

***Freedom in Entangled Worlds: West Papua and the Architecture of Global Power.* By Eben Kirksey. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2012. Softcover: 305pp.**

Violence in the Indonesian province of Papua remains unresolved. In fact, over the past decade Papua has experienced one of the worst periods of violence in its history, with many killings unresolved. The attention and sympathy of President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono towards Papua has been minimal. For instance, as reported by the *Jakarta Post* on 12 June 2012, Yudhoyono publicly stated, “The recent incidents in Papua can be considered small, with a limited number of victims. They are hardly as severe as the violence in the Middle East where we have witnessed deadly attacks with many fatalities almost every day.” While the international community remains disengaged with the current situation in Papua, Papuan aspirations for *merdeka* (independence) continue to flourish. These calls remain loud and clear despite the continuing Indonesian treatment of Papua as “abject” (J. Kristeva, *Powers of Horror, An Essay on Abjection*, 1982). This is the context in which Eben Kirksey and other contemporary scholars have tried to make sense of the conflict in Papua, one of the longest unresolved conflicts in the Asia Pacific.

John Braithwaite et al.’s *Anomie and Violence: Non-truth and Reconciliation in Indonesian Peacebuilding* (2009) provides a lengthy chapter on Papuan peacebuilding. Drawing on John Galtung’s perspective of peace, the authors argue that Papua has experienced only an absence of war over the past five decades rather than genuine peace. Moreover, Muridan Widjojo et al.’s *Papua Road Map* (2010) identifies the major root causes that underpin conflict in Papua. This analysis has been presented to the Indonesian government as a framework for peace negotiations between Papua and Jakarta. Similar to Braithwaite et al. and Widjojo et al., Danilyn Rutherford’s *Laughing at Leviathan* (2012) offers a dense analysis of the notion of sovereignty. This analysis remains the focus of defining the relationships between the nation-state of Indonesia and Papuans, although the latter are able to ridicule the former suggesting a degree of resistance against the domineering power. Overall, these analyses conclude that the

main obstacle to peace in Papua resides in the asymmetric power relationship between Indonesia and Papua.

In contrast, the specific contribution of Kirksey is his ethnography of *merdeka*. Kirksey's analysis offers a new and insightful contribution to this existing literature. It specifically explores the internal dynamics of *merdeka* drawing on the author's deep engagement with the Free Papua Movement (OPM) over the period 1994–2003. This engagement is remarkable. The tight restrictions imposed by the Indonesian authorities on foreign researchers, journalists and humanitarian organizations travelling to Papua have made Kirksey's work a testament to his commitment to justice, exemplified in this rare and original text. Furthermore, Kirksey asserts that he upheld the integrity of academic research by drawing clear boundaries between activism and academia. This explains the remarkable authorial voice which comes through so confidently in the book.

Kirksey develops an intriguing thesis of "collaboration as an alternative to resistance" (p. 1). This idea strikes at the heart of the Papuan resistance movement, which tends to perceive any engagement with Indonesian authorities as a mortal sin. Collaboration is equated with betrayal. On the contrary, non-cooperation is considered sacrosanct; a common feature of any resistance movement. Kirksey's proposed strategy is not a cynical one. Rather, it is based on a deep sympathy for the Papuan freedom fighters gained during his fieldwork. Moreover, it is an argument based on a well-informed understanding of Papuan factionalism that needs to be resolved in order to consolidate the aspirations of *merdeka*.

The book is set out in three parts. First, Kirksey investigates the idea of *merdeka* during the period of *reformasi*. He starts with the drama of *reformasi* which saw an end to the authoritarian period of President Soeharto's New Order in 1998. Kirksey frames this event from a "messianic" interpretation in that Papuans perceived *reformasi* as a moment of long-awaited liberation from Indonesian oppression. Reformasi is perceived as an opportunity for what Kirksey refers to as the rhizome of Papuan aspirations for *merdeka* to flourish. However, the Biak massacre of 1998 (during which hundreds of people were tortured, disappeared or killed) sent a different signal to Papuans and their aspirations for a greater freedom. Instead of liberation, Papuans only experienced

the ways the Indonesian security forces took heavy-handed measures against them who held peaceful demonstration by raising the Papuan national symbol, the Morning Star flag.

The second part explores the concept of entanglement. The author argues that Papuan freedom fighters are entangled in three different social worlds: the Indonesian reform movement; government security services; and the global market (p. 90). These powers and Papuan aspirations are at odds with each other. Inspired by Deleuze and Guatari's metaphor of rhizome of the Banyan (p. 57), Kirksey uses this Botanic metaphor to illustrate the strategy of collaboration. Rhizome is the underground stem of a plant that grows horizontally, thrusts any barrier and sustains the plant survival. In the case of the Banyan, its rhizome not only grows underground but also above the ground. More importantly, the Banyan rhizome survives because it grows on another plant. So just like a rhizome of the Banyan, Kirksey argues, collaboration can be a feasible alternative for survival and, more importantly, as a means to influence the international community.

The final part of the book covers a period through which the Banyan connects to global capital through a twenty-year contract between energy companies Sempra and BP. Kirksey examines the interplay between *merdeka* and rising global capital flows into Papua. While he is aware of the large gap between these two phenomenon, Kirksey seems hopeful that the Papuan rhizome may penetrate the world's most powerful market: the US market through the trade connection between Sempra and BP.

As an ethnographic account, Kirksey's analysis is beneficial for an understanding of the complexity of Papuan aspirations for *merdeka*, which consist of a variety of elements and layers. His emphasis on collaboration is strategic. However, Kirksey does not elaborate on the ways in which "collaboration" can actually work in practice. While he illustrates examples of Papuan engagement with individuals and institutions in power, the author does not provide a road map that Papuans can follow as a path to freedom. A regulatory framework might fill this gap. There exist two pertinent examples. First, Morten Pedersen's (2008) "principled engagement" theory elucidates a more practical concept of collaboration. This framework of engagement refers to the strategy of engaging an oppressive regime through friendly diplomacy and trading relationships while firmly pressing the issue

of democracy. Second, Braithwaite et al.'s analysis of Timor Leste's peacebuilding further illustrates the ways in which networked governance of local resistance, international solidarity and clandestine resistance movements can enhance the power of the weak.

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