
LAUGHING AT LEVIATHAN: JOHN FURNIVALL, DUTCH NEW GUINEA, AND THE RIDICULOUSNESS OF COLONIAL RULE

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One step above the sublime, makes the ridiculous.

Thomas Paine, 1795¹

... strictly speaking, we do not know what we are laughing about.

Sigmund Freud, 1905²

Colonialism has rarely been called "ridiculous." Exploitative, yes; violent, of course; but rarely has it been presented as the butt of a joke. Yet if we believe John Furnivall, every study of the spread of colonial rule should bring precisely this quality to light. Furnivall begins *The Fashioning of Leviathan*, his 1939 study of the first decades of British colonialism in Burma, by reflecting upon why so little has been written about the birth of empires. Even Hobbes avoided the topic. Hobbes referred to "that great *Leviathan* called a Commonwealth or State" as "but an Artificial Man."³ But when it came to describing Leviathan's birth, Hobbes recast the creature as a "Mortall God" and described the event in mythical terms. According to Furnivall,

Hobbes is driven to myth because Leviathan has this at least in common with the immortal gods—that we know little or nothing of his childhood. This is not strange, for no god is quite immune to ridicule, and children cannot help being ridiculous at times: if Aphrodite had caught cold, when rising from the

¹ Thomas Paine, *Age of Reason*, quoted in *The Compact Oxford English Dictionary*, Second Edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 1590.

² Sigmund Freud, *Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious*, trans. James Strachey (New York: W.W. Norton, 1960), p. 102.

³ See John S. Furnivall, *The Fashioning of Leviathan*, reprinted from *The Burma Research Society's Journal* 29, Part 1 (Rangoon: Zabu Meitswe Pitaka Press, 1939), p. 3.

foam on her first birthday, she was already big enough to use her pocket-handkerchief without being told to do so by her nurse. A god must feel secure in his divinity to let himself be laughed at, and Leviathan is not sufficiently at home in heaven to allow it.⁴

John Furnivall understood very well the inherently ridiculous nature of the colonial state on the frontiers of empire. Ben Anderson, who introduced Furnivall's texts to budding scholars of Southeast Asia, did so for good reason. *The Fashioning of Leviathan* is a comic masterpiece, as well as an insightful foray into the violent underpinnings of modern colonial power. In this essay, I relate these two aspects of Furnivall's study, showing how laughter and insight go hand in hand. I apply the lessons implicit in Furnivall's humor to the imperial frontier that long persisted in western New Guinea, in the eastern hinterlands of the Netherlands Indies, an area that now comprises the Indonesian province of Papua (formerly Irian Jaya). I show how phenomena that some might call "mestizo"—but that Furnivall called "ridiculous"—were an unintended effect of colonial intervention—and an incitement to bring the territory under greater control.

My argument takes Furnivall at his word: I approach the comedy that pervades *The Fashioning of Leviathan* as a means of diagnosing a central feature of colonial practice. In excavating the ridiculous from the archives of British imperialism, Furnivall does more than make fun of colonialism; he reveals an aspect of the colonial situation that both dogged the apparatus and stimulated its growth. As such, Furnivall's method enables us to build on the findings of more recent scholars, who have called into question conventional explanations of European imperialism. Consider Elsbeth Locher-Scholten's analysis of Dutch efforts to consolidate colonial rule within the Netherlands Indies' boundaries at the turn of the twentieth century. This endeavor did not in any simple sense result from the "economic interests of the metropole," "international competition," or the need to create a "diversion from internal problems."⁵ At the same time, its impetus did not come from the "periphery"—that is, the colony—alone. A new set of global imperatives, including "the expanding demands of economic privileges (tariffs and mineral exploitation) and the task of the modern western state to provide for the safety of European entrepreneurs, missionaries, and civil servants," created the context for colonial expansion.⁶ Paying heed to the interests and anxieties of the colonial administrators who called for increased intervention in areas under their jurisdiction, Locher-Scholten shows how a concern for "the prestige of our nation among foreigners" in this increasingly fraught setting was a key factor in the launching of "pacification" campaigns. These campaigns began when local officials felt that their authority had been called into question, generally through the resistance of indigenous rulers to official incursions. "Ethical imperialism," as Locher-Scholten dubs the phenomenon, giving new meaning to a favorite Dutch watchword of the time, had enormous effects. Twentieth-century state formation "resulted in foreign domination in many details of personal life, a process of

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Elsbeth Locher-Scholten, "Dutch Expansion in the Indonesian Archipelago Around 1900 and the Imperialist Debate," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 25,1 (March 1994): 91-111. See p. 93.

⁶ Ibid., p. 111.

westernization which in turn led to the forceful reaction of nationalism and at last to Indonesian national independence."⁷ Yet the potential for laughter lay at its origins. The intervention of local officials sparked a reaction that led Dutch authorities to worry about their regime's reputation in the eyes of the natives, no doubt, but also from the perspective of an imagined global audience. "Ethical imperialism" began, in other words, with officialdom's fear of appearing ridiculous: the opposite, one might argue, of having prestige.

In this essay, I suggest that Dutch New Guinea is a particularly good place to explore what we might learn from laughing at Leviathan. Above, I repeated part of Locher-Scholten's citation of an 1892 statement from the head of civil administration in Batavia. The full sentence reads: "The prestige of our nation among foreigners does not allow us to leave the population of Irian Jaya [sic] in their miserable and depraved condition."⁸ From a distance, it was easy to blame the irregularities of colonial practice in New Guinea on the "depravity" of its Papuan inhabitants. Up close, in the North Moluccan town of Ternate, where officials responsible for administering the territory in the nineteenth century were based, intervention in New Guinea brought to the foreground vicissitudes that every colonial project to some degree shares. Called upon to create an impression of colonial sovereignty, at the lowest possible cost, these officials dreaded that others would discover the absurd nature of their claims. In the conclusion, I reflect on the implications of this aspect of western New Guinea's colonial history for the Netherlands' post-war decision to retain the territory as a separate colony when the rest of the Indies gained independence. But before turning to this history, let us first consider Furnivall's insights on the logic and limits of modern colonial power.

HOBBS IN BURMA

The Fashioning of Leviathan focuses on a species of "Mortal God" for which, as Furnivall notes, the "searching light of truth" was likely to be particularly "embarrassing."⁹ The study provides a "step by step" account of

the incorporation in the Indian Empire of newly conquered territory; the building up of a local administrative organization; the gradual adjustment and adaptation of this local organization to the mechanism of the central government; and, finally, the assimilation of the new province within the general imperial system, so that it could no longer be distinguished from the rest of India except by such accidents of geography as its peoples and product.¹⁰

Furnivall constructs this narrative on the basis of letters written between 1825 and 1843 by Mr. Maingy and Mr. Blondell, the first two commissioners of the occupied

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid. p. 107. See also Director Binnenlandsch Bestuur to the Governor-General 6-2-1892, Historische nota in Algemeene Rijksarchief (hereafter ARA), Col., vb. 8-12-1897, no. 33.

