

## BOOK REVIEWS

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***Conflict, Violence, and Displacement in Indonesia.* Edited by Eva-Lotta E. Hedman. Ithaca, New York: Cornell Southeast Asia Program, 2008. Softcover: 304pp.**

The communal conflicts across Indonesia following the fall of Soeharto produced over 1.3 million internally displaced persons (IDPs). But displacement was often not merely an unintended by-product of conflict. In many cases, it was a deliberate tactic or even — in the form of ethnic cleansing — the objective of the conflict; in other cases, the management and resettlement of large numbers of IDPs risked sparking further conflict. These issues are discussed in a new publication from the Cornell Southeast Asia Program, *Conflict, Violence and Displacement in Indonesia*.

The editor, Eva-Lotta Hedmann, does not do her book any favours with her impenetrable introduction (typical sample “the very politics of their (dis)placement and, indeed their embeddedness therein, remained, in no small measure, ‘displaced’ even in refuge” (pp. 6–7)). The reader should skip lightly over this and plunge into the meat of the book: a series of essays addressing each of Indonesia’s major regional conflicts of the last decade.

The most impressive of these are a pair of essays on anti-Madurese violence in Kalimantan in the late 1990s, at the time the worst communal violence in Indonesia for three decades, and the only recent major conflict not structured around religious differences or a separatist struggle. Eschewing simplistic explanations about the supposed cultural incompatibility between indigenous Dayaks and Madurese migrants, Jamie Davidson traces the origins of the conflict in the long history of communal violence in the province, in the Dayak and Malay “awakenings” of the 1990s, and in the politics of regional autonomy. His subtle analysis provides real insight into the politics and motivations of the Malay and Dayak communities,

though — as so often — the Madurese community receive less attention.

This omission is magnificently put right by H el ene Bouvier and Glenn Smith in their study of the parallel conflict in Central Kalimantan, a sympathetic account of the much-maligned Madurese community. Bouvier and Smith note that Madurese points of view are largely absent from accounts of the conflict. They show how the Dayak version of events — that they were merely defending themselves against Madurese attacks — was uncritically accepted by commentators and the government, leading to the decision to evacuate the Madurese community. Even some Madurese came to accept this account, to the point that IDP parents enrolled their children in what can only be described as a re-education programme in an attempt to rid them of their supposedly negative Madurese character traits (p. 247).

Geoffrey Robinson considers two waves of displacement in East Timor, following the Indonesian invasion in 1975, and after the 1999 referendum. He shows how, in both cases, displacement was a deliberate tactic carried out for political ends by the Indonesian military and their proxies. The chapter was written before the 2006 crisis in independent Timor-Leste, which led to the displacement of 150,000 people. This is a pity. The 2006 displacement was in certain respects — the rapid acceptance of the need to flee, the numerous property disputes which led neighbour to turn out neighbour — the indirect consequence of the earlier episodes, and the patterns of displacement shed an interesting light on the past.

Robinson's chapter makes an interesting pair with Edward Aspinall's discussion of the Aceh conflict, which similarly shows how both the Free Aceh Movement (GAM) and the Indonesian military deliberately displaced populations as part of their attempts to exert control over populations and territories. As so often, East Timor was the testing ground for military tactics subsequently deployed elsewhere.

Devoting one chapter to each major regional conflict is a logical approach. But the book does not bring the threads together: there is little examination of common factors which drove conflict and displacement in so many parts of the archipelago, or of the responses of the state or the international community to the phenomenon. This last lacuna is partly compensated by an excellent analysis by Christopher Duncan of the state's efforts to manage and end the IPD problem in North Maluku. Duncan describes an alarming lack of interest in the causes of the conflict — with communities told the

conflict was “an act of God” (p. 223) and they should simply put it behind them — coupled with a strong drive to return IDPs to their community of origin as soon as possible. His warning that failures of reintegration could spark renewed conflict deserves attention.

The regional chapters are not all as strong as these. Richard Chauvel’s discussion of the Papua conflict would have benefited from more polishing and editing — pages 152 and 154, for example, contain almost identical discussions of the “segmented and stratified market”. Eva-Lotta Hedman’s rather anecdotal account of post-tsunami refugees in Aceh seems out of place in a book on conflict: it fails to illuminate the different treatment of conflict and tsunami IDPs, or the effect on post-tsunami relief efforts of Aceh’s status as a conflict zone.

It is a pity that no Indonesian or Asian writer features in the list of authors. Distinguished as the contributors are, they are all westerners (and mostly men). A more diverse group would have introduced different perspectives. In particular, it might have addressed one general failing of the book, the objectification of the IDPs themselves. Bouvier and Smith’s discussion of the Madurese in Central Kalimantan is an exception, as is Lorraine Aragon’s accounts of IDPs from Central Sulawesi. Elsewhere, the IDPs often appear as undifferentiated victims; more should have been done to bring out their diverse perspectives and voices.

Nonetheless, *Conflict, Violence and Displacement in Indonesia* contains much of merit, and the essays by Davidson, Duncan, and Bouvier and Smith are particularly worthy of attention.