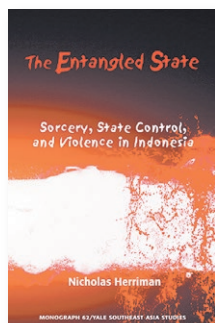


# Social control from below

In *The Entangled State: Sorcery, State Control, and Violence in Indonesia*, Nicholas Herriman draws on extensive ethnographic fieldwork in East Java and as a result calls into question the common scholarly understanding of the Indonesian state.

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Reviewed publication:  
Herriman, N. 2012. *The Entangled State: Sorcery, State Control, and Violence in Indonesia*, New Haven: Council on Southeast Asia Studies at Yale University. 172 pages. ISBN: 9780938692980 (paperback)

SPECIFICALLY, HERRIMAN INVESTIGATES

community-instigated killings of alleged sorcerers in the East Javanese regency of Banyuwangi, a region which, in the wake of Suharto's fall, witnessed an outbreak of sorcerer murders. Herriman conducted participant observation fieldwork in one Banyuwangi village and complemented this in-depth research with scores of interviews throughout the regency on sorcery cases from 1998, as well as from past decades. From this material, he is able to paint a fascinating, textured picture of sorcery accusations and killings in contemporary East Java. Rather than attributing this sorcery-related violence to yet another form of state terror, Herriman positions sorcery as an ideal window into the multi-faceted and often times contradictory ways that the Indonesian state manifests itself at the level of the village. Looking at village officials in particular, Herriman elucidates how local state representatives faced an intractable dilemma between communal demands for (often violent) action against alleged sorcerers and a state logic of legality, rationality, and order.

## Locally planned and popular violence

Herriman argues that village-level state officials are not only representatives of the Indonesian state but are also residents of their respective villages and are therefore deeply embedded within the social networks and norms of the community. As a result, these village officials are often sympathetic themselves to retributive actions against alleged sorcerers or subject to substantial communal pressure to allow such violence to occur. In attempting to navigate these village demands against the state imperative to maintain order, Herriman finds that local officials usually deploy one of three options: ignore the problem of sorcery altogether; seek to balance community demands with protection of the accused through re-location or protective custody; or openly side with perpetrators of retributive violence. In a majority of the cases he studied, Herriman notes that local officials "cave in to pressure from below" and therefore, to varying degrees,

compromise the state's absolute control over violence (99). For Herriman, this phenomenon of "social control from below" exemplifies the entangled nature of the state. In Herriman's words, "such entanglement produces a hybrid society in which local residents seek the state, rather than avoid it, adopting it into their lives on their own terms. In other words, the state is appropriated to local needs" (2). Therefore, the state is not separate and opposed to civil society; rather, the two are mutually constitutive with overlapping interests and claims to power.

Although Herriman grounds his analysis in the specific case of East Javanese sorcery killings, his concept of the 'entangled state' has broad implications for how to understand governance in modern Indonesian history. In this sense, the book serves as a welcome challenge to dominant academic accounts of the New Order as a violent, authoritarian state capable of terror and control at nearly every level of Indonesian life. Herriman criticizes such depictions of the New Order for being largely unsubstantiated and overly simplistic. Instead, he underscores the persistence of local participation and even initiative in *Reformasi*-era violence (from the East Javanese sorcery killings anti-sorcery to riots in Jakarta) as well as in the 1965-66 anti-communist massacres. While not denying oppressive behaviors on the part of the Indonesian state in either period, Herriman exposes locally planned and popular violence, thereby breaking down the false dichotomy between the immoral, authoritarian state and innocent, passive Indonesians. He therefore rejects the "overly sentimental" moral outrage which many academics have directed against the Indonesian state in exchange for a democratization of violence. On the sorcery killings in particular, Herriman writes: "my research indicates that local residents were not passive and peaceful Indonesians provoked into violence. They were not 'faced' with horror or 'living' with 'large armed groups dragging their neighbors away' or 'gripped by fear' at the 'bizarre and menacing' murders. Rather, they were actively involved in and leading these groups and were relieved to finally be rid of the 'accursed sorcerer' when they had finally killed them" (145). In this more democratic landscape of violence, ordinary Indonesians possess the agency to commit their own acts of terror. They are thus entangled in both collective violence and in the Indonesian state.

## Discretion of the state

For the most part, *The Entangled State* is a convincing and much needed correction to prevailing depictions of the Indonesian state and of the New Order in particular. Nonetheless, there were moments when Herriman's argument would have benefited from

a more extended discussion of the legal role of the state in cases of sorcerer killings. Specifically, in which contexts were the killers of alleged sorcerers arrested and brought to trial? Who within the Indonesian state initiated these proceedings, and to what extent were representatives of the state divided over the legality and ethics of such cases? Moreover, the purported arbitrariness by which Indonesian state officials sought to prevent or, after the fact, to adjudicate the killings of alleged sorcerers perhaps points to an unexamined source of state power: discretion. Did the specter of potential prosecution for retributive violence against sorcerers exact any control over villagers? Over village officials? In order to make his argument about 'the entangled state' more persuasive, the book calls for a more detailed exploration of the mechanisms by which state power did exert itself, especially in the legal realm, in relationship to sorcery.

