

# **1 Challenges to authoritarianism in Indonesia and Malaysia**

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This book examines the emergent challenges to authoritarianism in Indonesia and Malaysia, particularly during the 1990s. Women, public intellectuals, arts workers, industrial workers, as well as environmental and Islamic activists, are among the various social forces examined. These groups are not undifferentiated units; neither do they exist nor operate in isolation. Each is studied in its complexity and diversity both in form and strategies of action, and in relation to others. Together, the chapters engage themselves with the discourses and practices of the social actors in question in an effort to produce theoretically informed, empirically rich, and nuanced analyses of oppositional politics. In conceptualizing political tensions at the turn of the century, this book distinguishes itself from many others on related themes by focusing on aspects of political dynamics beyond formal political institutions and expressions of authoritarianism.

A polarity between authoritarianism at one extreme and democracy at the other has been a dominant theme in various political analyses during the last half century or so. Those with specific reference to countries in Southeast Asia are no exception, whether authored by locals or foreigners. With various degrees of explicitness, authoritarianism and democracy are assumed to be categories that represent existing realities or constitute realistic concepts. Authoritarianism is assumed to be uniformly disastrous and morally repulsive and democracy universally good for all human kind. Within this dominant tradition, there is a general belief that the main tasks of analysts are to measure how far different societies in this region have been able to move away from authoritarianism towards democracy; to identify what the impeding and facilitating factors are; and to predict or explain how soon these societies can overcome their impediments and advance towards attaining full democracy.<sup>1</sup> While more than a few have expressed dissatisfaction with such confining polarity,<sup>2</sup> most preserve it with nuanced modifications. Rarely do they challenge fundamentally the entire model. Thus 'transition to democracy' has been a stubbornly persistent theme well into the twenty-first century (e.g. Johannsen and Gomez 2001; Hara 2001; Frolic 2001).

This book does not privilege the authoritarianism/democracy polarity, or

confine its discussion to the grey areas between the two poles. The phrase 'challenging authoritarianism' in the title is inclusive of but not reducible to social practices that subscribe to the cause of 'democracy'. While acknowledging the values of the familiar polarity, authors in this book see it as one – but neither the only nor best – way of understanding power relations and political contestations in the societies studied. Terms such as authoritarianism and democracy are deployed without the presupposition that they are necessarily exclusive or mutually negating. In addition, it should be stressed at the outset that while this book is indebted to and critically engaged with the relevant theoretical literature, it does not aim at providing a critique of any specific theoretical position or constructing a new one. Rather, it favours nuanced empirical observations that hopefully will help re-examine familiar theories in a new light.

Authoritarianism is understood broadly here as a set of diffuse relationships both in the public and private spheres where the distribution of power is greatly unbalanced but – despite appearances – is never totally concentrated on a single person or group. Contrary to common wisdom, authoritarianism is not wholly constituted by a coercive social order designed by a small elite and forced upon suffering subjects without endorsement from the latter. In Southeast Asia for a long time but most visibly during the 1970s and 1980s, a substantial proportion of the population across nation-states appears to have helped enhance and even enjoy, social relations and a political order that outsiders conveniently disparage as 'authoritarian' in character (Stubbs 2001; Hadiz 2000b).<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, taking lessons from Joel Kahn (2001), one would suspect that this inclination is by no means peculiarly Asian. Under similar circumstances others might well do likewise. Like the term 'democracy', 'authoritarianism' is used here neither as a static state of being, nor a formal system of governance that operates in a clearly demarcated territory, space or institution.

It is curious that 'democracy' has managed to occupy such a hegemonic position among so many Western analysts in the last few decades, when it was considered suspect by the Western intelligentsia for a substantial period in its earlier history (Arblaster 1994: 7). If democracy does not appear to have found a fertile ground in Asia, it would be a mistake, albeit a very common one, to ask what is wrong with this or that Asian country. Equally problematic is the familiar question: is Western-style liberal democracy universal and compatible with Asian cultures (e.g. Antlöv and Ngo 2000). Democracy has not been universal either as a concept or practice in the West. When the concept is imported to other social contexts it is doubly complex. Unsurprisingly, like blue jeans, McDonald's hamburgers or Hollywood movies, democracy has been met with varied responses ranging from enthusiasm to hostility. Many of these diverse responses may be equally well founded (see Emmerson 2001 for illustrations).

Much scholarly and journalistic commentary identifies a new politics and formative changes in the political cultures of Indonesia and Malaysia, espe-

cially following the political ferment of 1998. This literature<sup>4</sup> has typically relied on conventional political and social analyses that tend to privilege party politics, elites and state actors (e.g. Baker *et al.* 1999; Emmerson 1999; Budiman *et al.* 1999; Liddle 2001; Schwarz and Paris 1999). Among the few exceptions are Boudreau (1999), Stubbs (2001), Hadiz (2000b) and Törnquist (2002). It is difficult to envision the particular dynamism – not to be confused with fervour – and significance of the subjects in question through such analyses. On the whole, we hope this book will render more lucid the dynamics, politics and significance of a range of extra-parliamentary actors, including their particular limitations and struggles.

The book has three principal foci. First, it investigates the significance of the challenges to authoritarianism in Indonesia and Malaysia. Second, each chapter examines in detail the contexts and constraints of anti-authoritarian forces, thereby giving consideration to both their problems and prospects. Third, the book offers a comparative discussion of social actors in Malaysia and Indonesia rather than the country-by-country approach taken by nearly all the existing work on the subject. Although some of the chapters mainly focus on one of the nation-states, without exception each comments on significant connections and contrasts between the two. This chapter draws the broader picture of the issues at hand and provides some necessary background information for readers who are less than familiar with Indonesia and Malaysia.

### Indonesia and Malaysia: political and social contexts

Indonesia and Malaysia are next-door neighbours that have much in common. Since 1972 they have shared similar official or national languages, the variants of Malay called *Bahasa Indonesia* and *Bahasa Malaysia* respectively. Islam is mandatory among Malays, the majority ethnic group to which Malaysia's dominant political elite belongs. In Indonesia, the Javanese are numerically bigger and politically more dominant than other ethnic groups – including ethnic Malays. Indonesia has the fourth largest population in the world, and Islam is the faith of around 90 per cent of the country's population; it claims the world's largest Muslim population. Muslim communities in Indonesia, however, are far more diverse and divided than their counterparts in Malaysia. This condition is due in part to the syncretic inclinations of vernacular animism, Hinduism and Buddhism that prevail on Java, Bali, and other islands.

