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Miller, Michelle Ann (2009), *Rebellion and Reform in Indonesia – Jakarta’s Security and Autonomy Policies in Aceh*, London/ New York: Routledge

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Over the last decade, Aceh – Indonesia’s northern-most province, burdened not only by the devastating tsunami in 2004 but also by a thirty-year long separatist conflict – has received profound scholarly attention. Unlike other scholars, who write about the Aceh conflict by promoting a bottom-up perspective (Drexler 2008; Aspinall 2009), Michelle Miller in *Rebellion and reform in Indonesia* takes a top-down approach and focuses on the widespread implications of the legislation on decentralisation and special autonomy for conflict resolution. In her centre-periphery study, Miller explores how four post-Suharto governments tried to accommodate centrifugal forces striving for Aceh’s disintegration. Comparing the initiatives and capacities of four subsequent regimes that aimed to contain the Aceh conflict by introducing a higher degree of regional autonomy, Miller demonstrates in detail how Jakarta addressed one of its most severe domestic challenges between 1998 and 2007. Although Miller offers meticulous research and an enormous amount of detail, she has managed to present her findings in a fluent and appealing writing style, which makes reading the book very enjoyable. In fact, the precision of the chronological overview of the past ten years and the accuracy of the detail make it a notably useful reference book for anybody interested in Aceh.

Based on the assumption that a certain instability is inherent in democratising states during their transition to democracy and therefore often prove to be weaker than authoritarian governments in their capacity to retain sovereignty over their disputed state territory, this study is driven by the question of how post-authoritarian regimes, especially multi-ethnic ones deal with the challenge of separatism in times of political transition. Miller argues that “Indonesia’s capacity to resolve its Aceh dilemma since 1998 has depended to a great extent on political agency, or ‘will’” (p. 183). With the structural and functional constraints of the New Order and the 1997 Asian financial and economic crisis in mind, Miller sets about investigating the legacies of the presidents Habibie, Wahid, Sukarnoputri, and Yudhoyono, whose governments aimed at granting special autonomy without losing control over Aceh. The book is divided into four parts; each part contains two chapters about one of the four respective presidents and their legacies in regard to finding a solution to the ‘Aceh problem’.

According to Miller, when B. J. Habibie came to power the security situation in Aceh was “highly unstable, but not yet critical” (p. 13). Local support for the *Gerakan Aceh Merdeka* (Free Aceh Movement, GAM) was

still weak, but so was the power of the state in Aceh (and other parts of the archipelago). This power vacuum allowed Aceh's reform movement to flourish and come forward with energetic demands for the persecution of human rights' violators and compensation for victims from the time Aceh was declared a special military zone (DOM). Having suffered a massive loss of state authority and legitimacy following Suharto's resignation in May 1998, the Habibie government was more receptive to public pressure for democratic reform, despite being in many ways a continuation of New Order personnel. At the beginning of his term, Habibie was in favour of a peaceful settlement to the conflict; he initiated human rights investigations, ordered the withdrawal of non-organic troops from Aceh and granted amnesty to hundreds of political prisoners. However, the results of the two commissions sent to Aceh to investigate human rights violations during DOM were ignored in Jakarta, and the responsible military officials remained unpunished. In addition to these shortcomings, which seriously diminished Habibie's credibility, it was not long before his policies adopted more repressive strategies consisting of excessive responses towards GAM activities on the ground. Miller outlines in detail why this policy shift backfired. Although the police had been structurally separated from the military and were solely in charge of internal security tasks, the military under General Wiranto had enough leeway to handle matters 'its way'. According to Miller, a number of massacres of Acehnese civilians by the military were the "most fertile incubator for creating another generation of GAM fighters" (p. 39).

Stemming from the incapacity of the police to uphold the rule of law, GAM benefited most by fuelling anti-Indonesian sentiment and openly challenging Indonesia's national unity. In fact, GAM managed to spread its control over rural areas, causing mass displacements (especially Javanese migrants) and pushing local village heads to resign from state duties. New violence evoked counter-violence, mostly in the form of counter-insurgency operations. On the one hand, the military's renewed takeover seriously reduced state legitimacy and therefore its capacity to govern Aceh effectively. On the other hand, for too long Habibie had offered only empty promises of more autonomy while at the same time implementing military campaigns. His reforms towards decentralisation came too late and were insufficient to regain the trust of the Acehnese population in the Jakarta government. Only in September 1999 was the law on special autonomy for Aceh (Law 44/1999) passed, granting additional powers in the fields of Islamic law, education and customary law (*adat*). This new legislation proved to be rather meaningless to the majority of the Acehnese population and therefore assisted GAM indirectly to consolidate its power in Aceh.

