Understanding Fortress Bali:The Impact of Democratisation and Religious Revival in Indonesia

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Abstrak

Politik liberalisasi dan desentralisasi dari kuasa negara sejak 1998 telah mentransformasi lanskap sosial dan politik Indonesia. Pergeseran itu diilustrasikan dalam artikel ini dengan membahas Bali sebagai sebuah studi kasus yang relevan. Sebagai rumah bagi sebagian besar warga Indonesia beragama Hindu yang minoritas, Bali juga dipengaruhi oleh dampak dari meningkatnya gerakan revivalisasi Islam dan ekstremisme agama. Sebuah gerakan sosial baru telah mencuat dan memicu sebuah pergeseran ke arah identitas Hindu yang lebih tegas. Tulisan ini meninjau persimpangan antara geopolitik dan proses perubahan lokal untuk memahami lebih baik karakter dari 'gerakan-gerakan lokalisasi', yang mungkin merangsang penggunaan agama sebagai kekuatan dalam perjuangan untuk meraih otonomi lokal, tetapi mungkin juga pemanfaatan wacana-wacana lingkungan, etnik, dan sejarah.

Keywords: Bali, Indonesia, religion, Islam, Hinduism, politics.

Introduction

During the last thirteen years of *Reformasi* or 'reform', following the demise of the authoritarian regime of former president Suharto in 1998, Indonesia's political system has undergone tremendous democratic change and, from a formal perspective, it has been a transformation almost beyond recognition. In this paper, I will first consider some of the dramatic improvements achieved to date, but also highlight the proliferation of religiously legitimised violence and the effect thereof, primarily, on the island of Bali.

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Until 1998 Indonesians had lived under a condition of deeply entrenched political oppression, where all authority rested with the President, his military support base and the monolithic stateparty apparatus of Suharto's Golkar party. Open opposition was violently suppressed. Even some of the most experienced Indonesia watchers were thus surprised to see the so-called New Order regime suddenly lose its hold on the will of a population who had been made compliant for an entire generation. Even when we take into consideration the declining living standards of Indonesians in the wake of the Asian economic crisis of 1997 – often credited for having triggered the regime's demise – the events of 1998 are still astonishing.

One of the main pillars of support for the Reformasi movement was a wide range of religious and cultural revival movements across Indonesia, particularly among Indonesia's Muslim majority but also among minority groups such as the Balinese. Apolitical religious movements had been tolerated under the New Order to some degree, and had become a haven for those with a mind for resistance. Religious organizations, old and new, thus counted among the few civil society groups with a ready capacity to mobilise, and were among the first to begin to fill the power vacuum left behind when Suharto stepped down. Political Islam, in particular, became a major force in Indonesian party politics and in public discourse.

In addition, we need to consider here that the Reformasi period coincided with a major shift in global politics, away from the rhetoric of the Cold War, where two conflicting models of secular political ideology had been employed to define the global political landscape. The demise of the Soviet Union, and the fall of the 'iron curtain', really was only an outward sign and a political consequence of an earlier and deeper economic shift, towards universal de facto adoption of capitalism, throughout most of the so-called Communist world. This meant that secular politics no longer had much utility as a discursive device for a valorisation of

world politics into blocks of friendly and enemy nations, especially from an American perspective. It had become impossible to declare 'Communist' China an enemy, for example, when every capitalist in the western world was falling over backwards to do business with the Chinese and vice versa.

The need for a new discriminating and valorising discourse that arose from these conditions was filled by religion. This kind of discourse is as old as the crusades, but its return to discursive primacy at this moment of world history was in response to an acute need for a new model of valorisation, and was further catalysed by what was to become the defining event of this period: The attacks by a radical Islamist group on the World Trade Centre and Pentagon on September 11, 2001.

This event and the shift in global political discourse that followed had a tremendous effect on Indonesia, the world's most populous Muslim nation. Nowhere was this effect felt more than in Bali, when the island became the target of another major religious hate attack on October 12, 2002. In this paper I will explore how Bali, which is home to many of Indonesia's Hindu minority, was affected by these events. One component is the political democratisation of Indonesia, which provided new opportunities for forming political organizations, taking public political action and conductive legislative reform in Bali. Another major component is the specific response to what was widely considered to be a religiously motivated attack on Balinese 'as Hindus', together a range of other, long-standing and related issues such as the influx of Muslim investors and immigrants and associated demographic and cultural changes in Bali.