⁹ "If there are sceptics, and especially if Leviathan himself be uneasy about his birth certificate and the social status of his parents, the searching light of truth may be embarrassing." Furnivall, *The Fashioning of Leviathan*, p. 3. Furnivall clearly has the colonial state in mind here.

¹⁰ Ibid., pp. 3-4.

zone of Tenasserim, the earliest outpost of what later became British Burma. At the time the letters were written, Tenasserim's future was far from certain. This narrow belt of coastal forest, accessible only by boat, had been won from the Thai by King Alaungp'aya of Burma some fifty years before the British assumed control. Viewed from the metropole, the occupation was but one variable in the British attempt to determine what sort of presence in the region would best serve the Empire's interests. The commissioners thus faced a challenge: to make the territory pay, they needed investment, to get investment they needed a commitment from the Empire, to get a commitment from the Empire, they needed to make the territory pay. They had to do all this while instituting a political order entirely different in form and ideology from the polity that had come before.

The magnitude of this task becomes clear when we compare Furnivall's portrayal of the first commissioner's arrival in Tenasserim with the following description of his Burmese predecessor's eighteenth-century campaign to capture the south. Robert Taylor writes:

[King Alaungp'aya's] initial power came from his army, a force unparalleled in recent times, and grew as he developed a more complete array of hegemonic devices, including symbolic regalia and the means to manipulate ethnic identity. The momentum of his victories and the legends that swept around the new king provided him with an aura of supernatural power. By chain letters and sponsored ballads, he sowed fear among the population ahead of his armies, thereby weakening the will of his opponents and creating massive defections. In promising release from slavery, he won over additional groups of men.¹¹

Enter Mr. Maingy on September 9, 1825, with four clerks, three translators, and a pair of servants. Shipwrecked on his first attempt, the new commissioner finally made it to the port town of Mergui and posted his own "chain letter," which proclaimed his intention to provide Mergui's inhabitants with a "civil and political administration on the most liberal and equitable principles."

Rest assured that your wives and children shall be defended against all foreign and domestic enemies. That life and property shall enjoy every liberty and protection, and that your religion shall be respected and your Priests and religious edifices secured from every insult and injury. Proper measures shall immediately be adopted for administering justice to you according to your own established laws, so far as they do not militate against the principles of humanity and natural equity. In respect to revenue and all other subjects your own customs and local usages shall be taken into consideration, but the most free and unrestricted internal and external commerce will be established and promoted.¹²

¹¹ See David P. Chandler, William R. Roff, John R. W. Smail, David Joel Steinberg, Robert H. Taylor, Alexander Woodside, and David K. Wyatt, *In Search of Southeast Asia: A Modern History*, revised edition, ed. David Joel Steinberg (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1985), p. 101.

¹² Furnivall, *The Fashioning of Leviathan*, pp. 5-6.

The new commissioner closed by promising that at "all hours and places" "even the poorest inhabitants" would be welcome to see him "on business."¹³ Mr. Maingy did keep an elephant and seemed to have a sense of personal dignity, but he was hardly the stuff of ballads. One can hardly imagine a greater contrast between the commissioner's sporting efforts to legitimate his rule and the majestic aura his predecessor maintained.

Mr. Maingy fashioned his Leviathan, in good Hobbesian style, "by Art according to the rules of common sense."¹⁴ His goal was to create a secure and lawful environment in which "liberal principles" (and commerce) could thrive. In Furnivall's chapter headings, one finds the colonial state stripped down to its essentials: jails and policing, road building and revenue, foreign policy. But as Ben Anderson pointed out so aptly to his students, the question that propels Furnivall's inquiry is not how the inhabitants of Tenasserim were incorporated into the British Empire, but how someone like Mr. Maingy could think himself capable of such a feat. The answer lies in the internal workings of the colonial bureaucracy.

By basing his analysis solely on the commissioners' official correspondence, Furnivall establishes the degree to which the apparatus sustained the confidence of Mr. Maingy and his successor, Mr. Blondell, and controlled their fate. Mr. Maingy's letters ended up in "the Secret and Political Department of the Government of India where, apparently they were regarded as so inviolably secret that for some years they were filed unread."¹⁵ Mr. Blondell, by contrast, had to answer to bureaucrats in Calcutta who were beginning to develop an institutional memory with regard to Tenasserim. Furnivall registers the ebb and flow of bureaucratic supervision by populating the study with multiple "Leviathans." On the one hand, the reader is invited to witness Leviathan's birth on Burmese soil; on the other, Leviathan is always already present in the form of Calcutta's meddling hand in the region's affairs. Although Furnivall associates "common sense" with the rationality of a system "geared for profit and productivity," Leviathan's guiding principles turn out to be equally multifarious. There is local common sense, residing in the commissioners' expeditious responses to Tenasserim's limitations and opportunities. There is common sense in Calcutta and presumably in England, serving different sets of utilitarian needs. What counts as common sense changes what counts as what Furnivall calls "human decency." As "Leviathan Indicus" assumes control of Tenasserim, those who fashioned the local system with a "velvet glove" become the human grit in the machine. This is why Mr. Blondell, who instituted the "compassionate" policy of taxing tribal communities at six times the going rate, can end the book as a "conservative" and "nationalist."¹⁶ However ironically, Furnivall anticipates Ben Anderson's argument that nationalism is a product of the administrative pilgrimages offered by the colonial state.¹⁷

Make no mistake: however serious Furnivall's conclusions might be, *The Fashioning of Leviathan* is incredibly funny. There are two ways of accounting for

¹³ Ibid., p. 6.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 136; see also ibid., p. 76. "[Leviathan's] machinery is regulated by the laws of common sense, and he will grind out bread so long as he can go on grinding at a profit."

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 19.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 134.

¹⁷ See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 1991), pp. 53-56.

this feature of the text. On the one hand, Furnivall deploys comedy for a classical purpose: to demean an exalted institution. *The Fashioning of Leviathan* anticipates themes from Furnivall's monumental studies of colonialism, *Netherlands India* and *Colonial Policy and Practice*.¹⁸ In these decidedly less humorous works, Furnivall elaborates a critique of colonial society, calling it "plural," i.e. inhabited by ethnic and racial groups that only meet in the market. In a population utterly lacking the "common will" that Furnivall viewed as integrating functioning democracies, the "survival of the cheapest" is the rule that prevails. In *The Fashioning of Leviathan*, Furnivall notes, in a similar vein, that colonialism's "common sense" is often at odds with the "claims of life."¹⁹ Obliquely, by taking up Hobbes's moniker to describe the colonial state, Furnivall calls attention to what he regards such a regime as missing—the "sense in common" or "common will" that is arguably a key element of Hobbes's understanding of the basis and outcome of the social contract.²⁰ For Furnivall, who views the precolonial order as one where people were "fast bound to honesty by the ties of social life," it is the colonial system that inaugurates a life that is "nasty, brutish and short."²¹

On the other hand, the study plays on a potential for comedy that is intrinsic to the materials Furnivall cites. Take, for instance, Furnivall's account of the importation of convict labor from the subcontinent.

