

***Anomie and Violence: Non-truth and Reconciliation in Indonesian Peace Building.* By John Braithwaite, Valerie Braithwaite, Michael Cookson and Leah Dunn. Canberra: Australian National University E Press, 2010. Softcover: 501pp.**

This volume joins a long list of titles which examine localized conflicts in post-New Order Indonesia. Many of the texts in this area of research are single case studies, such as Aceh or the Maluku, but *Anomie and Violence* joins a much smaller cluster of manuscripts which attempt to provide a rigorous comparative framework to explain the origins and resolution of the eight conflicts which erupted in Indonesia after the fall of Soeharto in 1998 (other examples include Jacques Bertrand's *Nationalism and Ethnic Conflict in Indonesia* [2004] and Gerry van Klinken's *Communal Violence and Democratization in Indonesia: Small town wars* [2007]). The bottom-line judgement is that this book provides a lucid, empirically comprehensive and balanced analysis of Indonesia's recent internal conflicts. The manuscript is intended to be part of a larger research effort aimed at coding the numerous variables that have shaped global conflicts since 1990. Indonesia was selected as the starting point for the research effort.

*Anomie and Violence* is organized into seven chapters. The Introduction lays out the theoretical framework and methodology, and provides a survey of national developments during the conflict period after 1998. While the authors prefer to emphasize the complexity of factors which caused Indonesia's internal conflicts, in essence, Braithwaite et al. claim that Indonesia experienced a period of anomie after 1998 in which the regulatory order collapsed and institutional governance arrangements became a scene of competition between local parties in the areas of conflict.

The five chapters which constitute the main body of the book provide comprehensive case studies of the conflicts in Papua, Maluku, North Maluku, Central Sulawesi, West and Central Kalimantan and Aceh. Each chapter begins with a narrative history of the region which sets the scene for the subsequent conflict, followed by a section describing how the conflict began and continued. The chapters then assume a more interpretive format to evaluate the structural, proximate and trigger incidents behind the conflicts. Each chapter also examines the key war-making and peace-making actors and their motivations. In line with the aims of the book, the authors conclude the empirical chapters with a review of the strengths and weaknesses of the peace-making process and lessons learnt. Each

empirical chapter includes an appendix table which summarizes the core findings. Given that one of the intentions of the book is to identify a large number of variables which the authors claim are important to understand a given conflict, these appendices are useful to the reader. The seventh chapter provides a conclusion to the manuscript, which seems disorganized and uninspired when compared to the previous sections.

*Anomie and Violence* has a number of strengths. It is noteworthy that the principal authors, John and Valerie Braithwaite, are not Indonesia area-experts but specialize in the discipline of peace-building and restorative justice (though one of the authors, Michael Cookson, is identified as an Indonesia area studies expert). To their credit, the authors executed extensive fieldwork with the help of local researchers, sought the counsel of influential Indonesianists on the book's findings and borrowed heavily from the work of established area experts. Consequently there is much empirical depth to *Anomie and Violence*. However, for this reviewer, the appeal of this book lies in its own frank assessment of its contribution to the field. As the authors note:

what added value [could] there be in research of inferior coverage led by a researcher with an inferior background and inferior language skills in the regions of conflict ... [for one] there have been more than a few instances in which we have discovered that the best scholars of that case have published a claim that is wrong ... Doubtless, there are even more howlers in this text than in theirs ... [therefore the authors state there is] some value from our research in adding a little to the superior body of data and insights accumulated by the very best experts ... This is not, however, the main contribution of comparative research. Its main added value is in the comparison and in the different ways of seeing that a comparative lens opens out ... (p. 3)

Such self-deprecation in academia is refreshing. Braithwaite et al. also make a good point about the benefits of comparative research: that we can only generalize trends (in this case on peace building) by rigorous comparison of many individual cases. Their text provides this analysis.

In terms of the audiences likely to benefit from this book, *Anomie and Violence* would be of interest to scholars with Indonesia area expertise, public policy practitioners who work on Indonesia and academics who examine peace building. For Indonesia experts this book is valuable, both as a reference text and for its analytical

value in explaining the causes and endings of Indonesia's recent internal conflicts. The greatest limitation of this manuscript, however, is that it does not really tell Indonesianists anything that is not already known. To be fair, Braithwaite et al. are open about this from the outset. If the book does not add anything substantially new, then why commend it? Perhaps there is an analogy here to be drawn with the musical tastes of my parents' generation. This reviewer knows of people who own original vinyl records of the Beatles, for example, but who still bought the same albums on CD: the music remained the same but the quality was crisper and more polished. The same situation I think applies to Braithwaite et al.'s manuscript. *Anomie and Violence* will not supplant the focused case study research of area specialists, like Chris Wilson on the conflict in North Maluku [*Ethno-Religious Violence in Indonesia: From Soil to God* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2008)], but what the authors have achieved is to cover ground well worn by other scholars and with an empirical and analytical comprehensiveness incorporated into a comparative framework that allows for juxtaposition between cases. This distinguishes the text from other academic products and makes it a valuable resource.

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