The Opportunities and Challenges of Reformasi in Indonesia and in Bali

There was much reason to be sceptical regarding the capacity of politically inexperienced reformers in the 1998 pro-democracy alliance to rebuild the New Order state in the image of democracy.

But widespread fears the reform movement would fall victim to political fragmentation, violent civil unrest and renewed military intervention did not materialise. While the reformers did encounter a range of serious challenges, some as predicted and others unforeseeable at the time - such as the transformation of world political discourses in response to the events of S11, 2001 -, it also gained some unexpected support from within the establishment, most notably from Suharto's former Vice-President Habibie during his brief interregnum. The reformers thus managed to press ahead with their agenda for democracy.

The national, provincial and district legislative elections in 1999 and 2004 were generally fair, free and peaceful, as were the first presidential elections in 2004, and the same can be said of the parliamentary and presidential elections in 2009. Elections have been well contested by the established and the dozens of new political parties that have emerged since 1998. With new decentralization laws enacted in 1999, public service delivery and budget planning have been devolved to 450 municipalities and districts, and the country held its first direct elections for provincial governors and district chief executives in 2005. Indonesians also have gained unprecedented freedom of expression, association and other civil liberties as well as greater local political and economic self-determination in the wake of comprehensive legislative and executive reforms, new human rights protection laws and the creation of a Constitutional Court. In election procedural and formal institutional terms, Indonesia thus has become a well-established democracy and indeed, it is now the third largest democracy in the world. How well this democracy is functioning on the ground is quite another matter.

As Andrew Ellis, head of Electoral Process in IDEA, pointed out in his 2005 report, "day to day governance, economic development, fighting corruption and building the rule of law is much less glamorous than building a new institutional framework after years of authoritarian government, but it remains the test

of whether Indonesia will make democracy work" (Ellis 2005:1). Putting democracy into practice does not depend solely on the level of commitment to good governance and other aspects of democracy-building among politicians within the present and future administrations. Indeed, Ikrar Bhakti, reflecting on this matter, concludes that such values were lacking among politicians: "Many of the political elites state that they are committed to supporting democracy and reform, but in reality they practice the kinds of politics that demonstrate their lack of political ethics - ethics that are essential for the development of democracy" (Bhakti 2004:202-3). Indonesia's political future may thus depend on the rise of a democratic culture at a more popular level, so that the public, civil society organizations and the opposition parties will work together to hold any incumbent government accountable for poor governance and to press for further reform of institutions where change has been slow or partial, or where corruption remains endemic. The judiciary is one institution where such cultural pressure for democratic reform needs to be applied. The Munir murder case, which has attracted continuous media attention and public protests by human rights groups, may not be an exception but indicative of rising democratic pressures on all kinds of public institutions.

According to a recent report, cultural commitment to democracy in general appears to be quite strong and resilient in Indonesia now, at least within civil society:

With the exception of fringe religious groups, all significant political actors and social groups appear to agree on the importance of democracy. Although there is some nostalgia for the levels of economic growth and stability achieved during Suharto's authoritarian New Order, no significant group argues for a government dominated by the military or the benefits of authoritarian rule. Moreover, Indonesians understand democracy to involve such basic ideas as open competition, protection of civil liberties, the rule of law, and respect for pluralism and minority rights. As part of this consensus

on democracy, Indonesian actors agree on the importance of genuinely democratic elections and accept the premise that elections are the only legitimate way to change governments (Democracy International 2008:4).

All international commentators, ironically, do not share Indonesia's popular enthusiasm for democracy and general lack of nostalgia for authoritarian rule. Indeed, some of the enemies of democracy are found among those who most loudly claim to promote it. In 2005, for example, the New York Times published an opinion piece by Scott Atran stating that "the entrenchment of democracy has weakened Indonesia's willingness to fight terrorism... Such lack of resolve augurs ill for American efforts to promote democracy as an antidote to terrorism elsewhere in the Muslim world" (New York Times 2005:1). Lex Rieffel (2008), via the Brookings Institution, even claims that "in some countries, electoral democracy can be a recipe for political chaos", describing Suharto as a good friend of the US who rescued Indonesia from the chaos of its first, post- independence democratic period in 1965. As for the new democracy under the current president, he notes that "SBY [Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono] knows what needs to be done but cannot do it because he does not have the power to rule that Suharto had. In effect, right now, it can be said that Indonesia is suffering from an excess of democracy."