The Commissioner recognized that the jails were not very secure. But they were not meant to be very secure. He regarded the convicts as so much cheap labour imported to make roads; if he had to spend money in housing the labourers he might as well employ more expensive local labour on the roads. But the people in India who supplied the convicts looked at matters in a different light; when they were asked to supply convicts for Tenasserim, they thought it a providential opportunity to get rid of their hard cases. At that time the Government of India was engaged on rooting out the thugs, that strange caste of professional murderers. So it happened that among one batch of convicts sent to labour on the roads there were twenty-five who had been "guilty of Thuggee and Murder,—part of a desperate gang of Thugs which had lately been broken up in Central India" and "whose safe custody was an object of paramount importance." Nasty fellows to build roads with, these, or to keep in confinement in a wooden bungalow with a thatched roof. It was hardly playing the game to send convicts of that type to a well-meaning officer who had quite

¹⁸ See John S. Furnivall, *Netherlands India: A Study in the Plural Economy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1944); John S. Furnivall, *Colonial Policy and Practice* (New York: New York University Press, 1948, reprinted 1956). In 1939, when *The Fashioning of Leviathan* was published, Furnivall was part way through his second career, as a bookstore owner with close ties to the Burmese nationalist movement. His first career had been as a colonial official, serving in the south of Burma, where the study was set.

¹⁹ Moreover, whatever "Leviathan cannot comprehend he instinctively regards as dangerous and puts forth all his strength to crush." Furnivall, *The Fashioning of Leviathan*, p. 136.

²⁰ See Richard Tuck's introduction to Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. Richard Tuck (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. i–lxxiv. The inhabitants of the plural society lack precisely what Hobbes's Leviathan inaugurates, according to Tuck's reading: a public language that enables them to express and reconcile their opposing intentions, so they will not be driven to violence by uncertainty and fear.

²¹ See Furnivall, *The Fashioning of Leviathan*, p. 45.

enough trouble in building up his own little corner of the Empire. Mr. Maingy protested vigorously, but in vain. He asked for convicts and kept on asking; Thugs were convicts, so they sent him Thugs, and kept on sending. It is not surprising then to read of murders by Thug convicts who "not only confessed the murder, but gloried in the act and vied with each other in shouldering the guilt." Even that did not convince the authorities in India that thugs should not be exported to Tenasserim. For, many years later, a young missionary, destined to become famous as an educational pioneer in Burma, was sent to the hospital in Moulmain, seriously ill. But he found the hospital more dangerous than his disease. Left alone under the charge of a convict hospital assistant, apparently quiet and well mannered, he was alarmed by a sudden change in the man's demeanour. All was quiet in the hospital, and the convict was performing the usual duties of a sick nurse, when suddenly a ferocious glare lighted up his eyes and he sprang at the sick man's throat. Fortunately, for lack of practice, his hands had lost their cunning, and the noise of the struggle attracted help; the assailant was overpowered and, presumably, discharged from his duties in the hospital. He was a thug; one of the men sent in the early days to labour on the roads, and after all these years his lust for murder was not yet quenched. The missionary lived to educate Prince Thibaw, and to see his pupil massacre his relatives on a scale that would have done credit to the most devout of thugs. Still, it was rather a slur on the medical profession to appoint a professional murderer as a hospital assistant.²²

The judicial system provides fodder for similar stories. In an attempt to respect his native subjects' own sense of justice, Mr. Maingy appointed a jury of local notables to render decisions, which included sentencing a man accused of rape to be paraded through town with his face blackened, despite the fact that they had just acquitted him.²³ Mr. Maingy found the courts to be quite efficient—no lawyers were allowed, so cases sailed quickly through the system—even though there was room for improvement. "There might have been even less crime, if people understood what the English regarded as offenses."²⁴ Furnivall does not relate these details solely to amuse his readers. Rather, in detailing the absurd outcome of decisions that must have seemed reasonable at the time, these anecdotes illustrate the forces that led to Calcutta's intrusion into local affairs. In more neutral terms, one could describe Mr. Maingy's "ridiculous" policies as an effect of the "mestizo" qualities of the situation in Tenasserim.²⁵ After all, Mr. Maingy did try to draw on Burmese "law and order" in establishing his regime. Still, in suggesting a smooth confection of ingredients, the term does not quite capture Mr. Maingy's predicament. Mr. Maingy was compelled to envision the world he created from the perspective of distant others who shared his commitment to "humanity" and "natural equity." Yet this world took shape through his interactions with colonial "subjects" who no doubt interpreted his behavior in very different terms.

This scenario, in which one comes to perceive a situation from multiple perspectives, all at once, is essential to the comic, if we can trust Freud's

²² *Ibid.*, pp. 37–38.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

²⁵ See Jean Taylor, *The Social World of Batavia* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1984).

formulations. The comic, like jokes and humor, derives from the "economy of expenditure" that results when one contrasts what one witnesses to more proper or predictable ways of acting. In the difference between the energy it takes to meet conventional expectations and that exposed by the comic figure one observes, emerges the "quota" that one "laughs off."²⁶ A common form of comedy takes as its object the "naïve," a person who devotes more effort to physical activities (e.g., walking or gesturing in an exaggerated way) and less to mental activities (e.g., reasoning with little regard for logic) than the observer imagines him or herself expending in a similar situation. But another form, more relevant for our purposes, entails a process of degradation, through which an esteemed person or institution is put into a comic situation or frame.

One way to render such persons or institutions ridiculous is to make them "tally with something familiar and inferior, on imagining which there is a complete absence of any expenditure upon abstraction."²⁷ Furnivall's comparison of that abstraction *par excellence*, the colonial state, to a runny-nosed child, a devouring monster, and an out-of-control machine certainly fits within Freud's formulations. But another and potentially more potent component of *The Fashioning of Leviathan's* comic vision lies in the nature of the materials on which Furnivall drew. The writings of European colonial officials, like Mr. Maingy, provide a fertile field for the "Janus-faced" experience of the comic. On the one hand, these officials had to present their actions as meeting the standards of a colonial regime whose objectives were framed in terms of abstract values. On the other hand, they had to appeal to local interlocutors, to elicit, at the very least, a simulacrum of consent. The fact that officials sought this consent against the backdrop of the threat of force did not resolve the interpretive dilemma faced by the state's agents; if anything, it made it even more difficult to gauge when the "natives" were making a mockery of one's rule. Colonial encounters brought to the forefront what Freud describes as key sources of pleasure in "innocent" jokes: the "illogic" that comes into focus when different forms of rationality come into contact, a fixation on the "acoustic images" of alien words. No doubt, this potential pleasure would have been a source of discomfort for officers responsible for reforming native ways.

