

HISTORY AND SOCIAL STRUCTURE IN THE
STUDY OF CONTEMPORARY INDONESIA

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Harry Benda has characterized theorizing about post-independence Indonesia as "essentially presenting us highly sophisticated and persuasive answers to an intrinsically mistaken, or irrelevant, question."¹ Although, as we shall see, his own analysis shares the same basic failings found in those he criticizes, his complaint is well taken. Those who have attempted solutions to the problem of making sense of the last twenty years of Indonesian history have failed, by and large, to see beyond the surface phenomena. They find themselves so absorbed by the intricacies of parliamentary politics that most of their time is spent in the sorting out of month-to-month maneuvers in cabinet and parliament. This failure to penetrate to the essentials of a problem, it must be emphasized, cannot be attributed to lack of intelligence, integrity, or scholarship. Rather the source of the difficulty must be located in the basic perspective from which such analysts operate. The specific approach which a theorist adopts defines not only the character of his analysis but the questions which he poses and, equally, the questions he does not pose. If the questions are posed incorrectly, the analysis will be incapable of explaining the phenomena under study.

All attempts to analyze the Indonesian political system *from within*, by accepting the social structure which forms its underpinning as given, must share in the irrationality of that system. In other words, if the social groups, and classes, which hold political and economic power use that power to obstruct rather than to facilitate progress, then the social system which they dominate is irrational. History has its own internal logic in the sense that it displays objective laws of development. Mental processes should reflect this objective logic. By rejecting the laws of historic development, analytic theory ties itself down to the "present," becomes incapable of envisioning revolutionary social change, and, in essence, denies the possibility of progress. With respect to Indonesia, such theorizing becomes totally bound up in what is an essentially retrogressive social system. When thinking about the problems generated by such a system accepts that system as "given," then that thinking can neither understand the social system as an historically-rooted

1. "Democracy in Indonesia," Journal of Asian Studies, 23, No. 3 (May 1964), p. 449.

and transitory phenomenon nor allow that solutions to the society's problems must be sought in the transformations of the system itself.

The unsatisfactory nature of the available analyses of modern Indonesia is particularly discouraging because of the immediacy and the seriousness of her problems. The future seems (on the surface at least) to hold no solutions to the problems of unemployment, poverty, inflation, and political instability. The "Constitutional Democracy" of the 1950's has been gradually transformed into a military dictatorship more in line with underlying social realities. The need for a theory which can be used to help solve these problems has barely begun to be met.

One of the more impressive attempts to explain Indonesian politics is that of Herbert Feith.² His work is concerned with accounting for the political instability that plagues the entire period since the Revolution. Feith attempts to explain these events in terms of a cleavage within the Indonesian elite. On the one hand was a group of men (associated with Hatta) whom he designates as an "administrative" elite. These men were particularly involved with the day-to-day concerns of running the country and stabilizing the economy. Opposed to this group was one designated as "solidarity-makers," led by Sukarno. This latter group was more concerned with the symbols of the Revolution and the continuing of the Revolution than with the administration of the government. The first group is seen by Feith as more conservative and Western-oriented as well as more efficient and capable than the second. For Feith "the history of the period is the story of the political failure of the Hatta group of leaders."³ Within Indonesia the ties of this group were to "non-bureaucratic business"; it wanted to conserve what it could of the "modern administrative and economic structure" left from the colonial period.

It is in the intra-elite battle between these two groups that Feith finds the source of the political instability of the period. Yet in accounting for the failure of constitutional democracy, he is forced to focus on "factors related to political unrest." The source of this unrest lay in the Revolution and the groups with which it was associated were outside of the elite. The very problems with which the elite was forced to deal were (and still are) problems of "how this unrest would be handled."⁴

2. Decline of Constitutional Democracy in Indonesia (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University, 1962).

3. Feith, Decline of Constitutional Democracy, p. 604.

4. Ibid., p. 606.

So far as the true source of the failure of constitutional democracy lies in the unrest of groups outside of the elite, it lies in a factor external to Feith's entire theoretical structure. The problem becomes one of accounting for the existence of this unrest and then accounting for its influence on Indonesian politics. We make little progress by pointing to the rise of a "solidarity-maker" group which exploits this unrest if we do not turn our analysis to the historical, social, and economic relationships between the ruling groups and the masses. The "solidarity-maker" group is still a part of the ruling elite and is in no basic sense representative of the people.

