

Angus McIntyre. *The Indonesian Presidency: The Shift from Personal Toward Constitutional Rule*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2005. 303 pages.

Janet Steele. *Wars Within: The Story of Tempo, an Independent Magazine in Soeharto's Indonesia*. Jakarta and Singapore: Equinox Publishing and Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2005. 328 pages.

Dirk Tomsa

At first sight, the two books reviewed in this essay, Angus McIntyre's *The Indonesian Presidency* and Janet Steele's *Wars Within*, do not seem to have much in common. While McIntyre's work focuses on biographical details of three Indonesian presidents, Steele's book tells the story of *Tempo*, Indonesia's most influential newsmagazine. Despite the very different topical foci, however, the two books do share a common denominator: they are both history books that attempt to fuse different analytical streams and weave them together into one coherent narrative. Significantly, though, only one of them succeeds in this endeavor.

Angus McIntyre's book *The Indonesian Presidency* chronicles the "shift from personal toward constitutional rule" in Indonesia from the Guided Democracy era to the present. Focusing on the presidencies of Sukarno, Suharto, and Megawati Sukarnoputri, the book represents an interesting yet ultimately somewhat disappointing attempt to mix an analysis of Indonesia's constitutional history with elements of political and psychological biography. Although some passages provide excellent and insightful material—especially in the first section about Sukarno—the overall impression is that this book is neither fish nor fowl.

For readers with a primary interest in biographical details, the lack of comprehensiveness in the second part and the lack of analytical depth in the third part of the book will probably be unsatisfactory. Conversely, those who are mainly interested in the nitty-gritty of Indonesia's constitutional history are likely to miss more extensive discussions about Suharto's instrumentalization of the Pancasila and the circumstances surrounding the process of constitutional amendments between 1999 and 2002. Apart from this, readers from any kind of background may wonder about the unbalanced structure of the book that features four chapters about Sukarno (66 pages), just two chapters about Suharto (32 pages), and then a total of nine chapters about Megawati (134 pages). Regrettably, the two other presidents who had served brief tenures between Suharto and Megawati, B. J. Habibie and Abdurrahman Wahid, are only mentioned in passing, even though they played immensely important roles in Indonesia's shift toward constitutional rule.

The book begins with a brief introductory overview of Indonesia's constitutional history up until 1959 and then quickly moves on to a mostly insightful and well-researched discussion of Sukarno's presidency during the Guided Democracy era. Arguably, this first section of the book is the best and most interesting part of the entire work. Here, McIntyre's impressive skills as a psycho-biographer are most accentuated as he elaborately explores the fascinating personality of Indonesia's founding father.

By analyzing a multitude of Sukarno's speeches as well as some informative passages from the president's autobiography as told to Cindy Adams, the author paints an intriguing picture of a man haunted by the "feeling of desolation" (*kesepian*) and the fear of aging and death.

McIntyre traces the first occurrence of *kesepian* in Sukarno's life back to 1929, when he was arrested for the first time by the Dutch colonial authorities. The emotional hardship the young Sukarno experienced during his incarceration had a significant impact on his psyche as he came to suffer from loneliness and depression. Those feelings were further exacerbated when he was arrested for a second time in 1933 and subsequently sent to exile in Flores and later Sumatra, where he remained until the end of Dutch colonial rule in 1942.

As McIntyre argues, the years of imprisonment and exile left Sukarno in an "enduring state of *kesepian*" (p. 43). In fact, Sukarno was so deeply scarred by his experience that once he was released from exile he found himself in a constant struggle to "fend off this feeling of desolation." Ultimately, McIntyre asserts, the efforts to fight this feeling directly impacted upon Sukarno's leadership style during his presidency, especially after 1957, when he first began to entertain the idea of Guided Democracy. According to the author, *kesepian* and Sukarno's efforts to deal with it:

gave rise to a "politics of being central," which may be understood as the particular form his personal rule assumed, whereby he placed himself at the center of fervent attention among government members and a large circle of followers and admirers beyond, to all of whom he looked for affirmation (p. 32).

