The Indonesian Marginalisation of Class Interests and Democracy Olle Törnquist

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Given that democracy is not just about procedures but also equal political power over public affairs, why have so few crucial actors tried to foster development in accordance to their different interests by way of democratisation? The question is particularly valid in Indonesia, which in the 1950s had the world's largest popular movement and which in the 1990s managed to do away with Suharto's abuse of political power. Why has there been such a conspicuous lack of class interest in democracy, even on part of the broadly defined Left? To be more précises there are three puzzles. One is why the largest communist movement (outside the then Soviet Union and China) gave up on democratisation and rallied behind increasingly authoritarian President Sukarno even though it had expanded very rapidly thanks to freedoms and elections? Another is why the opposition against Suharto's politically facilitated accumulation of capital did not suggest democratic reforms of the state but rather extensive privatisation and localisation of politics? Yet another is why the democracy movement has neither really engaged in democratic mass politics nor welfare and development? Finally, what are the ways ahead.

The answer to **the first puzzle** is rooted both liberal and Marxist thinking about modernisation and democracy as well as in Marxist theory of primitive accumulation of capital.

Indonesian democratisation grew out of the struggle against imperialism, racism and indirect rule through local strongmen. Initially, the groups that had fought for independence were only represented by elitist negotiations in a liberal parliamentary system; there were periods of anticommunist repression; and many cosmopolitan minorities from Asia and Europe had to leave. The main problems were corruption, elitist party politics, and clientelist political mobilisation combined with socio-religious and ethnic networks. The only reasonably modern class based mass-party was built by young communists who opted for a reformist agenda after 1951. Yet there were also important attempts at equal citizenship, rule of law and justice, freedoms and rights and widespread basic education with a unifying Indonesian language. And there were national elections in 1955 and local elections in 1957. Ironically, there was little wrong with these elections, but the outcome was a failure for the elitist western-oriented socialists; there was a stalemate between nationalists, and traditional and modern-oriented Muslims; and they were all afraid that the quite successful Communist Party (PKI) would gain more supporters by closing up behind nationalist President Sukarno and his military leaders and be elected into power. So remarkably – almost all came to agree that democracy was premature and that the right conditions had to be generated in advance (Bourchier and Legge 1994). On the one hand, the liberals, socialists and modernist Muslims advocated marketled development, the rule of law and certain rights and freedoms – but not popular sovereignty – and engaged in an attempted coup and regional protests. On the other hand, President Sukarno along with

nationalists and communists as well as traditionally-oriented Muslims and officers in favour of a unitary state argued that the dissidents posed a threat to national unity and developed therefore a campaign for the 'liberation' of West New Guinea, the nationalisation of all Dutch properties, plans for land reform and the introduction of 'Guided Democracy'. The parliament was dissolved and a new one appointed; elections were postponed and the main dissident parties were outlawed; the constitution was altered in favour of a strong presidency and emergency regulations granted decisive powers to the army. The dissidents tried in vain to respond with a rebellion from the 'outer islands' – after which their western supporters altered their policies by attracting instead the anti-communist officers who had fought the rebels. This new strategy was soon to be summarised in Samuel Huntington's idea about the need for rule of law, strong state institutions and 'politics of order' ahead of popular sovereignty (Huntington 1965). The measures included generous support to the military officers, western education of economists, administrators and the siblings of the officers in cooperation with American university- based area studies programmes and the Ford Foundation. Later on, this perspective was to provide legitimacy for Suharto's mass killings, the coup against Sukarno and the subsequent three decades of authoritarian 'New Order'.

In the early 1960s, however, the communists and President Sukarno on their part were still in command of the largest popular movement in the world, but the situation changed radically in the latter half of 1965. The popular communist movement is of course not to be blamed for the repression and massacre – which aside from being rightist remind very much of Stalin's pogroms in the late 1930s – but how come it was possible in the first place? Despite being a mass movement for radical transformation, the PKI had since circa 1957 failed to uphold the cause of democratisation. The communists had set aside freedoms and elections, opting instead for Sukarno's army-supported 'Guided Democracy', arguing that land reforms and radical nationalism were a precondition to genuine democracy. And the party could not return to an electoral strategy when many of the military officers behind the 'Guided Democracy', from 1960 in particular, turned against the popular movement (Törnquist 1984). On the contrary, a few party leaders engaged in the audacious so-called 30th September Movement (G30S) of dissident officers and political activists against the anti-communist military leadership. These actions became the pretext for army-led repression and mass killings across the country, supported by the west (Roosa 2006).

