Audrey Kahin. *Rebellion to Integration: West Sumatra and the Indonesian Polity, 1926-1988.* Amsterdam: University of Amsterdam Press, 1999. 368 pages.

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A history written for the period from 1926 to 1988 deals with living memory. A strong continuity of ideas, issues, and people binds this regional history together. Even so, by the book's end, the author has clarified striking differences that distinguish the region's turbulent and salient contribution to national politics in the past from Minangkabau society and politics as they exist now.

In the decades after independence, the history, politics, culture, and social organization of West Sumatra attracted many scholars from a wide range of disciplines. In recent years, that interest has ebbed to some extent, since the province's national significance has been in relative decline. Throughout the same period, the political center of gravity in Indonesia has been Java and the national capital, Jakarta. Audrey Kahin's lucid and authoritative history, covering most of the twentieth century, helps us to understand why the Minangkabau have attracted so much interest, and why perhaps that interest has waned—until now.

Kahin's earlier (1985) edited volume[1] addressed the regional dynamics of the Indonesian revolution. It showed the variable significance of the dispersed anti-colonial conflicts of 1945–1950. Yet it can also be said of that period of both armed and diplomatic struggle that the crucial contest was for Java and Sumatra, and on Sumatra, the West Coast was the key. When Yogyakarta fell to the Dutch in December 1948, the nationalist leaders were taken prisoner. The republican government immediately reconstituted itself in Bukittinggi. It was equally notable in the years leading up to independence that the heart of the republican government contained a disproportionate number of Minangkabau—Hatta, Sjahrir and Haji Agus Salim among them—just as, beyond the government, the influence of West Sumatrans ranged from Haji Rasul in the Muhammadiah to Tan Malaka in the Marxist nationalist left. Yet, by the 1990s few would dispute Ichlasul Amal's observation that the Minangkabau leadership under the New Order had come to recognize that "West Sumatra [was] 'just one region' rather than . . . an 'alternative center' or a region with a special calling to lead the Outer Islands or the forces of Islam." (p. 251)

The complexity of Minangkabau history is due in no small part to the decentralized, egalitarian nature of social organization and the values that sustained the largely self-governing village communities of the region, the Minangkabau *nagari*. Kahin guides us through this history with a sequential narrative that concludes with the fall of Suharto and its aftermath. It is divided into four main sections: "Late Colonial Rule," "Achieving Independence," "Region versus Capital," and "Integration under the New Order." The book begins with a short review of the Minangkabau political order, of religion and anti-colonialism in the region, and the earlier proto-nationalist struggles that influenced the 1927 uprising. Similarly, it concludes with some observations about the still evolving era of reform in the late 1990s.

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[1] Audrey Kahin, ed., *Regional Dynamics of the Indonesian Revolution* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1985).

The 1927 rebellion is an appropriate point of departure since it displays the main political, ideological, and religious currents within Minangkabau society at that time, and the ways in which they continually frustrated attempts by the Dutch colonial state to dominate the region. After the rebellion, the colonial state turned to policies of repression that fell no less heavily on political activity of all kinds—religious and nationalist as well as communist. However, within a few years, political activism revived, this time under the leadership of religious scholars. That evoked a further wave of repression in 1933, and the systematic jailing and exile of indigenous political leaders. Yet, in her examination of nationalism in pre-war West Sumatra (chapter 3), Kahin emphasizes the extent to which nationalist ferment intensivied among local communities, entrepreneurs, and especially in the networks of independent schools. As well as drawing on indigenous ideals of equality and justice, these nationalists were influenced by anti-colonial discourses flowing through the Muslim world and suffused through networks that spread through Malaya, Singapore, India, and the Middle East. Kahin rightly takes issue with histories of Indonesian nationalism that are uncritically dependent on Dutch colonial sources, which asserted that nationalist orientations were largely restricted to a small, urban, western-educated elite on Java.

