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Bräuchler, Birgit (ed.) (2009), *Reconciling Indonesia. Grassroots Agency for Peace*, London/ New York: Routledge

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Indonesia is not only famous for its natural and cultural diversity; it has also gained high profile for its ongoing social, religious and economic conflicts. Birgit Bräuchler, the editor of the volume *Reconciling Indonesia*, takes the fact that conflicts are widespread and seem inherent in various cultures in Indonesia – (Bräuchler uses the example of head-hunting formerly practiced in different parts of the archipelago) – as a reason for the absence of work on reconciliation in Indonesia. Therefore *Reconciling Indonesia* aims to fill the gap of presenting reconciliatory traditions, cultures and movements in present-day Indonesia. The assumption that conflict also creates commitment to peace and agency for reconciliation was the focus of a conference titled "In Search of Reconciliation and Peace in Indonesia and East Timor", held at the Asia Research Institute (ARI) in Singapore in July 2007. As the book shows, its search was successful.

The volume focuses on grassroots agency dealing with different scales of conflict, ranging from state-sponsored violence and terrorist attacks to communal conflicts and local, small-scale crime. All the examples deal with the political and societal landscape of a democratizing, post-Suharto Indonesia (*era reformasi*). Therefore, the killings following the "failed coup" of the former communist party (PKI) in 1965 are also discussed. The book broadly defines "grassroots agency" as comprising virtually all actors on a societal level, not only civil society organizations but also village elders, (religious) teachers, security patrols, and theatre groups. The book contains contributions from authors with different academic backgrounds such as anthropology, history, political science and peace and conflict studies as well as contributions from several activists from the grassroots organizations themselves. The focus on a cultural as well as collective dimension of reconciliation takes a clear stance against the internationalized "transitional justice tool kit". This tool kit comprises different mechanisms such as truth commissions, tribunals, and reparations, which are implemented in a top-down approach and whose societal impacts are currently being hotly debated (Van der Merve, Baxter, and Chapman 2009). Although international donors are aware of the fact that reconciliation mechanisms have to be rooted in local traditions and have to be adjusted to local concepts of justice and reconciliation, this creates a dilemma between international requirements (for example, the prohibition of amnesty) and local norms. As the book argues, it is therefore even more important to integrate grassroots initiatives into any peace-building process because they can provide sustainability since they

are comprised of the people who in the end have to live with the results of any conflict resolution.

The introductory section is rounded out by an article by Annette Hornbacher that presents an intriguing example of a "culture of reconciliation" in Indonesia. The Balinese willingness to peacefully handle terrorism, an act of which ravaged Kuta in October 2002, could be seen as proof for universally accepted morals that Western scholars claim to be the basis for universal reconciliation. Instead, Hornbacher demonstrates how peacefulness is the result of an interpretation in terms of a Balinese "ethos of de-escalation and balance". To illustrate she gives examples of how the discourse on 9/11 has been interpreted according to this Balinese ethos rejecting basic assumptions the so-called "war on terror" is based on. Even more, Hornbacher presents the Balinese attempts at reconciliation as not being directed towards the alleged enemy such as Islamist terrorists but towards the non-human world, where human beings have to install balance within a cosmological realm.

The second part of the book broaches the issue of performative approaches to reconciliation. The author describes ceremonies, traditional justice mechanisms and restorative performances and not only analyses their impact on building peace but also their role in the development of the conflict. Although reconciliation in a symbolic and performative realm might not be enough to create sustainable peace, it has the potential to fundamentally contribute to the restoration of relationships and to identity transformation. The performative aspect of the rituals and ceremonies has the advantage of being bound to a higher legitimacy while theatre plays exert no pressure on conflicting parties but at the same time convey messages that can be integrated into people's daily lives. Kari Telle describes an oath-taking ceremony in Central Lombok that has reconciliatory as well as retributive notions. Therefore, the conflict is de-personalized and turned into a communal matter while at the same time the person lying is threatened with sickness. Telle describes the ceremony in a wider context of a changing understanding of "security" in the *era reformasi*. The revitalization of traditional laws and systems of justice (*adat*) can be seen as a means to respond to challenges posed by a changing political landscape. After describing the ritual, Telle reveals how it has been adapted to the practice of night patrol groups, i.e. giving them new legitimacy, and at the same time introducing the ritual into new settings. Unfortunately, she does not include these findings in her conclusion. After revealing many different aspects of the complex dynamics of the "revitalization of tradition", her conclusion is restricted to a dismissal of the concept of confession within the Sasak community.

