

## *Book Reviews*



**Shane Joshua Barter**

(2014) *Civilian Strategies in Civil War: Insights from Indonesia, Thailand, and the Philippines*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan. 245 pages. ISBN: 978-1-137-40299-8.

Barter examines the role of civilians in civil war through case studies of civil wars in Southeast Asia. The first and most extensive case study (covering three full chapters) examines the secessionist conflict in Aceh, Indonesia. Barter provides chapter-length analyses of secessionists in Patani (Thailand) and Mindanao (the Philippines). This book is a good illustration of the often unheralded potential for comparative qualitative research to contribute to conflict studies. Conflict studies itself has been dominated, on one hand, by large-n cross-national regression analysis and, on the other hand, studies of a relatively circumscribed set of cases, most often Colombia, Vietnam, Malaya, Iraq and Afghanistan. By bringing in cases from Southeast Asia, Barter adds much needed breadth and novel data to the discussion. Barter is particularly astute about data collection techniques. Like many field researchers toiling in conflict zones, Barter relies on snow-ball sampling methodologies. This involves building networks of interviewees through referrals. Such techniques are no doubt necessary in environments where people have good reason to distrust prying outsiders. Yet, they also introduce selection bias and create an information echo chamber. To rectify this, Barter takes pains to reach out to communities that are not in his initial sample. This allows him to test whether his conclusions hold fast outside the networks.

Barter's methodological acumen makes the book's theoretical contribution all the more impactful. The book addresses a major lacuna in conflict studies, namely the way civilians behave in the midst of civil war. There is a considerable literature on the mobilisation and activities of rebel armies. Since the 1990s, studies of civil war have turned away from the idea that rebellions are motivated by grievances or political ideology. Instead, there was increasing consensus that what drives people to take up arms against the state is some

combination of opportunity and pecuniary incentive. Cross-national, quantitative studies demonstrated that states with significant endowments of natural resources, such as oil, diamonds and narcotics, were especially prone to international violence. Micro-political studies that focused on district, village or hamlet-level described similar mechanistic dynamics. The promise of loot, whether in the form of natural resources or more quotidian houses, cars or property is a kind of catnip for men (almost exclusively) to gravitate to armed group. In this analysis, material power and benefit—greed, to put it bluntly—is the key driver, not any abstract ideologies like ethno-sectarian or class solidarity.

Barter's book shifts the focus to examine the vast majority of people caught in the midst of conflict who do not take up arms. Civilians, in most theories, are treated as a kind of inert mass, forced to accept whatever protections the state or rebels are willing to offer them. Drawing on Albert Hirschmann's seminal exit/voice/loyalty schema, Barter shows that civilians, in fact, have a menu of choices to make in the midst of civil war. First, civilians can choose to flee potential dangers or hardships. This, of course, is well known. Each of the conflicts in the book have generated massive outflows of refugees and internally displaced people. Secondly, they can endeavour to support the incoming rulers through collaboration. As Mao famously put it, insurgents "must move amongst the people as a fish swims in the sea." Among other forms of support, civilians can provide rebels with material goods, labour and information. The final option is perhaps the least understood. Civilians can choose to remain in place, vocalising their concerns and demands to incoming rebel rulers. Such acts of voice take many forms. They can be openly defiant through protests or strikes. They can be subtly subversive. Or they can try to engage rebel on their own terms, using institutions like the rebel's own revolutionary courts to articulate their grievances and demands. Barter shows that civilians are naturally concerned about physical and economic security and seek out safety in zones of control, but they are not merely pragmatic. Rather, civilian responses to rebel armies are animated by embedded senses of moral grievance and ethno-sectarian solidarity and community. These responses, in turn, can help or hinder the ability of groups like the Moro Islamic Liberation Front, the Free Aceh Movement (GAM) and the Patani United Liberation Organization to carry out their struggles.

In sum, *Civilian Strategies in Civil War* contributes significantly to both the methodology and the theoretical understanding of civil war dynamics. Although Barter focuses on the empirical cases of separatists in Indonesia, Thailand and the Philippines, the book is about much more than these three cases. Barter provides a model from how inductive and ethnographic researchers can con-

tribute to mid-range theories about civil wars and internal conflicts generally. This book will, therefore, be a necessary read for anyone interested in civil wars and internal conflict.

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