The incredible shrinking Pancasila: nationalist propaganda and the missing ideological legacy of Suharto

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The incredible shrinking Pancasila: nationalist propaganda and the missing ideological legacy of Suharto

Robert Cribb

The old man died. They buried him.

On the morning of Monday 28 January 2008, a military plane took off from Jakarta’s Halim Air Force Base with the body of Suharto, President of Indonesia for 32 years, former commander of the Indonesian Army’s Strategic Reserve, former commander of the Central Java Diponegoro Division, former revolutionary military officer, former sergeant in the Dutch colonial army, former village boy.

The plane landed in Solo and a military convoy took the body on a narrow asphalt road leading eastwards and uphill, past the village of Matesih, to a place called Astana Giribangun, (Palace of the Risen Mountain). There, at 12.25 pm, the remains of the former president were consigned to the Suharto family mausoleum, a low building with wide eaves and a high central spire in traditional Javanese style.

The building had waited a long time to receive its distinguished occupant. Construction began in 1974, the year that President Suharto had faced his first serious political challenge in the form of the Malari riots. Ostensibly directed against the visiting Japanese Prime Minister Tanaka Kakuei, the riots were widely seen as an outpouring of discontent with Suharto’s economic policies. Following the displacement of President Sukarno in 1966–67, Suharto had implemented policies of accelerated economic development that involved fiscal stabilisation and massive investment in infrastructure, funded by foreign aid and by revenues from the sale of oil and timber. Suharto’s policies pulled Indonesia out of the economic misery of the final years of Sukarno’s rule, but they left victims—families evicted from squatter settlements for construction projects, workers given no opportunity to pursue higher wages in the absence of free trade unions. And they had beneficiaries. Those who agreed to work with...
the New Order, especially in its upper echelons, found opportunity, sometimes abundant opportunity, to acquire wealth through corruption. It would be another three years before the pop group Bimbo satirised the new rich of the New Order in the song ‘Tante Sun’, but in 1974 the signs were there of a new gap between rich and poor, even if the poor were much less poor than they had been (Mortimer 1974).

In 1974, the year he began to build Astana Giribangun, Suharto saw off his last credible challenger from within the Indonesian military elite. The now-forgotten General Sumitro, a corpulent, moustachioed caricature of a Third World general, had begun to map out a populist alliance with student groups, seemingly as a prelude to telling Suharto at some point that his time was up. Sumitro was head of KOPKAMTIB, the New Order’s military command for security and order, and he seemed ready to replicate the pattern of Third World military politics in which each former military president is displaced by his successor in the army. But Suharto had outmanoeuvred him and he spent his days after 1974 playing golf and writing political commentary (Jenkins 1984).

Also in 1974, Suharto abandoned the dour no-politics conceit of the early New Order and gave Indonesia a state ideology. As the basis for this ideology he chose the Pancasila, five broad principles that had been incorporated into the preamble of the first constitution of newly-independent Indonesia in 1945. Formulated by Indonesia’s first president, Sukarno, the Pancasila was a declaration of programmatic nationalism. One of the five principles—the unity of Indonesia—spoke directly to land and soil, those traditional exemplars of national identity, but the others—belief in God, humanity, democracy, and social justice—had no specific link to the people of the archipelago. They contained no hint of ethnicity, or even history. Rather, they were noble universal principles that Sukarno presented as the basis for a national identity transcending simple hostility to colonialism.

But incorporating the Pancasila into the Constitution’s preamble was not just an assertion of nobility; it was also an act of exclusion. Inserting belief in God—whether the God of Christians or the God of Muslims—into the Constitution meant that Indonesia could not be an Islamic state, despite the fact that around 90% of its population were Muslims. Blocking that road, in turn, meant that the Indonesian state would be alien to those of its Muslim subjects who believed that Muslims could only dwell in the place of peace, a Darussalam, if they lived under Islamic law. An Islamic state in Indonesia would have alienated still more Indonesians, not just believers in other religions but also Muslims whose Islam did not require Islamic law; nonetheless the Pancasila took its second incarnation as a device to exclude fundamental Islam from the idiom of national politics. During the 1950s, the Pancasila took on a third identity, this time against communism. As the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) grew in popularity, belief in God became a bulwark against the supposed atheism of the communists. They could not, it was asserted, be true Indonesians without believing in God.