Some of the important differences between Indonesia and Malaysia have their origins in the transition from colonial rule to independence (in 1945 and 1957 respectively) when contrasting forms of authoritarianism were instituted in each country.<sup>5</sup> A variety of politically active groups emerged in strength soon after the Second World War throughout the Southeast Asian region. Left wing political movements and politics made much headway to be halted by the beginning of the 'Cold War' and the rise of US-sponsored

anti-Communism and anti-neutralism' (Hewison and Rodan 1996: 53). In the British colony of Malaya, the war against the Communist Party became an opportunity for the colonial power to eliminate left wing political culture as a whole. Independent oppositional politics of all kinds was crushed between 1948 and 1960, the period the British termed 'the Emergency'. As the Communist movement was smashed before the creation of Malaysia, Benedict Anderson argues that the country 'inherited (and later improved on) the colonial regime's draconian anti-subversion laws and steely bureaucracy, but not the insurrection itself' (Anderson 1998). As such, he observes that Malaysia has had a 'permanent authoritarian government', a condition that has 'everything to do with a collective determination on the part of the Malay ethnic group (52 per cent) to monopolize real political power in the face of the large Chinese (35 per cent) and the smaller (10 per cent) Indian minorities'. Sheila Nair offers further analysis that renders the complexity of the inter-ethnic compact and its importance in the ruling elite's claims to legitimacy (Nair 1999: 91–3).

After gaining independence, Malaysia has been gradually transformed from an exporter of agricultural products to an industrializing country, its authoritarianism sustained mostly through legal measures. Since 1981, the country has assumed an increasingly high profile in the international community under the leadership of Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad and the multi-party ruling coalition, the National Front (*Barisan Nasional*), led by him. UMNO (United Malays National Organization), the mainly ethnic Malay party, is the dominant partner in this coalition. As President of UMNO, Mahathir is understood to be the Prime Minister of the country as well. In 1993, he appointed his protégé Anwar Ibrahim as the Deputy Prime Minister, a post held by the latter until 1998.

Indonesia's experience with communism differed from Malaysia in decisive ways. Unlike in Malaysia, the Indonesian Communist Party participated freely in electoral politics after independence. The Party was nevertheless held in suspicion by the military, particularly as the former transformed itself into one of the four leading contestants in the 1955 general elections. Unlike its counterpart in Malaysia which survived into the early 1990s in the jungles on the northern border with Thailand, it was eliminated under the aegis of Cold War politics after nearly two decades of independence and by violent military means that left a lasting mark on the country.

In the middle of the 1960s, segments of the military leaning to the ideological right came to political prominence in direct confrontation with the Indonesian Communist Party, the largest in the world outside China and the Soviet Union. In 1966, these officers helped accelerate the removal of the first President Sukarno, with tacit assistance from the major powers of the Western bloc. Sukarno, an anti-Western autocrat and champion of the Non-Aligned Movement, campaigned against the formation of the Federation of Malaysia in 1963. Five years after independence, Malaysia was to be reconstituted with the inclusion of three former British colonies:

Singapore, Sarawak and Sabah.<sup>6</sup> Sukarno opposed the move aggressively as he saw it as a project of Western neo-colonial interests. Unsupportive of his efforts to undermine Malaysia, the Indonesian army pursued its own agenda. The army took control of the government in 1966 following one of the bloodiest massacres in modern history; around one million suspected communists and their sympathizers were killed (see Heryanto 1999c). Following the establishment in 1967 of the New Order, for 32 years formal political and military power was highly centralized in the hands of one person, Retired General Suharto. An ethnic Javanese who was inclined towards patrimonialism and developmentalism, the second President was a master of the political manoeuvre.

Under Suharto, Indonesia was transformed into a haven for foreign investors and domestic capitalist cronies. While the rule of law and the judiciary in Malaysia enjoyed a good reputation until the late 1980s, Indonesia's industrialization took place with little or no commitment to building good and accountable governance, respect for the rule of law, the separation of powers, and the protection of civil life. As a number of the following chapters show, the contrasts in governance have led to a relatively higher degree of confidence in the state among a variety of Malaysian social actors than among their Indonesian counterparts (see especially Chapters 3, 4 and 6). Fear, violence and corruption prevailed in Indonesia in tandem with the official rhetoric of social harmony, consensus, religious virtues, and familial values. Although Indonesia saw regular elections under Suharto, the governing regulations and implementation of the elections undermined the principles they stood for: people's sovereignty and political accountability.

Besides the political and legal histories of the two countries, the politics of ethnicity, particularly in relation to the variety of Chinese communities, deserves some elaboration in the present discussion. Colonialism changed the historical, social and cultural relationships of the diverse and dispersed Chinese communities with the people of the region. In Malaysia under the British, poor Chinese migrated in substantial numbers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries specifically to fill a variety of roles in the colonial economy. Today, Chinese Malaysians constitute less than one third of the total population of over 20 million, some of them hold a crucial role in the nation's economy. On the whole, ethnic Chinese communities are a strong non-majority political constituency.

Contemporary Malaysian political and institutional life is markedly divided by ethnicity, more so than Indonesia. Colonial rule created the social and economic conditions for the numbers of Chinese to swell in urban centres while confining Malays largely to the rural areas. In the interest of social and economic equality, the Malaysian government implemented the New Economic Policy (NEP; 1971–90), an affirmative action measure designed to promote the participation of the *Bumiputera* or 'indigenous' population (mainly ethnic Malay but in legal terms not exclusively so) in the modern sectors of the nation-state. While the NEP may be credited with

advancing the interests of a broad cross-section of society, it also sowed divisions as it became the instrument of the racialization practised by the country's ruling coalition (Mandal forthcoming).

As in Malaysia, the Chinese population in Indonesia increased substantially under colonial rule, and they were funnelled into particular sectors of the economy under the Dutch. Today, the business elite of the ethnic Chinese enjoy important positions within the national economy, and share with other Indonesian elites some degree of cronyism and collusion. Unlike the situation in Malaysia, however, Chinese Indonesians, constituting less than 3 per cent of the population of nearly 230 million, had no political representation under the New Order, while their cultural identities were declared undesirable. Chinese schools, languages, writings and cultural practices were banned. Citizens of Chinese descent were required to carry and present documentation beyond the ordinary to obtain public services. Quotas were imposed on members of this ethnic group for entry into certain professions and educational institutions. Although similar quotas have been in place in Malaysia, they were implemented in New Order Indonesia without the same political controls as its neighbour.

The social and political histories of Indonesia and Malaysia indicate differences in the use of repressive powers in the two states. The New Order rose on the basis of political violence and maintained its militarist rule by dealing with political opposition in a brutal manner. The Malaysian state's repression on the other hand has been largely exercised through national security laws inherited from the British. There was a time, especially before 1990, when Malaysia was perceived as a more orderly state than their own country by Indonesians, while the reverse is true of Malaysians. In this connection the 'regularized' character of authoritarianism in Malaysia is further examined in Kelly's chapter. He discusses an instance of political containment by law in the April 1998 amendment to the Companies Act. As a result, bureaucrats were provided with greater power to refuse the registration of organizations or close them down.