The colonial policy of exiling political leaders clearly contributed, however, to important deficits in leadership and organization, compounded during the Japanese Occupation when West Sumatra was kept isolated from Java and other parts of Sumatra. As a consequence, the early resistance to the return of the Dutch was almost entirely mobilized through purely local organizations. Among these was the local "people's volunteer army" (*Giyu gun*), formed and trained by the Japanese. Kahin declares this development to be "one of the most important watersheds in the region's modern history" (p. 99). This West Sumatran armed force served as the nucleus for the Banteng Division, which was in the vanguard of the war against the Dutch, and later, in the 1950s, central to the PRRI[2] rebellion against the Sukarno government.

However, while the anti-colonial movement had robust, organic roots in local society, other Minangkabau activists, including Hatta, Sjahrir, and Tan Malaka, had already established themselves outside the region among the foremost leaders of the nationalist movement. As the isolation of West Sumatra was eased, so the interplay between national and regional developments increased.

The events of the revolution, including the formation of the Emergency Government of the Republic of Indonesia (PDRI) in December 1948, following the capture of Sukarno, Hatta, and Sjahrir in Yogyakarta, are well known. Chapters 5 and 6 deal with national, international, and West Sumatran events, including additional detail about the military campaigns, the misconceived Dutch attempts to stimulate anti-Javanese feelings in West Sumatra, and the contribution of trade by republican forces to the war effort.

The third section, "Region versus Capital," is one of the most important parts of the book. It gives, in three chapters, an account of the PRRI rebellion. The exposition of the origins and development of the escalating conflict between Sumatra and Jakarta is, in my view, the best account available of this fateful confrontation. The development

[2] PRRI: The Revolutionary Government of the Republic of Indonesia (Pemerintah Revolusioner Republik Indonesia).

of the book that precedes section three establishes the identity of the protagonists and the nature of their grievances in fine detail. A number of political currents fed the confrontation, not least the imperative, both political and military, felt by the national leadership in Jakarta to centralize, unify, and integrate the nation. This hardened resolve to centralize the Indonesian polity was in conflict with a very different vision of Indonesia that had formed elsewhere, especially the deeply held commitment to a decentralized polity that existed in West Sumatra. The way the crisis, which coexisted with the Darul Islam and Permesta rebellions, was dealt with by Sukarno and Nasution led directly to the repudiation of parliamentary democracy and the entrenchment of successive authoritarian regimes (Guided Democracy and the New Order).

The Minangkabau were the losers in this civil war and had to endure the humiliation of occupation by the national army. The ideals of autonomy and egalitarianism, of an Indonesia in which the many regional societies could be unified without surrendering their distinctive identities, has been overwhelmed by a vision of national unity whose basic impulses were homogenizing and centralizing.

The final section traces the overthrow of the Old Order—in which the extremes of mass murder experienced in Java, Bali and North Sumatra were largely avoided in West Sumatra—and the subsequent accommodation with the center (chapter 11) when political pragmatism ensured that West Sumatra shared in the economic growth of the New Order period.

Kahin's historical narrative of the Minangkabau region between 1926 and 1998 is written elegantly and concisely. The story itself is at times very complex, but the reader is not taxed by this because of the clear and succinct exposition. Among the virtues of the book that may not be obvious to many readers, since they will not have worked with the primary materials, is the impressive integration of information from many sources—archival documents (Indonesian, Dutch, British, and Japanese), oral histories, and numerous interviews with those involved, from figures who are widely known, to others whose place has been more obscure. Additionally, of course, there is scrupulous use of the most authoritative published sources. There are many of these, but they deal with limited periods and specialized aspects of Minangkabau history. The sources are such that the historical account had to be painstakingly assembled from a diversity of materials. To have integrated a continuous historical narrative treating the greater part of a century is therefore an impressive achievement.