In 1965–66, Suharto crushed the PKI and pasted the Pancasila label in front of democracy to characterise his undemocratic order, but mass killing and mass detention turned out to be a far more effective way of excluding communism from the national idiom. A heavily-orchestrated electoral and parliamentary system excluded fundamentalist Islam nearly as effectively, and the Pancasila was hardly more than a distant flag for the early years of Suharto’s rule (Nishimura 1995). Even government officials, asked to list the five principles, would struggle to recall more than three or four. In 1974, however, the Pancasila entered its fourth incarnation as a corporatist ideology for the Suharto regime.

The mausoleum that Suharto constructed in 1974 was an architectural hybrid. The form of the mausoleum resembled the palace (kraton) of the minor Mangkunegaran royal family with which Suharto’s wife was loosely connected, but the high peak of its roof recalled some of the traditional architecture of eastern Indonesia (Pemberton 2000). The Pancasila of 1974, the year of the mausoleum, of the Malari riots, and of the fall of Sumitro, was also a hybrid. Sukarno’s universalist formulation was recast as essentialist Indonesian culture, dug out of the Indonesian earth with no input or inspiration from outside (Antlov 2005:46–47). A committee chaired by former vice-president and nationalist leader Mohammad Hatta began to shape what became known as P4, the Pedoman Penghayatan dan Pengamalan Pancasila (Guide for the Realisation and Implementation of Pancasila), which was formally adopted by parliament in 1978. Rather than working as a device to exclude specific sections of Indonesian society from full acceptance as Indonesians, this new Pancasila was devised as a guide to behaviour. The P4 identified 36 behavioural norms (butir, literally ‘nuggets’) said to be derived from the Pancasila:

Belief in God (four nuggets)

- Belief in and devotion to God, according to each person’s respective religion and beliefs on the basis of a just and civilised humanity
- Respect and co-operation between believers and followers of different religions and beliefs for the sake of social harmony
- Mutual respect for the freedom to worship according to respective religions and beliefs
- Not forcing one religion or belief on others
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Humanity (eight nuggets)
- Recognise the equal status, equal rights and equal duties of all human beings
- Love each other as human beings
- Develop respectful attitudes
- Don't behave cruelly to others
- Give the highest respect to human values
- Be fond of undertaking humanitarian acts
- Have the courage to defend truth and justice
- The Indonesian people are a part of humankind as a whole and therefore should develop attitudes of respect and co-operation towards other peoples

Unity of Indonesia (five nuggets)
- Place the unity, one-ness, interests and welfare of the people and the state above personal or group interests
- Be willing to sacrifice oneself for the interests of the people and the state
- Love one's country and people
- Be proud of being Indonesian and be one with the country
- Promote social interaction for the sake of the unity and one-ness of the people, based on the principle Bhinneka Tunggal Ika (Unity in diversity)

Democracy (seven nuggets)
- Give priority to the interests of state and society
- Don't force your will on other people
- Give priority to consultation and discussion (musyawarah) when taking decisions in the common interest.
- Consultation and discussion so as to achieve consensus based on family spirit
- With good faith and a sense of responsibility accept and implement the decisions of the community
- Consultation and discussion are carried out with sound reasoning and according to a glorious inner heart
- Decisions must be morally consistent with the will of God, and must exalt the status of human beings and the values of truth and justice

Social justice (12 nuggets)
- Develop glorious actions that reflect the attitude and atmosphere of family and mutual self-help
- Have a just attitude
- Ensure a balance between rights and duties
- Respect the rights of others
- Help other people
- Reject the use of force against others
- Don't be wasteful
- Don't live extravagantly
- Don't do things that harm the public interest
- Work hard
- Appreciate the work of others
- Strive together to achieve progress that is equitable and socially just.