In *The Fashioning of Leviathan*, Furnivall uses laughter not only as a weapon, but also as a lens to bring into focus aspects of the colonial situation that might otherwise have remained obscure. It is no accident that this work is comic, whereas *Netherlands India* and *Colonial Policy and Practice* are not. In fact, the earlier and the later works are not as similar as one might think. Where Furnivall's account of the "plural society" provides a portrait of what one might call the horizontal dimension of the colonial system—as epitomized in the market, where groups maintain their distance, even as they interact—*The Fashioning of Leviathan* focuses on the vertical dimension.²⁸ The colonial official, unlike the colonial capitalist, cannot take difference for granted, for what is at stake is the validation

of inequality. As Homi Bhabha and others have noted, modern colonial discourse is inherently unstable.²⁹ The colonial project is justified by the racist presumption that the colonizers are inherently more civilized and rational than those they colonize. But it is also justified by a vision of progress in which this disjuncture, however gradually, is bridged. The ridiculous emerges at moments like those described in *The Fashioning of Leviathan*, when officials come face to face with the estrangement that is a necessary component of the civilizing mission. The colonial market, at least as Furnivall describes it, does not stimulate this kind of self-consciousness; even the power of currency to erode differences, so stressed by Marx and others, fails to threaten colonial boundaries.³⁰ Furnivall was clearly mistaken in presuming the existence of ethnic and racial identities that were as much the outcome of colonial practice as its object. But his formulations do open an interesting angle on the complexities of colonial consciousness. To complicate matters even further, one could argue that the ridiculous arises when the "vertical" meets the "horizontal." On the one side, we have colonial officials anxiously seeking an indication of the "natives'" recognition of their authority. On the other side, we may well have "natives" using their interactions with the state's agents to appropriate something of value from across a linguistic and cultural divide.

Furnivall is not the only writer to have found comedy at the heart of state power.³¹ But *The Fashioning of Leviathan* provides a distinctive perspective on the colonial situation. To arrive at this perspective, one must move beyond Furnivall's understated wit, which follows the conventions of a particular brand of British humor, to scrutinize those aspects of colonial rule that provided this sensibility with such fertile ground.³² Approached in this fashion, Furnivall's study demonstrates why it is possible to read colonial reports against the grain, as more than simply an expression of metropolitan ideologies. In the fodder for ridicule that lurks in these reports, one finds evidence of a range of alternative points of view. In the remainder of this essay, I explore the comparative

²⁹ See Homi Bhabha, "The Other Question," *Screen* 24,6 (November/December 1983): 18-36. It seems to me that this account of the "ridiculous" provides us with one way of thinking about what Bhabha describes as the threat underlying the fetishistic production (and reproduction) of the colonial stereotype.

³⁰ See Karl Marx, *Capital*, ed. Frederick Engels, trans. Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling (New York: International Publishers, 1967), vol. 1, p. 132. See also Georg Simmel, *The Philosophy of Money*, second edition, trans. Tom Bottomore and David Frisby (London and New York: Routledge, 1978); Paul Bohannon, "Some Principles of Exchange and Investment among the Tiv," *American Anthropologist* 57 (1955): 60-70.

³¹ See, e.g., Slavoj Žižek, "The Obscene Object of Postmodernity," in *Looking Awry: An Introduction to Jacques Lacan through Popular Culture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993), p. 146. In a commentary on Kafka, Žižek points to the phantasmatic underpinnings of bureaucratic authority. "In so far as the law is not grounded in truth, it is impregnated in enjoyment," Žižek writes, on the basis of Kafka's account of the "obscene, nauseous phenomena" pervading the legal system described in *The Trial*. See also Achille Mbembe, *On the Postcolony* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), p. 133. Mbembe refers to obscenity (and jokes that refer to it) as "one modality of power in the postcolony," as well as "one of the arenas in which subordinates reaffirm or subvert that power." Significantly, Mbembe distinguishes between colonial and postcolonial violence, the former being linked, if not fully reducible, to "an overriding concern for profits and productivity." What Mbembe calls the "aesthetics of vulgarity" has a greater role to play in the postcolony, with its rulers' obsession for majesty and pomp. *Ibid.*, p. 113.

³² Sandra Macpherson, David Levin, and Jacqueline Goldsby helped me clarify this point.

²⁶ See Freud, *Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious*, p. 149. See also *Ibid.*, p. 234: "It is a necessary condition for generating the comic that we should be obliged, simultaneously or in rapid succession, to apply to one and the same act of ideation two different ideational methods, between which the 'comparison' is then made and the comic difference emerges."

²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 210-11. Freud notes that this procedure allows the observer "to have an idea of [the institution] as though it were something common place, in whose presence I need not pull myself together but may, to use the military formula, 'stand easy.'" *Ibid.*, p. 201.

²⁸ I would like to thank Jim Siegel for suggesting this contrast.

implications of this interpretation of Furnivall's study by examining the fashioning of colonial authority in a part of the Netherlands Indies where Leviathan's "infancy" was extended. The anecdotes that follow may not be as funny as those that Furnivall recounts, but they prove equally revealing. In coastal New Guinea, as in Tenasserim, colonial expansion turned on the fact that Leviathan just could not take a joke.

ABSTINENCE AND DISPLAY

Western New Guinea became part of the Netherlands Indies early in the nineteenth century.³³ In 1828 and 1848, the Netherlands Indies government drafted secret documents asserting sovereignty over areas of western New Guinea supposedly ruled by the North Moluccan sultanate of Tidore. These documents were kept secret for the simple reason that their publication would have exposed the degree to which Tidore's sphere of influence had been inflated to suit Dutch needs. While there is no doubt that the Tidoran sultans sporadically received tribute from the "Papuan islands," the polity's authority was most tangible in the Raja Ampats, in the waters west of the Bird's Head peninsula.³⁴ Yet the colonial government used Tidore's dealings in the region as the basis for its claim to New Guinea's entire western half, which was made public in 1865.³⁵ If indirect rule always rested on more or less fictitious foundations, when it came to New Guinea, Dutch officials were acutely aware of the fragile underpinnings of their right to rule.