In her contribution, Barbara Hatley describes how theatre performances can contribute to communal integration and a sense of solidarity

among different groups and individuals. The performances Hatley describes are diverse, ranging from a university theatre group presenting the 1965 killings in a very direct way, to performances shown alongside a gathering of former women prisoners. Her analysis shows that it is not the direct representation of the killings that causes new contention about the events and a sense of reconciliation in the long run. Instead, it is performative cultural display in general that can be interpreted as representing the situation of former victims and marginalized groups that leads to a shared sense of identity and solidarity. The third article in this section describes a repatriation ritual performed in the central Moluccas. After describing the Moluccan conflict and the setting of the villages that have been the objects of the study, Bräuchler gives insight into the negotiation process that took place among representatives of several villages in order to enable an expelled community to return to their abandoned village. Herein, she not only demonstrates how *adat* is used to rebuild relationships between formerly antagonistic parties but also, by describing the different oral histories concerning the co-existence of the communities, how *adat* can be a source of conflict. At the same time, the article gives insight into how tradition (here in the form of a ceremony) can be re-negotiated and reformulated in order to bring about the perspective of a common future.

The third section of the book gives a wider assessment of the potentials and problems that the so-called "revitalization of tradition" entails. One of the reforms profoundly shaping the transformation process in Indonesia has been a radical decentralization policy. The autonomy law has made a return to traditional customs and practices attractive not only for elites seeking to consolidate their power but also for the people resisting power politics. While the instrumentalization of culture includes a reification of traditions, grassroots agency for peace is much more dependent on culture being seen as a fluid and negotiable process, adaptable to political and societal developments. By giving insight into reconciliatory efforts in Aceh, Ambon and Sulawesi, the section contributes valuably to several current debates on "dealing with the past".

Leena Avonius describes the highly contested responses to human rights violations in Aceh by using the example of a family whose son was killed by the military. Avonius analyses how traditional justice, in this case a ceremony regarding dispute settlement, is instrumentalized by outsiders, (in this case, representatives of the central government and the military), to avoid legal justice. Because traditional rituals have become accepted means of dealing with minor conflicts in the aftermath of the peace agreement in Aceh, tradition is now used not only to weaken justified claims for retribution but also to avoid the formal justice system. Jeroen Adam gives insight

into the issue of land management and conflict in Ambon. In contrast to Birgit Bräuchler's description of mediated repatriation in the Moluccas, Adam's contribution shows how strongly conflict settlement depends on land management. This article also stresses the importance of underlying conflicts over land and status that have been shaping the relationships between communities and the (nation-)state for a long time. As Adam claims, it is not only legal pluralism that gives rise to conflict over land but also different interpretations within one legal system that can lead to conflict. Concerning reconciliation, Adam demonstrates the ambivalence of claims to land (since abandoned land can become an economic asset claimed by different actors). Adam presents an example that fits well into the ongoing discussion about the inclusion of economic, social and cultural rights into reconciliation mechanisms (Miller 2008). He also demonstrates that the rebuilding of relationships is closely connected to the renegotiation of access to economic assets and markets. Reconciliation in the form of rituals and performances can only be one part; a sustainable peace process also needs a renegotiation (and not only a restoration) of the social and economic order.

The last article of this section, by Y. Tri Subagya, gives insight into women's agency for peace and reconciliation initiatives, a set of organizations often neglected by donors and the state. By describing women's perceptions of violence and conflict in Poso, Sulawesi, he depicts how women are handling situations that are life-threatening for them and their families. Despite their heightened vulnerability as care-takers of the family, their initiative for peace is often not acknowledged due to the patriarchal structures dominant in local traditions. However, Subagya stays behind his claim to present women's grassroots initiatives to peace building. Instead, he lists NGOs working on women's empowerment, while at the same time admitting that these organizations have been criticized for promoting patriarchal structures. Subagya points to several things that might lead to reconciliation (for example, the fact that women's economic roles have expanded due to the conflict). However, he does not explain how these processes are actually taking place.