The Internal Security Act (ISA) is a more illuminating example of Malaysia's regularized authoritarianism, indeed one that was being considered by Suharto for implementation in Indonesia.<sup>7</sup> The Act is noted in several of the following chapters, especially in Budianta's discussion (Chapter 6) of the humanitarian protests against it by Malaysian women. The ISA legalizes methods that amount to orderly options to the 'disappearances' or 'mysterious killings' that were brutally carried out by the New Order (see Bouchier 1990). It vests the state with the lawful power to detain anyone without trial. This post-colonial refinement of colonial laws has been used during several intra-elite political crises in order to control dissenting intellectuals, artists, activists, and opposition party members. One of the most wide-scale recent implementations of the Act occurred in 1987 when 106 people were detained without trial. *Operasi Lalang* as it was called is noted in a number of the chapters as a key turning point whose

impact, though unequal to the repressive violence of the militarist New Order, was significant within the Malaysian context. In Chapter 5 Othman characterizes the state's dependence on the Act to repress freedom of expression as its 'ISA mentality'.

### *Reformasi politics*

Similar to situations in South Korea and Thailand after 1997, Indonesia's economic crisis rapidly developed into political and moral crises of the incumbent leadership, followed by a change in government. The extra-parliamentary protests that date back to the early 1990s gained momentum and became more forceful in demanding the end of the New Order, the longest-lasting authoritarian regime of the capitalist Western bloc. President Suharto eventually stepped down (some argue that he only stepped aside) on 21 May 1998. The term *Reformasi*, 'reform', became the most salient catchword for the largely unorganized millions of Indonesians who demanded a change in government and a reversal of the deteriorating social conditions. One dominant formulation of the evils of the day was KKN, the abbreviation for *Korupsi, Kolusi, Nepotisme* (Corruption, Collusion, Nepotism).

It should be noted at the outset that *Reformasi* has meant different things to different people. In Chapter 2 Heryanto speculates that the term may have its origins in the diplomatic talks between New Order officials and the IMF and World Bank respectively. At this time, the term referred to Suharto's compliance with the conditions of the donor agencies' bail-out package that included an end to corruption, collusion and nepotism, a more radical meaning than typically intended by the word *Reformasi*. When the media accorded primacy to it, oppositional actors (including those who preferred *Revolusi* to *Reformasi*) found it difficult to avoid its use. The term was first introduced to Malaysians by Anwar Ibrahim's political camp around the middle of 1998 – when political turmoil was near its peak in Indonesia – in reference to calls for greater transparency in government. In response, Mahathir attacked Anwar and his supporters later in the year. In both countries then, *Reformasi* was the rallying cry of those who took to the streets as well as many others, including the political and business elite. Budianta suggests in Chapter 6 that the term is useful not as an analytical framework but as a name for the 'political, economic and social responses to a multidimensional crisis that provided an outlet for previously repressed and widespread demands for structural change'. Hers is a good working definition for the diversity of forms and substance in *Reformasi* activism. The very open-endedness of the term has been the source of its success, allowing disparate oppositional groups to find in it something that spoke to their cause and thereby galvanize their forces (Noor 1999).

In a series of fast-moving events that were not imaginable only a few years earlier, both the Indonesian catch phrases '*Reformasi*' and '*KKN*' spread across the Straits of Melaka and became the rallying cry of



thousands of Malaysians, mainly but not exclusively in the capital city of Kuala Lumpur, who demanded an end to the long-standing leadership of Mahathir. Standing at the forefront of these masses – largely unorganized and morally outraged citizens as in Indonesia – was Anwar Ibrahim. Ironically, Anwar had been until then the Prime Minister's heir apparent.

There are many other similarities, connections and contrasts between the ways events unfolded in Indonesia and Malaysia. For instance, the dramatic removal of Suharto in May 1998 inevitably influenced the calls for Mahathir's resignation soon after he sacked Anwar. Transformed into a martyr, the latter became a unifying icon and politically capable leader for the unorganized and angry masses. Alongside the politically charged cries of '*Reformasi*' and '*KKN*', spectacular images and dramatic narratives of militant and heroically audacious student activists in violent confrontations with security forces were imported to Malaysia. Likewise, the orchestrated anti-Chinese violence (some of the worst in many decades) in Jakarta, Solo, and several other towns in Indonesia had a great impact on the imagination of Malaysians. Chinese Malaysians were forced to contemplate the fearful implications for Malaysia of the racialized atrocities in neighbouring Indonesia (see Heryanto 1999a) that mobilized women activists (Chapter 6) and led to the solidarity work in the arts community (Chapter 7).

Needless to say, the traffic in images, narratives, gossip, direct references, subtle allusions and illusions in this Internet era was a lot more complex. Individuals and groups took and mistook different elements of events in different ways for a wide variety of reasons. However, it is worth exploring a few instances of 'othering' that provide insights into the relationships that have been imagined and developed between Indonesians and Malaysians in recent years.

### Othering

Post-structuralist and post-colonial writings have helped popularize the concept of 'Others' and its derivative 'othering' in contemporary social sciences and the humanities. A survey of the varied ways the terms have been deployed is neither possible nor necessary here. Suffice it to note how the concept can be relevant to our discussion at hand. Othering, as used here, refers to a communicative act, where a third party (real or perceived) is discursively constructed as a convenient foil for the collective 'Self' of the speaking subjects. In such acts of othering, the referents are usually silenced, excluded, or absent. The existence of Others is recognized and taken seriously, but their identity is remoulded, mainly though not always consciously to facilitate the assertion of the identity and interest of the Self as the privileged, centred, or normalized subject(s). While it is obvious that the term 'othering' carries negative overtones, it remains debatable whether or not all discursive practices are guilty of some degree of othering.<sup>8</sup>

Unsurprisingly, othering has come to prominence in selected Asian

countries since the so-called 'economic boom' of the 1980s, in tandem with the invention and propaganda of 'Asian values'. As Pinches observes, 'othering' in Asian countries constructs not only the particular imagined, 'West' but fellow Asians as well. He notes that 'officials, national elites and rising middle classes have used heightened levels and overtly nationalist forms of consumption as national status claims *vis-à-vis* other countries and peoples in the region' (Pinches 1999: 31). This observation works nicely in the case of Malaysia and Indonesia where the shaping of mutual perceptions has played significant roles in domestic and regional politics.

Indonesians have been influenced by a romantic othering in the area of managing ethnic tension and political and economic equity. In Indonesia, there have been ideological nativists who look up to Malaysia's NEP as the necessary and desirable correction to Indonesia's economic discrepancies for which the economic power of 'Chinese businessmen' is often blamed. According to this view, the government of Indonesia should impose further restrictions on ethnic Chinese participation in the nation's economy. Unsurprisingly, such a view finds enthusiasts among the newly emerging and more independent business class of *pribumi* ('native') ethnic groups who claim to have suffered from the New Order's cronyism and racial discrimination. At the same time, some Chinese Indonesians claim Malaysia sets a good example by guaranteeing the ethnic minorities rightful civil rights and political representation in state institutions, often overlooking the context – the racially hierarchical party politics for instance – and the distinctive historical conditions that enabled the NEP's implementation in Malaysia.