In 1978, courses to instruct government officials in these fine points of the Pancasila were introduced, followed not long after by an extensive program of Pancasila Moral Education (Pendidikan Moral Pancasila, PMP) in all educational institutions. In 1985, Suharto had the Pancasila declared the azas tunggal (sole basic principle) for all social organisations, other than businesses, in Indonesia. This law required even religious organisations to place the Pancasila ahead of their basic beliefs, at least in a formal sense, and it aroused great antagonism, especially from Muslim circles (Bourchier & Hadiz 2003:14, 82-96).

The ideological heart of Suharto's Pancasila was a conception of Indonesia as an organic society. The consequence of this organicism was that there were no natural conflicts in Indonesian society; conflicts arose out of the intrusion of alien values (communism, liberalism and the like) and out of egoism, the selfish placing of individual interests ahead of those of society. In making this contrast between the constructive collective interest of society and the destructiveness of competitive individualism, the Pancasila placed itself both in the tradition of President Sukarno's condemnation of 'free-fight' liberalism and in the vanguard of the so-called 'Asian values debate' (Barr 2004). PMP emphasised, therefore, subordinating individual interest to the common good, and avoiding conflict and maintaining social harmony as absolute social goods (Parker 1992:95-116; Kammen 1995:147-54).

Indonesia's sixth president, retired General Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, delivered a brief speech at Suharto's funeral on 28 January 2008:
Honoured guests and the whole of the Indonesian people, wherever they may be, inna illahi wa inna illahi roji’un [to, we belong to Allah, and to Allah we return], with the deepest sorrow, we the whole Indonesian people are gathered here today to mark the passing of Retired General H.M. Suharto, second President of the Republic of Indonesia.

The deceased [almarhum] returned peacefully to the mercy of Allah on Sunday 27 January 2008 at 13.10, Western Indonesian Time, in the Central Pertamina Hospital, Jakarta.

We have lost one of our best sons, a faithful fighter, a true soldier and an honoured statesman.

We have come here to the family tomb of Astana Giribangun at Karanganyar to pay our final respects at this state ceremony.

We carry out this ceremony as a sign of honour and appreciation from the state and the government for the selfless service and conscientious achievements of the deceased to the state and the people during his life.

As we all know, the deceased, born in Yogyakarta on 8 June 1921, devoted his whole life to the people and the state.

He had a long career in the military, politics and government.

History records that during the National Revolution of 1945–1949 the deceased struggled unyieldingly to expel the colonialists to realise and defend the sovereignty of the people and of the young state.

History also notes a most monumental act of struggle: when the deceased and other fighters launched the General Attack of 1 March 1949 and occupied the city of Yogyakarta.

This important event was a weighty and powerful contribution to the negotiations that ended in recognition of the sovereignty of the Republic of Indonesia.

Following the National Revolution, in 1962, when this country was struggling to liberate West Irian, the deceased returned to fulfill the call of his state by carrying out glorious duty as head of the Mandala Command.

History has already recognised this event as a successful fusion between diplomacy and armed force.

In 1965, when our nation was tested once again by the G30S PKI affair, once again took up his duty to save the integrity of the state, the integrity of the nation and to restore security and order.

During his time in government, that is, after being appointed President of the Republic of Indonesia on 27 March 1968, the deceased unyieldingly led the national development program that rested on the Developmental Trilogy [Triologi Pembangunan], that is, Stability, Growth and Equality.

The many outcomes and successes that were achieved by the government which the deceased led brought about the fact that the Indonesian people, step by step, became increasingly advanced [maju] and increasingly prosperous.
roads to Astana Giribangun lined with Suhartoists asserting that their leader’s ideology would live on as inspiration after his death. The very term ‘Suhartoism’ remains an alien one in Indonesian politics. The Pancasila lives on, but it has returned to its second incarnation as code for the rejection of an Islamic state in Indonesia. In the 1999 and 2004 elections, parties which did not choose Islam (or codes for Islam) as their formal basis tended to choose the Pancasila as a sign of what they were not (Pompe 1999).