McIntyre points out that the politics of being central, which found expression in aggressive political actions such as the West Irian campaign and the confrontational foreign policy toward Malaysia, were primarily but not only driven by Sukarno's feeling of desolation. Another important factor, which according to the author actually magnified the effects of *kesepian*, was the president's pronounced fear of aging and death. This fear was in fact so pervasive that it not only helps explain Sukarno's disposition to the politics of being central, but it also helps to explain Sukarno's notorious idealization of youth and his particularly transfigured view of his own youth. As is well-known, Sukarno often surrounded himself with young people and frequently emphasized the "invigorating and rejuvenating qualities of youth" (p. 66). McIntyre convincingly locates the origins of this characteristic in the president's fear of aging and death.

All in all, the chapters on Sukarno provide for interesting and stimulating reading. For most parts of this section, McIntyre is successful in his endeavor to attribute distinct features of Guided Democracy to Sukarno's personal psyche, and arguably it is this convincing argumentation that represents one of the major strengths of this part of the book. While it is undeniable that Guided Democracy was also shaped by a number of other factors, which McIntyre chooses to ignore in his book, the key argument of this section—that the personal rule of the Guided Democracy period was to a large extent a direct result of Sukarno's personal characteristics—is presented in a persuasive and easy-to-follow way.

Unfortunately, however, the same cannot be said about the next section of the book, which is dedicated to Sukarno's successor, Suharto. Oddly, this section only

consists of two short chapters, even though Suharto was actually Indonesia's longest-serving president. Given the brevity of the analysis, it is hardly surprising that this section puts forward fairly little new material. The first of the two chapters merely summarizes the political history of the New Order and some key characteristics of the regime, while the second is reduced to reviewing a number of previously published biographical works about Suharto including the president's autobiography, but, strangely, largely excluding the most recent work by R. E. Elson (*Suharto: A Political Biography*).¹

Lack of depth aside, a more significant weakness of this part of the book is the fact that, in contrast to the preceding section about Sukarno, it largely fails to establish a causal connection between the leader's personality and the nature of his regime. McIntyre briefly touches upon the concept of sultanism, but he does not provide any meaningful insights into how the New Order was gradually transformed into a sultanistic regime, or in what sense Suharto's personality was instrumental in this process. Moreover, even if he had elaborated on this point, it is important to note that the New Order's transition toward sultanism only happened in the twilight years of the regime. While Suharto had, of course, always been a dominant figure in the regime, the New Order was by no means a personalistic regime for the entirety of its existence. Especially during the early years the president was hardly more than a *primus inter pares* who had to accommodate the various interests of the army, his business cronies, and his powerful international backers in order to stay in power. Even in the late New Order years, when Suharto seemed to have established himself as an almost irreplaceable leader, the basis of his personal rule proved to be rather porous, as his sudden fall from grace in 1998 demonstrated.

Apart from a lack of engagement with those factors, another notable omission in this section is Suharto's family, particularly his late wife, Ibu Tien. While McIntyre dedicates considerable attention to Suharto's turbulent childhood, he completely ignores the role of Suharto's wife and children in influencing the development of the president's personality. While Suharto will be remembered first and foremost as Indonesia's second and longest-serving president, he was also a husband and father. Here, the author could have made a valuable contribution if he had shed some new light on the patterns of interaction between Suharto and his family and, subsequently, on the way members of the first family influenced his presidential leadership style. Furthermore, McIntyre could have attempted to link the emergence of sultanistic tendencies in the late New Order to the passing of Ibu Tien.

Finally, from the perspective of constitutional history, it seems curious that McIntyre pays no attention to Suharto's abuse of the constitution, and especially its preamble, for the sake of consolidating his power. In contrast to Sukarno, who exploited other weaknesses in the constitution to strengthen his personal rule, Suharto turned to the Pancasila—the five principles listed in the preamble of the constitution that make up the philosophical foundation of the Indonesian state—in his search for an ideological tool to silence his critics and strengthen his grip on power. By overlooking the various implications of this tactic for the development of Suharto's leadership, McIntyre misses a great opportunity to provide a comparative analysis of how the two leaders interpreted the constitution in the name of power politics.

¹ R. E. Elson, *Suharto: A Political Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 389 pages.

