

## REVIEW

### ROBIN OSBORNE, *INDONESIA'S SECRET WAR: THE GUERRILLA STRUGGLE IN IRIAN JAYA\**

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Indonesian nationalists, succored by appeasement geopolitics of sundry great and motley powers and abetted by Dutch abandonment of belated preparations for an independent West Papua, imposed an alien dominion over the peoples of West New Guinea by early 1963, while a post- and counter-revolutionary ABRI had begun inflicting one of the cataclysms of this age upon the communities of Portuguese Timor by early 1976. Yet even in 1987 it remains a commonplace that were valid acts of popular self-determination to be conducted in these far reaches of the realm, the collective voice of the politically dispossessed would mock the claims of the Indonesian state. The proprieties of peaceful liberation remain as subversive in contemporary Indonesia as emancipation through violence. Consequently, ABRI still seeks to enforce submission in these territories in the face of tenacious resistance movements. Against overwhelming military odds, Melanesian deviance has endured implausibly for a quarter century and Timorese insurgency for ten years on. While stalemates prevail, Fretilin's armed struggle has attracted far more examination, interest, and even sympathy than the less sophisticated and more unruly efforts of the Organisasi Papua Merdeka (OPM). This is unfortunate, for Irian Jaya's predicaments may well anticipate Timor Timur's future.

It is in this context that Robin Osborne's *Indonesia's Secret War* makes its most convincing contribution. The book delivers a profusion of uncommon and fresh information in the hybrid style of the tenacious investigative journalist become burrowing scholar. Once the mandatory but well-executed initial chapter titled "From Sabang to Merauke" overviews the context for the territory's political destiny through 1969, "From Sorong to Numbay" begins to spin out an intricate tale of internal resistance inside Irian Jaya through 1978. Narrowing the focus further, "The New OPM" documents the impact of intractable rebel factionalism through 1984. "Paradise Lost" then moves beyond the headline-grabbing bloodshed and essays a global discussion of its institutionalization through Indonesia's administration of Irian Jaya as an "internal colony" (p. 116). Finally, "East of the Border" continues to broaden the historical picture with a discussion of Australia's impact on Papua New Guinea's border policy and PNG's own self-interested handling of OPM.

For the moment, there is no book in print containing more information on current resistance to Indonesian rule by Melanesians in Irian Jaya. Mostly this accomplishment is due to Osborne's long access to key sources in Indonesia, PNG, and Australia in his capacities as a freelance journalist competent in Indonesian, Press Secretary to then PNG Prime Minister Julius Chan and later to

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\* Sydney, London, and Boston: Allen & Unwin, 1985. xvi + 213 pp.

then Deputy Prime Minister Paias Wingti, and an open ear to OPM fighters, sympathizers, and agitprop artists of all stripes. Indeed, Osborne continues to run practically a one-man show among the world's press corps in keeping the international public and interested nongovernmental organizations alert to continuing problems in Irian Jaya and the fate of over 10,000 refugees in PNG. A nearly unbroken record of single-minded journalistic productivity has played a key role in his consistent access to primary sources despite official bans since imposed on his reporting in Indonesia and PNG.

Some of the more important fruits of Osborne's labors evident in the book include: rare documentation of Melanesian protest and Indonesian repression throughout Irian Jaya for the duration of Indonesian rule; recollection of the succession of martyrs sometimes generations deep in a family; the important neglected religious dimension of the resistance and individual OPM leaders in the Koreri movement and Christianity; the symbolic meaning of the repeated seemingly senseless and often surreptitious hoistings of the OPM's Morning Star flag; a strong account of the origins of the futile early 1984 OPM rising; a credible weighing of the reasons for the subsequent unprecedented distinctive streams of refugees across the border into PNG; the unveiling of the cleavage between the Pemka (Pemulihan Keadilan, Restoration of Justice) and Victoria commands within OPM identified with Jacob Prai and Seth Rumkorem respectively; estimation of the significance of the Unity Group of exiles in PNG; provision of extensive biographic information on OPM commanders; quotations reflecting their commitment to "transitional" military rule and discrimination against non-Papuans after attaining independence; revelation of frequent meetings in PNG between highest level OPM and PNG leaders; elaboration of regular recurrence of about-faces toward the OPM by major PNG politicians once assuming office; and hints of deep covert involvement by Australian, PNG, and Indonesian intelligence services (JIO, NIO, Kopkamtib) in the border area and among Irian Jaya exiles in Port Moresby.