When Wahid became president in October 1999, Aceh had developed into Indonesia's most severe domestic security problem. GAM had lined up with the Aceh Referendum Information Centre (SIRA) demanding a referendum on Acehnese self-determination, which was spurred on by developments in East Timor, where the outcome of a public vote had decided in favour of national independence. In November 1999, Aceh saw the largest pro-referendum mass rallies bring hundreds of thousands to the streets of Banda Aceh. Fearing the 'balkanisation' of Indonesia, the Jakarta ruling elite rejected another referendum, although a number of Wahid's "off-the-cuff remarks" (p. 66) had demonstrated that he was not that disinclined to grant the Acehnese a public vote as well. However, after being summoned by the parliament, Wahid was forced to abandon referendum plans, which cost him his much needed legitimacy both in Jakarta and Aceh. In fact, his inconsistent statements and his generally "dysfunctional and erratic governance" (p. 66) alienated not only the Acehnese but also military generals who served as ministers in his cabinet. Like Habibie, Wahid also applied a mixture of persuasive and repressive policies, for example he gave amnesties to political prisoners and initiated more human rights investigations. However, the outcome of the trials held at civil-military connectivity courts, in which no senior military commander was adequately prosecuted, again revealed the impunity of the military and the weakness of the judiciary, legislature and executive in post-Suharto Indonesia.

One of Wahid's probably most important merits in his otherwise chaotic leadership and his impromptu decision-making without cabinet consultation was the initiation of peace talks with GAM. Not only did he send state secretary Bondan Gunawan to Aceh to talk with GAM chief commander Abdullah Syafi'ie, but Wahid also tried to get in touch with the GAM leadership overseas. According to Miller, the signing of the Humanitarian Pause in May 2000 was definitely a breakthrough; but the agreement did not address the substantive issues of the Aceh conflict. Moreover, both GAM and the military contravened the agreement. The violence in Aceh continued unabated, a number of civil leaders were killed and Aceh civil society groups were pushed more and more into silence. Security operations intensified and violence escalated sharply in 2001. In particular, the redeployment of non-organic troops and new counter-insurgency campaigns resulted in sweepings, unlawful arrests, extortion and burning of houses. Although Wahid could resist demands for partial martial law, Vice-President Megawati and her military allies were on the ascendant.

While Wahid was busy saving his skin after two corruption scandals and fending off widespread calls for his impeachment, he lost his focus on Aceh. A few days before Wahid was ousted from office, he signed the

presidential instruction 4/2001 that stipulated a combination of counter-insurgency on the one hand and social, political and economic reforms for Aceh on the other. The latter were manifested in the special autonomy law for Nanggroe Aceh Darussalam (NAD) (Law 18/2001). Even though the new legislation granted Aceh direct local elections and a special position for *Wali Nanggroe* (guardian of the state) in reference to Hasan Tiro, the original founder of GAM, the right to implement syariah law and to keep 70 percent of the oil and gas revenues for the next eight years, all these incentives could not restore the confidence of the Acehnese in the Jakarta government. Or as Miller put it, the new special autonomy law was “widely seen as meaningless amidst the escalating violence” (p. 87).

When Megawati became president there were more security forces on the ground than at any other time since the end of the New Order. Due to Megawati’s lack of goodwill, the military was able to pursue its agenda (p. 126). For the chronically underfinanced security forces, Aceh became an essential means of income generation by allowing the soldiers to engage in all sorts of legal and illegal business. The search for a democratic solution had become disillusioned. Although Megawati apologised to the Acehnese about former human rights violations, there was no action in regard to human rights issues. New atrocities by the military, such as the Bantaquiah massacre, were only superficially investigated by the national Human Rights Commission (KOMNAS HAM). Like her predecessors, Megawati applied a dual track policy consisting of security operations and special autonomy. At the beginning of her presidency, she signed the special autonomy Nanggroe Aceh Darussalam (NAD). However, her government put little effort into properly implementing that new law. In fact, generally Megawati deeply mistrusted provincial autonomy for undermining the unitary state and therefore reduced the government’s emphasis on decentralisation. Moreover, Jakarta became increasingly frustrated with the Aceh provincial government, its ineffective leadership, poor performance, mismanagement and a number of corruption scandals that further eroded the faith of the Acehnese in the Indonesian authorities.

Jakarta’s Aceh approach hardened and many politicians had growing sympathies for a purely military solution to deal with the Acehnese, who were thought to have unrealistic demands after having already being granted many concessions and to be too stubborn to be accommodated by peaceful means. Regarding Megawati’s Aceh policies, it was the former general and then Coordinating Minister of Political and Security Affairs, Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, who played a key role in drafting operational plans. Intensified security operations resulted in some success for the Indonesian security forces, causing GAM to lose control over the cities and having to retreat to

rural areas, especially after killing GAM commander in chief Abdullah Syafi'ie in January 2002. Militia recruited and equipped by the military complicated the situation on the ground.