More than a few Malay Malaysians consider Chinese Indonesians more desirable, because they appear to be more considerate and patriotic, a condition attributed to successful assimilation. Indeed, in the eyes of many Malaysians, Chinese Indonesians – especially the youth who grew up under the New Order – look, speak, and behave almost indistinguishably from the so-called *pribumi* population. Their counterparts in Malaysia, on the other hand, preserve selected Chinese cultural practices and traditions, though in localized forms. Malaysians who find the character of Chinese Indonesian identity attractive nevertheless fail to observe the coercive measures and censorship that made the 'assimilation' in Indonesia possible.

'Chineseness' became a significant point of contention on the side of the anti-authoritarian forces. On the one hand, Malaysian *Reformasi* activists regretted that their fellow citizens of Chinese descent were not as politically active as those in Indonesia in challenging authoritarianism in the streets. However, as we have touched on already, these activists' perceptions of Indonesia were not necessarily grounded in social and political realities. Ethnicity was not the sole decisive factor in determining the participation or level of involvement of citizens in the *Reformasi* movements of either Indonesia or Malaysia. Opposition publications in Malaysia mythologized the struggle in Indonesia precisely in ways that Heryanto argues against in the next chapter. Hence such optimistic prognoses were made as the

prediction that UMNO would fall just like the Suharto political machinery (*Harakah* 1999).

On the other hand, supporters of Mahathir depicted the anti-Chinese violence from Indonesia as a threat to the success of the Malaysian state in maintaining social and political order. Images and reports were reproduced in the mass media that tended to intimidate the general public by hinting at the chaos the *Reformasi* movement would lead to in Malaysia if Malaysians followed the example of Indonesians by taking to the streets. In the months preceding the 1999 general elections, for instance, government-controlled television stations ran 'multi-lingual and slickly produced long-form advertisements contrasting Malaysia's stable government and social conditions with riots, deaths and property destruction in neighbouring Indonesia' (Wong 2000: 129). Narratives such as this served to draw a contrast between barbaric Indonesian 'rioters' and the implied civilized character of Malay Malaysians (namely the ruling party UMNO), aimed particularly at the Chinese segments of the population.

Contrary to the political conservatism of the ASEAN compact, as exemplified by its shared credo of non-interference in member states' affairs, politics crossed borders and became regionalized. This intensified at the height of the euphoria surrounding *Reformasi* in 1998–9. News of Indonesian support for Anwar reached Malaysians through the wire services, the opposition mass media and the Internet. Adnan Buyung Nasution, the influential Jakarta lawyer and friend of Anwar, criticized Mahathir in the international press, and acted as an observer at his friend's trial (AFP 1999). A photograph was circulated by an international news agency of demonstrators at the Malaysian embassy in Jakarta with a large banner carrying this message: 'Mahathir = Soeharto' (*The Straits Times* 1998). An Indonesian publisher of Islam-oriented work released in Jakarta a translation of Anwar's book *Asian Renaissance* a few months after his arrest, including in it a statement by the author after he was ousted from his post (Anwar 1998). Politics became regionalized even further when Anwar stalwarts, hounded by Malaysian security personnel, sought exile in Jakarta where they began to organize a political comeback (Lopez 1998).

All in all, the political elite in Malaysia may have been genuinely scared by the stories that they themselves encouraged and circulated concerning Indonesia. There was much fear in the ruling elite that 'Indonesian riots' would visit them when thousands of people marched through the streets of Kuala Lumpur on 20 September 1998 upon responding to the call by Anwar for a peaceful demonstration. The country had not seen protests by such large numbers since the student demonstrations that took place at the end of 1974, nearly a quarter of a century earlier. The absence of mass demonstrations for so long may have been reason enough for the government to be very concerned. According to the reports of top officials, however, what the government most feared was a repeat in Kuala Lumpur of the so-called 'Jakarta riots' of May and June of 1998 (for more see Heryanto 1999a). The

Inspector General of Police at the time, Rahim Noor, observes as follows, implying a causal link it seems between the two cities: 'Uppermost in our minds was not to allow the riots in Jakarta to spill over to KL at all costs and a repeat of the riots and lootings which happened in Jakarta' (Koshy 1999).

The veracity or accuracy of the admission by the head of the police force is not as significant as the degree to which the othering of Indonesia was engendered by the mass media allied to the government as well as opposed to it. The consequences of the othering, however, were not necessarily predictable or in keeping with the aims of either the government or oppositional groups. For instance, even as the pro-government media attempted to instil a fear of Indonesia as the 'other', this effort nevertheless advanced the possibility of imagining a transnational space.<sup>9</sup> Consequently, an avenue was opened for individuals and social groups themselves to make sense of the connections and contrasts between the political upheavals in the two countries. As the chapters of this book reveal, the street protests of 1998 in Malaysia, indeed the *Reformasi* movement as whole, were linked in various ways and at different levels to developments in Indonesia.

### Studying Indonesia–Malaysia

Despite the compelling and long-standing connections, similarities, and illuminating contrasts between Indonesia and Malaysia as cursorily outlined above, there has been remarkably limited interest in them in the general public discussion of the two countries and among scholarly observers. Comparative scholarship on the two countries has been embarrassingly rare and usually falls under the more general rubric of Southeast Asian studies. Indeed, when the work towards this book was initially conceptualized in 1997, before the 'economic crisis' which proved to be a historical watershed, it was not easy to advance a rationale for a comparative study of Indonesia and Malaysia. Once the project got off the ground in the latter part of 1997, the series of dramatic incidents then unfolding in the two countries – and unexpected by many – made it seem as if scholarship of this sort had always been necessary.

Just as this book project was initiated, a study on a closely related theme was published, namely Syed Farid Alatas' *Democracy and Authoritarianism in Indonesia and Malaysia* (Alatas 1997). Alatas makes the important, fair and accurate claim that 'there has not been any comparative work done on the state in Malaysia and Indonesia' (Alatas 1997: 150). In addressing the lacuna, Alatas' work deserves attention. His approach is, however, quite different in kind and style from that pursued in this book. Highlighting these differences helps elucidate what this book attempts to achieve and why.

Alatas' book is evidently a product of serious research and analysis. Within the terms it sets, it is a solid piece of scholarly work. It covers much ground and offers many insights and important information. Unfortunately,

history has been unkind to this book. In less than a year of its publication, the societies it discusses changed radically, thus undermining its primary arguments. Essentially, the book is a comparative study of the causal historical factors that have made Malaysia a 'democratic' state and Indonesia an 'authoritarian' one (1997: 2). Alatas argues that three causal factors have been responsible for the formation of these two different regime types, namely (a) the existence (in Indonesia) or absence (in Malaysia) of armed struggle against the state; (b) the internal strength of the state (in Malaysia, and the lack thereof in Indonesia); and (c) the high degree of cohesion (in Malaysia) or division (in Indonesia) of the elite.

Alatas provides a review of the literature, discusses the various definitions of what constitutes 'democratic' states, and delineates them in very formalistic terms that reflect conventional social and political analyses (Alatas 1997: 1). These terms include the existence of fair and competitive elections, independent political parties, civil society, and the separation of powers. Despite some qualifications and admitted problems in designating Malaysia as a democracy, Alatas (1997: 5) maintains that one should not think that 'democracy is merely façade' in Malaysia.