Twin problems of many books on liberation movements include the studied glorification of their struggle and excessive optimism about their prospects. Osborne's book does not fall into these traps. His effort is neither apologia for OPM nor polemic for an independent West Papua under OPM rule. Notably, he recounts in excruciating detail the well-publicized major OPM blunders of the 1981 Holtekang logging camp kidnappings, the 1984 atrocity slaying of two defenseless Indonesians--a construction boss and a doctor--aboard a captured Catholic-owned aircraft, and Henk Joku's indiscreet open arms-raising campaign in Australia. In many passages, Osborne less directly rues the seemingly ineradicable political fractiousness of OPM's shifting leaders and makes clear his disdain for many self-serving and exaggerated assertions by Prai and Rumkorem alike. Equally, Osborne suffers no delusions about any fatal flaw in the political or military armor of the unitary Indonesian state. He realistically judges that independence in any form--a free West Papua, a unitary New Guinea state, a Melanesian federation--is not on the cards anytime in the foreseeable future. To his credit, he understands that such an event could only somehow be brought about in the upper sanctum of Jakarta military politics under a set of unlikely international political pressures far from accommodating to Indonesia, not in bush clashes between the OPM and ABRI. Yearn as he does for a free West Papua, Osborne's intellectual honesty compels his ultimate commitments more to the political cause than the resistance struggle, more to the people than their leaders.

His book has three major drawbacks. Its exposition is substantially less comprehensible than it might have been. The research difficulties posed by Indonesian secrecy and problematic credibility of OPM sources are not systemati-

cally treated. Many central political questions are not explicitly posed and so only partially answered.

Osborne often deliberately limits himself to what might fairly be dubbed a style of dense description of events. Fascinating and tantalizing as this fairly frequent sliding of detail into digression may be to those with prior global mastery of the actors and their roles, it creates difficulty in comprehending the threads of argument by the larger lay audience for whom Osborne ostensibly intended his book. There simply are not enough overview paragraphs and subheads breaking the text. The prose resembles more the lumbering *Wall Street Journal* than the spare *Christian Science Monitor*. The acuteness of the problem becomes evident when the reader begins ruthlessly to flip pages to determine what year a reported incident is occurring. A Chronology of major events and Who's Who of characters alongside the indispensable Glossary and Abbreviations would have helped immeasurably.

In the important case of Pemka and Victoria factional membership, nowhere does Osborne attempt a systematic name list. Instead, the reader often feels stranded in a puzzle palace. Endowed with the critical knowledge of this major cleavage, it is necessary to use pad and pencil to establish the lineups as Osborne doles out the information or as reasonable inferences are made from chains of command and accounts of comradeship. The cast thus assembled, it becomes necessary to return to the text to annotate roles and importance in particular historical spans as leaders get captured, killed off, or exiled. That done, the wholesale nature of repeated leadership successions makes clearer the impact of ABRI's numerous operations and the regenerative capacity of Melanesian resistance. But the same exercise shows how spotty a picture Osborne has left us of the changing and complex communication and control relationships between the principal exile leadership in Greece (Rumkorem) and Sweden (Prai) and the guerrillas and propagandists on the ground. Continuing the exercise also shows an incomplete picture of the shifting loyalties of the PNG exiles. Little information is provided about the resistance roles of important non-factional figures in the Netherlands (Rex Rumakiek, Fred Korwa) and in Irian Jaya itself (Arnold Ap). The alignments of the Universitas Cenderawasih intellectuals who fled in the February 1984 exodus are left unsaid. Their possible regroupment or resettlement may explain this gap.

