

Inequality, crisis and social change in Indonesia: the muted worlds of Bali / edited by Thomas A. Reuter

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Abstrak

Indonesia has been in a state of continuous economic and political crisis since the fall of former President Suhartos authoritarian government in 1998. The crisis persists as the current government of President Megawati Sukarnoputri struggles to rebuild a country torn apart by decades of corruption, nepotism and state oppression, as well as by interethnic violence, religious conflict and separatism.¹ Under the seemingly chaotic conditions of the last 4 years, social tensions and conflicts have surfaced that, for decades, had been simmering under a lid of political repression and remained hidden behind the veil of a culture of enforced silence.

While it may have been viewed and widely reported upon as a cause of concern for Indonesia and its neighbours, this continuing state of instability also provides an opportunity. People who had been silenced during the so- called New Order (Orde Baru) period of Suhartos rule have become relatively free to voice their grievances and pursue their interests under the momentarily more equitable political conditions created by the social turmoil and major political restructuring since 1998. Indeed, some of the silences that are being broken in the current Reform Period or Era Reformasi reach back much further still. Some contemporary struggles relate to patterns of inequity established in the course of Balis pre-colonial or colonial history. A difficult time though it may be, the present period of uncertainty thus holds a potential for Indonesians and engaged Indonesianists to witness political and social change unfolding at a rather dramatic pace.

case studies of social inequality, conflict and change on the island of Bali with the aim of illuminating some of the complex interactions between the local, regional, and national aspects of the current crisis in Indonesia (see Map 1.1). It incorporates contributions from eminent scholars in a range of disciplines, as well as presenting the innovative work of some younger researchers to a wider audience for the first time. The chapters in this collection were initially presented at The Third Australian Balinese Studies Conference, held on 24-26 September 1999 at the University of Melbourne and organized by the editor. The aim of this gathering had been to assess and discuss the dramatic changes in the sociopolitical landscape of Bali emerging in the aftermath of the Asian economic crisis and following the collapse of former President Suhartos authoritarian government in Indonesia. Several revisions have been necessary to keep the contributions in pace with changing local conditions in Bali, and with the rapid unfolding of political events on a national level.

Global economic and a national political crisis are being experienced at a grass-roots level in Indonesia, with particular emphasis on interactions between local, regional and national structures of power and knowledge in a Balinese setting. Special attention is paid to disadvantaged sectors of Balinese society, including marginal ethnic or religious groups, rural populations and women, and to their efforts to renegotiate their social position during this moment of crisis. With their special focus on muted worlds and social change, the authors are aspiring to add a new dimension to the study of Balinese culture, history, and society from a contemporary and critical perspective.