One can take issue with the conceptualization of 'democracy' and other key categories that Alatas adopts, as well as the extent to which Malaysia and Indonesia fit into the dichotomous categories of democracy and authoritarianism respectively. His main arguments about the three causal factors that determine the character of a state along the democratic-authoritarian axis are well presented but open to debate. Importantly, a critique or disagreement at a conceptual and abstract level may not be necessary. The weakness of his arguments becomes clear when we consider changes in Malaysia and Indonesia merely a few months following the book's publication in 1997, and more so after 1998. Indeed one fundamental reservation that we have about Alatas' work is its generalized, and consequently reductionist, portrayal of the two countries compared, glossing over their respective internal contradictions and histories. Even if we accept for a moment the view that Malaysia was once democratic and Indonesia authoritarian for historical reasons that Alatas offers, one wonders why the same historical factors have generated very different political environments, and in some areas political reversals, in both countries since 1998.

In several important areas in Indonesia, important reversals followed the end of Suharto's three decades of authoritarianism, rendering the familiar 'authoritarian-versus-democracy' categories more problematic. One of a few obvious examples includes the general elections of 1999, the first accountable effort to elect a new parliament since the 1955 elections. New electoral laws were enforced, allowing forty-eight political parties to compete instead of the officially-sanctioned three, as in the previous twenty-five years of the New Order. For the first time various independent and volunteer groups from different walks of life across the nation took part in unified efforts at monitoring the process and ensuring the maximum possible degree of fair-

ness and accountability (more in Chapter 2). To the surprise and relief of many, the elections were completed with a remarkably minimal degree of violence in comparison with previous state-controlled elections in the New Order era.

The role and dignity of the armed forces has plunged to a degree unimaginable a few years earlier (see Bouchier 1999 for details). Due to the absence of a majority vote and single party dominance in the new government, the military and the New Order's political party Golkar could not be totally liquidated. The military still enjoys reserved seats in parliament, but their number was reduced to thirty-eight from seventy-five. Public demands for a total removal of this privilege continue to be heard well into 2002. With the loss of power and prestige in East Timor, and subsequent threats of legal inquiries and prosecution for past crimes and human rights violations, demoralization was rampant among the soldiers. To make things worse, street protesters often inflicted abuse and violence against passing military officers and their properties (vans, buildings and equipment) during the volatile years of 1998–2000.

During the same period in rural areas hundreds of kilometres away from the capital city, telecommunications networks and political tussles within the nation's elite, there have been regular reports of outrage unleashed against village chiefs or local parliaments in a style and scale unseen in many decades (see e.g. Cohen 1999). Private businesses and professional as well as civic associations mushroomed during the first two euphoric years of post-Suharto Indonesia. The government dissolved the Department of Information that functioned for more than three decades as the New Order's machinery for propaganda and censorship. The number of licensed print media increased to 1,687 in the year 2000 from around 289 prior to 1998 (Heryanto and Adi 2002). Only several hundred of them actually survived for more than one year. Many of the newly published media organs became either the mouthpieces of new political parties and civic groups, or retailers of gossip, superstitious pronouncements, and sensationalist materials purveying violence and sex.

The above account is meant only to introduce new developments and highlight core issues in the contemporary analyses of the two countries. The best, if implicit, lesson we can draw from Alatas' book is presented by himself in the penultimate sentence of his concluding chapter: 'Democratization in Indonesia and Malaysia must always be in a state of flux and uncertainty' (Alatas 1997: 164). Put differently, a study of social change in these countries, as elsewhere, including so-called 'democratization' must recognize the messiness of the reality under investigation. Such study requires flexibility and a dialectics of a scale greater than often allowed in the familiar orthodoxy of positivist political science and sociology. Diagrams, tables, conceptual definitions, taxonomic categories, and jargon – all respectable and often desirable – in many scientifically inclined approaches to the study of power and social relationships are often more



satisfying in the enhancement of established academic empires, and theorization in the disciplines, than to the development of a critical intellectual practice (see also Chapter 6).

The next section proceeds to a critical reflection of our own endeavours and predicament. Alatas concluded his pioneering work on this note: 'But, if rapid development increases the stakes for the government, it also strengthens the resolve of extra-bureaucratic forces to press on for democratic reforms' (Alatas 1997:164). He ends where we begin.

### **Towards post-authoritarian societies**

In contrast to Alatas' focus on the so-called 'state', and the formal typology of regime types along the 'authoritarianism' versus 'democracy' divide, all contributors to this book focus their research on the complex and often contradictory features of non-statist agencies, structures, practices and histories. The agencies in focus include urban-based professionals, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and labour activists, religious communities and leadership, and women's groups, as well as socially engaged artists. The central questions that all the ensuing chapters ask concern the constitution and history of these agencies, the dynamics of their assets and liabilities, and their structural relationships with those outside their immediate circles.

Questions of the state do not totally disappear in the picture, but they occupy less than central positions. Underlying the decision to pursue these core questions is the fundamental conviction and working framework that power and political relationships do not reside, accumulate, or concentrate only within formal state institutions or their officials. In other words, our endeavour does not avoid the political in order to resort to ostensibly apolitical areas of inquiry or alternative academic disciplines such as cultural anthropology and psychology. Rather, we try to be as broad-minded as possible in accounting for the field and the workings of power relations.

Understood broadly, authoritarianism, just like democracy, is not a state of being or 'system' that operates in a clearly demarcated territory, space or institution. Authoritarianism is understood here as a set of diffuse relationships both in the public and private spheres, where power is never totally concentrated on a single person or group – as it may occasionally appear – and without legal or moral accountability to the public. By no means is this either uniquely Asian or an exceptionalism. While the phenomenon may have broader validity, it is particularly relevant in studies of post-colonial societies, Indonesia and Malaysia included, where the modern nation-state is fairly novel and unevenly institutionalized across the body politic.

Consequently, our research has yielded a series of in-depth, nuanced, and polyphonic narratives of specific areas and issues rather than a consistent breadth of inter-regional comparative analyses. In contrast to familiar political and politico-economic analyses where democracy, development and

authoritarianism are most rigorously discussed, and where they acquire some of their dogmatic senses, the current study seeks to investigate more qualitative and less tangible dimensions of social phenomena. Instead of working with the given definitions and decidedly taxonomic boxes of 'authoritarianism' and 'democracy', or seeking alternatives between the two as well as desirable modifiers and designators (like 'soft authoritarianism' or 'semi-democracy'), the chapters that follow assess and comment on the qualities of authoritarian subjecthood, social relations, practices and structures, as well as those of its democratic counterparts in today's Malaysia and Indonesia. These are things that are constantly, as Alatas puts it, in 'a state of flux and uncertainty' (Alatas 1997: 164).

