

*Bahasa Reformasi: Political rhetoric in post-Suharto Indonesia*

By ARNDT GRAF

Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2010. Pp. 202. Appendix, Glossary, Bibliography, Index.

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This book originates from the author's 'habilitation thesis', a requirement for his promotion to professorship. It displays the author's extensive reading on the Indonesian *reformasi* movement (1998), in several lengthy reviews of a wide range of works on Indonesia, with indiscriminate levels of relevance to the core issues at hand. The author assumes that an older work on a subject matter is better than a newer one, except his own. While dismissing the merits of nearly all previous works on the subject matter (p. 107), the author repeatedly expresses his frustration when finding a piece of work by others that does not cite older works. He does so, without explaining what exactly the consequence of such omission might be in the cases cited, so that criticism is warranted.

Political upheavals in the wake of the overthrow of the New Order government in May 1998 are examined thoroughly, as a context and background to the book's focus, namely the political rhetoric of the few individual politicians. Since the international dimension is overlooked, they appear largely as national events. The book consults a broad scope of materials, including a considerable amount of journalistic materials in Indonesian. Readers may wish to keep a copy of the book as a kind of encyclopaedic reference on the Indonesian *reformasi* period, with some awareness that in several areas the factual details could be debatable. In others, they can be fine-tuned. For instance, the author tells us that Forum Demokrasi was 'founded in the early 1990s' as 'a late successor to Indonesians in the beginning of the twentieth century' (p. 51). To be precise, it was founded in March 1991, as an immediate and confrontational response to then President Suharto's establishing ICMI (Ikatan Cendekiawan Muslim Indonesia, 'Association of Indonesian Muslim Intellectuals') in December 1990.

The generous presentation of the empirical details has not consistently served the author's purpose. At times, these details appear excessive, drawing the reader's attention away from the book's focus. The chapters also suffer from a lack of coherence. Various works are cited and simply summarised, with no adequate discussion how they might be relevant to the main concerns of the book. Most sections contain interesting commentaries on specific issues with very loose connections. Issues of coherence are most pronounced when the author jumps from a literary analysis of poems in Part II and deploying a highly imaginative style of narrative to make his arguments, to a presentation of percentile figures in a series of tables, a result of his statistics of word frequency in Part III.

The author also claims that the earliest important work on the subject matter is a little-known journal article in French by Hussein-Jouffroy (1976). He regrets other works do not cite it. There is no substantive discussion to support his claim. He considers nearly all previous works, except Hussein-Jouffroy's, as being flawed, based on his allegation that those works are based on 'guess work' (p. 107). Again, no elaboration is provided to support this serious allegation. Relying on computerised statistical

tables in Part III, he claims his 'computational rhetoric' method and positivistic collection of data to be superior to other keywords studies on Indonesia.

Part III is dedicated to a keyword approach and analysis of humour. The origin and global popularity of the keyword approach has been widely attributed to the book *Keywords* by Raymond Williams (1976). In Graf's book the term means something else that will disappoint those familiar with the legacy of Williams' perspective. While citing various books inspired by Williams, the author ignores the theoretical insights and methodological rigour that have been developed in the growing body of literature. His own version of the keyword approach means calculating the numerical frequency of words used by six individual members of the Indonesian top political elite between 1997 and 2000.

Keyword analysts usually begin with examining how certain keywords have power to 'bound together certain ways of seeing culture and society' (Williams, 1976: 15) and how they change over time. Language is taken as a form of social relations that is both indicative and constitutive of history, and politics is understood in its broadest sense. In the book under review, however, language is seen as a tool in the hands of individual politicians in a series of media interviews. Politics is understood very narrowly: formal state institutions and state officials.

The book is undoubtedly a product of hard labour, with rich empirical details on one of the most unstable moments in Indonesian history. That moment was just the beginning of a series of rapid political changes in the country, however, rendering many of the details from the period under study here obsolete by the time this book was published a decade later.

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*Five centuries of Indonesian textiles: The Mary Hunt Kahlenberg collection*

Edited by RUTH BARNES and MARY HUNT KAHLENBERG

Prestel: DelMonico Books, 2010. Pp. 408. 300 Colour Plates, Maps, Bibliography, Index.

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With its ambitious title, *Five centuries of Indonesian textiles*, a heavy volume (3.7 kilogrammes), edited by Mary Hunt Kahlenberg and Ruth Barnes, portrays some exquisite textiles of the Kahlenberg collection. Complete with a glossary and an index (which is not necessarily the case in textile books) and richly decorated, the volume is divided into seven geographical areas, some of which earned an essay: Java (Rens Heringa), Bali (Marie-Louise Nabholz-Kartaschoff), Borneo (Traude Gavin), Nusa Tenggara (Roy Hamilton) and the Moluccas (Toos van Dijk).

In a long opening note Mary Hunt Kahlenberg, a former museum curator (Textile Museum in Washington, DC, Los Angeles County Museum of Arts) and later owner of a fine gallery in Santa Fe, reflects on her passionate endeavour in collecting hundreds of