The uneasiness inherent in an analysis such as the above is even more apparent in Daniel Lev's discussion in his *Transition to Guided Democracy*. In basic structure, the work is quite comparable to Feith's. Again Lev is concerned with a month-by-month cataloging of the events in Indonesian political life. Insofar as he holds to this approach, his concern is with developments within the elite. Yet, perhaps because of the nature of the period he has chosen, a new factor, outside of the elite, breaks into the analysis. The increasing unrest of the masses, generally associated with (though not identical to) the rise of the Communist Party (P.K.I.), forces its way into the political life of the elite-run constitutional democracy. It is in large measure the accessibility of the parliamentary structures to mass demands through the electoral mechanism that is responsible for their dissolution. The confrontation between the ruling classes and the more conscious elements of the masses which forms a central theme of Indonesian politics, undermines the whole analytical basis of the elite-centered history of Feith and Lev. The latter is somewhat more aware of this than is the former. Although he fails to dissect the relationship between his elite and the masses, it is an essential point of his analysis that "communist success in the parliamentary system contributed to the eventual replacement of that system by Guided Democracy."⁵ Lev's insight into the relationship of the P.K.I. to the system of parliamentary democracy is important because it can form both the basis of a more satisfying analysis of Indonesian politics and a critique of his own work. It is therefore worthwhile to quote him at length:

. . . the P.K.I. threatened not only the other parties, but the entire social and political order. It was not simply that everyone feared that the communists, once in power, would overthrow the existing political organization, eliminate the old elite, and invoke their own exclusive ideology. That clearly was the crux of the matter, but it cannot be too strongly emphasized

5. Daniel Lev, Transition to Guided Democracy (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell Modern Indonesia Project, 1966), p. 75.

that the social force mobilized by the P.K.I. could not be matched by any of the other parties, by the army, or even (in organizational terms) by President Sukarno. . . . By containing the truly radical P.K.I., the elite whom it challenged, both party and nonparty, was able to maintain its hopes for the future. It is important to point out that this elite did in fact remain in power under Guided Democracy and that it did so by shifting away from a broader electoral basis of politics towards a narrower and more traditional elite basis.⁶

The increasing popularity of the P.K.I., while by no means identical with the unrest of the masses, is a strong indication and reflection of the strength of that unrest.

At this point, it is important to see that the discussion thus far has brought the approach of Feith and Lev into serious question. If post-independence developments are best understood in terms of an increasing threat to elite power by a disaffected mass, then the key historical problems focus around the nature of Indonesian social structure itself and the sources of unrest in the Indonesian political economy. Yet, the two discussions cited above are more concerned with developments on the purely political level than with the underlying problems of the political economy.

Before elaborating this critique, it will be instructive to turn to some of the economic theory available to students of contemporary Indonesia.

We might begin with the least satisfactory kind of analysis-- that which sees political and economic factors as basically independent, though having important influences on each other. Such an analysis allows political questions into its theorizing only in the very crude sense of political instability creating economic instability. Although "economic conditions . . . have had much to do with aggravating deep-seated political tensions," tensions which are "associated with the general social revolution," nonetheless, basically, "Indonesian experience in 1957 and 1958 presents an almost classic example of the economic ramifications of political instability."⁷ By ignoring the unity of economics and politics, Douglas Paauw provides a striking example of an analytical theory which partakes of the irrationality of its subject matter. He sees two fundamental solutions to Indonesia's economic difficulties: reduction of inflation-

6. Lev, Transition to Guided Democracy, p. 171.

7. Douglas S. Paauw, "The High Cost of Political Instability in Indonesia," in Vlekke, Indonesia's Struggle (The Hague: Netherlands Institute of International Affairs, 1959), p. 23.

financed spending and expansion of aggregate supply.⁸ The curious fact about these "solutions" is that they are mutually exclusive, given the present structure of the Indonesian political economy. If no change comes about in the "mode of utilization" of Indonesia's economic surplus,⁹ there will be no other indigenous source of financing than inflation, and aggregate supply is not likely to increase without government financing. Thus Paauw's solution is no more (and perhaps considerably less) than a statement of the problem.