Over the course of 20 years, Indonesians spent millions of hours studying the Pancasila. Students were not permitted to progress to the next grade, officials were not promoted unless they passed the compulsory training in the state ideology. Millions of pages were printed and tens of thousands of broadcast hours were used to disseminate the Pancasila message to every corner of the archipelago. And yet the Pancasila has disappeared as an ideological force.

The disappearance is all the more remarkable given the resilience of other aspects of New Order indoctrination, especially hostility to communism. The vehemence of hostility to communism in contemporary Indonesia is remarkable, given the global retreat of communism as an intellectual and political force and the shameful circumstances of the murder of half a million members of the PKI in 1965–6 (Heryanto 1999:147–177). In 2000, there was widespread public outrage when President Abdurrahman Wahid proposed abolishing Resolution No. 25/1966 which had been passed by Provisional People’s Consultative Assembly (MPRS) on 5 July 1966, outlawing the PKI and banning the teaching of Marxist-Leninist ideology. Although it is not difficult to find reasons why the New Order wished to sustain the anti-communist paranoia of its early years, the puzzle is why it was not able to sustain the Pancasila to the same effect.

The explanation lies in the special character of Pancasila propaganda. We think of propaganda as having the purpose of persuading people into a view that they would not otherwise have had—a generally political purpose. We know that Suharto made deft use of anti-communist propaganda in the weeks after the so-called 30th September Movement coup in Jakarta on 1 October 1965. Though we cannot now examine the actual workings of this propaganda, it seems that the carefully manufactured stories of the torture and sexual mutilation of anti-communist generals, together with manufactured rumours that communists in general were planning to slaughter their neighbours contributed significantly to the willingness of ordinary Indonesians to take part in the mass killings that followed (Drakeley 2000). The propaganda of 1965 was plausible in an atmosphere of profound political uncertainty and antagonism.

What, then, is one to make of the Pancasila propaganda that enjoined Indonesians to reject the use of force against others, to avoid waste and not to live extravagantly? Around them they could see these injunctions flouted daily by the very people who were communicating them. Even though Indonesian elites have traditionally despised the masses for their ‘stupidity’ (kebodohan), the Pancasila propaganda format seems egregiously unconvincing.

It is likely, however, that it was never meant to convince, or at least never meant to convince comprehensively in the way that, for instance, communists in China demanded thoroughgoing belief in party doctrine. Rather, apart from the odd useful effect it might have on the unusually receptive, the Pancasila functioned as ‘white noise’. It was quasi-ideological chatter intended to fill the space in Indonesian public life that might otherwise be occupied by serious, ideologically informed discussion.

Throughout its history, Pancasila has confused observers of Indonesia. How could such a bland set of principles take so central a place in national political discourse? The answer is that it was never truly an ideology. Even in its most elaborated form under the New Order, it was a device to mark who would be included in and excluded from the Indonesian project. Its decline after 1998 partly reflected the discrediting of the New Order, but its disappearance has much more to do with a transformation in the politics of exclusion that has taken place over the last ten years.

There are two elements in this transformation. First is the introduction of democracy which has the great benefit of giving value to every voter. Authoritarian systems based on patronage, as the New Order was, rely on informal devices to ensure that people know their place, that they know who is in and who is out. The New Order’s Pancasila was designed to impart this understanding to Indonesian society in general. Democracy has led by contrast to a more inclusive national discourse. One of the most encouraging developments in this respect has been the removal of formal discrimination against Indonesians of Chinese descent and the fact that the removal of this discrimination has provoked no hostile reaction, either from the elite or from the masses. Second, the introduction of far-reaching regional autonomy has created new contours of exclusion within Indonesia. As more and more important decisions are taken at a local level, the overwhelming importance of creating exclusionary devices at the centre has simply eroded. The importance of being putra daerah (a child of the local region) has intruded dramatically into local politics, and the inclusiveness of the national sphere can be valued as an alternative. These two elements in the transformation of Indonesian politics are enormously important in establishing generally-accepted conventions for accepting democratic procedures. Even if we can still sense the excitement and nobility of Sukarno’s original idea of Pancasila, expressed in 1945 on the eve of Indonesian independence, we can recognise that the departure of the Pancasila is a good thing for Indonesian politics.
Implications for the future