In these commentaries we already see references to "fringe religious groups" and the notion that democracy encourages "terrorism". At the same time as a return to democracy was being celebrated in Indonesia, similar arguments were being used to legitimise an assault on democracy in many western countries, with many civil liberties eroded purportedly to "help fight terrorism". It is thus important to note that democracy provided opportunities to two forms of conservative extremism: Firstly, radical Islamist fringe groups with a religiously flavoured political agenda were free to organize themselves, recruit members,

propagate their views and cause all manner of trouble in the Reformasi period. Secondly, political elites opposed to democracy were able to use the presence of extremist religious groups to justify calls for greater military and police powers and restrictions on civil liberties, or at least for a crackdown on those groups. At present, the opportunities for the first kind of extremism have been curtailed rather effectively without giving way to the second type of extremism in Indonesia.

Turning now more specifically to the Balinese case, similar opportunities and challenges can be observed. To begin with, the political freedom and associated opportunities for local empowerment brought about by Reformasi were seized with considerable enthusiasm in Bali. Apart from a change of guard in politics and to a lesser extent in the bureaucracy, which was largely a shift from the Golkar Party loyalists to the cadres of Megawati Sukarnoputri's PDI-P, the most important change brought about by *Reformasi* was the implementation of new regional autonomy legislation from 2001 onward.

Decentralisation, in the case of Bali, led to a transfer of political, economic and administrative powers from the centre in Jakarta to the regencies (*kabupaten*), rather than to the province of Bali as a whole. Regency heads (*bupati*), unfortunately, can and often do ignore the provincial government in important matters such as coordinating a sustainable approach to resource management and tourism development. In response, many proponents of the Ajeg Bali movement have campaigned for Bali to receive special autonomy status as a province, which they hope would ensure Balinese unity in the face of external threats (*Kompas* 22 Nov. 2004; Bagus 2004). Nevertheless, *desentralisasi* did afford a new sense of authority and freedom to Balinese legislators at the provincial level, and new provincial decrees (*Perda*) have brought about sweeping changes, particularly in relation to village governance and associated traditional institutions.

The political revitalisation of the traditional 'village assembly'

(krama desa) into a local decision-making body is one of the most important changes brought about by Reformasi and Ajeg Bali. In order to understand the significance of this change, it needs to be seen in historical perspective. The Dutch had introduced a distinction between administrative (desa dinas) and customary (desa adat) rule at the village (desa) level in the 1920s, officially in order to protect local traditions but it also as a compromise aimed at limiting political discontent at the local level. The adat-dinas divide was adopted by the New Order, but over three decades desa adat became increasingly subordinated to desa dinas. As the authoritarian New Order regime tightened its regulations through new provincial decrees (Perda 6/1986; 12/1988), adat eventually came to be treated as an obstacle to progress unless it could be controlled, streamlined and shaped into an instrument to serve the development needs of the state.

Reformasi and the law on decentralisation turned this situation upside down. The media had popularised the idea that local adat needed to be 'reinforced' because 'Bali was seriously ill' (Radar Bali 7 June 2001), and legislators soon took up the idea. With Law No. 22 of 1999 they moved to abolished Law No. 5 of 1979, which had concentrated power in the village in the hands of a few governmentcontrolled officials. In 2001 the provincial government legislated to strengthen desa adat even further. Replacing provincial decree 6 of 1986, Perda 3 of 2001 reflected the concerns of an urban middle class, who believed Balinese culture should be protected against the evils of globalisation and saw desa adat as the foundation of this culture (Warren 2004). The term desa adat was deemed too 'colonial' and ethnically inappropriate for further use because the word hadat (custom) is Arabic and thus associated with Islam. The term was replaced with the more undeniably Balinese desa pakraman ('village community'). Perda 3 of 2001 gave the desa pakraman full authority to run its internal affairs and mades this traditional institution the highest authority in regulating local affairs. The desa pakraman has authority over village land, which

may not be sold or taxed. Furthermore, villages can now request a share of government income from tourist 'objects' such as temples located within villages, demand payments from nearby hotels, provide credit, set up local businesses and attract investors.