We are presented with an essentially sterile framework of analysis: inflation results (in large part) from deficit spending; deficit spending, in its turn, results both from the lack of alternative sources of funds and from the need to meet the expenses of political instability itself. Thus, if the unrest of the masses is to be eased, economic development is essential, and yet outside of inflationary deficit spending, the government has no funds from indigenous sources for effective development programs.

Here we seem confronted with an insurmountable theoretical (and practical) question. It is generally conceived of as a "vicious circle."¹⁰ There seem to be no sources for financing economic development which will not result in political instability which is itself a drain on funds potentially available for development. Such funds are used to build armies and civil services rather than tractors and factories. A closer examination, however, should reveal that the knot in which these theorists seem tied is one strictly of their own making. There is no way out in sight because of the restricted vision of those who are looking. To find the source of their problems it is necessary to isolate their generally unstated underlying assumptions.

In his review of Feith's book, Harry Benda criticizes Feith along these lines. He attempts to bring out the underlying assumptions of Feith's approach which render his results sterile and comes upon the following insight:

Most of our questions . . . have hitherto resolved around a singularly simple, continuing theme best caricatured by the adage. "What's wrong with Indonesia?" The answers given to this all pervasive, if usually

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8. Paauw, "High Cost of Political Instability," p. 30.
 9. For a discussion of the concept of the economic surplus see: Paul A. Baran, The Political Economy of Growth (New York: Monthly Review, 1962), ch. 2.
 10. See, for example: Paauw, "The High Cost of Political Instability," p. 23; and Herbert Feith, "Dynamics of Guided Democracy," in Ruth McVey (ed.), Indonesia (New Haven: H.R.A.F., 1963), p. 409.

unstated, question vary from author to author, from discipline to discipline; but basically they have led--with greater or less ingenuity--to the discovery of a *diabolus ex machina*.¹¹

The trouble with this approach, as Benda suggests, is that it is unhistorical. Such theorizing is bounded by Western history. If something has gone wrong then there must be some right way in which Indonesia should have developed. In a certain sense this assertion is undeniable. There must be something radically unsatisfactory in a country in which social disorder, poverty, and violence have been endemic for a good deal longer than the twenty odd years since independence. However the tone in which the question "what went wrong" is generally asked tends to deny any structural disease in favor of a *diabolus ex machina*. The basic structure of social relationships is seen as adequate for the task of pursuing economic development and political democracy; therefore, if these objectives have not been achieved it is only because the individuals in charge have been incapable or uninterested in such progress. In other words, this approach accepts the social structure as given and finds the major historical dynamic not in social groups and classes, but in individuals.¹²

The alternative Benda presents us for understanding recent Indonesian history is a kind of identity crisis on a grand scale. In the last twenty years we have witnessed "the agonizing, difficult adjustment of Indonesia to its own identity. . . . A selective process of adapting resurgent continuity to a changing reality."¹³ He contends that the colonial period in Indonesia has had little influence on the basic continuity of Indonesian history. His argument is that in terms of elite structure,¹⁴ and in terms of economic change,¹⁵ the influence of the West has been, in a basic sense, superficial.

What Benda succeeds in enforcing is, above all, the re-orientation of our approach to Indonesian history. In order to evaluate and criticize his approach we must clarify the relationship between Western imperialism and the course of Indonesian history. The connection is much more organic and

11. "Democracy in Indonesia," p. 450.

12. Feith, Decline of Constitutional Democracy, p. 108.

13. "Decolonization in Indonesia: The Problem of Continuity and Change," American Historical Review, 70 (July 1965), p. 1072.

14. Benda, "Decolonization in Indonesia," pp. 1065-1066.

15. Ibid., p. 1066.

continuing than Benda realizes. Insofar as the Indonesian Revolution failed to sever Indonesia's future from the structures and laws of development defined by the colonial relationships of the past, analysts who ignore colonial relationships and concentrate on post-independence politics as if they occurred in a vacuum cannot possibly explain what they see. Equally, insofar as the colonial relationship has radically affected the character of Indonesian society, analysts (such as Benda) who look to an Indonesian "identity" in the pre-colonial past are searching for something of questionable significance.

