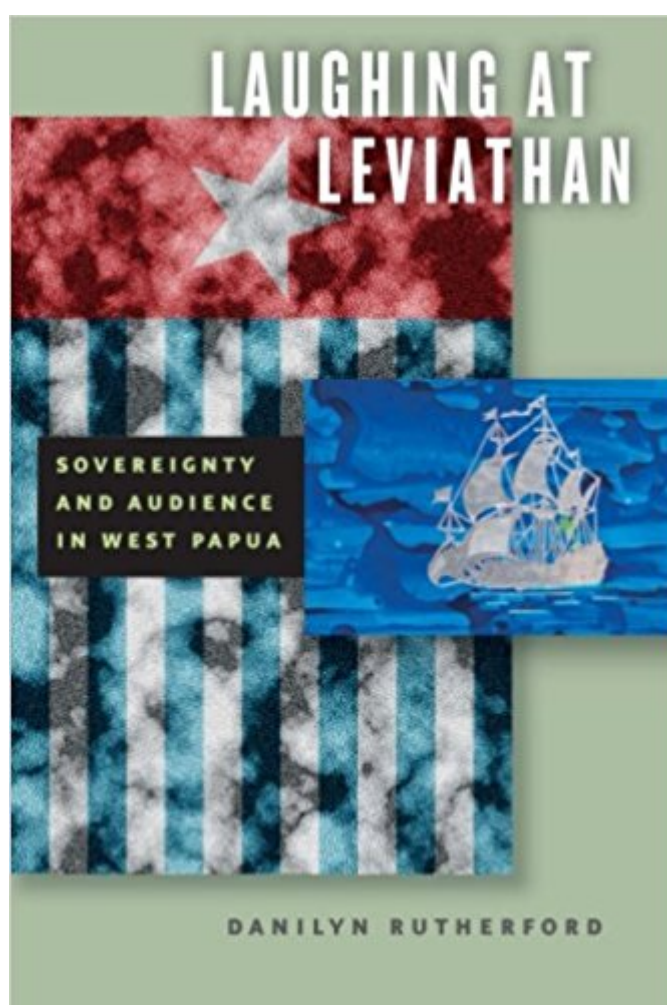


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Laughing At Leviathan: Sovereignty And Audience In West Papua (Chicago Studies In Practices Of Meaning)



Synopsis

For West Papua and its people, the promise of sovereignty has never been realized, despite a long and fraught struggle for independence from Indonesia. In *Laughing at Leviathan*, Danilyn Rutherford examines this struggle through a series of interlocking essays that drive at the core meaning of sovereignty itself—how it is fueled, formed, and even thwarted by pivotal but often overlooked players: those that make up an audience. Whether these players are citizens, missionaries, competing governmental powers, nongovernmental organizations, or the international community at large, Rutherford shows how a complex interplay of various observers is key to the establishment and understanding of the sovereign nation-state. Drawing on a wide array of sources, from YouTube videos to Dutch propaganda to her own fieldwork observations, Rutherford draws the history of Indonesia, empire, and postcolonial nation-building into a powerful examination of performance and power. Ultimately she revises Thomas Hobbes, painting a picture of the Leviathan not as a coherent body but a fragmented one distributed across a wide range of both real and imagined spectators. In doing so, she offers an important new approach to the understanding of political struggle.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

“Danilyn Rutherford’s essays collected in *Laughing at Leviathan* draw our attention to West Papua as a territory particularly compelling for the study of sovereignty and (post)colonial power asymmetries. To put it briefly, [these] inspiring essays, revealing configurations of