One aspect of the book that has been thoroughly developed is the biographical; descriptions of the protagonists contribute to the reader's interest and the ease of reading. Once again, it is not only the major national figures whose stories are told, but also many others who are less well known. One has a clearer sense of their motives, both individual and collective, through the accumulation of these biographical accounts. An excellent collection of photos of people and events is woven into the book, which adds to the accessibility of the historical narrative. The presentational qualities of the book are generally excellent. There are a handful of minor lapses in editing (e.g., p. 17), including a failure to synchronize the page references of endnotes in the index, but these are minor flaws in an attractively produced volume.

One major reason why West Sumatra stands out among the regions in Indonesian history is identified in one of the principal organizing themes of the book. Kahin contrasts the political vision of independent Indonesia that existed in West Sumatra with that of Java. Others have been impressed with comparisons of this kind. Clifford Geertz,[3] for example, sought to contrast the entrepreneurial drive of Minangkabau smallholders, who successfully produced crops for world markets during a sustained economic boom early in the twentieth century, with the defensive "involuted" cultural strategies of "poverty sharing" among Javanese peasants. In this book, Kahin observes how the Minangkabau remained committed to the Indonesian nation throughout the struggle for independence, noting that they were sustained by the belief that an independent Indonesia would be founded on democratic principles and would be tolerant of regional diversity. By contrast, Kahin maintains, the Javanese political orientation was to preserve unity above all else and to achieve that through strong central control (p. 17). Javanese culture has a highly developed sense of hierarchy, whereas culture and social organization in West Sumatra are posited on decentralization of authority and equality between members of the community.

As the struggle for control in Jakarta developed in the post-independence period, the government and the military were increasingly anxious about the growth of several powerful movements of regional disaffection which dangerously complicated the already tense national polity. For their part, the expectations of political and military groups in West Sumatra were increasingly at odds with the center.

Things began badly with the rejection of federalism by the new republic in 1950. Although laws on decentralization were passed in 1948 and 1950, it became clear that the central government was unwilling to allow the policies of local autonomy to proceed. The existing Sumatran regencies were abolished and combined into three heterogeneous provinces (North, Central, and South Sumatra). Local representative government was suspended in 1951. Successive central governments failed to deal with this situation for five years. Their lack of action was due as much to indecisiveness and the rapid turnover of governments as anything else, but the frustrations in Aceh and West Sumatra mounted as their demands for local government, decentralization, and democratization were ignored. Not only were their political aspirations thwarted, but also their needs for economic development and fiscal reform were denied at a time when almost three quarters of Indonesia's foreign exchange earnings were generated in Sumatra.

The clumsy disregard for regional sensitivities was compounded in the military field where, as part of the plan for national rationalization of the armed forces, West Sumatra's Banteng Division was dismembered. In 1956, in a series of meetings in Jakarta and Padang, officers and men of the former Banteng Division drew up a Reform Charter demanding attention be paid to problems in Sumatra and in the nation as a whole. At a reunion in Padang in November 1956, the "Banteng Council" was formed to implement the charter, and, if necessary, take matters "into its own hands" (p. 183). Regional discontent merged with national tensions a month later when vice-president Hatta (a Minangkabau) resigned. Three weeks later, the governor of Central Sumatra handed over authority to the Banteng Brigade commander, Lt. Col. Ahmad

[3] Clifford Geertz, *Agricultural Involution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1963).

Husein. The move had broad support in West Sumatran society, enough so that the central government and army were unwilling to confront the Banteng Council directly. Kahin's account then traces the brief period of euphoria when, in 1957, the rebels seemed to win real local autonomy. The fortunes of the rebels soon collapsed when increasingly unstable political maneuvering led to open defiance of Jakarta, invasion, civil war, defeat, and humiliation. The main losers in party political terms were the modernist Islamic party, Masjumi, and the moderate socialist PSI (Partai Sosialis Indonesia). If any party gained in West Sumatra, it was the communists (PKI). However, only four years later the communists in turn were purged as a result of the army's objective of extirpating the PKI nationally in 1965-66. There were few killings in West Sumatra. The local communists tended to cleave to Tan Malaka's nationalist left tradition, and, in any case, it was uncertain who the "real" communists were, since many political activists had found it prudent, after the defeat of the PRRI, to take on leftist political coloring in a region occupied by Diponegoro elements sympathetic to the PKI.