Recent studies by Pelzer¹⁶ and van der Kroef¹⁷ indicate that, contrary to Benda's thesis, important changes have been going on in the economic and social structure of rural Indonesia. These studies indicate that "in the past century, and in particular in the last four decades, tenancy, along with the rise of a landlord class, has reached alarming proportions in densely populated sections of rural Java."¹⁸ These changes are greatly influencing Javanese social and cultural institutions.¹⁹ Insofar as these are significant developments, Benda's attempt to return to pre-colonial history is bound to be seriously misleading. The relationship between the colonial period and the present Indonesian situation is much more important than even these discussions indicate. To see this, we now turn to those analysts who have studied present developments from a historical perspective.

One of the few efforts to see contemporary Indonesian history as an integral part of a historical development is that of Clifford Geertz.²⁰ His analysis operates on an entirely

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16. Karl J. Pelzer, "The Agricultural Foundation," in McVey, Indonesia.
 17. J. M. van der Kroef, "Indonesia's Economic Future," Pacific Affairs, 32 (March 1959); "Peasant and Land Reform in Indonesian Communism," Journal of Southeast Asian History, 4, No. 1 (March 1963); and "Land Tenure and Social Structure in Rural Java," Rural Sociology, 25, No. 4 (December 1960).
 18. van der Kroef, "Land Tenure," p. 422.
 19. van der Kroef, "Indonesia's Economic Future," p. 60.
 20. See: Agricultural Involution: the Process of Ecological Change in Indonesia (Berkeley: University of California, 1966). One other such study is that of J. H. Boeke, Economics and Economic Policy of Dual Societies as Exemplified by Indonesia (New York: Institute of Pacific Relations, 1953). I have neither the time nor space to discuss this latter work. For a criticism of the theory as it applies to Indonesia, see the Geertz book, pp. 61-62. For a more general criticism of "dual" theories see Andrew Gunder Frank, "The Development of Underdevelopment," Monthly Review, 18, No. 4 (September 1966).

different level than those previously discussed. But, not only does his analysis highlight the inadequacies of our first group of theories of "what went wrong"; in addition, by specifying the colonial relationship as the key to the economic development of Indonesia, Geertz brings Benda's theory into further doubt.

According to Geertz:

The economy functions much less efficiently but (or, more precisely, because) it is the same economy. The threefold thematic structure announced by the Company, developed by the Culture System, and resolved by the Corporate Plantation System--technological dualism, regional imbalance, and ecological involution--persists; and the frustrations of Indonesian aspirations persist with it.²¹

The influence of Dutch colonialism has been to sacrifice the possibilities of Indonesian industrialization in favor of Dutch. The discussion implies very strongly that Dutch economic development and Indonesian underdevelopment are two sides of the same coin. For the Javanese peasant "there was no industrial sector into which to move and, as the returns from cultivation went, in Furnivall's words, to keep the Netherlands from becoming another Portugal, none developed."²² It is purely hypothetical to speculate on whether Indonesia would have industrialized had the Dutch not been present. It is not hypothetical, however, to point out that the effect of Dutch involvement was to close off any opportunity for development and ensure that the history of the Indonesian economy would be one of underdevelopment.

The point to be emphasized here is that the forces generating underdevelopment did not disappear with the Revolution in 1949. This is precisely the reason why a correct understanding of the entire colonial period is the essential prerequisite for an understanding of present problems. In the words of Paul Baran:

Indeed the forces that have moulded the fate of the backward world still exercise a powerful impact on the conditions prevailing at the present time. Their forms have changed, their intensities are different today; their origin and direction have remained unaltered. They control now as they have controlled in the past the destinies of the underdeveloped capitalist countries, and it is the speed with which and the processes by which they will be overcome that will

21. Agricultural Involution, p. 125.

22. Ibid., p. 80.

determine these countries future economic and social development.²³

H. O. Schmitt has suggested a re-interpretation of Indonesian politics which, in some important respects, fits in well with this thesis. Operating on the premise that politics and economics must be united, he has succeeded in explaining some important aspects of political instability in terms of the foreign penetration of the Indonesian economy.