Following the short analysis of the Suharto era, the final section of the book begins with a brief overview of the Habibie and Wahid presidencies and a similarly concise discussion of the process of constitutional amendments that took place between 1999 and 2002. Then McIntyre quickly—too quickly for the taste of this reviewer—turns his attention to Megawati, and the book effectively becomes a biography of Indonesia's first female president. In contrast to the sections about Sukarno and Suharto, however, this part of the book is mainly a political, not a psychological, biography. With the exception of a short (but interesting) chapter about Megawati's childhood and youth, it basically concentrates on sketching Megawati's political career from the beginnings in 1986 to her presidency (2001–2004). Overall, this section is well-presented, yet it is mostly descriptive and does not offer many new insights into the personality behind Megawati's famously silent façade.

For example, the reader learns fairly little about the reasons behind Megawati's initial decision to enter politics in 1986. McIntyre summarizes the period between 1973 and 1986 in less than one page (at the beginning of Chapter 10), and when Megawati suddenly decided to stand for parliament in the 1987 election, the only information McIntyre provides about her reasoning is that “[h]er decision seems to have been underpinned by a certain amount of postparental freedom” (p. 152). Similarly, in the remainder of Chapter 10, which is entitled “Megawati Sukarnoputri's Political Apprenticeship,” McIntyre outlines Megawati's first experiences as a politician, but he does not explain how and to what extent she actually developed a particular set of political ideas, not to mention how such ideas may be linked to her personality.

Only in Chapter 13 does the reader finally get some information about Megawati's basic political convictions and her “emphasis on leadership rather than representation” (p. 196). But even here, McIntyre does not illustrate how exactly Megawati gained those convictions and to what extent her very own personality may have accounted for the development of those views. Throughout this section he sometimes alludes to her troublesome childhood and her interactions with her father, but such elucidations remain cursory and not nearly as persuasive as the psychological analysis provided in the chapters on Sukarno. In other words, the reader learns quite a lot about the various formal stages of Megawati's political career, but very little about the process of political socialization that complemented this career.

Another, if much less serious, point of contention is McIntyre's obvious bias in favor of Megawati. On numerous occasions, he uses adjectives with clearly positive connotations to describe her. The choice of words ranges from “defiant, and at times bitterly ironic” (p. 182) to “bold” (p. 185), “reflective” (p. 186), and “modest and down-to-earth” (p. 196). He also repeatedly describes her as “brave” (pp. 182, 210, 212) and marvels at her capability of “drawing lessons” (p. 224) and her “remarkable restraint” (p. 225). Even when discussing Megawati's political or personal mistakes, the author describes her favorably. This is exemplified in his discussion of the East Timor referendum in 1999, when he qualifies his criticism of her rejecting the referendum by pointing to similar attitudes shown by other politicians (p. 212). He also points out that “it must be said in Megawati's favor that she accepted the result with good grace” (p. 214). Interestingly, though, the language becomes a bit more neutral toward the end of the book. In fact, it seems as if McIntyre, in the process of preparing his manuscript, struggled more and more to come to terms with Megawati's increasingly irritating

political actions. Referring to her notorious confidence in the military, he eventually makes the stunning admission that:

This hapless biographer has tried hard to explain Megawati's regard for the military but as he contemplates her willingness to entrust the territorial integrity of the Republic of Indonesia to such generals as Ryamizard Ryacudu, he is struck by the incompleteness of his previous formulations. (p. 246)

Overall, this book has quite a lot to offer, but it ultimately falls short of what it promises in the opening section. The psycho-biographical elements that feature so prominently in the first part about Sukarno are almost completely absent from the second and third sections. The last part about Megawati in particular is mainly a chronological and mostly descriptive account of the political career of Indonesia's first female president. While this may still appeal to readers with little prior knowledge about Indonesian politics, it is unlikely to excite students and scholars who follow events in Indonesia on a regular basis.

Compared to *The Indonesian Presidency*, Janet Steele's *Wars Within: The Story of Tempo, an Independent Magazine in Soeharto's Indonesia*, is a much more absorbing book. In contrast to McIntyre's work, which only partly succeeds in its attempt to weave together two different research approaches, *Wars Within* is a thoroughly fascinating combination of media history, general political history, and even a bit of biographical history. Written in a highly readable prose style, this book first and foremost tells the story of *Tempo*, Indonesia's most prestigious newsmagazine. But it also provides a condensed historical sketch of the New Order in general, as Steele revisits some key events during the Suharto era and reviews them through the lens of the magazine. Additionally, the book is garnished with some interesting biographical data about *Tempo's* revered co-founder and long-time chief editor, Goenawan Mohamad, even though it should be noted that the descriptions of Goenawan sometimes appear to be a bit too close to hero-worshipping.