This book does not offer a single answer to a single question. It asks several but highly inter-related questions about the conditions of, possibility for, and observable practices of challenging authoritarianism in Indonesia and Malaysia in the late 1990s. It considers these questions from several angles and recognizes the contrasts and connections between them. The questions raised in this book do not come straightforwardly from the dominant discourses of social change in the established social sciences and humanities in the West. While all contributors in this collection are trained in the West, and continue to be engaged with global intellectual exchanges, nearly all spent their formative years within the contexts of the social transformations they analyse. Nearly all have had several years of direct and active involvement with the organizations and activities they describe in their chapters.

For these reasons this book is rare among its kind. The central questions it raises and the answers it attempts to offer do not descend directly from the exogenous logic and imperatives of academic production from outside the societies it studies. Chapters in this book arise from years of personal practical engagements, grounded analytical reflection, serious doubts, and a series of intellectual dialogues with Western-based social sciences and humanities. It is an inductive venture with a commitment to an open exploration that is full of uncertainties. While each chapter makes the painful but necessary compromises of analysis and reporting to be able to communicate effectively with some focus, each rejects easy reductionism or succumbing to the high abstraction characteristic of hegemonic global academic practices.

In keeping with the scholarly directions described above, Mary Louise Pratt offers an illuminating critique of Western theory. She argues against its tendency to generalize as this can reduce heterogeneity. Good theory is conventionally 'understood as the ability to explain a maximum range of cases with a minimum number of axioms' (Pratt 1998: 430). In place of this kind of theorizing, she offers the approach of scholars studying new social movements in Latin America who 'have been challenged to conceive of social formations as constituted by (rather than in spite of) heterogeneity and to reconceive social bonding as constituted by (rather than in spite of) difference' (Pratt 1998: 431). In the course of her argument, she relates this



alternative theoretical perspective to the very diversification of academic knowledge itself.

Pratt suggests that the single most important task facing scholars is expanding and deepening the idea of democracy when 'neoliberal discourse has forcibly emptied it of meaning, until the mere presence of elections remains its lone defining characteristic' (Pratt 1998: 434). The perspective advanced here is echoed by Budianta in her chapter in this book when she articulates – citing Chantal Mouffe – democracy as a subversive discourse, and again by Mandal in the claims made by working class social actors to the arts as an egalitarian social space. These and other chapters in the book problematize democracy as a social process in pluralist and heterogeneous terms through the study of a variety of social actors within particular historical and social contexts.

### Beyond the authoritarianism/democracy axis

As stated earlier, most comparative observations of Indonesia and Malaysia take the form of partial and passing statements in works devoted to Southeast Asia as a whole, or in collections of essays devoted to specific countries in the region. The best work on the subject to date remains the seminal study by Harold Crouch (1985).<sup>10</sup> It is a structuralist analysis of the relationship between economic development and political structure after Barrington Moore (1966) that establishes the classical model for most studies of development and democracy in 'Third World', 'developing', 'post-colonial', or 'South' countries.<sup>11</sup> More recent works of similar or related perspectives, including the rare collection of essays co-edited by Hewison *et al.* (1993), have been critically and insightfully reviewed by Jacques Bertrand (1998). Like the pioneering book by Alatas (1997), Bertrand's essay falls victim to the historic transformations that have been taking place in Indonesia and Malaysia since 1998, rendering it outdated too quickly.

From the perspective of this book, what is missing from many conventional politico-economic analyses is a consideration of the complex and dynamic workings of power beyond formal institutions – especially the state apparatus. Most of these studies are centred on the political elite and formal institutions. Of late, attempts have been made with varying levels of success to move away from the state and formal political institutions in order to examine the disparate pockets of challenges to authoritarianism in Asia. These include Garry Rodan's mostly pessimistic edited collection (1996) and three more optimistic works, namely Anders Uhlin on democratization in Indonesia (1997), Robert Hefner (2000), and Krishna Sen and David Hill (2000). More immediately relevant and intellectually challenging is Vincent Boudreau's post-*Reformasi* analysis of Indonesian democratization (1999), where the latter is compared rather disparagingly with the people's power movement in the Philippines which ended President Ferdinand Marcos' authoritarian rule in February 1986.

With few exceptions such as Boudreau (1999), societies in many of these usually politico-economic analyses are portrayed as building blocks that are reducible to a few definitions and conceptual frameworks. These societies are dissected as if they must and will undergo a more or less unilinear trajectory from underdevelopment to development, from tradition to modernity, from feudalism to capitalism, from authoritarianism to democracy. Such analyses differ in assessing the levels of failure or success of these societies to democratize and the possible reasons, leading the analysts to suggest a variety of typologies. Democracy is almost always assumed to be fundamentally unproblematic in principle. It is also assumed to be achieved once and for all in the West without any serious problems, and it is the best possible ideal for the rest of human history. Empirical details and quantitative data are often constructed in abundance in an objectivist style, as dictated by the chosen theoretical framework, and presented in order to defend abstract arguments that are far-reaching in claims but too narrow to accommodate the complexities of the phenomena they purport to describe. An example of such comparative works on democratization in the countries under study is Neher and Marlay (1995).

In several of these studies, one finds sophistication. However, not infrequently it is the sophistication of conceptual abstractions and analyses that resonates in mathematics, engineering, or chemistry – as if social entities and relations are comparable to figures or chemical substances, accompanied by reductionism and simplifications of social aspects that are considered given, unproblematic, or insignificant from the chosen theoretical position.<sup>12</sup> One target of such reductionism and simplification is 'culture' while another is social 'identity'. To name but one poor outcome of such reductionism, we need only consider the scant reflection informing the use of such terms as 'race' in reigning perspectives on Malaysia. Typically, party political and socially-based notions of 'race' are taken as unproblematic reflections of social and cultural realities in the country (Mandal forthcoming).

Apparently these problems are not the failure of individual scholars, but indicative of something more systematic. The 'regnant' paradigm in studies of Southeast Asia has been largely resistant to change (McVey 1995) and mostly focused on contributing to the success of modernization and nation-building. In addition, we must also take into account the early and important observation of the American political scientist Donald Emmerson (1984), who argued that Southeast Asia is an externally constructed political entity that came to prominence only around the Second World War (alongside the heavy presence of the United States' military as well as the prolific production of analyses by North American political scientists). Academic studies from this formative period largely take the nation-state and international relations as their main units of analyses. Anthropological studies that have had a longer engagement with the region,

and have been more sensitive to the more vernacular, localized, intra- and cross-national boundaries, were marginalized.

Our task is definitely not simply to bring back anthropological studies of the past as Emmerson (1984) suggests, because 'culture' as understood and practised in the regnant anthropological perspectives has been equally problematic (see Kahn 1993: 6–21). To put it crudely, formal categories such as 'economy', 'politics' and 'culture' have too often been reified to represent discrete social relations. So often, when culture is inserted into such political analysis, it is conceived to be a static, often essentialist, form or substance that belongs exclusively to one definable community. In other words, this is a conception of culture that does not exist in most contemporary works where culture is central and problematized (for instance in contemporary cultural studies, post-structuralism, and studies of the media and identity politics, to name a few).