One of the strengths of the book is its careful examination of social divisions in West Sumatra (pp. 84–89). In civil conflicts, the fact that opposing forces contain members of the same clan or family can intensify bitterness, but in the West Sumatran case it more often appears to have dulled the edge of zealotry. In the 1927 communist uprisings, the Dutch found it difficult to categorize adequately the main political currents and were reduced to describing the rebellion's leaders as "discontents" (p. 85). One of the fascinations of a study of this duration is the way it clarifies how patterns of continuity in resistance contributed to the development of regional politics. Nevertheless, since 1961 and 1965, the national political influence of West Sumatra has been muted. The regrettable outcome of the 1950s and 1960s is that the political dynamism of this regional bastion of the nationalist movement appeared to be drained of its sense of purpose by the double blow of the crushing of the PRRI rebellion in 1958-1961, followed by the purge of communists in 1965.

West Sumatra saw significant economic gains as Suharto's New Order matured. This was its reward for engaging in a Faustian bargain that purchased central government largesse (development resources) in return for political passivity and votes for Golkar. The standardization of village administration after 1979 effectively took away from the larger rural Minangkabau community (the *nagari*) many of its economic and cultural functions, along with its administrative responsibilities. West Sumatra was indeed becoming "just another region" in New Order Indonesia.

The sudden implosion of the Suharto regime, the anger throughout society aroused by the corruption and political abuses of its functionaries, and the promise of democratic reform have dramatically opened new possibilities in the region. West Sumatran students and activists, like their counterparts in Jakarta, were uncompromising participants in the reform movement that followed the collapse of the New Order; they forced out a number of key office holders associated with the authoritarian regime. There is more than a little irony in the realization that demands central to the program of the Banteng Council in the 1950s are now core elements of *reformasi*. The 1957 article by Mohammad Hatta, written for the Padang newspaper *Haluan*, which Kahin cites in her book (p. 194) could be transcribed without

modification into an agenda for the late 1990s. It includes a call for political and financial decentralization.

In January 2001, laws no. 22 and 25 of 1999 will come into effect, dramatically transferring powers of local autonomy to provinces, towns (*kota*), and districts (*kabupaten*) throughout the country. These complex reforms are apparently unstoppable. Indeed, they are proceeding in spite of the widespread lack of preparation for the major shift of responsibility and resources that they entail. As Kahin notes, even the changes begun under President Habibie have led to a limited revival of the political and cultural functions of the *nagari*. It is possible that West Sumatra will recover some of its earlier dynamism if the decentralization reforms of Abdurrahman Wahid's government achieve their objectives.

It is unlikely nevertheless, that West Sumatra will again achieve the special place it held during and after the national revolution. That is in part because the articulation of demands for justice, equality, and democratic government now emanate from activists who, if they are to be identified in terms of their ethnic and regional origins at all, will be seen to be Minangkabau, Bugis, Batak, Balinese, Acehnese, and, indeed, Javanese. The particular vision of a democratic Indonesia that was once most strongly associated with West Sumatra for now appears to be widely dispersed among many Indonesians.

The book is, therefore, first and foremost a regional history. It is clearly not, in the pejorative sense, a provincial history, since it consistently illuminates the development of the national Indonesian polity. It is especially useful for the perspective it offers of the politics of the Sukarno era. For the study of West Sumatra, there is nothing comparable for the twentieth century,[4] and I am confident it will become the standard reference for its period in the future.

[4] Christine Dobbin's fine history of the first half of the nineteenth century has a different emphasis, but nicely complements Kahin's twentieth-century study. See Christine Dobbin, *Islamic Revivalism in a Changing Peasant Economy: Central Sumatra, 1784-1847* (London: Curzon, 1983).