The book begins with a number of background chapters, including an introduction, a comprehensive prologue, and a general overview of what Steele calls "the community." In these opening chapters the author not only explains some important details of her research, but she also reveals first insights into her close relationship with Goenawan Mohamad. Steele then embarks on a well-structured chronological account of the genesis and history of "Indonesia's only world-class magazine" (p. xiv). As the story unfolds, the reader learns about *Tempo's* roots in the student movement of the 1960s, the personal and professional backgrounds of the magazine's founding fathers, as well as the funding arrangements with prominent Chinese-Indonesian business tycoon Ciputra, whose support helped to keep the magazine financially secure. Furthermore, Steele discusses *Tempo's* place in the dynamic debate about Islam in Indonesia, the magazine's innovative use of language, and the characteristics of its predominantly middle-class readership. Toward the end she examines the socio-economic and political changes in *Tempo's* environment in the late 1980s and early 1990s and analyses how those changes affected not only the public image and the self-perception of the magazine, but ultimately also its very existence. The book closes with an epilogue about the 2003–2004 court trial against three *Tempo* journalists and its implications for press freedom in Indonesia.

What becomes clear throughout the book is that *Tempo* was—and still is—much more than just a newsmagazine. In the early days after its establishment in 1971, for example, it served as an important rallying point for artists and writers who, in the 1960s, had been engaged “in the struggle against Communism and the tyranny of politics over art” (p. 25). Many of those writers were drawn to the magazine because of the charismatic appeal of Goenawan Mohamad, one of the magazine’s founders and himself a poet and essayist. Goenawan’s goal was to create a magazine like *Time* or *Newsweek*, and in order to achieve that goal he encouraged the young, aspiring writers who joined the new magazine to write articles that would read “like stories” (p. 74). With its new style, *Tempo* quickly revolutionized Indonesian journalism. According to Steele, “*Tempo* stories were written in a style that was always *enak dibaca*—a pleasure to read” (p. 71).

It is, however, significant to note that in the early days *Tempo* was not a particularly critical newsmagazine. Established in 1971, it was, in many ways, a direct product of the New Order, and as such it was in fact quite supportive of many policies implemented by the Suharto regime. It was not before the infamous Malari incident in 1974 that things began to change. The Malari incident, a riot in Jakarta that was instigated by rivaling army factions, resulted in the effective banning of twelve Indonesian publications that had sided too openly with the loser in the army’s factional infighting, General Soemitro. *Tempo* was spared during this purge because it had maintained a relatively neutral stance during the confrontation between Soemitro and his key opponent, Ali Moertopo, but as Steele notes, “after 1974 the magazine’s relationship with the New Order became increasingly complex” (p. 87).

As censorship became tighter after Malari, *Tempo* grew more and more critical toward the regime. The two processes complemented each other, forcing *Tempo* writers to seek new strategies of how to position the magazine vis-à-vis an increasingly authoritarian government. In Chapter 4 Steele gives some interesting examples of these strategies. Particularly intriguing are her accounts of *Tempo*’s lobbying strategies toward the military and other government officials. Against the background of the temporary ban of the magazine in 1982, Steele demonstrates how leading members of *Tempo* deliberately cultivated good relations with selected members of the government and the military, including powerful figures like Benny Moerdani, Ali Moertopo, Moerdiono, and Sudharmono. The basic aim of this lobbying was to enable *Tempo* to get “inside stories,” but the good contacts with individual members of the regime elite were also helpful in times of trouble, as the 1982 episode illustrates. Steele writes:

[...] *Tempo*’s relationship with power was complex. As Goenawan said, during the New Order there were always “people in the government [with whom] you could communicate.” As part of the “Generation of ‘66,” the founders of *Tempo* were acquainted with many of the founders of the New Order. Although the army had long since betrayed its alliance with the young activists who had helped bring the regime to power, *Tempo*’s editors were nevertheless able occasionally to draw upon their connections inside the government and military. For example, “[General] Moerdiono always protected *Tempo*,” Goenawan said. (p. 106)

