

BOOK REVIEW



**Finding a New Prism of Understanding the “Papua Conflict” Through
Papua’s Insecurity: State Failure in The Indonesia Periphery**

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Another international published research voicing yet the Papua quandary was written by author Bobby Anderson, a non-Indonesian research worker who has been conducting much work in the area. Published in 2015, *Papua’s Insecurity: State Failure in the Indonesian Periphery* is part of the Policy Studies series, an ongoing publication project by the U.S.-based education and research institution of the East-West Center. Issues of the series are based on fieldwork and academic study, that aim primarily to provide new perspectives and insights on stakeholders’ policies—and in the context of this particular publication, those in the Papua region. It is also noteworthy that the series, tallying to the platform of the above-stated organization, cover the areas of Asia and have target readers comprised particularly of policy and business communities, academics, journalists, and the informed public who probably also hold a special interest in the relations between the U.S. and the region.

The prescriptive study is relatively concise, consisting of sixty pages main content and twelve page of an impressive list of references. It falls into five sections—one of which is an introductory chapter. In this introduction, the writer broaches his main argument to the readers. The vertical conflicts between the state and the indigenous people of Papua as the major factor of insecurity in the region have been becoming the predominantly accepted analytical theme of many scholarly works. There is actually another important factor which should be brought into the equation, *i.e.* the actual absence

of the state—rather than its dominance—which somehow corresponds to the horizontal conflicts. The writer also alludes to several paralleling cases to Papua in South and Southeast Asia, where the history of colonialism in the area has led to the contemporary antagonistic relations between certain regions and the state to which they presently belong. The incorporation of Papua into Indonesian state was coerced, and that has created state-resistant social structures. However, this work delineates that the case of Papua is rather distinct. The absence of the state, especially in the Papua highlands, is near-total and incomparable to any other cases of state neglect in Southeast Asia.

Post-New Order regime, however, some things apparently changed. The decentralization process with the passing of special autonomy law (*Otonomi Khusus/Otsus*) has slightly augmented the state presence in many sectors. It also has resulted in what the author call the co-optations: “Special autonomy and administrative fragmentation allow the state to co-opt Papuans, and Papuans to co-opt the state (p.3)”. From that point on, as what can be inferred from the author’s arguments, the incompetence of the actors involved in those mutual co-optations process that leads to policy dysfunction is to blame as well for the insecurity in Papua—which has been primarily attributed to the state oppression and exploitation. The remaining four chapters of the book are where the author develops his previously mentioned arguments.

The first section consists of two subsections, highlighting briefly the history of Papua from the

Dutch colonial period to the Indonesian period. The author underlines several historical developments which eventually brought about the current socio-economic and political developments—and the lack thereof. The underlined issue is the massive gap between the coastal regions which have long contacts experiences with the outside world and the highlands areas which mostly remain uneasily penetrable. The rugged topography has been a major hindrance for intra-Papua migrations. Alas, the majority of the indigenous Papuans live precisely in these underdeveloped highlands—whereas most dominating Papuan elites originate from the coastal areas. The author also depicts that since the era of European expansion in the Archipelago, to the Dutch ministration, up to present Indonesian governance, Papua dolefully remains peripheral and continues being treated like backwater with minimal state presence: “[t]he only interaction many Papuans have with the state is through local Indonesian armed forces or police” (p.11). The rest of the story illustrates the history of state violence against Papuan civilians and how this somehow led to the resurgence of Papuan independence aspirations. The author notes that despite the upheaval in various areas, the rest of hinterland areas is left unaffected and stays in dire undeveloped conditions.

In the second section, the author examines the common singular proposition of Papua conflict being that of only two parties, the state against the Papuans. He deems it problematic and argues that there are multiplicities of actors involved—encompassing numerous administrative, religious (church), and primordial boundaries such as clan (*suku*), extended family (*marga*), and language. These are factors playing part in the diversity of Papua security landscape. In this chapter, the author also presents the result of the study and monitoring system of violent conflict in Indonesia. It shows a nuanced picture of the violent conflicts in Papua. Though it is true that the area still holds the highest number of violent deaths in Indonesia, relatively few cases were linked to state-against-civilian conflict. The study records eight categories of resulting-in-deaths violent conflicts: popular justice (*main hakim sendiri*), crime and response, domestic violence, identity or clan violence, political violence, resource-related

violence, administrative violence, and others. The study also reports that the actors involved in those violent conflicts are far from being of a singular character. The bigger part of this second section of the book is geared to analyze various sources of insecurity in contemporary Papua which breed those multifarious violent conflicts: the state, the state security apparatus, the clan, separatist groups, migration, and other sources.

In the third section, the author attempts to re-examine and counter-argues one of the bitterest discourses, also one that is pleaded and propagated by many non-Indonesian supporters of Papuan independence: the deliberate cultural genocide and mass murders of the Papuans. He states that “[it] is difficult to argue that Indonesia’s actions were meant to exterminate Papuans as an ethnic group” (p.43.) The author propounds that such claim is to be scrutinized for it is misleading and has generated distorted images of Papua.

The fourth section is the concluding chapter. The author proposes several policy suggestions for the betterments of the indigenous Papuan condition. In the previous sections, the multifaceted insecurity in contemporary has been described. The author outlines that it is still poorly understood, and argues that instead of stemming from the state overwhelming presence, the insecurity in Papua is rather due to the lack of a functioning state. The prevalent abuses by security forces that have been interpreted invariably should be understood “within the context of an addressed history of humiliation, racism, and killing” (p.48). The author then acknowledges the so-called “policy road map”, a dialog-and-reconciliation oriented reform blueprint developed by the Indonesian Institute of Sciences (LIPI) as one of the most pragmatic paths toward peace and justice in Papua. The problem, however, LIPI is still an Indonesian government entity. Albeit the goodwill on its impartiality, the author suggests that LIPI hands over the role of the facilitator of the dialog and reconciliation to others. He further offers recommendations in line with the dialogue and reconciliation orientations: continuing and accelerating the security sector reform, ending the military impunity in the area, re-centralizing the management of some government services without marginalizing Papuan involvement in their own affairs.

Papua's Insecurity: State Failure in the Indonesian Periphery is conceivably not a pastime read or for a first-time peruser of the Papua issue. It contains nonetheless valuable information and insights for any reader. Regardless of the political valuation bore by the work, the author provides us with empirical observations of the current Papua state of affairs. The initial intention of the author is quite clear, that is to contribute additional perspective and interpretation of the intricate Papua debacle by delivering his assessment and eventually providing several recommendations. An ordinary Indonesian casual reader might get a little hesitant to read such a heavily politically laden book, or even could be a tad uncomfortable simply from reading the morose title. Those who are rather better-informed about the discourses related to Papua might notice that this is another "outsider's perspective"—and probably become slightly skeptical and cautious, which is good in a way.

Impressions may differ, receptions may vary. Yet, it does not change the many an objective fact laid bare by the author. Those who are for any intellectual and political dialogue would undoubtedly never turn a blind eye to actualities nor turn a deaf ear to constructive criticisms. Those who do not buy into the singularly top-down view of nationalism would unreservedly see what this book has to offer. Those who simply wish to broaden their knowledge and expand their cognitive understanding of the idea of a more inclusive Indonesia would give this work a read. Though focuses mostly on the politics, this book does attempt to give room to the deserving voices of the Papuan grassroots.

REFERENCE

Anderson, Bobby (2015). *Papua's Insecurity: State Failure in the Indonesian Periphery*. Policy Studies 73. Washington, D.C.: East-West Center.