

**CONFLICT, VIOLENCE, AND DISPLACEMENT IN INDONESIA.**

*Edited by Eva-Lotta E. Hedman. Ithaca NY: Southeast Asia Program, Cornell University, 2008. 304 pp. (Maps, photographs, tables.) US\$23.95, paper. ISBN 978-0-877-27745-3.*

This book deserves a warm welcome by students of Indonesian studies and of conflict and political displacement. The ten chapters plus an introduction are authored by highly qualified scholars who have studied their respective topics for years. Some of the most important insights that the book delivers concern displacement as an end itself, instead of a by-product of political violence (chapters by Sidel on inter-religious violence in Sulawesi and North Maluku; Robinson on East Timor; and Aspinall on Aceh); the highly problematic concepts of originary “placement” and “replacement” as a possible solution to “displacement” (Aragon on Central Sulawesi); and the determining temporal and spatial specificities of local conflicts (Davidson on West Kalimantan).

Personally, I find the chapters by Nils Bubandt, Jamie Davidson and John Sidel (in this order) most compelling, despite their significant differences in subject matter, perspective and writing style. Davidson’s study of the conflict in West Kalimantan is a breath of fresh air for students of political violence in post-1998 Indonesia. Original in data and arguments, it serves as a helpful corrective to the general tendency to simplify the profoundly different conflicts across the archipelago. The familiar but problematic view is that Indonesia is being seriously torn by ethno-religious conflicts that have their common roots in the New Order’s centralized governance from 1966, and the recent outbreak is generally assumed to be a direct reaction to, or an inevitable consequence of, the regime’s downfall in 1998. Davidson eloquently demonstrates the relative autonomy of the conflict in West Kalimantan to national politics and the importance of the specific nature and dynamics of the problem at the local level, without losing sight of the external forces that aggravated the situation.

The story that Sidel reveals in his chapter largely fits the widely held understanding of Indonesia’s protracted problems. His approach is fairly conventional. What distinguishes Sidel’s study from most others on the subject matter is the rich and carefully examined empirical details, as well as the rigour of his analysis of data. As shown in his previous works on related topics, Sidel’s chapter is impressive for the depth and comprehensiveness in treating the subject matter.

Other chapters make important contributions to the debate in various ways and with different levels of quality. These include Chauvel on Papua, Duncan on North Maluku, Bouvier and Smith on Central Kalimantan, Hedman on Aceh and Bubant on Maluku. Bouvier and Smith’s chapter is notably important and praiseworthy for being one of the first studies to take into account the voice of the victims (ethnic Madurese) in the deadly conflict in Central Kalimantan.

As can be expected, anthropological and political scientific perspectives dominate the chapters. Several authors pay tribute to Clifford Geertz and follow his ethnographic method of “thick description.” What is minimal in these anthropological and politically oriented chapters is heavy theorization. This is perhaps wise, given the subject matter. Too much theorization (in search for some higher truth, intellectual gratification or academic credentials) of the human tragedies in Indonesia in very recent time could risk the inadvertent effects of trivializing the plight of the displaced and other seriously traumatized people. Most of these people continued to endure the sufferings discussed in this book as it went to press.

Human rights reports feature prominently as the source of reference in several chapters. Fortunately, the chapters manage to distinguish themselves from such reports by avoiding any strong statements of advocacy or condemnation. Notwithstanding, more than a few chapters are overcrowded with numerical data, dates and names of places and persons. Although they are arguably important, in some of the chapters they require more analysis and reflective discussion than what is presented to make them adequately meaningful. Against such chapters, reading the concluding chapter by Bubandt is a great relief and intellectually refreshing. This is the only chapter that does not focus on “displacement.” Problematizing the concept of “trauma” in both its global and local contexts, Bubandt presents an admirable combination of narrative, interpretation and ethnographic reporting in good balance and proportion. Significantly more than other chapters in the book, Bubandt demonstrates a critical self-reflexivity, both deploying and critiquing selected contemporary Western-derived theories in analysis of post-colonial practice. This is probably the best work by Bubandt that I have read to date.

The editor’s introductory chapter is helpful in providing the broader historical context of the complex issues that the subsequent chapters address. Despite this, the book reads like an issue of the journal *Indonesia* from the same publisher. The citations across the chapters are strongly oriented towards previously published articles from that journal. Like the journal, the book has no index, the reference sources are available only per chapter, with little cross-referencing between chapters.

*Australian National University, Canberra, Australia*

ARIEL HERYANTO

**BROKERING A REVOLUTION: Cadres in a Philippine Insurgency.**  
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How does one broker a revolution? The word “broker” implies that there