Whenever a powerful, long-lasting ruler dies, we feel an urgent need for some kind of summary judgement. So it was when Suharto died in January 2008. When the destiny of a country has appeared to have been so tightly woven into the life of an individual man, we want to know what difference he really made and what his legacy to the future will be.

For the most part, the verdicts on Suharto sought to establish the balance between his achievements and his shortcomings. His achievements? Above all, Indonesia’s spectacular economic growth since 1966, its transformation from one of the poorest countries in the world to a land where the vast majority of people experience a low to middling standard of living. Despite the crisis in the Indonesian economy in 1997 and after, the country is still in a far stronger economic position than at any time before Suharto came to power.

Alongside economic growth, public order. Only a shrinking minority of Indonesians recall the political atmosphere of late Guided Democracy, when shrill political confrontations dominated the news and violent clashes racked the countryside, when the Islamic revolution of the Darul Islam, far more destructive in terms of life and property than any of today’s Islamist terror, had only just been brutally suppressed in rural West Java and South Sulawesi.

Alongside public order, a foreign policy in Southeast Asia which spearheaded the creation of ASEAN and Southeast Asia’s remarkable long peace since the mid 1970s. The triviality and civility of the recent border dispute, for instance, with Malaysia over Sipadan and Ligitan is a striking contrast with the martial confrontations and the failed attempts at co-operation that dominated Southeast Asia before the creation of ASEAN.

Despite a faltering immediately after Suharto’s fall from power in 1998, each of these achievements has proven to be durable. The succession crisis led some commentators to suggest that all the achievements of the Suharto era had suddenly crumbled to dust, but the reality is that Indonesia, even at the depths of the Asian financial crisis, was a far better run, more prosperous and civilised place than it had been when Suharto came to power. If we look only at Suharto’s achievements we can see why his successor, Habibie, once enthusiastically described him as ‘SGS’ (Super Genius Suharto) (Emmerson 1999:315).

Yet against these achievements we can set massive shortcomings. Corruption, for one thing. By most measures Indonesia under Suharto was one of the most corrupt countries in the world, and the corruption went all the way to the top, in the form of the wealth that was creamed off to yayasan (supposedly charitable foundations) under Suharto’s control. Suharto’s personal lack of ostentation took an edge off this corruption—unlike other dictators he did not accumulate fast luxury cars or palaces—but he was the means by which funds that might otherwise have gone to the state for the benefit of the Indonesian people were devoted instead to his personal interests. And, of course, there were the Suharto children, predatory and hypocritical. Although he had a knack of choosing capable subordinates, he also tended to surround himself with an unsavoury collection of carpetbaggers, sycophants and opportunists who slurped up Indonesia’s wealth for their own benefit.

Brutality for another thing. The killing of half a million Leftists in 1965–6, the intense violence against separatists and alleged separatists in East Timor, to which Indonesia had no reasonable title in international law, Aceh and Papua and the substantial violence at critical moments—in the peciha killings of the early 1980s and in Tanjung Priok in 1984. There have been many exaggerated claims of the number of victims in each of these conflicts and affairs, but even a conservative estimate gives us a figure of hundreds of thousands of people killed under the auspices of the New Order. Although it involved far fewer deaths, we have to consider also the New Order’s vast protection racket run at the expense of Chinese Indonesians—the systematic extortion of protection money under threat of violence by Indonesian masses who were supposed to be viscerally anti-Chinese. Still more extensive than brutality was Suharto’s crippling of public life in Indonesia, the suppression of free discussion by means of censorship and intimidation, the compromising of the parliamentary and election systems with a vast array of regulations that hypocritically preserved the form of democracy while draining that form of all meaning. When we look at the underside of the Suharto era like this, then we see sense in the summary judgement of The Economist (31 Jan. 2008), which called Suharto ‘a crook and a tyrant’.

