Book and Media Reviews
Two recent works are casting a much-needed light on the history and contemporary experience of West Papua in an age of ever deeper and more complex global entanglements and local struggles. *Freedom in Entangled Worlds: West Papua and the Architecture of Global Power*, by Eben Kirksey, chronicles a number of striking and significant moments in the recent history of West Papua: the surge of indigenous political protests and fresh rounds of violence after the fall of Suharto, the emergence of Theys Eluay as an independence leader and his subsequent murder by Indonesian Special Forces, and the much-publicized attack that killed two Americans and an Indonesian employed by an international school near West Papua’s controversial Freeport mine, to name a few. Kirksey’s position in this account is itself remarkable. His first research trip to West Papua in July 1998 coincided with mass demonstrations of indigenous men and women protesting Indonesian rule in the provincial capital, Jayapura. He boarded a passenger ship to leave the city and ended up stranded on Biak island off the north coast, just in time to witness a landmark protest and the massacre of protestors by Indonesian military and police on 6 July 1998.

Papuan resistance and the movement for merdeka (freedom or independence) is the focus of the book, centered by Kirksey’s insistent question, “What are the possibilities of finding limited rights and justice while trapped within unwanted entanglements?” (1). His interests include the forms of hope West Papuans embraced in times of complete hopelessness (19), as well as thoughtful examinations of the strategies they have embarked on to keep merdeka alive even as Indonesian authorities have tried to destroy the movement with raw force (18). One of his key findings is that, as a result of violence or people’s sense of disappointment in leaders, the struggle for merdeka frequently goes underground and emergent visionaries refigure hopes and desires (54).

Based on multiple visits to West Papua over the course of his undergraduate and doctoral research projects, which took place from approximately 1998 to 2008, this book “traces ideas about freedom as they moved through time, among West Papuan cultural groups” (xii). Kirksey himself calls it “an unconventional anthropological study, a multisited ethnography, about people and political formations in motion” (xiii). The book’s most central argument—that social movements “wed collaboration with imagination to
open up surprising opportunities in the field of historical possibility” (xiii)—is well supported and mostly convincing. The book provides various kinds of evidence of how political strategies that combine collaboration with structures of power, and expansive dreams of transformation, work to secure partial successes for West Papuans in spite of ongoing exploitation and violence.

_Freedom in Entangled Worlds_ starts with a list of eight key characters whose experiences and perspectives informed the book including West Papuan journalists, human rights researchers, and well-known activists. In this way we are alerted to the prominence of West Papuan activists and political figures in Kirksey’s account of merdeka dreams. Yet some of the most compelling accounts in the book come from West Papuan informants who are neither well-known activists nor members of the political elite. The gripping introduction to the book describes the story of Ester Nawipa, a young woman from the Mee tribe of the central highlands who was forced into two years of sexual slavery by Indonesian soldiers. As she related her story to Kirksey in 2002, several years after being allowed to leave the barracks and the soldiers, Ester saw herself as not a passive victim but as someone who had subtly asserted herself by using her status as the “girlfriend” of a commanding officer to intervene in conflict situations and prevent indigenous people from being shot. Ester’s story is depicted as alerting Kirksey to parallels in the experiences of West Papuan activists fighting against Indonesian occupation, in terms of doing what is possible in circumstances where possibility is highly circumscribed.

_Freedom in Entangled Worlds_ offers fresh insights into political, cultural, and colonial conditions in West Papua; it is much more than an explication of indigenous activism and Indonesian rebuttals. Kirksey does much to improve our understanding of the entangled worlds at war in West Papua as political activists encounter the Indonesian reform movement, government security forces, and global capitalists. It is because of these entangled worlds, he argues, that pursuing freedom entails “a subversive politics of engagement” (78). Conceptually, Kirksey’s employment of environmental metaphors to explicate theoretical points about social movements and West Papuan freedom dreams—the banyan tree, the strangler fig, the rhizome, among others—not only speaks to his unique academic upbringing but also demonstrates his interest in making his book accessible to the broadest possible audience.