But there was an even more fundamental problem involved. The very idea of national development and welfare by way of a state supported pact between peasants, labour and the 'national bourgeoisie' for land reforms and anti-imperialism that was to create preconditions for democracy did exactly the opposite – it nourished instead increasingly authoritarian accumulation of capital (Törnquist 1984). The entrepreneurial-oriented actors were often close to the west and anti-communists while the nationalists, who did talk of anti-imperialism and at times even of land reform and popular participation, were not very production-oriented and used instead their radical politics and administrative power to enrich themselves. In the late 1950s moreover, PKI added progressive

nationalist-politicians, bureaucrats and military officers in the state and politics to a coalition for what Moscow labelled 'non-capitalist development'. This made things even worse as those actors in particular came to use radical nationalisation in order to monopolise control of state regulation, assets, credits, investments, prices and jobs as well as labour and trade unions in original accumulation of capital and appropriation of economic surplus.

The problems of anticipating these dynamics were related to Marx's British-based model of the rise of private capitalism, according to which primitive accumulation of capital only refers to the appropriation of land and other means of production from peasants and artisans by commercially-oriented landlords and other private actors supported by the state. The basic means of production were thereby turned into capital (that could be invested) and labourers were turned into commodities (that could be exploited), which enabled capitalist exploitation and accumulation of capital. This was, however, an insufficient analytical framework for post-colonial contexts. Here dominant actors who had been held back by colonialism were too weak to dispossess most people of their land and other means of production in a similarly forceful way. However, they were capable of using politics, the state and military coercion to gain indirect control of natural resources, land and small businesses (and thus also much of the surplus produced in these sectors) as well as to nationalise or take advantage of foreign owned companies in addition to foreign aid. In short, they were quite capable of political accumulation of original capital, which later on became the basis for capitalism.

With regard to class relations within agriculture, it is true that research initiated by the PKI in the late 1950s and early 1960s identified more complicated forms of exploitation as compared to the European model, thus coining the concept of 'seven village devils'. And within other economic sectors the leaders picked up on the Chinese concept of 'bureaucratic capitalists' to characterise their new opponents. But the party never acknowledged that the prime base of their adversaries lay in their control of politics, state and coercion rather than in their links to landlords and imperialists, which the PKI continued to regard as the main enemies and thus tried to weaken by way of supporting Sukarno's land reform agenda, the nationalisation of foreign companies and generally radical nationalism.

The consequences were devastating. The 'national bourgeoisie' and the supposedly progressive state leaders who accepted Sukarno did not act as expected. There was little dynamic investment and growth, even though the PKI was able to constrain militant labour activism in order to build a social pact with the 'national bourgeoisie' and the supposedly progressive leaders of the state and its business interests. The result was severe economic mismanagement and crisis. Protests against looting and corruption resulted in more repression. And the communists could not fight back as doing so would have meant losing the support of Sukarno. People were mobilised for the nationalisation of foreign companies and in support of anti- imperialist policies with the purpose of undermining the strength of the so-called bureaucratic capitalists because their power was supposed to be based on foreign capital and the west. But the military leaders continued to extend their control over both nationalised foreign companies and state resources in general. Although the rural context was more complicated, there was little land that could be expropriated and distributed, and there were few big landlords to fight. When

trying to identify and distribute 'surplus land' it was thus difficult to avoid infighting between small landholders, tenants and labourers. These were subject to more indirect means of exploitation by local strongmen who had succeeded in gaining religious, social, political and administrative power and thus dominated production and trade, while also providing patronage to compete with the communist-led organisations in some instances.

Later on, as part of the elimination of the mass movements under Suharto's New Order, the extraction of surplus by political and administrative means became more visible, brutalised and used for the expropriation of land. In the late 1970s and early 1980s therefore, the main enemy of the rural poor was perceived as the state itself and those in command of it rather than the landlords and strongmen with a base in private market-oriented production (Törnquist 1984a).