New Guinea was scarcely the only section of the colony where Dutch authority existed more or less only on paper. Before the period of "ethical imperialism" described by Locher-Scholten, the Indies government "abstained" from direct

³³ On the history of colonial governance in western New Guinea, see A. Haga, *Nederlandsch Nieuw-Guinea en de Papoesche eilanden: Historische bijdrage*, 2 vols. (Batavia: Bruining/S-Gravenhage: Nijhoff, 1884); F. C. Kamma, "De verhouding tussen Tidore en de Papoeze eilanden in legende en historie," *Indonesië* 1 (1947-48): 361-70, 536-59; *Indonesië* 2 (1948-49): 177-88, 256-75; *Dit Wonderlijk Werk*, vol. 1 (Oegstgeest: Raad voor de Zending der Ned. Hervormde Kerk, 1976), vol. 2 (Oegstgeest: Raad voor de Zending der Ned. Hervormde Kerk, 1977); Paul W. van der Veur, *The Search for New Guinea's Boundaries* (Canberra: ANU Press, 1966); I. F. M. Salim, *Viftien Jaar Boven Digoel: Concentratiekamp in Nieuw Guinea, Bakermat van Indonesische Onafhankelijkheid* (Amsterdam: Uitgeverij Contact, 1973); Rogier Smeele, "De Expansie van het Nederlandse Gezag en de Intensivering van de Bestuursbemoeyenis op Nederlands Nieuw-Guinea 1898-1942" (Doctoral Thesis, Institute of History, Utrecht University, 1988); Elke Beekman, "Driekleur en Kruisbanier, De Utrechtsche Zendingsvereniging op Nederlands Nieuw-Guinea 1859-1919" (Doctoral Thesis, Erasmus University, 1989); Jan van Baal, *Ontglijpt Verleden*, 2 vols. (Franeker: van Wijnen, 1989).

³⁴ Leonard Andaya stresses the role of Tidore in New Guinea. See Leonard Andaya, *The World of Maluku: Indonesia in the Early Modern Period* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1993). But see Pamela Swadling, *Plumes from Paradise* (Boroko, PNG: Papua New Guinea National Museum/Robert Brown, 1996), pp. 109-10. Swadling argues that in the period before 1660, when the Dutch made their first formal treaty with Tidore, the North Moluccan Sultan of Bacan was the one who had "real influence" in the Raja Ampats.

³⁵ No sooner did the Dutch expand Tidoran rule than they created a mechanism for dissolving it, in contracts that contained a clause stipulating that the Netherlands Indies government could assume direct governance of the region at any time. See Swadling, *Plumes from Paradise*, p. 119.

involvement in much of the so-called "Outer Islands."³⁶ What was peculiar about western New Guinea was not simply its size, not simply its isolation, but also the fact that it abutted the holdings of other colonial powers. This was also the case in Borneo, yet in New Guinea, the threat posed by foreign intervention—or even just foreign attention—seemed much more palpable.³⁷ It was not until the 1870s that England and Germany officially set the boundaries of their own colonies on the eastern half of the island. There was little actual saber rattling, merely a vague anxiety on the part of the Dutch that outsiders might mistake the territory for unclaimed land.

During the nineteenth century, to assuage this fear, the government pursued what Rogier Smeele has called a policy of display: through limited concrete measures, the Netherlands Indies government attempted to create the impression of colonial occupation in New Guinea.³⁸ Fort du Bos, founded in southwestern New Guinea in 1828, proved short-lived; disease and attacks by hostile locals decimated the small garrison of Dutch and native soldiers. Undertaken in response to rumors that the Australians were contemplating establishing a similar post, the experiment was the last of its kind for years to come. Instead of establishing settlements, the Indies government dispatched war ships to erect and maintain escutcheons at intervals along New Guinea's coasts. Accompanied by the Tidoran war fleet, or *hongi*, the crews built or repaired bases for the metal shields, which were embossed with the Dutch coat-of-arms. Meanwhile, their commanders confirmed the appointment of local headmen, leaders who had received their Tidoran titles from various sources, ranging from the Sultan and his vassals, to European ship captains, to Papuan relatives and trade friends, who passed along such signs of investiture as gifts.³⁹ Each headman received a suit of clothing and a flag, which he was instructed to trot out whenever a foreign ship anchored near the village. The Dutchmen also distributed gifts of beads and knives to the natives, before loading up with food and water for the voyage to the next site.

While the erection of escutcheons left sporadic evidence of Dutch sovereignty in the territory, it did not solve what Dutch administrators referred to as the problem of peace and order—the government's failure to establish a monopoly over the legitimate use of violence. Given his responsibility for European security in New Guinea, the Dutch Resident of Ternate was not pleased when Protestant missionaries approached him in the mid-1850s with plans to establish a post in Doreh Bay, a popular harbor on the northeastern tip of the Bird's Head.⁴⁰ Yet the

³⁶ For much of the century, the administration concentrated its interests and investment on the "inner island" of Java, which a system of forced cultivation transformed into one of the most profitable pieces of colonial real estate in the world. Dutch activities in the outer islands were overshadowed by a long and costly war in Aceh, a polity at the northwestern tip of Sumatra near the strategic Strait of Malacca. See J. van Goor, ed., *Imperialisme in de Marge: De Afronding van Nederlands-Indië* (Utrecht: HES, 1986).

³⁷ Part of this anxiety could be due to the fact that in the 1780s and 1790s, the Bird's Head peninsula had sheltered the English supporters of a rebellious claimant to the Tidoran throne. See Andaya, *The World of Maluku*, pp. 220-38.

³⁸ See Smeele, "De Expansie van het Nederlandse Gezag."

³⁹ See R. F. Ellen, "Conundrums about Panjandrums: On the Use of Titles in the Relations of Political Subordination in the Moluccas and along the Papuan Coast," *Indonesia* 41 (April 1986): 47-62.

⁴⁰ See Kamma, *Dit Wonderlijk Werk*, vol. 1, p. 50.

Resident soon found a use for the evangelists, who were well apprised of regional happenings, since they supported themselves by trading with the Papuans. The administration gave the "brothers" a monthly stipend for rescuing foreign shipwreck victims, whom the natives tended to kill. Eventually, the missionaries became a thorn in the government's side, with their grisly accounts of Papuan raiding and immorality, which usually ended with a plea for the administration to apply a firmer hand. In the meantime, by preventing the scandal that would have resulted from the death of foreign nationals, the missionaries helped keep the Residents' superiors off their backs.

After the Berlin Conference of 1885, which made effective occupation a condition for the holding of colonial possessions, the stakes in New Guinea rose. As we have seen, when in 1895 the Estates General in the Hague finally agreed to allocate funds for the placement of colonial administrators and police in New Guinea, lawmakers justified the measure not only in terms of the plight of the "deeply sunken" population, but also of the Netherlands' reputation in the colonial world.⁴¹ In the south, attacks by Tugeri tribesmen had led to complaints by the British, who had demanded that the Dutch either control their Papuan subjects or move the border so that the British could curb the raids themselves. In the north, spurred by a new fashion in ladies' hats, a "feather boom" had brought scores of Malay and European traders and hunters to New Guinea, where, with their modern rifles, they had exacerbated the region's security problems by starting a small arms race among the various tribes. Between 1898 and 1901, the government founded permanent posts at Manokwari, Fak-Fak, and Merauke.⁴² But the government's accomplishments never lived up to the expectations of optimistic observers, who cherished hopes that New Guinea would not only cover the cost of its own administration, but actually turn a profit for the Dutch. Despite the introduction of a head tax and corvée labor in limited parts of the territory, the Netherlands continued to follow a policy of display, albeit by different means.

