

# The Anatomy of Betrayal

Review >  
Southeast Asia

Over 2,700 delegates at the Papuan Congress gathered in West Papua's capital of Jayapura in June 2000 to proclaim their independence from Indonesia and call for a major historiographical revision that would straighten the history of West Papua. Indonesian nationalist historians have depicted the incorporation of West Papua into their nation's fold as a transparent and uncontested process. Leaders of the 2000 Papuan Congress, many of whom have contested Indonesian rule since it began in the 1960s, were aware that their perspective had been written out of history. *The Anatomy of Betrayal* responds to Papuan nationalist calls for historical revision and argues that the transfer of West Papua from the Netherlands to Indonesia violated international agreements. John Saltford's timely book examines whether the people of West Papua were ever given a genuine opportunity to exercise their right to self-determination.

By S. Eben Kirksey

On 15 August 1962, representatives of the Netherlands and the Republic of Indonesia signed an accord at the United Nations headquarters in New York. According to Saltford, this accord, which is known as the New York Agreement, 'explicitly acknowledged and guaranteed the right of self-determination for West Papua'. The Agreement obliged the UN, the Netherlands, and Indonesia to protect the political rights and freedoms of the Papuans and to hold a referendum in accordance with international practice. Saltford argues, however, that Cold War politics and the interests of 'big power' meant that Papuan self-determination would never be considered a serious option.

While Saltford outlines the gross anatomy of West Papua's betrayal, he does not explain how this treachery was orchestrated. Racist colonial discourse, for example, was one tool used by 'big power' for denying Papuans the right to self-determination. At the time of West Papua's transfer to Indonesia the international community depicted Papuans as cannibals, headhunters, and Stone-Age savages: as a people not fit to govern themselves.

The United Nations Temporary Executive Authority (UNTEA) administered West Papua from 1 October 1962 to 1 May 1963. According to the preamble of the UN Charter, one of the aims of this international body was 'to establish conditions under which justice and respect for the obligations arising from treaties and other sources of international law can be maintained.' *The Anatomy of Betrayal* details how the UN ignored the obligations of the New York Agreement and violated its own mandate in West Papua, for example by banning Papuan nationalist marches during this

period. Additionally, Indonesian military troops began a campaign of violence against Papuan nationalists while UN administrators were still ostensibly in control of the territory.

Indonesian rule of West Papua began on 1 May 1963, before any act of self-determination had taken place. Military operations against Papuan nationalists intensified once Indonesian administration officially began. In 1969 the Act of Free Choice was conducted by Indonesian authorities, Saltford argues, in order to give the false outward appearance that Papuans supported the transfer of authority to Indonesia. This was intended to fulfil the terms of the 1962 New York Agreement, stipulating that Indonesia, under UN supervision, would conduct an act of self-determination 'in accordance with international practice.' What contemporary Papuans call the Act of No Choice was actually a public 'consultation' with 1,022 carefully selected representatives, and Saltford details the UN role in monitoring and endorsing this controversial consultation. Indeed, according to a senior UN official quoted by Saltford, 'the vote was a complete sham'.

*The Anatomy of Betrayal* is an important reference work for historians of the Cold War, scholars of post-colonial Southeast Asia, and policy makers who seek to understand the roots of Papuan nationalism. Saltford's documentation is thorough, and at times daunting. An Indonesian language translation of this study – eagerly awaited by Papuan intellectuals – is already in the works. Saltford's exhaustive study of UN sources about the Indonesian acquisition of West Papua is one of the very first academic books about the post-colonial history of the territory. This book has broken significant ground and sets the stage for future research on related topics given the vast wealth of rich and varied source materials that remain unstudied. ◀

- Saltford, John, *The United Nations and the Indonesian Takeover of West Papua, 1962-1969: The Anatomy of Betrayal*, London: RoutledgeCurzon (2003), pp. 228, ISBN 0-7007-1751-X

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Katie Wilson  
'Operation Free Irian' statue in Jakarta