In short, transformative democratic politics was undermined both because liberties and elections were set aside, and, more fundamentally, because the social pact in favour of state-driven land reform and anti-imperialism was hijacked by nationalists and the military as a means towards political forms of original accumulation of capital which mass-based movements and political parties were unable to oppose as they had disposed of their democratic tools to fight the new enemies.

This brings us to **the second puzzle**. By the late 1980s the many analysts and actors who had argued since the late 1950s that democracy was premature began to prove wrong. The demands for democratic rights and liberties and the adjustment of the political institutions that were abused became increasingly important items on the political agenda. They culminated in the overthrow of Suharto in 1998 and the fostering of peace and reconstruction in the rebellious, tsunami affected province of Aceh seven years later. So how come that in-spite of this struggle for democracy there were more individual freedom and privatisation than extensive and substantial democratisation and adjustment of state and politics?

It is true that Indonesia today is characterised as a successful case of the crafting of democracy (Aspinall 2010). The country is the most liberal in South East Asia. Papua remains a problem but East Timor has gained independence and the civil war in Aceh was replaced by the inclusion of the conservative former rebels in government. Corruption remains severe but is extensively criticised; and the political role of the military is significantly reduced. And the economy does well thanks to the export of raw materials and middle class consumption. Yet, most analysts argue that the fundamentals are wrong. Some say Indonesian democracy is fake by rather being an oligarchy based on Suharto's old elite, now governing through formally democratic elections in which they use their huge resources to win a majority of the votes (Robinson and Hadiz 2004). Others say there is a combination of freedoms and elections and dominance of a broader alliance of like-minded elites (e.g. Priyono *et al.* 2007; Nordholt and van Klinken 2007, Samadhi and Warouw 2009; van Klinken 2009). The vital freedoms and procedural elements of democracy are possible because centralised political governance of public affairs, including business opportunities, has been replaced by decentralisation, privatisation and delegation to non-governmental institutions. Elected

executives, parliamentarians, private capitalists and NGO leaders have taken over from those who had in the past been appointed by the authorities. And while there have been few safe havens for the old oligarchs, they have been given the best possible opportunities to build new alliances with former dissident politicians, business actors and social leaders. The elite that dominated under Suharto but also those powerful actors who gained a new lease of life after 1998 thanks to economic resources, networks and control of the media, have thus monopolised government institutions. Suharto's corporative system of top-down representation has been disposed on but there is no democratic alternative, only pressure group politics, lobbying and media campaigns that require good contacts and access to substantial funds. As in so many other countries, Indonesia's democratisation has been possible because public affairs have been depoliticised (c.f. Harriss et al. 2004 and Törnquist et al. 2009).

But why were no alternative actors interested and capable of mobilising a broader stratum of popular forces on a consistent democratic platform? This is the **third puzzle**.

The democracy movement was formed of three main strands (e.g. Törnquist 1997; Aspinall 2005; Lane 2008). One was made up of the liberal and socialist-oriented intellectuals and student groups that had been critical of Sukarno's authoritarianism and the PKI's radical nationalism. Some even supported the military in 1965 before they later realised that Suharto's coup involved mass killings and that the military, rather than the middle-class technocrats and intellectuals, would be at the helm. Another strand came from the non-communist trade unions and civil society organisations that focused on the farmers and urban poor. A third strand belonged to a new generation of civil society groups concerned with 'alternative development', often focusing on the environment or human rights and corruption. All dissidents agreed, however, that the authoritarian state was a major obstacle and that 'civil society' was the basis for an alternative. Class differences were not at the forefront and the new groups were neither based on extensive membership nor countrywide organisations outside of the major cities, functioning rather as influential networks. The focus was on specific issues, rights and problems. Later, leftist-oriented students tried to alter this cautious approach, arguing that substantive improvement required regime change. This called for political leadership and closer links between civil society groups, activists and ordinary people. The radical position was increasingly accepted but there was no agreement on how to move ahead. There were temporary coalitions, but most groups stuck to their own projects in opposing the regime and were suspicious of each other. Meanwhile, other activists tried to reach out to ordinary people by relating to socio-religious organisations.