Whereas under the New Order the *desa dinas* had been the main recipient of government funding, the Balinese government now prefers to subsidise the *desa pakraman*. In June 2001 the provincial government decided to donate Rp10 million to every *desa pakraman*. More important still are changes in the flow of routine funding. Following the provincial policy of favouring the *desa pakraman*, regional governments also now prefer to support the *desa pakraman*, though the level of funding varies from region to region. In 2002 for example, every *desa pakraman* in the regency of Badung received Rp120 million while the *desa dinas* received only Rp75 million. In keeping with their renewed socio-economic significance, *desa pakraman* are now becoming increasingly involved in local politics, most notably through block voting (*Denpost* 7 & 11 Sept. 2002), and many local communities have also created their own security/police forces.

The new provincial legislation is in many ways reflects the accommodation by the Balinese themselves to different ideological positions. Many Balinese appreciate the revitalisation of local traditional institutions and of the values enshrined in customary law. But others are critical on practical grounds. The pragmatists argue that traditional institutions like the *desa pakraman* struggle to cope with the ethnic and cultural heterogeneity of contemporary Bali, especially in the sprawling urban areas that have been subject to significant labour migration and cultural globalisation. These progressive left-wing intellectuals, as well as a few Hindu extremists, tend to reject as fundamentally flawed this attempt to give a new lease of life to Balinese traditions, though for different reasons. The intellectuals' argument is that emphasis on an essentially Hindu tradition prepares the path for Hindu fundamentalism. For the small group of Hindu extremists who would rather see an Hindu

than an Balinese revival movement, the latter's emphasis on custom or tradition is already a compromise, and a weak one, which will not suffice to keep away non-Hindu migrants.

According to the new regulation migrants are recognised as members of the *desa pakraman* but have no obligations to fulfil time-consuming religious tasks (*Sarad* 39, 2003; *Bali Post* 27 May 2004). Conversely, migrants are subject to a range of other customary regulations to which they have no moral and religious commitment. The resulting social tensions between Hindu Balinese and mainly Muslim newcomers are part of the motivation for the establishment of a neo-traditional police force at the local level, the so-called *pecalang* (Darling 2003).

Pecalang became popular after the founding congress of PDI-P in October 1998 for which PDI-P had organised its own security force. Since then militias dressed in traditional attire have served as security forces at other big events, while all over Bali villages have established their own pecalang groups. In June 2000 the Bali Department of Culture decided to impose some uniformity. In a booklet published in cooperation with PHDI, the mandate and costume of the pecalang are explained (Widnyani & Widia 2002). Perda 3 of 2001 now also recognises pecalang as a traditional security force (satgas keamanan tradisional). It represents a neotraditional local authority and is seen in contrast to an external police force that is often corrupt and inefficient. Since local tradition is the foundation of Balinese culture, pecalang serve as 'a last line of defence against the evils of globalisation and terrorism' (Denpost 19 Oct. 2002).

Political decentralisation, the revival of customary village authority and the rise of village militias have supported a new grassroots sense of empowerment among the Balinese. At the same time, there is evidence that violent conflicts within and between villages are increasing. Government authority has weakened and administrative institutions no longer have sufficient authority to suppress local conflicts. Known as *kasus adat*, land disputes as

well as conflicts over caste privileges have become common. The Balinese journal *Sarad* (44, 2003) estimates that since 1997 almost every month a *kasus adat* has resulted in community violence. These internal divisions are portrayed as undermining the cause of Balinese unity championed by the so-called Ajeg Bali movement (e.g. *Denpost* 29 Aug. & 9 Sept. 2002, see also Reuter 2008).

The above examples illustrate some of the opportunities of reformasi, and how they were made use of in Bali. As for the challenges, much has to do with the rise of Islamic revivalism as an important political discourse in Indonesia, driven by the ideology of the War on Terror and, particularly in Bali, by the experience of domestic terrorism.