With Osborne having extracted and pieced together so much material about events on the ground in Irian Jaya from interviews, leaked official documents, letters (smuggled and otherwise), and the PNG press, it is easy to forget he is writing, as his book title aptly has it, about a war designed to be kept secret. The official blackout is *more* effective than the one for East Timor. The Indonesian press remains under tight strictures not to become curious about, much less report, anything about armed conflict, casualties, or even detentions in Irian Jaya. Prominent Indonesian human rights lawyers can visit but not practice there. Consequently, the low-level war in Irian Jaya is as unknown to most Indonesians as it is to most foreigners. There has never been a clandestine *internal* OPM radio station comparable to Fretilin's Radio Maubere in its several incarnations. International human rights and humanitarian organizations operating in Indonesia rarely even pressure to visit prisons in Irian Jaya, much less sites of clashes or areas of substantial refugee flight. They consider East Timor a higher priority about which more can be done, and handily trade off access to Irian Jaya. An uninterested regional foreign press corps seldom pushes for access save occasionally to accompany official delegations of their home countries on essentially guided tours which deal with subjects only tangentially related to the resistance.

Consequently, it would be a mistake to conclude that having been told so much by Osborne we know even half the story. It is principally the more or less formal OPM and a few others inside Irian Jaya committed to its struggle or aspirations, together with their ABRI antagonists, who know the largest segments of the true state of affairs. Far more information comes from OPM than from ABRI. Yet OPM's external information operation is impoverished, skimpy, furtive, and only dimly and intermittently aware of the importance of credible publicity and foreign solidarity groups for the West Papuan cause. Assessing the credibility of OPM sources is a matter Osborne generally averts rather than handles head on. He knows even internal OPM communications can be no more than sheaves of rumors or adorned capsule accounts. Having seen enough such documents over long periods of time, it is possible to develop more than strong hunches about their authenticity and accuracy. But it would have been helpful if Osborne had provided us with more insights than he does into the criteria he uses. Perhaps the greatest disappointment in the book is his reluctance to conclude what is the most likely account of the murder by Indonesian troops of Arnold Ap, the martyred Biak whose reputation was at once Papuan, Indonesian, and international in scope.

The work is an essential reference for academics and intelligence analysts whose tasks involve making the best available estimates from information on hand. With effort, it is possible to patch together answers to some of the questions such analytically oriented persons might pose, but not to others. Osborne could have served this group of readers better if he had explicitly tasked himself with framing these questions and laying out his answers. Is Melanesian resistance province-wide? Yes, captured Indonesian documents confirm OPM claims. OPM is not a border phenomenon. Just disproportionately more confirmable border news gets out. How long has such widespread alienation prevailed? Quite a while, especially once the educated Papuan political elite experienced re-subordination, but all resistance has hardly been guided or even inspired by OPM. Has OPM ever been a single hierarchy? Plainly not. Despite attempts at unification, at most it has evolved toward competing hierarchies. How deep are its roots in the villages and towns? Extensive, but it is impossible to be specific over time across wide geographic areas. Probably even ABRI and OPM remain unsure of the scope of the support base. Can OPM mobilize thousands behind a tactical aim? It has done so repeatedly. But can it do so as effectively against a projected controversial transmigration site as an ABRI atrocity? The answer remains unclear, despite hard feelings among Melanesians about uncompensated land grabs. Does OPM have support among Melanesians in the Indonesian Army? Without doubt. But how deep is the support among Melanesian soldiers who had no need to desert and cross the PNG border after the February 1984 rising? No one knows. Is there any potential for successful nonviolent resistance to continued Indonesian rule? Only for limited gains. Are there plausible scenarios for a transition to a more autonomous Irian Jaya or a free West Papua? This is the most consequential unanswered question of all. Osborne's unwritten reply could deeply color judgments of the manner of struggle.