One could argue that the policy of display continued into the 1950s, when the Netherlands retained this final fragment of the colony after the rest of the Indies gained independence.⁴³ But to understand the impetus behind the Netherlands' costly post-war project in New Guinea, one must attend to a prior series of colonial moments. To borrow Locher-Scholten's terms, the Dutch authorities were "pulled into the periphery" in coastal New Guinea not simply by the "resistance" of their Papuan subjects, but also by the unexpected effects of their interventions. In the writings of officers charged with governing the territory, one detects a heightened awareness of the prospect of surveillance, not simply by their own superiors, not simply by other Europeans, but also by the Papuans, who turned their encounters with authority to their own peculiar ends.

⁴¹ See Locher-Scholten, "Dutch Expansion in the Indonesian Archipelago," p. 107. See also Smeele, "De Expansie van het Nederlandse Gezag."

⁴² With the exception of three years in the 1920s, when New Guinea was governed as a separate residency, the territory remained divided between administrative units based on Ternate and Ambon.

⁴³ In this time of rapid decolonization, Dutch officials were keenly aware of the publicity value of the social welfare programs they undertook on behalf of the "primitive" Papuans. Administratively and philosophically, the "ethical project" in the Indies as a whole provided a model for the mission in New Guinea. See van Baal, *Ontglijpt Verleden*, vol. 2, p. 169.

VISIONS OF THE RIDICULOUS

The best place to find the ridiculous in colonial documents concerning New Guinea is neither at the end nor at the beginning of an account. Dutch officials who described their forays into the territory, not surprisingly, incorporated particular agendas into their reports. One wrote of the Papuans' "sweet, timid" nature, as part of a diatribe against the depredations of the Tidoran war fleet. "Under a civilized government, they would surely quickly attach themselves to the same and could demonstrate great service," G. F. de Bruyn Kops concluded, in an effort to convince his superiors of the value of introducing direct Dutch rule. Some decades later, van der Crab ended a description of a similar journey with harsh words on the Papuans' "disposition"—which was "in a word, bad"—to support his argument against greater investment in this god-forsaken land.⁴⁴ But in the middle of these reports—and often in the middle of particular paragraphs or even sentences—one finds an indication of these same officers' awareness of imagined observers, above and beyond the official audience for which these texts were penned.

Take, for example, de Bruyn Kops's description of the pleasure with which one group of Papuans greeted the erection of an escutcheon in 1848. The natives

... took it with joy that the pole was a sign that the Dutch government had taken the place under its protection, because they hoped through this to remain free of the *hongis* visits. The upper chief was charged with keeping the pole in good condition, and, to the end of inspiring the people, they were told that it was an amulet for the village, the latter to their great satisfaction.⁴⁵

For de Bruyn Kops, the natives' "satisfaction" indexed their almost instinctive affinity for their "civilized" Dutch rulers. The despotic Tidorans, by contrast, only enjoyed the appearance of Papuan loyalty; Papuan chiefs, de Bruyn Kops notes, only put on their yellow costumes and acted like leaders when they learned that the *hongis* was close at hand. But certain details in the passage indicate that the Papuans' enthusiasm for the Dutch may well have rested on equally shaky grounds. The people were "inspired" because they took the escutcheon for an "amulet"—called a *korwar* in this region—the temporary container of a vaguely ancestral form of power.⁴⁶ If nineteenth-century accounts are correct, when amulets ceased to work, the Papuans simply cast them into the sea.⁴⁷ The details de Bruyn

⁴⁴ "The disposition of the Papuans is, in a word, bad; they are crude in their manners, cruel to one another, treacherous with foreigners and traders, little subordinated to their own chiefs and more than frank with Europeans. Most writers on New Guinea are agreed on this point; also the work of the famous naturalist, Wallace, who no one should deny a proper look, describes the Papuan in very unfavorable terms." See P. J. B. C. Robide van der Aa, *Reizen naar Nederlandsch Nieuw-Guinea ondernomen op last der Regeering van Nederlandsch-Indië in de jaren 1871, 1872, 1875-1876* (S-Gravenhage: Martinus Nijhoff, 1879), p. 131.

⁴⁵ See G. F. de Bruyn Kops, "Bijdrage tot de kennis der Noord-en Oostkusten van Nieuw Guinea," *Natuurkundig Tijdschrift voor Nederlandsch Indië* 1 (1850): 195.

⁴⁶ See Danilyn Rutherford, "The Bible Meets the Idol: Writing and Conversion in Biak, Irian Jaya, Indonesia," *Words and Things: The Anthropology of Christianity*, ed. Fenella Cannell (Durham: Duke University Press, under review).

⁴⁷ See Thomas P. van Baaren, *Korwars and Korwar Style: Art and Ancestor Worship in North-West New Guinea* (The Hague: Mouton, 1968); and Rutherford, "The Bible Meets the Idol."

Kops paints into this happy scene belie his wider message: the Papuans' "attachment" to the Dutch may not have been so solid after all.

In arguing that the Papuans' submission to the Tidorans was no more than a façade, colonial observers raised the question of whether the Papuans' submission to the Dutch might not be equally superficial. Needless to say, this question was made all the more pressing by the fact that Dutch expeditions of the period traveled with the *hongi* in tow. Clearly, one could read the signs of Dutch sovereignty—including not only the escutcheons, but also the Papuans' words and gestures—in multiple ways. An account of an 1858 Dutch expedition to Humbolt Bay ends with a long description of the joy with which the Tobati welcomed the raising of a Dutch flag over one of their "temples." At the flag's unfurling, "a cry of amazement and pleasure arose from the gathered crowd."⁴⁸ The Tobati were eager for the Dutch officers to return and found a post—an observation that the report's author presents with remarkable confidence, given that no one on the expedition knew the local language. Still, the report contains hints that the natives could be promiscuous in their affections. When the ship first arrived in Humbolt Bay, canoes soon surrounded the vessel, carrying natives whose necklaces reminded the Dutch visitors of the collars worn by French Legionnaires. Among the Papuans' "screams," one word was discernable—"Moseu"—interpreted by the travelers as "Monsieur"—a sign that the French had gotten to this bay first.⁴⁹ The casual way that Tidoran titles circulated among the Papuans—and were accepted from visiting traders—would have left Dutch officials somewhat uneasy. Other Europeans just as easily could have raised their flag on Papuan territory. The Papuans may well have been equally "satisfied" by any European bearing gifts.