Lisa Lowe and David Lloyd emphasize culture as a site that offers political possibilities 'when a cultural formation comes into contradiction with economic or political logics that try to refunction it for exploitation or domination' (Lowe and Lloyd 1997: 1). These authors posit the notion of the 'social' as a terrain where the political, cultural and economic relate to each other. Such insight helps frame the efforts in the chapters that follow to articulate the political 'productivity' of non-traditional actors and actions. Both the Malaysian and Indonesian states have articulated an official culture where economics, politics and culture have come to be regarded as strictly separate domains. Many of the challenges to authoritarianism analyzed in this book arise from the intersection of these ostensibly separate domains, significantly in the conjuncture of the cultural and the political. It is precisely this point of intersection that has mobilized some scholars of Latin America 'to draw attention to how social movements operate at the interface of culture and politics' (Alvarez *et al.* 1998: xi). Further, these scholars 'contest the often-made claim that the "political" significance of social movements has receded with the return of formal, electoral democracy to much of Latin America'. In keeping with Lowe and Lloyd, they articulate 'how the "cultural" struggles of social movements over meanings and representations are deeply entangled with their struggles for rights and economic and political-institutional power'.

In any case, the uses of culture in voluminous works under the rubric of development studies and modernization, and more recently 'Asian miracles', have accentuated the so-called 'culturalist approach' to political change (e.g. Vatikiotis 1996; Antlöv and Ngo 2000). This approach, in turn, becomes too easy a target for those more inclined towards positivism (e.g. Alatas 1997: 20–1). Meanwhile, 'culture' and 'power' as developed in 'cultural studies' appear to have minimal dialogues, if any, with scholars of democratization and authoritarianism in Indonesia and Malaysia. This book attempts to make a contribution to fill this gap.<sup>13</sup>

Partly in reaction to Samuel Huntington's controversial thesis of the

'third wave of democratization' (1991), many students of democratization in the 1990s strongly reject any temptations to assume any simple correlation between economic growth and democratization. Similarly, they reject the notion that the decline of an authoritarian regime will necessarily lead to durable democratization. Despite this general tendency, studies of democratization in Southeast Asia to date appear to fall short of the theoretical rigour and comparative perspectives of their counterparts in Latin America and post-Communist Eastern Europe. Unlike the majority of works on Southeast Asia that operate within the bipolar framework of authoritarianism versus democracy and are preoccupied with types of regimes, major studies on Latin America probe the more subtle and challenging questions about the conditions and qualities of the processes toward consolidated democracy (see Martz 1997).

This book was prepared with a broad view that questions of social change generally and more specifically in Southeast Asia should not be reduced to arguments about the types of authoritarianism or democratization. Neither should we concentrate on the purely programmatic and predictive question of how authoritarian trends and dispositions in Indonesia and Malaysia give way to more democratic structures, agencies and practices. Such questions are indisputably important and worth pursuing. Nevertheless, the admittedly dormant stage of critical studies of political change in Indonesia and Malaysia suggests others. We believe there are many other and equally important questions about social agents and practices in predominantly authoritarian circumstances that lie beyond the confines of formal political institutions and economic performance.

The foregoing suggests that two different major areas of enquiry demand more serious attention. The first is a critical re-examination of the already hegemonic concept of 'democratization'. The other is a broader and more in-depth ethnography of political agencies, practices and institutions beyond the historical dominance of studies of 'transition from authoritarianism to democracy'. Rodan warns of the danger 'that new forms of political organization and reconstitutions of state-society relations which do not correspond with the liberal democratic model will escape adequate identification and analysis' (Rodan 1996: 5). Rendering the effectiveness, innovativeness and subtleties of the social actors in question thus requires attention to nuanced discourses and practices to register their political value. This book attempts a few exploratory steps in this direction.

### The chapters

The next six chapters share a number of perspectives. Challenges and responses to authoritarianism are presented in their variety. State and capital form both the object and partial sites of resistance by democratic struggles, thus rendering inevitable contradictions and predicaments. All the chapters discuss particular social forces whose work is nonetheless nearly

always in conjunction with a broad range of individuals and groups. These chapters also show that authoritarianism need not end with the removal of the autocrat in power – Suharto in this instance – just as it may not be solely attributed to the same. Authoritarianism persists in a variety of ways despite the greater mobility that is evident in certain areas such as the increased freedom of expression in Indonesia after 1998. Several forms of liberalization emerge as common phenomena following the fall of authoritarian regimes, but they do not in themselves necessarily lead to the formation of long-lasting democratization. The chapters consider in some depth how middle class intellectuals, non-governmental actors, workers, Islamic activists, women and arts workers respond to transitional political moments, and how they find themselves entangled and disentangled with profound challenges, old and new. A brief description of each helps in assessing the overall argument of the book.

In the following chapter, Heryanto shows that the middle classes need not necessarily be dismissed – as many scholars believe – as oppositional social actors. Given certain historical conditions, in this instance shaped by the early stages of a rapid and large-scale expansion of industrialization, elements of Indonesia's middle classes can and have played important roles in the democratization of politics and society. However, as Heryanto emphasizes, not all their actions and values are inherent to the class; these are not only the result of the selflessness and virtuosity by which journalists and academics have been mythologized but the consequence of historical experiences. The key point made in his chapter applies to the rest: industrialization under the authoritarian governments of Indonesia and Malaysia has brought about distinct historical conditions whose constraints and possibilities must be assessed anew in any examination of social actors.

Kelly's study of industrial zones peripheral to the national capitals shows how much the history, social institutions and cultural orientations of an industrializing locality shape the kind of civil society that is formed. Kelly compares NGOs in two rather radically different contexts in terms of infrastructural development, social composition, historical influences and interconnectedness with the world – Penang in Malaysia and Batam in Indonesia. Yet both these geographical peripheries to the capital have been areas of rapid industrial growth, attracted a youthful work force from around the country, grown largely from foreign investment, and importantly, gained economically as a result of state intervention in facilitating the entry of global capital. However, the kind of authoritarian state intervention in each case has been quite different. Kelly describes Penang as administered by a bureaucratic authoritarianism with some localization of political power. Batam on the other hand had been until the late 1990s under the centralized and militaristic authoritarianism of the New Order. Kelly argues that there is little uniformity in civil society formation as a consequence of industrialization. He extrapolates from here that there is not necessarily a

common sense to the conceptualization of civil society as well as its relationship to 'democracy' or 'development' in this regard.

As Kelly observes for NGOs, Vedi R. Hadiz sees the trajectory of workers' activism in no simple or predictable manner. Hadiz argues that the exclusion from political life of labour – by employing militaristic force in Indonesia and by institutional means in Malaysia – has made it difficult for workers to form a cohesive and independent counterweight to the state in these countries. As a result, he concludes that workers have not been well positioned to shape 'the agenda of the reform movement dominated by political actors organically unconnected to the labour movement'. Importantly, his argument rests not on the exclusionary practice of authoritarianism in one country alone but on the globalization process. Although globalization's consequences have been contradictory, multi-national corporations have been able to press for restrictions on workers' organizational activities. Yet, transnational labour solidarities have been slow in the making. Hadiz notes for instance the absence of efforts by Malaysian trade unionists to defend the rights of Indonesian migrant workers. In the past, unofficial organizing vehicles without clear structures were advantageous in dealing with state repression, but Hadiz feels that it is unclear if these can develop into effective institutions in the post-Suharto era. He concludes by emphasizing the need for workers to develop 'the capacity for self-organization' in order to influence society, politics and the economy.