In his engaging examination of 'the entangled state', Herriman concludes that "local communities thus exert control over local state representatives, resulting in a breakdown of state control at the local level" (147). However, what exactly constitutes the local for Herriman? The book's fifth chapter provides a brief sketch of local village officials who reside in their constituencies versus 'supralocal' career bureaucrats who reside in towns; but, beyond the implication that villages are synonymous with the local, Herriman does not explicate the wider meaning of the term. Indeed, Herriman treats the local as a self-evident category – a problematic move given the significance of a 'local' perspective on the Indonesian state for the book's overall argument. At the core of this argument is Herriman's contention that local state officials are inextricably part of their local communities and therefore suffer from a dual loyalty to local concerns and state logics. Yet, are these aspects of 'local state representatives' confined only to villages? If so, then are mayors of small towns, provincial-level bureaucrats, or even ministry officials who work in Jakarta therefore *not* embedded in their own communities? Are they not subject to the demands of kin and neighbors? By extension, are the town, city, province, and nation then still governed by a self-contained and authoritarian state? By taking the category of the local as self-evident, Herriman continues to attribute state control to some undefined 'center' (for example, pg. 99), without taking the next logical step and questioning the autonomy of higher levels of state bureaucracy as well. In other words, how high up the ladder of state authority does the entangled-ness of the state go? Without a more critical discussion of the local as a category, Herriman allows the question to linger.

Despite the abovementioned critique, Nicholas Herriman's ethnographic study of sorcery in East Java provides both a nuanced glimpse into a fascinating moment in recent Indonesian history and contributes an important voice to the on-going scholarly discussion over state power in Indonesia. Filled with intriguing details of village politics, it thereby enriches our understanding of contemporary East Java, of sorcery, and of the relationship between violence and the Indonesian state.

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Liu describes how leading Indonesians during the Sukarno years were invited to China as part of Beijing's efforts to win Indonesia's friendship amidst heightening Cold War tension in the region. These Indonesians returned with generally positive accounts of the country they saw. They found among the Chinese a sense of purposefulness, discipline and willingness to make sacrifices for the new nation. They saw cities that were clean and public services that worked. And entering China from Hong Kong, Indonesian visitors encountered a way of life they judged as less decadent. Liu sums up that China, to admiring Indonesians, was a nation undergoing economic growth with equitable sharing of wealth, of a populist regime supported by the people, and of intellectuals actively participating in nation-building.

For Pramoedya, it was universal humanism expressed by Chinese intellectuals that attracted his attention and on this he had much to share during his two trips to China in the late 1950s. Pramoedya was impressed too by the productive output of intellectuals and the higher rewards and status they were accorded compared to those in Indonesia.

## Idealized image

Liu suggests that Indonesia's idealized image of China differed greatly from Western observers who viewed the country as a repressive, totalitarian communist state. Indonesians disassociated the China they admired from its communist ideology and instead credited the creation of a disciplined, cohesive and harmonious society to Chinese nationalism and the new democracy. Sukarno saw no incompatibilities between the ideas driving China and his

own views, and his interpretation of China's political experience served as a key rationale for the introduction of Guided Democracy that greatly concentrated power in the president's hands. Disenchanted with Western-style democracy, China as a model appealed to Sukarno.

In setting the discussion of the China metaphor within Indonesia's efforts at nation-building, Liu invites a relook at modernity theories beyond those that are Western-dominant. Elaborating on S.N Eisenstadt's reference to "multiple modernities" Liu asserted that a transnational and intranational flow of ideas and people encouraged the articulation of the idea of 'Asianism' and consequently the search for modernity in the Asian context. It was this two-way flow of ideas that led to an appreciation among Indonesia's political elite of another path to modernity which was Chinese in nature.

The Chinese metaphor in Indonesia's search for an alternative modernity route is a fascinating proposition by Liu. Nevertheless, in the wider Indonesian society deeply rooted in Islam and Javanese culture, one is reminded that there had always been competing sources of inspirations and strategies to overcome the country's economic and political challenges. That the Chinese model was most positively appreciated, as Liu noted, simply underlined "the complex characteristics and ambivalent nature" of Indonesia's intellectuals and politicians as well as of the political mood of the period.

## More nuanced understanding

Indonesia's contemplation of the China route ended abruptly following the failed PKI-inspired coup in 1965 and the over-

throw of Sukarno. The China that captured the imagination of Indonesian leaders itself went through political convulsions during the Cultural Revolution.

Diplomatic relations between Jakarta and Beijing were restored only in 1990. But it is a different China that Indonesians today encounter. China has abandoned many of the features that once impressed visiting Indonesians and Beijing has since 1978 embarked on reforms and a more open economy. It is not world revolution that propels China's return to Indonesia but markets and natural resources. Indonesia too has changed to a politically freer and more competitive environment. Indonesian leaders, like those who preceded them, recognize the progress and potential of an emerging China.

Liu Hong's study draws together very complex sets of perceptions and perspectives into a coherent narrative. This is timely and helpful in enabling an understanding not only of evolving relations between China and Indonesia, but also how Indonesians view their country's development both in the past and the present. It brings new research approaches, drawing upon extensive and little used Indonesian and Chinese sources including recently opened records of the Chinese Foreign Ministry, to achieve a richer and more nuanced understanding not only of Indonesia's turbulent Constitutional and Guided Democracy years but also of a society's self-criticism amidst competing aspirations.

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