

state. Every now and then things go wrong, sometimes dramatically wrong. The Rose and Orange Revolutions in Georgia and Ukraine, respectively, are two prime examples of post-communist regime collapse. Wilson has difficulty explaining these very real political events. He gives four conditions for maintaining virtual politics: a powerful, amoral and united elite; a passive civil society and electorate; a culture of information control; and a lack of external counterpoint or intervention. His interpretation of political change boils down to a rather tautological observation: virtual politics works, until it fails. The powers-that-be win, until they lose. But why and how do they lose? Not everything is virtual in Russian politics, Wilson writes, but what is virtual and what is not? Where to draw the line? *Virtual Politics* raises more questions than it answers, which may be typical of a book that breaks new ground.

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Power and Political Culture in Suharto's Indonesia: The Indonesian Democratic Party (PDI) and Decline of the New Order (1986–98) by Stefan Eklöf. Copenhagen: NIAS-Press, 2003. Pp.xii+340; index, bibliography. £50 (hardback), £18.99 (paperback). ISBN 87-91114-18-7 and 50-0.

Opposing Suharto: Compromise, Resistance, and Regime Change in Indonesia by Edward Aspinall. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005. Pp.xiii + 328; index, bibliography. £43.95 (hardback); £12.50 (paperback). ISBN 08-04748-44-6 and 45-4.

For a few years during the 1960s and 1970s, dependency theory-oriented scholars of power and politics in Indonesia emphasized the vulnerability of the 'New Order' regime. As that new order grew older, however, the general scholarly preoccupation turned instead to try to explain the relative stability and lack of change in spite of rapid economic growth. The mainstream frameworks were the social and economic structures, the cultural and historical legacies, and the struggles within the dominant and (to some extent) the dissident elites. Aside from shallow 'expert' reports coming out of international agencies, for instance, comparative and theoretically structured approaches were almost as rare as studies beyond the metropolis and from below. Hence the fall of the Soeharto regime and particularly the rise of the third largest (fledgling) democracy came largely as a surprise to most students, who could explain it only with reference to external factors (the global mobility of capital) or by arguing that very little had *actually* changed ('power has only been reorganized' and 'democratization is only a façade').

Of course, there is much to this, but slowly less predictable studies beyond grand structural perspectives have begun to appear. Two of them are the very readable dissertations of Stefan Eklöf and Edward Aspinall, whose works have grown out of the non-economic Australian school of Indonesia scholars that primarily employ eclectic Weberian perspectives in trying to bridge structure, culture and actors.

In his exciting introductory chapter, Eklöf outlines an ambition to renew the study of political culture beyond the drawbacks of rather provincial and atheoretical Indonesian studies. He seems to be particularly inspired by James C. Scott's arguments about culture and resistance. Eklöf wants to focus on a series of thematic problems of power in an historical chronological perspective. Fine! It is difficult, however, to track much systematic use of these perspectives and instruments in the following chapters. If power is the central topic and concept, why not elaborate and focus upon it? It is true that this weakness could have been compensated by new in-depth empirical findings, but I am not sure that there is much of that either.

The vital strength, is rather, the disciplined and well-written story of one of the important but neglected type of actors in Indonesia: the political parties. Under Soeharto they were looked upon as part of the façade; after his fall everyone from hardcore economists to radical civic activists tended to look at them as the hotbed of bad governance that should be disposed of, although none of them has absolutely anything with which to replace them. Eklöf focuses on the old Nationalist Party that was initiated by Sukarno, converted into the Democratic Party by followers of Soeharto, and then turned into the Democratic Party of Struggle when strange bedfellows from right to left and business and military turned Sukarno's daughter Megawati into their new party leader and turned the party itself into a vehicle for both negotiating vested interests and rallying large parts of 'ordinary people' behind their own ambitions.

Unfortunately, however, Eklöf remains confined to an elitist and metropolitan focus. It is difficult to understand, for instance, what followers and interests behind public figures such as enlightened businessman and economist Kwik Kian Gie enabled him to speak up but never to win. One wonders why so little is said of the local relations between different party bosses, such as those around Solo during the attempts in 1997 to form a so-called dissident Mega-Bintang alliance of moderate nationalists and a faction of the equally moderate Muslims (as the other faction, under later on erratic president Abdurrahman Wahid, had linked up temporarily with Soeharto's daughter Tutut). Beyond general remarks about clientelism and populism, the great question-mark remains: what interests are brought together and what masses are mobilized in what way?

In the end there is, therefore, little more to conclude but that James C. Scott's general idea that Eklöf quotes in the introductory chapter, about the possibility of using elements of old cultures to resist old enemies, seems to make sense. But most of the more exciting questions (that Scott addresses) of what exactly makes this resistance possible in different contexts, as well as what special dynamics may generate openings and new changes, are left unexplored.

In conclusion, however, Eklöf's well-written and enjoyable historical review of the role of an analytically neglected actor in the Indonesian transition from authoritarianism to shallow democracy is important, as such. Anyone who wonders how it was possible for Sukarno's daughter Megawati to somehow stand up against Soeharto is given a fine general introduction and we are all offered the kind of insightful reading that is needed beyond stereotypes of parties as insignificant and hopeless organs of money politics only.

This takes us to the broader, yet more precise, analysis by Edward Aspinall of the opposition against Soeharto. Was it only an economic crisis that brought down the regime or did the scattered and disorganized middle-class groups – who actually seemed to fear the masses more than the government – really make a substantial contribution? The easy answer is, of course, that the economic crisis explanation has nothing to say of why there was and still is a process of democratization beyond the fall of the dictator. This perspective is the major strength of Aspinall's book. It is a real achievement to write successfully more from the point of view of the opposition than the dominant elite.

For both good and bad, however, Aspinall reviews the opposition against Soeharto and the altering of his regime through the lenses of the transition literature by O'Donnell and Schmitter, as well as Linz and Stepan. The benefit is that it makes for easy and fruitful comparative readings for subscribers to a journal such as *Democratization*. For instance, Aspinall shows how the moderate dissidents slowed down their actions and lost momentum in the firm belief that the internal conflicts within the ruling elite would become even more serious.

The problem is, however, that the general explanatory power of the perspective of O'Donnell, Linz and others are not really problematized and brought to test, which could be by bringing in results and experiences that do not fit into the framework or by comparing the explanatory power of the framework to other possible models. After all, there are contending studies of the Indonesian dynamics. There are at least two widely accepted patterns of transition in addition to that of negotiations among the incumbent elite and loyal opposition (as in Spain, Russia and many cases in Latin America) with which comparisons would have been fruitful: rainbow coalitions by those having been excluded from power (as in the Philippines or Nicaragua) and elite-level negotiations that are driven by broad popular mobilization (as in South Africa and El Salvador and partly Poland).

In other words, it is probably less fruitful to try to squeeze Indonesia into the elitist pact pattern of Linz *et al.* than to explore possible combinations with other models – and perhaps add an Indonesian path where contending attempts at democratization become real issues only when oligarchic rule had proved unable to curb conflicts in an increasingly privatized and globalized economy.

In conclusion, Aspinall's study is probably the best available broad introduction to Indonesia's transition from Soeharto towards democracy that includes the perspective of the opposition, opens up for comparisons and paves the way for the kind of necessary further and closer studies. And just like Eklöf's book, it is a pleasure to read.

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The African Exception edited by Ulf Engel and Gorm Rye Olsen. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005. Pp. 176. £49.95 (hardback). ISBN 075463695X.

This is the latest in a series offering 'policy relevant research' and 'rigorous analyses' of issues relevant to the developing world. It tackles the question of why Africa,