Locating her analysis within complex political and structural constraints, Norani Othman argues that the democratization of Islamic politics and society has been at the forefront of the agenda of Muslim activists; in Malaysia and Indonesia, in keeping with post-colonial trends in Islamic countries worldwide. Her argument is sensitive to the global currents in the politics of Islam that both states have been forced to recognize and to which they have had to respond. Islamization in this regard is part of a complex process of social change and not the adoption of an ideological orientation alone. Othman argues that the response of the state to the complex phenomenon of Islamization has been short-sighted. Specifically, Mahathir invited Anwar to join the ruling cabinet to appease Islamic organizational interests and initiated a number of policies that led to the Islamization of laws and social practices. Given elite-led efforts to shape the Islamization process, the democratization of Islamic politics and society appear to lie in the same hands. While she believes that the *Reformasi* years have brought to the forefront Islamic notions on democratic alternatives, it is unclear to her if this development will shape the existing Islamic movements in the region in a substantive and long-lasting manner.

In contrast with Othman's Malaysia, Budianta sees women social actors in Indonesia contributing vital challenges to the existing gendered character of social relations as well as its divisive ethnic and religious tendencies. She argues that efforts by women activists to broaden the social and class basis of participation in political life – defined in novel and generous terms, has



consequences far more meaningful than the emergence of women leaders such as Megawati Sukarnoputri in elite politics. While the rise in women's activism during the *Reformasi* period may have been plagued by problems of organizational cohesion, the democratization of politics was advanced in significant ways. Budianta's focus is on the less structured women's organizations that mobilized across different social strata with increased vigour in response to the regional economic crisis and in challenging authoritarianism. Individuals and groups of women both in Malaysia and Indonesia were moved to act as a result of humanitarian concern following the deleterious effects of the economic crisis as well as the long-standing state violence, especially as it impinged on the bodies of women. Her work thus reconfigures the political, and shows how women from different strata became politicized in meaningful ways by such means as 'milk politics', when initially they had been fearful or sceptical of women's activist groups and 'politics'. Given this context, Budianta sees women's activism as not feminist alone but as democratic movements in themselves, hence her preference for the syncretic term 'feminist democratic' activism.

Mandal takes a broad-based approach in articulating the shape and substance of the engagements of activist arts workers. He makes the claim that activist arts workers cross many social boundaries – including class, religion, ethnicity, and gender – and have been collectively, though not necessarily cooperatively, producing significant aesthetic engagements with authoritarianism. Skilled in the modulation of symbols, they work with other social actors in addressing the inequities and repression under authoritarianism. To evaluate arts workers by some measure of 'direct' oppositional productivity would be a mistake. Activist art practices are shown through selected cases to be significant in developing critical perspectives from below in engaging authoritarianism. More immediate to the *Reformasi* movements, arts practices were critical in the lead up, crisis, transition, and aftermath of political change through such actions as the repossession of public space – a symbolic act of significance discussed in the chapter.

On the whole, the chapters support the idea that social analyses need to be broad based, self-critical, sensitive to practices, and capable of representing difference in order to be relevant. Reflecting the textured and differentiated social and political sphere, the chapters of the book intersect and interrogate each other with the hope that as a whole they provide a perspective on the dynamics and prospects of the challenges to authoritarianism that have taken place and are emerging. In different ways, these chapters also explore some of the fundamental limits that such prospects will have to confront in the long term.

## Notes

- 1 One respected scholar writes: 'Indonesia is still a far cry from genuine democracy, ... But yet somewhere deep inside I am optimistic, especially since most

- people that I talk to in Indonesia see the opportunities ... the future of democracy in Indonesia depends more upon how attractive and effective a new, more participatory, democracy can be made to the people – especially the elite – and less on the prevalence of certain "Asian" values' (Antlöv 2000: 221).
- 2 For a review, see a series of articles under the theme 'Debating the Transition Paradigm' in *Journal of Democracy*, 13 (2), July 2002.
- 3 For a slightly different, but comparable, situation in Burma see Alamgir (1997); and for China and Taiwan see Shi (2000).
- 4 By no means is this meant to be a survey of the literature. A few references are made only for illustrative purposes. Even then, only those published after the eventful year of 1998 and directly relevant to the issues under discussion are considered.
- 5 For a broader but brief history of Indonesia from about 5,000 years ago to the post-Suharto period, see Cribb (1999). For a more comprehensive history of Indonesia, see Ricklefs (1981). For Malaysia's history, see Crouch (1996) and Milne and Mauzy (1999).
- 6 Malaysia as it is known today was constituted only in 1965 with the inclusion of the states of Sabah and Sarawak and the exclusion of Singapore.
- 7 Under President Suharto, the New Order state periodically used the Anti-Subversion Law and 'Defamation' penal codes to detain and prosecute opposition figures (see Heryanto 1993a). What distinguishes the use of this Law from Malaysia's ISA is the general absence of an attempt by New Order officials to present their cases with legal credibility. Notwithstanding this difference of style, the effects of such state repression in the two countries may not be that different, namely inculcating widespread fear among the population. In response to the popular resentment towards the Anti-Subversion Law, New Order officials contemplated revising it and crafting something similar to the ISA of Malaysia (and Singapore). In 1999, partly in an attempt to consolidate his power and legitimacy, President Habibie scrapped the Anti-Subversion Law. However, to the dismay of many *Reformasi*-minded Indonesians, in the same year a new set of laws was proposed, that gave considerable power to the military and President to suppress internal and external threats in matters affecting 'state security'.
- 8 For an illuminating discussion of this, see R. Young (1990: 1–20). 'There has to be some "other" – no master without a slave, no economic-political power without exploitation, no dominant class without cattle under the yoke, no "Frenchmen" without wogs, no Nazis without Jews ...' (Cixous, cited in R. Young 1990: 2–3).
- 9 At least two highly innovative and original articles have explored problems of identity politics as mediated by the globalized Internet in response to the 1998 violence in Indonesia, see Lochore (2000) and Tay (2000).
- 10 As this book went to press, the news about the publication of Case (2002) came to our attention, but there was insufficient time to consider its relevance here.
- 11 According to such a perspective, social, economic and political change in the last one or two hundred years follows 'the reaction of [the] land-holding elites to the prospects of agrarian commercialization' (Crouch 1985: 3) and industrialization. For more, see Moore (1966).
- 12 Of course, most writings and academic genres are guilty of similar symbolic violence. The difference, however, lies in the degree of explicit admission and self-reflexivity incorporated in these activities.
- 13 Scholars of Thai democratization have engaged in more dialogues with post-modernism, see for instance Tejapira (1996) and Callahan (1998).