By examining the inflation which has plagued Indonesia since independence and by determining its primary victims, Schmitt is able to account for the conflict between Java and the Outer Islands in terms of "the contrary interests of exporters and importers" which "were quickly translated into a conflict between geographic regions."²⁴ The analysis takes us a step further by associating the exporters and importers with interest groups. In terms of economic groups "a bureaucracy in control of the state exploited inflationary policies at the expense of trading groups."²⁵ Here we have a cleavage within the Indonesian elite of significantly greater substance than that which forms the basis of Feith's analysis. Not only does it expose the superficiality of the "administrator"--"solidarity-maker" dichotomy but it also connects the divisions in the elite to foreign penetration of the economy and to economic backwardness. Schmitt suggests that taxing importers (who benefitted by the inflation) was "politically dangerous because of the central importance the treatment of importers had in the relations between the Indonesian elite and the foreign managerial groups that controlled the bulk of the economy. . . ."²⁶

The relation between political instability and the foreign domination of the economy goes much deeper. As long as the property rights of foreigners were guaranteed, the Indonesian political leadership could "not freely dispose of the resources of their own country,"²⁷ nor could they mobilize funds to finance economic development. An analysis, such as Feith's, which fails to make this fact central will be incapable of answering the challenge implicit in Schmitt's argument and made explicit by Bruce Glassburner:

23. The Political Economy of Growth, p. 163.

24. H. O. Schmitt, "Post-colonial Politics: A Suggested Interpretation of the Indonesian Experience, 1950-1958," Australian Journal of Politics and History, 9, No. 2 (November 1963), p. 177.

25. Schmitt, "Post-colonial Politics," p. 178.

26. Ibid., p. 180.

27. Ibid., p. 181.

Why, aside from the three almost quixotic attempts to deal with financial crises did all cabinets do so little in any direction? If they were all nationalists, why did they not vigorously attack the vested Dutch interests? Since they all called themselves socialists, why was there no vigorous program of building of state enterprise? Why when the more pragmatic intellectual clique was defeated, was there no clear repudiation of their policies and marked swing to reflect the polar political swing which Herbert Feith finds?²⁸

The answer, as Glassburner suggests (in part), is that given the colonial nature of economic relations few alternatives were open.

It should be possible now to specify the source of the failings of the theories discussed at the beginning of this paper. As I pointed out earlier, the approach which asks "what went wrong?" is essentially unhistorical in that it denies the unity of the present with the past in Indonesia. By fixing our attention on the most recent years, it obscures the source of today's problems in the broader historical development. In fact, nothing "went wrong" in Indonesia. Given the colonial legacy and the lack of a true social revolution, things could hardly have gone any other way.

The root failure of these analysts lies in their inability to envision an alternative to economic development as it came about in the West and to social structure as it developed in Indonesia. This inability manifests itself in various ways. One is the view of economic development as a purely technical or "economic" problem, rather than as a key social issue around which opposing social groups muster their forces. In the first view, solutions are arrived at through consultations with experts on the technical problems of building bridges and of input-output analysis. In the second view solutions are arrived at (sometimes violently) through the triumph of one of the antagonistic groups. The former view is the essence of Feith's concern over an "administrative" or "problem-solving" elite.²⁹ When it comes down to this basic point, we find Benda grouped with those he criticizes most severely. This is the implication of his contention that if Indonesia is to modernize (as he thinks it will) "'solidarity-making' will be forced to yield--or at least make progressively more room for--'problem-

28. Bruce Glassburner, "Economic Policy-Making in Indonesia," Economic Development and Cultural Change, 10, No. 2, pt. 1 (January 1962), p. 130.

29. Feith, "Dynamics of Guided Democracy," particularly pp 387-388, 395.

solving.'" The reason for this being that "economic modernization, in particular, is bound to follow its peculiar, rational, and, indeed, iron logic."³⁰

A somewhat different instance of the view of economic development as a purely technical factor is the view that it is politically neutral. Thus if we desire to add substance to Douglas Paauw's "solution" to the economic difficulties in Indonesia, we might be tempted to suggest that if it were not for political instability and the resultant drain on funds, resources would be released for the financing of economic development. We might be further tempted to contend that much of this potential capital comes from payments by foreign enterprise. The problem with this approach is that it disunites political and economic development and "even if partaking of the truth with regard to the parts constitutes falsehoods with regard to the whole," by severing an historical phenomenon "from its inevitable outgrowth."³¹ Misuse of funds is a result of the character of power relationships in Indonesia. In this sense it is an outgrowth, or manifestation of social organization (or disorganization) rather than the cause of it.