It is exciting to see an account that foregrounds West Papuans’ understandings of history and the forces of oppression they have experienced. Because of the humility with which Kirksey presents his data, the accessibility of his analysis, and the use of direct excerpts from his field notes, I often had the feeling of accompanying him through some precarious times and incredible moments, and I could imagine his own feelings of being caught up (as many West Papuans were during the times of his research) in circumstances beyond their control and perhaps beyond imagination.
Spending time with Elsham Papua, the human rights organization, Kirksey investigated the events surrounding the murder of an American teacher, an American school principal, and an Indonesian teacher working at the Tembagapura International School near Freeport mine and the FBI investigation that led to the arrest of a Papuan man, Antonius Wamang. Back in the United States, Kirksey took seriously the request of a Papuan informant to use his data to act on injustices occurring in West Papua and he began collaborating with other activists. Kirksey also reports on his experiences in the United Kingdom when he participated in dialogue with British Petroleum (BP) regarding their planned Tangguh natural gas plant to be opened at Bintuni Bay, the violence that BP’s actions brought forth locally, and the related massacre in the seaside village of Wasior. His reflections on being a participant, an advocate, and an “expert” are honest and compelling, particularly as he avoids becoming the protagonist in West Papuans’ stories. More than that, Kirksey’s presence as author does not show an obligatory form of reflexivity but rather, I found, evokes the sincere and candid experiences of a courageous yet humble collaborator trying to investigate some extraordinary, dangerous, and politically charged events. A sense of these tumultuous times is evoked when Kirksey writes, simply, “Lives were at stake all the time” (90).

It was because I felt enabled to participate in Kirksey’s journeys through these rich, pointed accounts that I was able to get over the fact that in this book there are many fleeting moments and brief encounters. What he does produce is not lacking in ethnographic richness or analytical sophistication. Moreover, it opened my eyes to the extent that research in West Papua relies on the same cracks in the architecture of power that allow for partial victories in West Papuans’ nationalist pursuits.

Freedom in Entangled Worlds ends with a turn to the United States, furthering the book’s pursuit of how global capital is determining the architecture of power in West Papua and closer to home. I felt this was appropriate given the not-so-strange bedfellows whose actions and agendas directly and indirectly contribute to Indonesian colonialism and West Papuan nationalism, and I saw this as an engaging way to ask readers to consider questions of freedom and action in their own lives, their towns and cities, and to see the connections between the United States and West Papua.

Danilyn Rutherford’s Laughing at Leviathan: Sovereignty and Audience in West Papua begins with a compelling question that the interrelated essays in this book address: Why do Papuans continue to pursue national sovereignty when their chances of achieving it seem so slight? Rutherford, author of Raiding the Land of the Foreigners (2003), situates the answer to this question in terms of “how the uneasy relationship between sovereignty and audience has shaped the history of colonialism and nationalism in West Papua” (6).

The book is based on field research in Biak, Jayapura, and Enarotali; historical and archival work in the Netherlands; and ethnographic
research with Papuan nationalists in the Netherlands. In addition, over the course of more than a decade, Rutherford interviewed Papuan activists and community leaders in a range of locations in Indonesia and the United States. Internet postings and e-mail newsgroups also provided important insights, in part because, as she points out, the Indonesian government barred foreign researchers and journalists from working in Papua for much of this period.

The focus of Laughing at Leviathan is an overlooked dimension of sovereignty: in practice, it relies on recognition from others, but this dependence undercuts supreme and absolute power. Referencing Leviathan—Thomas Hobbes’s conceptualization of state power in which sovereignty implied supremacy and was pursued through violence—Rutherford stresses “the interdependency that sovereignty always entails in practice” (1). The aim of the book is to approach sovereignty less as a set of functions and attributes of those in charge than as a value that social actors seek to have recognized as their own but can never fully possess (10). In framing the issues of sovereignty and audience, Rutherford draws on a range of sophisticated theoretical and conceptual allies, including Jessica Cattelino, Michel Foucault, Giorgio Agamben, James Siegel, Jacques Derrida, Erving Goffman, and Mikhael Bakhtin.

The story begins by asking us to consider the awkward, ill-fated voyage of the Karel Doorman, a Dutch aircraft carrier sent on a voyage to the Netherlands New Guinea to show the international community, including the governments of the United States and Indonesia, that the Dutch were serious about being prepared to do battle over this colonial territory, rather than hand political control over to the Indonesian claimants. Rutherford asks us to imagine the strangeness of this carefully staged performance, and the variety of audiences that the warship and its entourage encountered on the long journey from the Netherlands. “This book is the product of my fascination with such moments—moments when sovereignty makes an appearance, and in making an appearance, puts itself at risk” (xi). Throughout the book, readers encounter provocative illustrations of exactly what sovereignty is at risk of—seeming ridiculous, irrelevant, misguided, or more achievable than we might think.

In pursuing an answer to the question of why West Papuans pursue sovereignty against the odds, Rutherford employs anthropological analyses of sign use, drawing on linguistics and semiotics, to illuminate how the pursuit of sovereignty inevitably entails an encounter with spectators, with audiences in their myriad forms (2). Versions of chapters published elsewhere are reconsidered for the contributions they make to an argument about the need to consider sovereignty in terms of its audiences. Laughing at Leviathan’s conclusions and answers to the book’s main question are convincing and significant for the study of West Papua and sovereignty more broadly. Rutherford argues that Papuan nationalists continue their quests for sovereignty against the odds in part because there is pleasure, hope, and potency associated with being seen by, playing to, and being affected by potential spectators (27).
West Papuans continue their quests for sovereignty against all odds in part because the representational practices they engage in by doing so are pleasurable, invigorating, and exhilarating (205). This is a strong contribution to our understanding of independence movements and aspirations or quests for sovereignty. Indeed, there is something about the questing that is itself motivational. For West Papua, it may be that there is a sense of potency and renewal of enthusiasm Papuans gain when envisioning distant others sharing their sorrow, anger, and pain (205).