In short, there was a 'democracy movement' in the sense that groups agreed on the need for political change and democratisation. But there was no ideological unity or national level coordination, and almost no attempts at forming united fronts and parties. While important in undermining the legitimacy of the regime, the movement stood for no coherent alternative. A major claim was that 'civil society' and the people themselves should run the country. Yet the movement failed to develop

an alternative transitional arrangement and elitist snap elections made activists lose momentum, only to become socially and politically marginalised (Törnquist 2000; Prasetyo *et al.* 2003).

The major reason behind the democracy groups' inability to form a genuine alternative and develop a transformative strategy is simply that there was no strong reason for any of the actors involved to do so (see Budiman and Törnquist 2001; Prasetyo et al. 2003; Priyono et al. 2007; Samadhi and Warouw 2009). Typically, the pro-democrats only related to specific sections of the population, rarely providing links between, for instance, activities in workplace, residential areas and communities. Activists were engaged in particular localities, paying little attention to wider issues of governance, development and public welfare. There was much focus on the rule of law, human rights, corruption and civil control of the military, less on citizenship and almost nothing on representation and the capacity of governments to implement policies. Activists rarely tried to mobilise followers inside public administration and to engage in organised politics, nor were they present in public and private workplaces. Their main achievement was to collect and disseminate information, engaging in lobbying and pressure group activities and promoting self-management and self-help. Their authority and legitimacy were due to privileged knowledge and participation in the public discourse at the expense of organising with a view of obtaining a public mandate or winning elections. In spite of some advances, the activists remained poorly connected to social movements and popular organisations (and vice versa). Collective action was mainly based on individual networking and alternative patronage as opposed to participation in broad and representative organisations. Parliaments and executive institutions were approached primarily through lobbying by NGOs and critique from the media. Given the issues that were prioritised, this was a more effective strategy, at least in the short run, than to engage in building mass politics, viable political parties or broad interest-based organisations.

This was a major achievement compared with the Suharto period when organised politics (except in the government party) was prohibited at grassroots level in order to turn ordinary people into what the regime called a 'floating mass'. After Suharto, however, the pro-democracy activists themselves were 'floating', having failed to develop a solid social constituency. They were unable to generate substantial improvements in terms of popular control of public affairs on the basis of political equality. In many cases they even contributed to more privatisation and polycentrism. It was not clear what people (*demos*) would control which public affairs. In addition, the groups were often marginalised or co-opted by more powerful local actors within politics, administration and business, as well as by international organisations and donors.

In face of these weaknesses, many activists have tried to develop new ways of engaging in organised politics (Törnquist *et al.* 2009a), to 'go politics'. Some have tried to foster democracy through customary (*adat*) groups, indigenous peoples and Muslim congregations on the basis of equal citizenship. Others have made efforts to bypass 'rotten politics' by developing 'direct politics' to foster public discussion, social auditing, struggle against corruption and participatory budgeting in favour of not very specified 'pro-poor' policies. Additional projects have included the facilitation of trade union

or broader social movement-based politics and parties. The most popular strategy has been to negotiate political contracts of cooperation with strong political actors that need to broaden their alliances and support base beyond predominant clientelist arrangements.

All these strategies reflect existing priorities and organisational practices among the prodemocrats whose aims were modified, not their politics. The main focus was still on issues of immediate concern for their own organisation or movement rather than on interests of wider concern that would have called for broad alliances and mass politics. And when attempting to cooperate, the activists had problems of poor political representation, both within the groups and organisations themselves and in relation to political parties, parliaments and state institutions. Typically it was not even made clear what people (*demos*) were supposed to be in control of what public affairs.

Other activists did attempt to build political fronts from within an already powerful party or movement, turning them into instruments of change. The main problems were the risk of being coopted and the need to build sufficient strength to advance even when it was impossible to build open factions inside a party or movement. And those who built a national ideology-driven party on their own to provide political guidance and coordination to the many democracy groups were better read in radical literature than capable of serving as the representatives of civil society organisations in general and the supposedly broad popular movements that nevertheless hardly existed.