Throughout the 1980s *Tempo* proved to be extremely skillful in walking the fine line between what was acceptable to the regime elites and what was not. Steele’s chapters

on *Tempo's* coverage of the 1984 Tanjung Priok incident, in which a number of Muslim protesters were killed by the military, on *Tempo's* attitude towards employment of former political prisoners, and on *Tempo's* coverage of the so-called "mysterious shootings" in Java in 1983 all explore these complex intricacies of the magazine's evolving relationship with those in power. The author shows how *Tempo* varied its tactics between pushing the boundaries and retracting to compromise and compliance, while never losing sight of the overall objective to retain its status as an independent newsmagazine.

Even when *Tempo* was at last directly affected by the government's ever-increasing restrictions on freedom and independence, its leaders refused to bow down. On the contrary, as Steele shows in the last chapter of the book, the banning of *Tempo* in June 1994 marked the transformation of the magazine from a critical media organization into a powerful symbol for an emerging pro-democracy movement. And if Steele is to be believed, it was Goenawan Mohamad himself who at this point underwent the most dramatic transformation. "For years," she writes, "Goenawan had been forced to compromise with government authorities in order to keep his magazine alive—but the banning of *Tempo* changed all that. After June 21, 1994, there would be no more compromises, no more ambiguity." (p. 233)

Steele's book tells a fascinating, yet sometimes a bit too-heroic, tale of a magazine that for more than two decades defied the odds of surviving in an authoritarian regime. While there is no doubt that *Tempo* made an outstanding contribution to the development of professional journalism in Indonesia, Steele's obvious admiration for the magazine in general and for Goenawan Mohamad in particular has produced some rather strange effects. Especially her descriptions of Goenawan are riddled with details of questionable relevance and at times read more like fiction than academic research. For example, "He dresses casually, and the cuffs of his sleeves are folded back, revealing muscular forearms strong from tennis" (p. xxii–xxiii). In the introduction, Steele writes that she "drew up [her] own rules about what constituted research and what constituted friendship and where to draw the line between the two" (p. xviii), but arguably she did not quite succeed in drawing that line.

Another aspect that may be criticized concerns Steele's selective choice of sources, both in regards to her interview partners as well as her secondary sources. First, Steele has conducted a whole series of interviews and without a doubt the stories revealed by the interviewees are often very interesting and highly relevant for the development of the story. However, with a very few exceptions, she almost exclusively interviewed people who were or still are directly involved with *Tempo* in one way or another. Clearly, these people are all biased in their assessments, and often Steele's storytelling reflects this bias. In order to allow the reader to obtain a more balanced view on some issues, it would have been good if the author had considered interviewing a few more external observers, especially from other newsmagazines. While she does mention the establishment of rival magazines, such as *Gatra* and *Editor*, she barely engages with them. And when she does, as in Chapter 8, she often leaves the information vague, claiming that "memories do fade" (p. 200). This, however, seems odd in view of the fact that very few memories about the positive aspects of *Tempo's* development seem to have faded. In fact, much of the book is based on the memories of individuals, so to

claim that memories fade when it comes to the not-so-positive parts of the story does not sound too convincing.

Second, while Steele's blending of the history of *Tempo* with that of the New Order in general is one of the strong aspects of the book, the author could have added even more value to the analysis if she had extended her research about Indonesia's general political, economic, and cultural history beyond some of the classic works about the New Order. Especially the passages about the role of Islam in Chapters 5 and 9 rely almost exclusively on background information from Hefner's *Civil Islam*.² While this is certainly a good source, more variety could have added different perspectives on certain issues.

Overall, however, these are just minor weaknesses in an otherwise thoroughly enthralling book, which is informative and entertaining at the same time. *Wars Within* can be recommended to anyone interested in Indonesian media history, and it should be compulsory reading for any Western journalist who is going to be posted in Indonesia. The book features enough background material to make it accessible for readers with little knowledge about Indonesia, but the extensive use of specific first-hand information obtained from personal interviews also ensures that Indonesia specialists will find the book interesting, too.

²² Robert W. Hefner, *Civil Islam: Muslims and Democratization in Indonesia* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), 286 pages.