The contradiction between these two judgements was aptly reflected in the fact that Suharto’s state funeral—the official recognition of his contributions to the nation—took place while the corruption case against him, a case which would have marked him definitively as a thief, was still pending. So how do we come to a verdict?

The most common approach is a kind of crude cost-benefit calculation. Suharto achieved economic growth and political stability at the cost of loss of life and political corruption. Depending on how we value the material welfare of the current generation and how we value the lives of previous generations, we come to a conclusion—a high price but worth paying, or too high a price. It is a calculation that tends to devalue past brutality in relation to current prosperity. Effectively we ask the living, how much of your prosperity would you surrender, if you could, to give life back to the dead, especially to dead communists?
I want to suggest that actually we don't need to do this at all. Physicists need to treat matter as both waves and particles. The two conceptions are not reconcilable, but we need each of them to work with matter in a theoretical way. Similarly, it should be possible to acknowledge both Suharto's achievements and his deep flaws without taking that final step of totting up a balance sheet. He was both a national hero and a devil.

The disappearance of a man like Suharto from the political order leaves huge uncertainty. Because his reach into the political system was so far-reaching, his absence created instability. But I think that we can actually feel enormously encouraged by the events that surrounded his death—no riots, no disturbances, almost no dogmatic reassertions of the values of the New Order. The money that he stole, the lives that he took, the lies that he told—all these things still matter, of course, but the big thing is that Suharto no longer hovers like a ghost over Indonesian politics. Indonesian society can move on and let the past become another country. And that is something to be deeply thankful for.

Notes

1 Author's translation of 'Ketetapan Majelis Permusyawaratan Rakyat Republik Indonesia Nomor II/MPR/1978 tentang Pedoman Penghayatan dan Pengamalan Pancasila (Ekapratasi Pancakarsa)', www.mpr.go.id/pdf/ketetapan/ketetapan mpr thn 78.pdf. The 36 nuggets were later expanded to 45.
3 On 1 March 2008, the Indonesian language term 'Suhartoisme' scored a mere 406 hits on Google while its English equivalent, 'Suhartoism', scored 207.
4 On the issue of rehabilitating the former communists, see Birks (2006).

Winning hearts and minds?
Religion and politics in post-Suharto Indonesia

Thomas Reuter

In this chapter I discuss how Indonesians have responded to the American War on Terror and to a succession of terrorist attacks by Islamic extremists, from the 11 September 2001 World Trade Center attacks to the 12 October 2002 Bali nightclub bombing and beyond, and how this response has shaped the politics of religion and the general political climate in Indonesia during the reformasi period.

The data for this chapter are derived mainly from my own ethnographic research on religious movements in Java from 1998 until the present.1 In the course of this research I have been to many places in Java, where I have conversed with a wide range of people, from peasants to members of parliament, about issues relating to people's aspirations for the future of their nation. I was in Java to observe first-hand how different groups in Java reacted to 11 September 2001, the US-led attacks on Afghanistan and Iraq, and to further terrorist attacks abroad and at home.

My aim is to examine the extent to which the War on Terror and terrorist actions have influenced popular ideas about the usefulness of Islam as an alternative political model in the face of what many perceive as a loss of credibility for Indonesian nationalism, firstly because nationalism had been abused to legitimise authoritarianism under former president Suharto, and secondly, because the new nationalist leaders of the reformasi period appeared to be unable to establish political and economic stability. My thesis is that the combined effect of terrorism and the War on Terror has been a see-sawing of public opinion. The direction of these public opinion swings shows that most Indonesians in the newly democratic reformasi period have tended to oppose consistently those they perceive to be the party responsible for the dominant pattern of political violence and injustice at the time, whether the source of this violence be terrorism, the state, or the so-called 'world order' (Reuter 2003):