

BOOK REVIEW

RETHINKING INDONESIA: POSTCOLONIAL THEORY, AUTHORITARIANISM AND IDENTITY

Simon Philpott; Macmillan Press Ltd., London, 2000, xx-234

Since the colonialization era, Indonesia had become the object of western intellectual studies and shining more after the declaration of Indonesian independence, especially from fifties to the present. They studied Indonesia in several fields. In the political field the first popular person who is studying about Indonesia and known as the founding text of modern Indonesian Studies in United States was George Kahin. In 1952 he appeared a book entitled *Nationalism and Revolution in Indonesia*. Later in 1960 his student Herb Feith also published his book entitled *The Decline of Constitutional Democracy in Indonesia*. In the military field Harold Crouch often spoke about it and he wrote a book in 1978 about this under title *The Army and Politic in Indonesia*. In economic field Richard Robinson composed a book about *The Rise of Capital* which was first published in 1986. Then we didn't forget Ben Anderson who had written *The Idea of Power in Javanese Culture* which first appearing in 1972.

What mentioned above are just some of the populer books written by western researchers and there were many books again written in such kind. Recently, the attention of western intellectuals was increased after the falling of Soeharto that started the reformation era. The writing of many books analyzing the Indonesian situation after coming the reformation era was the clear indicator of it. One of those books was the book, which reviewed here namely *Rethinking Indonesia: Postcolonial Theory, Authoritarianism and Identity* written by Simon Philpott.

After the falling of Soeharto, many western observers were surprised for what happened were out of their thought. They didn't think that Soeharto would lose their dignity in last 1998, remembering that his power was still strong and solid at that time. But seeing what had came about, we knew that politics is an unpredictable affair. The reality of Indonesian politics couldn't be approached and read only through the discipline of formal political science, but also must be completed with the wares of understanding about political mechanic of Indonesia and knowing the history, the culture, and the Indonesian language.

According to the Simmon Philpott as the writer of the book, after the suffering of political and economical crisis in the end of 1997, Indonesia became the most populous nation and many western media often reported about the riot, serious human right abuses and military action against, in particular of the East Timorese which all has become pre-condition of New Order falling. The academicians such as Mc. Donald (1980), Schwarz (1994), Crouch (1978) and Anderson (1998) analogize the power of Soeharto with the power of Javanese Sultan. They argued that Soeharto saw himself as a traditional Javanese Sultan who consolidated all power in his own hands and used his office to dispense largesse to members of his 'courtly' entourage. Soeharto installed loyalists into key political, military, and bureaucratic positions to bolster his power at the periphery of his kingdom, traditionally regarded as the domain least susceptible to tight control by the Sultan.

Unfortunately, the coming of Indonesian political and economical crisis has changed those all. In Javanese culture, the rising of unsatisfying in the mind of people was an indication of the falling of a king power. Moreness over some faction of the military participated in creating of social rudeness, which is an indication of the death of the king. In Javanese culture, a good power must away from the rudeness. A Javanese king was strong as long as he escaped from the manipulation of survival of the power. As for the writer, quoting Anderson's view, many of the power Javanese terminology couldn't be analogized with the western political terminology. And then, it caused many Indonesian political phenomena out of political science study control. However such characteristics that made the study of Indonesian politics was interesting and raising the new assumptions.

The writer approaching in this book used the theoretical instruments belong to the Foucault and Edward Said, especially sourced from the book of *The Order Things* of Foucault (1971) and *Orientalism* of Said (1978). Both of these books explained that the classification of understanding and knowing to certain world depend on the space and time.

Actually, the studies of Indonesian political according to the writer was in a little trouble by the rising of the renewal of some theoretical traditions. Many analyzing and explaining categories like state, culture, tradition, freedom and modernity were some theoretical criticism subject at this time, which not use as the main instruments to analyze and explain Indonesian political discourse. Although, Simmon didn't blame such methods, but the abstract ideas like change and power ought to be seen as something that has specific meaning in Indonesian political discourse.

The neglectfulness has made some changes grew without any attentions, because it was not accordance with the political idea discourse. Such conditions could answer why the situations caused the falling of New Order came

from the 'unknown' thing. In the other words, indeed the people has become a new player in political field, eventhough they were not unknown in Indonesian political discourse, for they weren't political figures.

The questions about politics, power, state, civil society, change, culture, tradition and ethnicity which need to be conceptualized, stimulated the writer to summarize that it is very significant to consider the culture, tradition, and the sources of power in Indonesian politics discourses, that the study of Indonesian politics was legitimated as the reality of Indonesian politics. And finally, it will demand us to research of the beliefs, the assumptions, and the practice.

Through that demand, the writer looks –as he admitted– “forced” to read much more aspects. As the writer often uses Edward Said's theory of “ Post Colonial”, which has been successful to analyze the discourse of Indonesian politic after World War II. The writer of this book uses also the Foucault's theory of archeology and genealogy analyzing power and the subjectivity, which not only focuses on politic reality, but on the subjectivity question and the politic identity. Beside the two theories above, the writer uses also several critical literatures made as an analysis tool such as feminism, post structuralism, and post modernism. Automatically, the change of analysis tool will give impact on the change of focus that must be considered. How to move from the habit of concept accepting from the authority of Indonesian study institute to the statement of individual scholar is included to the change.

At this moment, according to the writer that talking about Human Right, Timor east, and democracy (with another reason) will be a serious threat for Indonesia as Soeharto collapse happened. There are view differences between international worlds and Indonesia in conceiving and in appreciating the problems above. Moreover in Indonesia, the view of government, individual authority, and experts often differ. Ironically, every group claimed that their selves are the truth. At the same moment –as the logical consequence of the end of World War II– there are many decolonization demands needing new perspective to consider the justice, independence, superiority, and egalitarianism matters. All of them go on politic interest of America and Europe states.

The phenomenon above influences the study of Indonesia. This book according to the writer, does not describe New Order only, but will also describe Indonesia with several theories and assumptions in the discourse of Indonesian politic. This book explored Indonesia from various sides to study the political history of Post World War II.

This book described Indonesia as a state having its own geopolitics and history. Beside that, the discourse of cold war, Anti Communism, modern-

ization theory, dependency theory, regime comparative analysis, politic culture, economic miracle, Asia values, and etc. give positive contribution to Indonesia although the reality of Indonesian politic brings about physic victim and its future. But whoever wants to analyze Indonesia, he must study concepts and assumptions produced by the West that have influenced Indonesia.

As the fore introduction of this Simon's book that it contained four chapters. The first chapter told us about the knowing Indonesia through the making of an orientalist discourse. The second one was about the study of Indonesian politic. The third one was about imagining Southeast Asia: power and knowledge in the formation of a Southeast Asian politics studies discourse. And last chapter was about government, subjectivity and power: contemporary Indonesian politics discourse and its alternatives.

Finally, as the study of paradigmatic historic, this book will criticize the discourse of Indonesian politic, which up to now have not considered enough of its imperative role. But these didn't deny what appear right now. Last but not least this book is very important for an intellectual who is interested in Indonesian studies.

M. Zainal Abidin & Fahrurrozi