In fact, the most unlikely of characters did serve as agents of the Dutch colonial state. Much like Furnivall's appropriately named Mr. Gouger, the merchant whom Mr. Maingy appointed as Police Superintendent, Magistrate, and Judge, these characters brought their own interests to the job.⁵⁰ The missionaries were particularly inclined to view local happenings through their own distinctive lenses, as we learn in the 1873 Memorandum of Transfer penned by F. Schenck, an outgoing Resident of Ternate. Word reached Ternate in 1872 that a pair of Italian naturalists would soon be visiting New Guinea.⁵¹ At first, the government called on the Resident to lend the visitors his support. But in May 1873, the Resident received a secret missive warning him to watch the naturalists carefully, in

⁴⁸ See Commissie voor Nieuw-Guinea, *Nieuw Guinea: Ethnographisch en Natuurkundig Onderzocht en Beschreven in 1858*, published by the Koninklijk Instituut voor Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde van Nederlandsch Indie (Amsterdam: Frederik Muller, 1862), p. 100.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 86. This is not to say that the escutcheons never served their purpose. Another officer reported in the 1870s that the escutcheon had served its purpose on Roan, where the crew of an English ship, in search of water, had fled when they saw the Dutch coat of arms. See Robide van der Aa, *Reizen naar Nederlandsch Nieuw-Guinea*, p. 93.

⁵⁰ "Mr. Maingy thought it would be unnecessary to enhance this salary, as it would suffice 'to grant him the privilege of trading.' Mr. Gouger must have found business profitable when, as Superintendent of Police, he could arrest those who owed him money and then, as Judge and Magistrate, choose whether to proceed them in his own court, civilly or criminally, having in either case good reason to expect a favorable judgement." See Furnivall, *The Fashioning of Leviathan*, p. 23.

⁵¹ See Jeroen A. Overweel, ed., *Topics Relating to Netherlands New Guinea: In Ternate Residency Memoranda of Transfer and other assorted documents*, Irian Jaya Source Materials No. 13 (Leiden: DSALCUL/IRIS, 1995), pp. 58-59.

connection with the Italian government's purported plan to establish a penal colony somewhere in the Netherlands Indies.⁵² Woelders, the missionary serving in the area where Beccari and Albertis launched their investigations, responded to the conflicting instructions with skepticism. He quickly developed his own reading of the Italians' objectives: they were not simply spies, they were Jesuits, which in his mind was even worse! Convinced that the Italians were distributing rosaries to the Papuans, Woelders railed against the government's tolerance in a letter reproduced in the Resident's report.

... we Hollanders show such liberality with strangers, not least towards "other thinkers" [i.e. Catholics] who may one day lead us to regret it ... the Jesuits, notwithstanding a centuries long history that warns us against it ... we cannot bear to have men surprise us with such Satanic wiles and all faults and errors of description without apprising others of the danger.⁵³

While the Resident notes that Woelders wrote "as a missionary," he appreciated the information; it was only through Woelders that he had learned that the Italians had come and gone.

In addition to the missionaries, visiting foreign nationals played a role in governing New Guinea, as another anecdote from Schenk's Memorandum makes clear. Rumors of the murder of crew members from an English pearl-fishing vessel reached Ternate by way of four Papuan heads, who had met the foreigners in Sorong, on the western tip of the Bird's Head.⁵⁴ A further report from a Tidoran vassal on one of the Raja Ampat islands filled in the details. Having refused the King of Salawatti's help, the English captain had sent two sloops to Poeloe Jaar, a lonely off-shore island, where the crew met some local people and communicated with gestures that they wanted them to go pearl diving. The local people obliged, then waited on shore until the crew was busy opening shells, at which point they set upon the men and killed them. The captain learned of the incident in Salawatti. After resolving the matter, the captain sailed on, leaving behind three letters: one for the first warship to pass through the area, one for the Prussian Consul General in Hamburg, and a third for the Sultan of Tidore, which thanked him for the King of Salawatti's assistance. In fact, the captain had forced the King of Salawatti to accompany him to the interior near Poeloe Jaar, where the hastily assembled "*hongi*" caught three suspects, including one in possession of rifles belonging to the dead Englishmen. The search party took the culprits back to the scene of the crime, where the captain ordered the King of Salawatti to pronounce judgement. The Englishmen then shot one of the culprits and hung his body from a tree as a warning. The captain left the other prisoners in Salawatti, having urged the King to execute them as well.

The King of Salawatti was understandably quite uneasy about his role in the expedition, given that the ban on *hongi* expeditions was then in force. Still, the Resident was grateful. "Be that as it may, through this *hongi* expedition, lawful or not, but in any case compelled with a pistol on the chest and thus excusable, they took the law into their own hands, but at the same time bringing a good end to a

⁵² Ibid., p. 59.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid., pp. 50-54.

thorny affair."⁵⁵ The English captain's actions met the requirements of "common sense" in this place where Dutch officials were more worried about angering foreigners than the niceties of judicial process. Still, the little drama made it clear that Dutch officials were far from possessing a monopoly on "legitimate" force.

By the end of the nineteenth century, this dispersal of official authority was beginning to grate. In 1903, a Dutch writer traveling with a team of naturalists met a headman on the off-shore island of Biak, who was convinced that he had an official appointment from the government on the basis of a letter "that had nothing to do with that and contained the simplest matters."⁵⁶ Although this observer found the Papuans' "familiar" relations with their European visitors amusing—and even heartening—the officers dispatched to bring New Guinea under an orderly administration at the turn of the century had a far less sanguine view of this state of affairs.⁵⁷ While earlier writers were clearly interested in the reactions of the Papuans, their requirements were modest: they asked only that the residents of particular, well-frequented trading stops be willing and able to express their awareness of Dutch sovereignty. Now the goal was to "enlighten" the Papuans. Where nineteenth-century officials confronted the fear of being observed—and replaced—by foreign interlopers, early twentieth-century officials faced the specter of appearing to the natives as the bearers of an alien, distinctly "unenlightened" power.

The writings of Lt. W. K. H. Feuilletau de Bruyn, the officer who "pacified" the island of Biak in 1915, bear evidence of this danger.⁵⁸ Feuilletau de Bruyn's campaign on Biak was part of a broader effort to bring Papuan "criminals" to justice. Instead of exacting collective retribution, the new generation of officials apprehended individuals and sent them to jail. The new policy was no doubt one factor in the mass conversion of coastal Papuans to Christianity. With the government holding them responsible for paying taxes and serving jail terms, the Papuans had good reasons for inviting native evangelists to settle in their villages: they benefited from their fluency in Malay, the Indies' administrative tongue.⁵⁹

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 54.