In the nine years since the fall of Suharto, fundamentalists groups such as Front Pembela Islam and re-formed elements of the Darul Islam movement have gained a degree of public support and made their presence felt, for example, by launching a series of attacks on 'un-Islamic' entertainment venues, Christian churches and Hindu temples (ICG 2002). The Islamic paramilitary groups Laskhar Jihad, Laskhar Jundullah and Mujahidin Kompak have been deeply involved in inter-religious fighting against Christians in Ambon and Central Sulawesi (Aragon 2000). Larger and more moderate Islamic organizations, although they too had been gaining ground in the final years of the Suharto period (Bocquet-Siek & Cribb 1991; Crouch 1987), failed to rein in and some of the more hawkish individuals in their own ranks, let alone the members of radical organizations. Eventually it became clear that they had failed to do so. Bali felt the effects of this failure in October 2002, when bombs planted by Islamic terrorists exploded outside the Sari Club and Paddy's Bar in the popular international beach resort of Kuta, killing over 200 people.

As a small Hindu enclave in a predominantly Muslim Indonesia, and feeling increasingly displaced by Muslim Javanese labour migrants and 'colonised' by wealthy investors from Jakarta, the Balinese had begun to react to the threat, as they perceived it

then, well before the bombing. Fears increased markedly in 1998, when AM Saefuddin, a member of President Habibie's cabinet, stated that Bali's favoured presidential candidate, Megawati Sukarnoputri, would not be a suitable for the highest political office in a Muslim country because she had prayed in a Hindu temple. There were public protests and a group known as 'AUM' called for 'Balinese independence' (*Bali Merdeka*) unless Saefuddin was sacked (Darma Putra 2004:209).

Remarkably, despite the fact that many of the victims of the Bali bombing were indeed Balinese, there were no revenge attacks on Muslim communities on the island (Couteau 2003). Interfaith dialogue and peace-building initiatives were instrumental in maintaining a sense of calm acceptance. A prayer for peace by a mixed congregation of Hindus, Muslims and Christians was held to avoid ethnic and religious conflict, and a large, intricate ritual was performed on Kuta beach on 15 November 2002 to release the souls of the victims and cleanse the site of the attack from lingering demonic forces. For many Balinese this ritual conveyed a sense of closure and opened the way for economic recovery.

The pathway to recovery, however, became a bone of contention. Bali had changed in the wake of *Reformasi* and *desentralisasi* and now had an opportunity to reinvent itself in its own image. The sense of acute crisis after the Bali bombing, coupled with rising aspirations and opportunities for more autonomy combined to create the momentum for an effective Balinese 'localisation movement'. *Ajeg Bali* – 'making Bali strong and upright' – became the new and timely catchword in a struggle for increased political participation and cultural and religious self-assertion. By now, many of the aspirations have been accommodated in new provincial legislation, as discussed above.

Conclusion

In my opinion, there are two important and closely interrelated tasks that lie ahead for those who wish to see democracy flourish in now more autonomous provinces like Bali, and in Indonesia more generally. Political sector reform is the first and foremost of these tasks. Good governance, especially at the level of local government, will be essential for improving the credibility of the government and the proper functioning of daily life in Indonesia's local communities. Meanwhile, the character of the parties is changing in a democratic climate, as they begin to depend more on media exposure than personal or identity networks (aliran) for gaining support (LSI 2008). This may provide opportunities for increased transparency, but it could also encourage media manipulation by wealthy and influential candidates, leading to the capture of popular aspirations reflected in localisation movements like Ajeg Bali by political elites. The second important task for Indonesian democrats is the need to strengthen the supremacy of the law over politicians, public servants and business elites who would abuse their power, but also over cultural elites, including those who would impose their religious beliefs on others. The actions of FPI and similar groups reflect widespread disregard for what is seen as a toothless and corrupt legal system, and an associated culture wherein violence and criminal behaviour are still considered normal.

Cultural revitalisation and other forms of 'localisation movements' will be a part of this process throughout Indonesia, and similarly in other parts of the world. Opportunities for such movements have been rather good in Reformasi Indonesia, and certainly much better than in some other countries at the same time, or in Indonesia under Suharto. But the practical difficulties in realising the goal of local communities achieving control over the future course of their lives are the same everywhere, and they are formidable challenges. Globalisation has brought about a concentration of capital that works to remove political, economic and cultural control from local people everywhere. So long as this underlying disparity remains, the struggle for local empowerment will continue, in one form or another.

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