Justus van der Kroef, who takes a position initially opposed to the above, ultimately shares this inability to see economic development as involving a deep-seated social and political transformation. He argues that local social structure has been a serious impediment to economic development. But rather than realize the necessity of the transformation of social structure as a key aspect of economic development he sees the existing "variety of social structures and cultural tones . . . as a desirable determinant of economic development."³² Thus economic development plans should be better adapted to existing social structures.

This perspective contrasts sharply with that which realizes the profound social implications of economic development. We can do little better than quote Paul Baran on this point:

. . . Economic development has historically always meant a far-reaching transformation of societies economic, social, and political structure, of the dominant organization of production, distribution, and consumption. Economic development has always been propelled by classes and groups interested in

30. "Democracy in Indonesia," p. 455.

31. Baran, The Political Economy of Growth, p. 218.

32. J. M. van der Kroef, "Social Structure and Economic Development in Indonesia," Social Research, 23 (January 1957), p. 417.

a new economic and social order, has always been opposed and obstructed by those interested in the *status quo*, rooted in and deriving innumerable benefits and habits of thought from the existing fabric of society, the prevailing mores, customs, and institutions. It has always been marked by more or less violent clashes, has proceeded by starts and spurts, suffered setbacks and gained new terrain-- it has never been a smooth, harmonious process unfolding placidly over time and space.³³

Here, then, is one striking instance of a theory which cannot transcend the social system it is constructed to explain. Theorists of economic development look hopefully to a Western-oriented, "responsible," administrative group to accomplish development. Just such a group is closest to the interests of Western capital and this capital is always seen as indispensable to development. The trouble is that it has been in close contact with Western capital which has, in Indonesia, resulted in underdevelopment.

This is the relationship traced so well by Geertz. Yet, in terms of connecting political events with the underlying social and economic forces, his analysis also fails us. He, perhaps more than any of the other writers, is unable to suggest an alternative to the continuation of these developments. The involution theme is essentially unhistorical insofar as it fails to encompass possible alternatives to the present "ecosystem"; rather it asks: "given an ecosystem . . . how is it organized?"³⁴ This approach falls apart if the given system contains, as an integral part of it, forces which both seek and are capable of accomplishing its transformation. In such cases only an analysis which can itself envision the transformation of a social system has achieved a real understanding of that system.

As far as the analysis of Glassburner and Schmitt takes us,³⁵ it, too, falls down in this one, all important, respect. After having specified foreign economic domination as a major source of the political and economic difficulties of post-independence Indonesia, both fail seriously to propose some way in which an end to this domination can come about as the first step towards economic development and political stability. "Indonesia's present plight" is, indeed, "the logical

33. The Political Economy of Growth, pp. 3-4.

34. Agricultural Involution, p. 10.

35. This is not to deny differences in the analyses of these two. See their exchange in Economic Development and Cultural Change, vols. 10, 11 and 12. However they do seem to be in agreement on this point.

consequence of a particularly unfortunate social structure"-- a social structure dominated by foreign enterprise. Yet, while Schmitt seems capable of realizing that this "unfortunate social structure" results when "an imperial power transfers political authority to a former colony without concurrently ceding economic power as well,"³⁶ he does not seem ready to suggest an alternative. Writing in 1963, he suggested that the United States buy up and give to Indonesia the various foreign holdings there, but this is obviously beyond the realm of the conceivable. What we must look to is not the American government turning on its own, but social forces in Indonesia capable of taking positive action to regain control over the Indonesian economy. However, the taking of economic power by "Indonesians" will not, by itself, prove sufficient to assure economic growth and social peace. Forceful and effective development programs can be accomplished only by a party with widespread popular support and organization, a party which can, in effect, bring the masses into an active role in the reconstruction of Indonesian society.