The only political project that at least initially made a crucial difference was that of fighting for the legalising of local parties and independent candidates in elections in the autonomous war-torn and tsunami affected province of Aceh. Remarkably, the leaders and activists involved even managed to turn this into the generally accepted foundation for the peace agreement in Helsinki and to then build an alliance and win the 2006 elections of local executives, in spite of resistance from semi- aristocratic leaders in exile of the Free Aceh Movement (GAM) and mainstream Indonesian politicians. Thus it was possible to envision the new institutions as a model for the country at large as well as for other conflict areas. These advances, however, were rapidly undermined. The international community were busy with the post-tsunami reconstruction work and made little effort to employ their enormous programmes to support attempts at better governance in Aceh. This helped the semi-aristocratic leaders and local strongmen with access to the command structure of the rebel movement to become dominant, to develop power-sharing agreements with former enemies in Jakarta and to do away with the reformists. Moreover, the reformists themselves were not very successful in using the positions that they had gained in the elections to foster interest-based representation and initiate alternative development and welfare measures. Thus most actors, (no matter reformist or not), turned instead to lobbying, clientelism and corruption in their efforts to retain their positions (Törnquist et al. 2011, Törnquist 2013).

In conclusion, Indonesia has gone from the separation in the late 1950s and early 1960s of interest-based mass politics and democratisation to the acknowledgement in the late 1980s onwards that democratisation really is crucial and primary – but now pro-democrats are constrained by polycentrism, individual freedoms and privatisation as well as being disconnected from interest-based mass politics.

Are there any realistic ways to resolve these contradictions between democracy and development?

'The Indonesian story' provides six important lessons in other contexts too. First, the descent into authoritarianism in Indonesia in the 1960s testifies to the problems of incorporation rather than integration of people into politics, including on the part of several of the liberal and socialist leftoriented actors. This remains a key concern in many states that have undergone depoliticised and neoliberal transitions to liberal democracy in recent decades (Harriss et al. 2004; Törnquist et al. 2009; Törnquist 2013a). Second, the historical experiences in Indonesia point to the related problem, namely that many powerful actors gave and still give priority to supposedly stable institutions of governance as a precursor to popular sovereignty. This position, which was influential in political and academic discourse in the 1960s, has returned to the forefront through discussion about the sequencing of institutional reforms for rule of law and popular democratic representation in transitions to democracy (Huntington 1965; Carothers 2007). Today it is supported by the leaders in Beijing and Hanoi too. Third, the Indonesian case demonstrates the unresolved problem of finding a viable alternative to the old social pacts that opened up neoliberal and authoritarian growth models by negating the importance of democratisation to discipline the political accumulation of capital. Fourth, Indonesia also points to the continuous challenges of identity politics and integration, namely how to reconcile universalism and group belonging in institutions and practices of citizenship and democratic representation. Fifth, Indonesia demonstrates the unresolved problem of developing a social democratic alternative to liberal peace strategies. The remarkable advances made in Aceh in 2005 and 2006 were undermined by the shortage of supplementary forms of popular representation to the shallow freedoms and elections that former commanders and old patrons soon adapted to.

Sixth, I want to highlight that the dilemmas facing activists in Indonesia today, briefly summarised as challenges of ambiguous democratic representation and of combining struggle for freedoms and rights with popular interests and mass-based politics, are similar to those of activist in local civil societies in many states who have undergone transitions to liberal democracy and neoliberal development (Harriss *et al.* 2004; Törnquist *et al.* 2009). Even the most advanced new transformative projects such as in Brazil, Kerala, the Philippines and South Africa (see Heller (2013; Bull (2013); Jordhus-Lier (2013); and Baiocchi, Braathen and Teixeira (2013), Törnquist with Tharakan 1996; Törnquist 2004; Tharakan 2004; Törnquist *et al.* 2009a) continue to grapple with the problems of combining conventional liberal-democratic representation (including lobbying and civil society influence) with additional channels of both issue and interest representation, as well as to combine democratisation with reforms for welfare-based economic development.

