

Geoffrey Robinson, *The dark side of paradise; Political violence in Bali*. Ithaca/London: Cornell University Press, 1995, xxii + 341 pp. ISBN 0.8014.2965.X. Price US\$ 38.—.

HENK SCHULTE NORDHOLT

This is a brilliant book that must be read by anybody interested in modern Indonesia. Robinson wrote an exemplary local history in which persistent myths concerning cultural explanations of Balinese politics are demolished by showing how political processes, conflicts, and eventually the massacre of 1965-1966 can only be understood within a wider analytical framework in which the interaction between external and local states is of crucial importance.

The main question is a simple one, but has received extremely little attention in the academic world: How was it possible that from December 1965 till February 1966 80,000 Balinese, namely 5 per cent of the population, were killed in the aftermath of the September Coup in Jakarta? Some have tried to explain the blood-bath in terms of Balinese trance, cosmic imbalance, and ritual purification, but Robinson argues convincingly that such an approach has no analytical value. Instead, it serves the interests of the New Order regime by obscuring who the actual killers were, when and how they committed their crimes, and why.

Turning away from cultural explanations Robinson demonstrates that from the beginning of the twentieth century external states have influenced the outcome of the changing power relationships between regional and local figurations in Bali. In doing so it becomes clear that national politics in the post-war period were not just absorbed into traditional feuds between local factions; the struggle for power in Bali was the product of a dynamic interplay between national, regional, and local forces. It was this interplay that created new conditions, shifting alliances, new conflicts, and in the end the tragic circumstances under which so many people were killed.

Except for the colonial period when the Dutch established a power monopoly, Balinese history has been characterized by violence because of the fairly weak level of integration at the regional level. In Chapters 2-4 Robinson provides an outline of the main developments between 1900 and 1945. The seeming tranquillity during the colonial period has wrongly been identified as an essential characteristic of Balinese culture. Cogently, the absence of open conflict did not mean that there were no tensions. The uneven distribution of land, the powerful position of local kings within the system of indirect rule, the regulation of caste relationships, and, above all, the heavy burden of colonial taxation raised new conflicts within Balinese society. During the 1930s large parts of the population were impoverished because Bali paid two-thirds of all the taxes from the Outer Islands. During the Japanese occupation tensions between collaborating members of the

aristocracy and commoners intensified, while poverty increased and mass mobilization and military training created a militant youth that was not willing to welcome a return of the Dutch.

Chapters 5-7 discuss the complex interplay of external and internal forces during the revolution. Bali was caught between the Republic in Yogya and the pro-Dutch state of Eastern Indonesia (NIT), while within the island both moderate and radical revolutionaries, and weak and strong kings either tried to survive or to annex regional power. When the Dutch finally returned to the island in March 1946 they were faced with a strong resistance movement and were soon involved in guerrilla warfare. Robinson gives a detailed and well-documented picture of the complexities during this period which includes economic developments, caste issues, rivalries within the aristocracy and among the revolutionaries as well as between Dutch civil servants and the military. The outcome of these shifting figurations can only be understood if developments at the national level are taken into account. The majority of the revolutionary guerrilla forces decided for instance to surrender in May 1948, because the Republic had recognized the NIT at the Renville Conference earlier that year. It is also interesting to contemplate that the NIT was not purely a Dutch puppet state. Both the president (Cokorda Soekawati) and the prime minister (Anak Agung Gde Agung) of the NIT were Balinese and clashed with senior Dutch civil servants in Bali (Boon and Van Baal) over issues in which their personal interests were involved. As a result the Dutch civil servants lost their case and were removed from their positions.

In 1950 the revolution in Bali was by no means over, and local violence, including hundreds of killings, continued till 1957. The formation of political parties (PSI, PNI, and later PKI) and new alliances (between administrative, political and military factions) were partly a result of struggles for power dating from the revolution, but they were also informed by developments at the national level. In Chapters 7-10 Robinson explores the period between 1950 and 1965 about which very little has been written. Bali was in this period by no means an isolated part of Indonesia but depended in various respects heavily on the centre of the nation-state. It is impossible to summarize here all the events and developments in that period. One of the most striking features is the extent to which local and national politics became intertwined. Governor Suteja (1950-1965) manifested himself as a replica of Soekarno, and the rise of the PKI in Bali in the late 1950s reflects its growth at the national level. Also the alliance between the PKI and the governor in Bali runs parallel to the rapprochement between the party and President Soekarno.

In a separate chapter Robinson deals with economic developments. Bali depended for 90 per cent on revenues from Jakarta and as a result of inflation, low wages, shortage of land, crop failures, and the eruption of Gunung Agung in 1963 class conflict increased. In this context the PKI created a mass base which was mobilized during the campaigns for land

reforms in the early 1960s, which resulted in increased tension and conflicts. Robinson emphasizes that class did matter in those years. Special attention is also paid to the shifting role of the military and police forces in Bali at that time.

In this situation the coup and counter coup in Jakarta in 1965 had dramatic reverberations in Bali. The PKI soon lost its major allies and was isolated, but it took two months before the final reckoning started. In Chapter 10 Robinson describes the horrible killings that took place in Bali in terms of cultivating an atmosphere, organizing the means and logistics of the killings which were mainly done by military from Java. Robinson's analysis is also a verdict, because it cannot be denied that both Soeharto, actively supported by the USA, which was very well informed about what happened, local commanders, and leaders of PNI gangs deliberately organized the massacre of thousands of innocent people. By playing up the cultural peculiarities of Bali, and depicting the PKI as the embodiment of evil as a result of which victims 'volunteered' to be killed, the responsibility for this criminal act has been deliberately obscured and moved into the elusive realm of culture.

Despite my admiration for this book, I still have one question and two critical remarks. In November 1946 the Dutch wiped out the major revolutionary force in Bali and killed almost hundred guerrillas in one day. Is there any connection between these killings and the mass killings committed by Raymond Westerling in South Sulawesi, and the plans to establish the state of Eastern Indonesia (NIT)? Did, in other words, the Dutch want to get rid of revolutionaries around the capital of the NIT (Ujung Pandang) and the place where the NIT was officially proclaimed in December 1946 (Denpasar)?

Although Robinson states repeatedly that, besides political and economic factors, it is also important to observe the cultural specificities of Bali (p. 12, 264, 275, 307, 311), we are never told precisely what these cultural factors actually were, nor how they played a role in conceptualizing politics and conflicts in the Balinese setting. Following on from this point, the second remark is that I miss an additional local perspective on political developments in Bali, especially when it concerns the massacre of 1965-1966. In this respect I also miss a more precise description of the role of the PNI gangs, the so-called Tameng Marhaenis. They are only mentioned in passing, but seemed to have been a vital element in the logistics of the killings.

My final conclusion is, however, that Robinson has written an outstanding study which deserves a large audience, also because he has reminded us once more about the bloody origins of the New Order regime.

---