What is required is a study of the basic structure of Indonesian society, of the basic character--the strengths and weaknesses--of those social groups which will support such a plan of reconstruction, and those which will oppose it. The terms employed in many of the foregoing analyses are suggestive of the amount of work yet to be done. Up to this point the term "elite" has been used uncritically--accurately reflecting the use made of the term in most of the literature. It is not at all clear, however, that the concept of "elite" (or the analogous concept of "mass") provides us with the clarity or rigor necessary for an understanding of Indonesian society. On closer examination the concept, which is quite satisfactory for analyzing the outward appearance of power in Indonesia, breaks down if we are interested in the underlying basis of that power.

The elite, roughly speaking, contains those individuals who hold top positions in the official institutions for wielding power--the parliament, cabinet, political parties, and the army. By implication power resides in these institutions, and is the domain of individuals directly associated with these institutions rather than social groups and classes. But the correctness of this conception is not at all clear, particularly in the light of the rapid decline of these institutions (with the exception of the army) after a brief period of predominance. One lesson we can learn from more recent history is that, again with the exception of the army, real power in Indonesia was not exclusively, or even essentially, the domain of the institutions

36. Schmitt, "Foreign Capital and Social Conflict in Indonesia, 1950-1958," Economic Development and Cultural Change, 10, No. 3 (April 1962), p. 292.

officially viewed as the center of power. Real power is associated with the making of important decisions and, as Feith has shown,³⁷ the Indonesian parliaments and cabinets have been largely incapable of decision-making.

The ambiguity of the term elite is particularly striking when it is applied to the leadership of the Communist Party. While considering this leadership a part of the elite may or may not clarify something about its relationship with the Party's rank and file, it obscures the relationship of the P.K.I. to the other parties and to the political system itself. Insofar as the P.K.I. had a basis of power in the support of significant social groups and classes (e.g., the urban and rural workers) it stood apart from the other parties (see above, p. 7). To group the leadership of the P.K.I. with the leadership of the nationalist or Moslem parties under the category of elite is to obscure basic divisions in Indonesian society, the analysis of which may lead to a better understanding of Indonesian politics.³⁸ To take the point a step further, even the grouping of non-Communist leaders under a common heading may gloss over important cleavages in this group (such as that suggested by Schmitt) and thus be seriously misleading.

As noted at the beginning of this essay, groups outside of the elite tend to be given a secondary position in discussions of Indonesian politics. These groups may be designated the "mass"--a catch-all phrase for everyone not in the elite and, therefore, only as meaningful as the term elite from which it is derived by exclusion. Here, too, important distinctions are obscured. The mass, so defined, includes at least the following diverse (and in some cases antagonistic) social groups: peasants, tenant farmers, the rural and urban proletariat, the rural and urban unemployed, middle-class merchants and traders, and, in some cases, small-scale landlords.

This confusion of terminology may have its source in recent Indonesian history itself. The nationalist movement, by its socially amorphous character, may have encouraged the depreciation of basic social divisions. Nationalism was supported by a variety of diverse social groups and it has taken time for the apparent unity of the movement to dissolve in the face of resurgent divisions.

37. The Decline of Constitutional Democracy, pp. 309, 312, 557.

38. Jan Pluvier provides the beginnings of such an analysis. See his Confrontations (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University, 1965). His analysis suffers from the fact that he goes little deeper into Indonesian social structure than any of the others. His own elite-mass dichotomy is somewhat more useful but not appreciably less ambiguous.

In order to understand Indonesian society we need theory which operates along two dimensions which are all too often neglected. What theory we have sees largely the apparent, or surface, dimension. With notable exceptions,³⁹ this theory is concerned with the manifestations of deep-seated social problems rather than with those problems themselves. More viable theory must penetrate first to the basis of political and economic instability in the social structure, and second, to the historical dimension of contemporary Indonesian problems. If we approach present-day Indonesia as a historical phenomenon, then two important consequences follow. First, contemporary Indonesia cannot be understood in isolation, but only as an outgrowth of the accommodation of an indigenous society to Western imperialism which has influenced, and continues deeply to affect it. The second consequence of viewing the present in historical perspective is the necessity of treating Indonesian social and economic structure, not as a given within which solutions of problems must be sought, but as a historically rooted phenomenon the transformation of which will provide the only solution to these problems.

39. For example, W. F. Wertheim, Indonesian Society in Transition: A Study of Social Change (The Hague: van Hoeve, 1959).