sovereignty and audience from early colonial encounters to today—its online representations, clearly deserve a wider audience than the small scholarly community concerned with West Papuan sovereignty. (Martin Slama *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*) “Anthropology abounds with often self-serving proclamations about representing the margins but very few anthropologists manage to make marginal places directly address the core questions of the modern world. Danilyn Rutherford’s book is one of those rare examples. In essays densely packed with insights on every page, Rutherford tells a compelling and engaging story of how Christianity, ineffective colonial rule, millenarianism, and nationalist discourse have produced fledgling claims to sovereignty in West Papua. With fine attention to language, performance and continuities and breaks in history, Rutherford foregrounds how every claim to sovereign authority over land and people presupposes, and often co-produces, an audience. However, these audiences do not always see or hear merely what is projected. Deeply conditioned by often violent histories in this contested corner of the Dutch colony and later Indonesia, audiences hear and embrace sovereign performances by making them address their own desires for redemption and transformation. On the way, Rutherford also manages to excavate another long forgotten and inglorious chapter of colonial rule and settler dreams that lasted well into the 1960s. It is rare to find a book that blends insights from linguistic anthropology and anthropology of religion and politics so effortlessly and elegantly in exciting and jargon free prose. Rutherford does not try to flaunt her mastery of this impressive material. She really wants to tell us this riveting story and along the way she changes the reader’s perspective. This is anthropology at its very best.” (Thomas Blom Hansen, Stanford University 2012-01-26) “Laughing at Leviathan extends Rutherford’s keen double vision in broader purview. On one hand, it considers a wide range of engagements between people of West Papua and agents of foreign sovereignty. On the other hand, those engagements are framed as elements of a sustained critique of influential philosophical approaches to the state and state sovereignty. By intertwining these thematics, Rutherford demonstrates convincingly that anthropological orientations to the local and processual can be framed to speak compellingly and in unique ways to abstract, broad, interdisciplinary issues. . . . a remarkable work of syntheses between ethnography and social theory.” (Joseph Errington *Indonesia*) “At the core of *Laughing at Leviathan* is a heart-wrenching story: a subtle tracing of the historical disjunctions and disseminations of empire and nationalism that have not led to a new nation in Melanesia. It is a kind of prehistory to a sovereignty that never comes. In writing the prehistory of a form of sovereignty that has neither failed nor succeeded, Danilyn Rutherford also provides a searing metacommentary on sovereignty

itself. —Elizabeth Povinelli, Columbia University (Elizabeth Povinelli

2011-10-17) —“Laughing at Leviathan is an important and unusual book; in it Danilyn Rutherford shows the role that audience plays in sovereignty in one of the world’s most disputed places — West Papua, or the Indonesian half of the island of New Guinea. — Rutherford makes use of history and anthropology as well as politics and memory; she glides effortlessly through a forest of languages, perspectives, and possibilities in order to do this work. — Hers is nothing if not a multivalent examination of the task at hand. It is also a remarkably acute inquiry, the kind of work that shows not only what can be done, but should be done in troubled global sites. This is scholarship of the highest order. — (Eric Tagliacozzo, Cornell University

2012-01-26) —“Laughing at Leviathan probes previously unexplored historical contingencies, ironies, and oddities — and unravels enduring mysteries — haunting colonialism, Christianity, nationalism, sovereignty, and state power in West Papua. Thanks to Rutherford’s trademark combination of theoretical sophistication, eagle-eyed ethnographic insight, and irrepressibly zany humor, Laughing at Leviathan offers an eminently worthy companion volume to John Furnivall and Ben Anderson’s classic studies. This book will interest, inform, and inspire scholars working across Southeast Asia and far beyond for many years to come. — (John T. Sidel, London School of Economics and Political Science 2012-01-26) —“Danilyn Rutherford’s witty and respectful study of colonialism and nationalism in Western Papua shows that sovereignty is not so much a matter of domination over people and territory as it is a mediated claim to rule. — All such claims must be recognized by audiences — and audiences are always multiply positioned, engaged in many varieties of political communication, from the most global to the most intimate. With this closely argued and beautifully written book, we learn to challenge dominant political claims anew, even as we see a fresh significance in the complex histories of multiply colonized places like contemporary Papua. — (Judith Farquhar, University of Chicago 2012-01-26)

Danilyn Rutherford is professor of anthropology at the University of California, Santa Cruz. She is the author of *Raiding the Land of the Foreigners: The Limits of the Nation on an Indonesian Frontier*. —

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