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Christianity. One thing I wonder here is whether especially the latter two subjects could not have been equally well studied in the context of the IRIS/ISIR projects or even as part of this book. Earlier on, I also quoted a remark on “keeping up with developments in Papua New Guinea.” In both these respects this book disappoints me, it seems that both the two projects and the authors of this volume have failed to jump over their own shadow. Purely based on the book, I am left with the uncomfortable idea that there is very little lying beyond the narrow stretch of land connecting the Bird’s Head Peninsula to the rest of the island.

Criticism notwithstanding, *One Head, Many Faces* is not only a catchy phrase summing up what the book is all about. It provides a good overview of the intricate variety of groups that live in the region and manages through various perspectives to keep both the trees and the woods themselves visible for the reader. It leaves me with one nagging question: Is this too little, too late? A decade of research, the digging up of a large number of previously unpublished source materials, and we are still only left with a careful hint of how complex the reality of Papua is, how it links up historically with both Indonesia and Melanesia. In fact, we do not even know all that much yet of the links with the various other parts of Papua Barat and Papua provinces. Are universities in Indonesia ready to continue this work (remember that one of the purposes of the IRIS project was to improve academic education in and on Papua)? More to the point, is there enough academic interest and funding available to continue the quest? It would be a colossal waste if these results would do little more than gather dust in the near future.

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**MEDIATING ACROSS DIFFERENCE: Oceanic and Asian Approaches to Conflict Resolution.** *Writing Past Colonialism Series. Edited by Morgan Brigg and Roland Bleiker.* Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2011. vii, 284 pp. (Figures.) US\$28.00, paper. ISBN 978-0-8248-3519-4.

*Mediating across Difference* is an edited volume based on a workshop held at the University of Queensland, Brisbane, in 2007. This meeting facilitated the initial exchange between the 19 contributors, including representatives from indigenous Australia, the Pacific and East Asia. The volume’s central theme is that in order to deal adequately with conflict, openness towards different cultural practices and ways of knowing and being is required. Instead of understanding cultural difference as an inevitable source of conflict, difference can also be a valuable source for managing conflict and producing stable socio-political orders (2). By offering insight into the often overlooked local traditions of conflict resolution in Oceania and

Asia, the volume aims to challenge mainstream Western conflict resolution and provide new perspectives on conflict and its mitigation.

The book is divided into four parts. The first part problematizes Western approaches to conflict resolution. In chapter 1, the editors argue that a prevailing focus on Western approaches to conflict resolution has neglected local knowledge and traditions of conflict resolution. The legacy of European colonialism resulted in a “weak and failing states” discourse that justifies neoliberal interventions and the imposition of “Western approaches over indigenous forms of knowing and managing conflict” (22). In addition, the widespread tendency to identify difference as a problem continues to guide foreign policy making and their approaches to conflict resolution (25). To further frame the chapters, the editors identify seven key themes that are instructive of how different cultures approach conflict and its resolution. These are: 1. Reason and Emotion, 2. Communication beyond Speech, 3. Universal and Contextual Procedures, 4. Time, 5. Violence, 6. Individuals and Relationships, and 7. Myth and Magic. The volume’s participants were asked to reflect and elaborate on these themes.

In chapter 2 it is argued that Western models of conflict resolution tend to privilege speech over non-verbal means of communication (38), perceiving silence as passivity and lack of agency. However, silence is a form of non-verbal communication, and has an existential importance in many cultures (47). In the context of conflict and peacebuilding, “silence is part of the collective stock of knowledge through resistance, rituals, and performances, and it can create imaginative and nonconformist forms of conflict resolution and community building after conflict” (52-53). Chapter 3 deals with how prevalent neo-liberal approaches to conflict resolution fail to draw upon local culture. It seems that local knowledges are only accepted if they are presented in Western terms (10). If we want to provide culturally sensitive frameworks “through which war-torn societies can heal and rebuild successfully,” conflict resolution and peacebuilding need to be reclaimed from Western neo-liberal agendas (59). The author then offers suggestions about how this can be done, amongst others by opening “a process of genuine communication between internationals and the recipients of peacebuilding” (70).

The subsequent three parts deal with indigenous traditions of managing conflict in respectively, Australia and Aotearoa/ New Zealand (part 2), Solomon Islands and Bougainville (part 3), and Indonesia, Japan, China and Korea (part 4). In the final chapter, some of the recurring themes in the volume are summed up. Instead of the “fly-in, settle conflict, and fly-out” conflict mediation practices, which ignore local particularities, the author stresses the necessity of engaging normative values in conflict resolution (271).

The most interesting parts of this volume are the case-studies in

chapters 4 to 12, which often reflect fruitful collaborations between indigenous scholars and/or practitioners and Western academics. These multi-authored dialogues show the importance of relationships, time, place, emotions, rituals, ceremonies, religion and the inclusion of ancestral and non-human others in conflict mitigation, which are in many respects incompatible with Western institutions and practices of peacebuilding. For example, while professional mediators tend to focus on spoken and written words in reconciliation practices, the case studies show that symbolic activities, such as ceremonial gift exchanges, dances, prayers and customary reconciliation rituals can be more important and powerful, as they express commitment and trust, and create harmony and enduring relationships. The chapters on Oceania and Indonesia underline the importance of collaboration between local and Anglo-European conflict resolution approaches, and how this “blending” (136, 180) may become exemplary for mediating across difference elsewhere. It is stressed that local people are in the best position to restore good relations. Outsiders may be helpful in “recognizing, strengthen and consolidate what is already done on a local level” (159).

Although most authors acknowledge that customary conflict resolution does not have all the answers, overall, *Mediating Across Difference* emphasizes its strength and success. This is especially salient in chapter 9 with regard to one of Indonesia’s traditional conflict resolution methods: the *pela gandong* of Ambon. The authors argue that these peace norms and rituals of reconciliation provided villagers with mechanisms to limit and control the extent of violent clashes between Muslims and Christians. However, they omit the fact that *pela gandong* was criticized by mainly Muslims for being exclusive, despite its inclusive ideology, and for being part of *adat* (tradition) instead of the modern Indonesian state. As a result, it could not provide the means to limit violence for all those concerned. The authors argue that processes of nation building and the influences of the state on local cultures eroded the *pela gandong* (202). Instead, I think the problem is the implementation of a too idealized form, which did not take into account new forms of knowledge and being within the Indonesian nation. Reconciliation methods have to be flexible and adaptive to new circumstances. The volume’s case studies reveal that it is this ability to transform and adapt, and to work across differences that makes indigenous conflict resolution successful. For Western approaches the challenge is to be as equally adaptive, sensitive and aware of local detail. As argued in the final chapter, only by respecting cultural differences and mediating across those differences, can these insights be achieved (273).

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