Rutherford’s love of story, irony, humor, and language are evident throughout the book, not least in her insistence that colonialism can and should be studied in terms of the role that ridicule and embarrassment of government officials, and the state, plays in the expansion of empire. *Laughing at Leviathan* mostly considers the activities and rhetorical strategies of Papuan elites and prominent figures, but the patterns Rutherford identifies are unlikely to be limited to nationalist leaders. This book ends with a powerful bit of optimism: shifting perspectives, or imagining “others whose gaze disturbs familiar hierarchies,” can reveal “audiences who may have a claim to sovereignty after all” (248).

Although they go about their work differently, both of these books offer a refreshing take on politics and culture in West Papua. Most obviously the two works pursue understandings of Papuan nationalism—characterized as the pursuit of sovereignty by Rutherford and freedom dreams or the merdeka movement by Kirksey. Rutherford is concerned with the role that audiences play in motivating and shaping the pursuit of sovereignty, especially though not exclusively among prominent Papuan political figures. Kirksey pursues an understanding of how the messianic spirit of merdeka moves Papuans, and how both resistance leaders and other Papuans engage in the merdeka movement. These books traverse some similar conceptual and geographic spaces (Biak, Enarotali, Itchy Old Man, merdeka, and Derrida, to name a few). It is clear that a productive sharing of ideas and adventures took place between Kirksey and Rutherford.

Issues of subversive engagement and the affective experience of political resistance penetrate these works. The question of why Papuans continue to pursue national sovereignty when their chances of achieving it seem so slight clearly relates to how and why Papuans pursue freedom in entangled worlds. Both books easily convey the authors’ intellectual passion for West Papua and the pleasure they take in engaging with their theoretical questions and the spectacular complexities and everyday intrigue they find in the locales of their research. These contributions make clear the kinds of entanglements that occur betwixt and between supporters of Papuan nationalism and their apparent opponents. I did wonder, how much does the sophistication of Papuan performances of and toward sovereignty index the brutal and often unsophisticated methods of oppression employed by the Indonesian state? It is hard not to think of West Papua as a place where collaboration and imagination are simply gunned down, rounded up,
or tossed in jail when they begin to become too effective at mobilizing support or engaging audiences, especially international onlookers. However, I appreciated the urging of these authors to reframe the violence and exploitation of Indonesian colonialism as a matter of how and why West Papuans continue to pursue merdeka and sovereignty in spite of these conditions.

Both authors are frank about the obvious constraints on long-term, contiguous ethnographic research in West Papua—the fact that foreign researchers are almost never granted formal permits required by the government, for one thing. Nonetheless, neither book can be criticized on the grounds that there are incredible challenges to doing sustained ethnographic research in West Papua. That the field of West Papuan studies could use more in-depth investigations of the everyday lives of West Papuans, either by indigenous scholars, foreign scholars, or in some kind of collaboration, takes nothing away from these excellent contributions. Politics, even when not including the threat of detention or the imprisonment or death of informants, always shapes the kinds of research questions asked and answers pursued.

Both of these books present fascinating contributions to the study of West Papuan freedom dreams, and I hope that as scholars analyze recent events, fresh violence, and new brandings of indigenous organizations as “terrorist” groups, they take seriously the creative insights presented by Kirksey and Rutherford. Two are especially resonant: Massacres do not end the world of merdeka (Kirksey, 54) and, “Acts of violence, both ordinary and sovereign, always presume an evaluating gaze” (Rutherford, 101).

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Music in Pacific Island Cultures consists of over 200 pages of text and, for students and other newcomers to regional acoustic traditions, generously and helpfully includes a CD with forty-nine tracks. It should be noted that this book is another volume in the Global Music Series edited by Bonnie C Wade and Patricia Sheehan Campbell, who have recently done a great deal to bring a heightened appreciation for global musical diversity and change in the form of these readily readable books. Produced as a tool for teachers and students of musics of the world, the Global Music Series consists of some twenty-five volumes. Some of the works focus on theoretical and methodological topics—such as Wade’s Thinking Musically (third edition, 2012) and Campbell’s Teaching Music Globally (2004)—but most volumes refer to well-defined areas, for example, Music in Turkey (Eliot Bates, 2010); Music in Bali (Lisa Gold, 2004); and Music in Central Java (Benjamin Brinner, 2007). The current volume appears to sit nicely