The last section of the book deals most closely with the dynamics of grassroots agency as it confronts state politicians' denials of the pogroms against alleged members of the Indonesian Communist Party in 1965. The articles describe in a comprehensive way the chain of events that led to the killing of more than one million people and the detention of many more. The refusal of any reconciliatory initiative on the state level makes grassroots agency all the more important. Although it cannot replace the state's initiatives to create accountability and foster reconciliation, they are the initial points for a society to start debating on the truth as well as to begin to

restore social relationships among formerly hostile groups and individuals. At the same time, the articles show how simplistic victim–perpetrator dichotomies constrain a reconciliation process. Due to the decade-long construction of an anti-communist stance in Indonesian society, promoters of reconciliation do not only have to fight against the injustice once committed against a social group but also against power-related discourses on loyalty to the state and to one's religious group.

Grace Leksana depicts the reformation of history education as a means to promote critical thinking about state propaganda and history. Because the *era reformasi* has led to a redefinition of the curriculum, some teachers and NGOs have taken the chance to include alternative information about the killings of 1965 in their lessons. However, Leksana, a human rights activist and history teacher, stresses the fact that reconciliation might be easier in the coming generations, but critical historical thinking first needs to be introduced to the teachers themselves. The second article of the section describes the former youth wing of the Muslim organization Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) in the killings of 1965 by an NGO called Syarikat. By focusing on the establishment of communication between the victims and the perpetrators, who often came from the same village, the initiative might not be able to contribute to the official rehabilitation of the victims. Still, it contributes to reconciliation and acknowledgement of the suffering on a communal and a broader societal level. Just as Suilstiyanto and Setyadi correctly state, their example is much more focused on the aforementioned acknowledgement of the suffering than on victim–perpetrator dichotomies. Reconciliation cannot assume that everybody agrees on the same version of history, but it means giving every party the right to present their story.

The last chapter of the book complements the perspective on the work of Syarikat. Katharine E. McGregor presents several discourses within Nahdlatul Ulama which concern the work of Syarikat as well as the issue of Muslim involvement in the killings of 1965. Herein, she illustrates how the same events can result in different victim–perpetrator definitions, as Muslims justify their violence by referring to former land seizures by PKI members. While Sulistiyanto and Steyadi present the external impact of Syarikat's work, McGregor focuses on the resistance within NU to face and deal with the past. Therefore, civil society organizations (such as Nahdlatul Ulama) can also have an ambivalent influence on reconciliation. Herein, religion provides the basis not only for the justification of the killings but also for their condemnation. The decision on which version to follow has to take into account the whole setting of depoliticized religion during Suharto's New Order as well as a new fundamentalist upsurge since the beginning of the *era reformasi*.

What turns this edited volume into more than just a collection of articles by different authors from different backgrounds is the analytical framework thoroughly elaborated in the introductory chapter by Birgit Bräuchler. The framework touches upon classic and current strands of "transitional justice" as well as peace and conflict studies. Especially by focusing on the roles of culture and the collective within peace and reconciliation initiatives, it adds practical examples to a highly debated issue. This makes the book not only a valuable contribution in the field of area studies but also strongly recommendable for academia and practitioners working in the field of peace-building and "dealing with the past". The book underscores the common claim that grassroots reconciliation can only be one element of a peace-building process and that state-sponsored initiatives have to complement civil society's efforts in order to create accountability and reconciliation but also to demonstrate rule of law. Since the role of grassroots agency in peace processes has long been acknowledged by academia as well as by international donors, the volume would have been even more comprehensive had it included more examples of the ambivalent role civil society organizations can play in reconciliation processes (Belloni 2008). However, this does not reduce the quality of the book's assessment of reconciliation in Indonesia. The variety of articles concerning different levels of conflict as well as different actors does not weaken the focus of the book; rather, it facilitates a better understanding of the various "cultures of reconciliation" in present-day Indonesia.

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