Although Megawati tried to sideline GAM leaders in Sweden from the guerrillas on the ground and to discredit GAM as a terrorist organisation after 9/11, peace talks with GAM resumed in Geneva in February 2002 following international pressure. But neither the renewed peace process nor the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement (CoHA) in December 2002 could reduce the violence on the ground. Since Jakarta kept insisting that GAM must accept the new NAD law as more than merely a starting point for new negotiations and also hand in its weapons to end the armed struggle for independence, GAM refused to comply. After the collapse of the peace process and with preparations for martial law already under way, Megawati declared a military emergency in Aceh in May 2003.

What followed was Indonesia's largest military operation after the invasion of East Timor, which did not address any of the primary or secondary causes of the Aceh conflict but on the contrary aggravated the violent conflict. After declaring martial law, the central government put all decentralisation efforts on hold and also discontinued further socialisation of the law. Except for establishing a shariah agency, nothing much was done to improve the capacities of the inefficient provincial and sub-provincial administrations during the military emergency. Although Aceh received more funding due to the special autonomy law, there was hardly any trickle-down effect that would have benefited the impoverished population. According to Miller, the "general living standards in Aceh further declined after NAD law came into effect" (p. 136). The further implementation of shariah law could not reduce the violence in Aceh nor had the shariah promoters much to offer in regard to conflict resolution. On the contrary, some clerics seized the opportunity to promote a very conservative Islamic agenda promoting physical punishments for drinking, gambling and extramarital intercourse. The regular harassment of women for not conforming to clothing regulations caused a lot of protest but did not result in any policy changes. In fact, so Miller argues, shariah law became a political tool for the local conservative elites.

When Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono took office, Aceh was no longer a major political issue in Indonesia and the state had regained stability. Although most nationalist politicians favoured the continuation of the military approach in Aceh and even the wider Indonesian population had only little sympathy for the Acehese cause, Yudhoyono and his Deputy Yusuf Kalla were committed to pacifying Aceh and therefore employed secret shuttle diplomacy to work towards new peace negotiations. However, under Yud-

hoyono there were no troop withdrawals, no amnesty for political prisoners nor any apologies for past atrocities. Reasserting the authority of the Indonesian security forces pushed GAM to retreat further in rural areas, even though in May 2004 martial law was downgraded to civil emergency. Although GAM declared a unilateral ceasefire after the tsunami hit Aceh on 26 December 2004, the military continued attacks in areas spared by the tsunami. In fact, more troops were sent to Aceh (p. 157).

At the same time, under the auspices of the former Finnish President Marti Ahtisaari new, more ambitious peace negotiations between representatives of the Indonesian government and GAM took place in Helsinki to address substantive issues. Given the devastating situation in Aceh after the natural catastrophe, both sides were more eager to make considerable compromise. In the peace agreement signed in August 2005, GAM agreed to end its armed struggle for independence and accept 'self-government' instead of special autonomy, thus making Aceh the most autonomous province in Indonesia. Moreover, the Indonesian side approved the formation of Aceh-based political parties and independent candidates for the regional elections. An international Aceh Monitoring Mission oversaw the demobilisation of GAM and the decommissioning of its weapons, as well as the withdrawal of non-organic troops and the release of more than 1000 GAM prisoners. Although facing strong opposition by the military and the parliament (especially Megawati's party) to the Helsinki peace deal, Yudhoyono managed to persuade these opposing forces to accept the agreement.

Nevertheless, the new Law on Governing Aceh (LoGA 11/2006) passed in July 2006 delivered fewer concessions than had been agreed upon in the Helsinki accord. Besides independent candidates in local elections, Aceh-based political parties, continuing revenues from natural resources and the right to implement Islamic law, the LoGA contains more emphasis on human rights and even stipulates a human rights court and the formation of a truth and reconciliation commission. However, lacking retroactivity, only offences committed after the promulgation of the law but not from the time of the conflict can be covered. So far, nothing much has been done to accelerate their implementation (Aspinall 2008). Even though GAM representatives did very well in the first local elections after the conflict in December 2006, and in fact, one GAM member was even elected governor, human rights issues have not been made high priority.

Under the LoGA Aceh is entitled to special autonomy funds and, together with the massive financial support of foreign donor countries in aid of the reconstruction, Aceh is now able to rely on a substantial financial security for its near future and therefore has the chance to fundamentally change the disadvantageous condition on the ground that had caused the

armed rebellion against Jakarta. However, so far it seems that the local bureaucracy spends more on vehicles, buildings and equipment rather than on the required training for staff, who lack the skills and capacities to plan, manage and implement their new and large budgets effectively (p. 180). The LoGA has not ended all political and structural problems in Aceh, however, especially as the omission of some key provision from the Helsinki peace accord might become an ongoing source of dispute between the central government and Aceh. Nevertheless, so Miller concludes, if both the former conflicting parties uphold their commitment to peace, these remaining problems should be manageable.

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