Where does this take us in the case of Indonesia? Scholars and practitioners involved in the analyses of the problems and options of democratisation and transformative politics that have been drawn upon in the above focus in two openings. One opening is related to what James Manor (2013) has

labelled post-clientelism with reference to other parts of Asia and Africa. The basic argument is that mainstream political leaders can no longer rely on clientelism, bossism and huge financial resources only. To win elections they also need additional means of mobilisation. Thus, many try to add and include populist measures and identity politics. Yet others who want to build a reputation for being more modern and democratic also try to link up with well reputed leaders and activists in civil society and interest organisations in an attempt to win extra votes. This may well end up in the co-optation of activists. But there are also examples of increasingly well prepared progressives who try to develop transformative politics and make gradual advances, for instance in the city of Solo in Central Java (Pratikno and Lay 2013) and most recently in the election of the new Governor of Jakarta. One aspect of the cooperation to this end may, for instance, be demands (in return for the support of powerful politicians) for preferential treatment of genuine interest-based organisations and their democratic inclusion in public governance. Thus it may be possible to facilitate local and central level coalitions for sustainable and welfare-based economic development.

Another opening relates to the needs as well as demands in rapidly late-industrialising countries such as Brazil, India, South Africa, Nigeria and Indonesia for general schemes towards the provision of social security and unemployment benefits, as well as agreements between employers and trade unions on a range of other issues (c.f. Beckman 2004, Chatterjee 2008, Beckman 2009, UNRISD 2010, Harriss et al. 2011, Baiocchi and Braathen 2013, Bull 2013, Harriss 2013, Jordhus Lier 2013, Stokke and Törnquist 2013). If so, it may be possible to identify associated openings for demands, policies and agreements. This may in turn increase the capacity of individual employees and their organisations as well as the necessary means of democracy and government agencies to introduce and implement new welfare policies. The main aim of many dominant actors may certainly be to contain social unrest, but this may also be taken advantage of by strategically thinking actors of change. At the same time, globalisation of not just trade but also finance and production may not just cause uneven development in the Global South but also affect old industrialised countries in the form of environmental problems, de-industrialisation and more. Thus enlightened left of centre governments in the North may wish to redirect (in their own interest) some of their international cooperation in favour of like-minded partners and policies in the South to foster common efforts at disciplining globalisation (Stokke and Törnquist 2013).

Given these openings, what priorities are key to fostering democratic transformative politics? So far the emphasis in Indonesia has been on relatively progressive party or independent candidates in elections of local political executives. Local parties were also thought of as an entry point but were only viable in Aceh -- and with dubious results. The crucial point is, however, to form independent socio-political blocks in relation to such candidates and parties. There is the need to counter fragmentation between various civil society organisations, social movements and political groups by promoting organisation on an intermediate level -- 'above' the typically specific and issue oriented CSOs, popular organisations and social movements and 'below' the top-down party-political

initiatives to win voters and clients. There could be joint demands at this level for institutional arrangements 'from above' that would create better options for popular representation while also stimulating broader organisation and joint action among citizen and popular organisations. The parties and candidates as well as the CSOs and popular groupings would certainly like to form and dominate their own supportive groups and movements and coalitions. But such shortcuts are likely to fail as they would be too narrow and partisan to generate sufficient majorities in elections. Those politicians and supportive groups that really want to make a difference by winning the people's mandate may thus have to opt for more inclusive socio-political blocks with a decisive degree of independence of the elitist politicians as well as of the fragmented CSOs and popular oriented groups; possibly initiated by taskforces at central and local levels with sufficient operational capacity that are separate from but trusted by the politicians and the fragmented groups and movements.

To gain momentum and serve as a platform for agents of change, moreover, the socio-political blocks would have to go beyond the support of particular figures by emphasising the basic democratic principles *and* transformative development and welfare policies. Democratic principles and institutions are needed to generate trust in cooperation, prevent elite-capture and enable the blocks to fight abuses of power, a focus on welfare policies would be needed to strengthen the social and political capacity of the people and their organisations as well as related public governance. Given the comparative experiences from more successful cases (Stokke and Törnquist 2013), the creation of supplementary democratic channels for issue and interest-based representation are deemed fundamental in order to support the growth of broad popular movements and organisations. Similarly, these comparative experiences suggest that various benefits should be as universal as possible rather than targeted and means tested. This is in order to enable wide inclusion and support beyond special interests and groups. Five policy areas seem most critical in the Indonesian context: welfare policies that (as in e.g. Brazil and Scandinavia) contribute to rather than constrain economic growth, sustainable development, transparency and anti-corruption, gender equality, and democratised education and public discourse.

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