

BOOK REVIEW

Aceh, Indonesia Securing the Insecure State

By Elizabeth F. Drexler

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This book analyses political violence in Aceh to a great extent. The author draws upon her specialized experience as a policy analyst taking into consideration how an understanding about violence is formed and regulated by state politics. She explains this through the lens of corruption. The author argues that each recurrence of politically assessed narratives that does not line up with past experience can weaken the social legitimacy of new institutions. She expands an analysis of corruption in order to guide ethnography for an insecure state. She has archived this by illustrating how bribery and bias are used in the Indonesians' structure of daily life. She has noted the lack of legitimacy of institutions of law and governance in a double sense by measuring how the historical narratives are used as technologies both for governance and violence.

The author indicates corruption as a fundamental feature of social relations and therefore, its distortion of politics and overturning of means and ends. Even though the legal process grants protection to identified perpetrators, it fails to recognize known victims. As a result, corruption becomes contaminated systematically. Her analysis on corruption is resonate with Veena Das's conceptualization of illegibility, in which Das argues that the legibility and iterability of the state introduce opportunities for forgery and other unauthorized performances of the state power (Das: 2004). Furthermore, she analyses corruption as a source of public outrage that led to the conditions for continuous violence. Looking through the lens of corruption it is easier to understand why the strategies of international human rights advocacy efforts did not end the cycles of violence and justice in Indonesia. Therefore, it has clearly demonstrated the limitations and total failures of the law as understood by international bodies and humanitarian agencies.

In chapter four she explains how the state function dominates through the lethal force that is used to transform violence into politics (p134). Furthermore, she explains that in the absence of a judicial system, there is created questions about the protection of human rights and achieving justice. Drexler analyses the state function monopoly by lethal force given in connection with Edward Aspinall's work on the Aceh Peace process, in which he also admitted that violence in Aceh was being conducted by opportunistic criminal elements and therefore, it is frequently difficult to identify which groups are responsible, such as the military, police GAM or any other group (Aspinall 2005: p.8).

An article by Elizabeth Drexler also investigates the involvement of history and violence in Aceh and develops the concept of “liability”. The author explains that important past violence has implications for future violence. She also stresses how the state is responsible for the violence (Drexler: 2006).

Overall this book offers one of the most comprehensive analyses of violence in Aceh Indonesia and most importantly, the author engages in an honest assessment of the severe realities and what can be done to move forward in order to build law and justice.

References:

1. Aspinall, Edward 2005, *The Helsinki Agreement: A More Promising basis for Peace in Aceh?*. Policy studies 20 East-West Center Washington.
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3. Das, Veena and Deborah Poole eds. 2004. *Anthropology in the margins of state*. Santa Fe, N.M.: School of American Research Press.