⁵⁶ The encounter called to mind another headman who had "a receipt from a photographer as a letter of appointment. The letterhead of the receipt was printed with several medals that the man had won at exhibitions, but these stamp-like marks gave the thing its cachet." See H. A. Lorentz, *Eenige maanden onder de Papoea's*, privately published edition dedicated to Prof. Dr. C. E. A. Wichmann, Leader of the New Guinea Expedition of 1903, p. 195.

⁵⁷ "People once admonished us that we associated with them too familiarly and permitted them liberties that were not in fact proper. I believe that these persons are very mistaken and have more in mind the intercourse between Europeans and Malays or Javans. One must not forget that the Papuans feel entirely free and independent and can live very well without us. Indeed, the only thing in which our government can be noticed consists of the fact that the *korano* is given a Dutch flag and a black jacket with gold lace. He thus understands that at the arrival of a ship the bearer of the pretty jacket gets a double portion of the gifts in the form of tobacco and beads." Ibid., pp. 31-32.

⁵⁸ Feuilletau de Bruyn's Military Memorandum of Transfer, which was later published as a book-length monograph, was obviously written with a scholarly audience in mind. See Feuilletau de Bruyn, *Schouten en Padaido-eilanden, Mededeelingen Encyclopaedisch Bureau* 21 (Batavia: Javaasche Boekhandel, 1920).

⁵⁹ See W. K. H. Feuilletau de Bruyn, *Militaire Memorie der Schouten-eilanden*, August 31, 1916, Nummer Toegang 10-25, Stuk 183, Nienhuis Collectie van de Departement van Bevolkszaken Hollandia Rapportenarchief (The Hague: Algemeene Rijksarchief, 1916), p. 244. According to

After a Biak warrior killed one of the Ambonese "teachers" (Malay: *guru*) serving on the island, the government intervened.

Feuilletau de Bruyn's goal in Biak was not merely to track down the subject; it was to institute a form of authority different from that exercised by the Tidorans. With people at such a low level of development, he noted, one achieved more through "justice tempered with mercy" than with a "mailed fist."⁶⁰ Nevertheless, in Feuilletau de Bruyn's description of the military campaign, unexpected moments of identification emerge. In a chapter of his Military Memorandum of Transfer on native warfare, he explains how Biak raiders would land their canoes some distance from an enemy village, so they could approach the waterfront houses from the rear. Almost in passing, the Lieutenant admits that he and his troops deployed the same method "with much success."⁶¹ Feuilletau de Bruyn comes close to admitting that the detachment's surprise attacks recalled a long history of punitive raids. In order to compel the perpetrators to surrender, Feuilletau de Bruyn and his men took hostages, some of whom ended up at the government post in Manokwari. It was all the lieutenant could do to convince the locals that their loved ones had not been taken as slaves. As he notes later in the report, it was relatively easy to collect taxes on the island. "Through the levying that Tidore in earlier days imposed, people are used to the idea that taxes are levied by foreigners in order to prevent the punishment people know they would get, which the population (incorrectly) thought we would do as well" [the italicized section is crossed out].⁶² The fact that Feuilletau de Bruyn felt compelled to eliminate the second half of the sentence in the published version of the text indicates the officer's vague cognizance of his predicament. Leading a detachment that resembled a Biak war party, calling to mind the Tidoran *hong*i, Feuilletau de Bruyn reproduced the "old" order on Biak through his very efforts to impose something new.

Registered subtly in the writings of officials like Feuilletau de Bruyn, this local perspective, which placed the "civilizing mission" in an unexpected light, became even clearer in mission documents of the period. Although missionaries like Friedrich Hartweg, a German who served in Biak during the mid-1920s, should have been grateful to the government for suppressing native raiding parties and heathen feasts, the effects of the new policies did not always meet the brothers' expectations. On the one hand, the native administrators who replaced Feuilletau de Bruyn failed to enforce the new regulations.

We have a so-called prohibition against dance feasts. And it is naturally not followed. We have a prohibition on palm wine tapping, and that is good, but it is also only on paper. They took Marisan, the notorious raiding party leader, to Ternate [to prison]—and he escaped. They took a pair or so of pirates (murderers) to Manokwari [the government seat]—and they escaped. They have brought three murderers of village heads to the same place—they have escaped. Several years ago, those who incited unrest in North Biak were sent to

Feuilletau de Bruyn, the general practice on Biak was for disputants to "buy" an interpreter to represent them in legal proceedings. Matters went badly for those who did not.

⁶⁰ See Feuilletau de Bruyn, *Militaire Memorie*, p. 264.

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 259.

⁶² Ibid., p. 360.

Manokwari—each getting eight to ten years—and they all escaped. Can you imagine the impression this makes on the Papuan?⁶³

A missionary, Hartweg noted, somewhat disingenuously, should avoid interfering in government affairs. But the Papuans themselves did not draw sharp distinctions between evangelists and government officers—they were all “pastors” (Malay: *pandita*), in their eyes—and government policy had a direct effect on Hartweg’s work. The enforcement of the head tax had made it impossible for the missionary to carry out his duties without regular infusions of cash. “No Papuan is of a mind, now that he has to pay taxes and pay them quickly or be hauled away with truncheons and ropes, to work without receiving pay.”⁶⁴ Due to a financial mix-up, Hartweg had become deeply in debt, not only to the Chinese traders living near the mission post, but also to the Papuans his predecessor had employed.

You know how a few Papuans can be worse than a blood sucker, but almost sixty Papuans have a claim to the 100 guilders [owed by Hartweg’s predecessor, Brother Agter, who was evacuated due to poor health]. They can talk you to death . . .⁶⁵

Hartweg had to answer to mission society leaders in the Netherlands, whom he accused, in a particularly ill-tempered letter, of taking him to be “a monarchist or a Bolshevik” after they took issue with his criticisms of the government.⁶⁶ But he also had to answer to local interlocutors, as his letters make clear. We can only guess what was at stake for Hartweg’s Papuan interlocutors in their interactions with the missionary, but it seems safe to suppose it was not his recognition.⁶⁷ Hartweg’s letters are tragic, to the extent that we identify with his predicament, but comic, to the degree that within them, we sense how the potential for ridicule made itself felt.

CONCLUSION

The ridiculous is the consequence of colonial intervention in settings where a systematic lack of shared understandings prevails. Such settings are not in any

⁶³ See Friedrich Hartweg, Letter to the Board of September 23, 1926, UZV K31, D12 (Oegstgeest, the Netherlands: Archives of the Hendrik Kraemer Institute). Hartweg did not mention this, but it seems clear that the Papuans’ impression of the government’s actions was further complicated by the fate of those who did serve out their jail terms—they often returned as Malay-speaking village chiefs.

⁶⁴ See Friedrich Hartweg, Letter to the Board of February 7, 1927, UZV K31, D 12 (Oegstgeest, the Netherlands: Archives of the Hendrik Kraemer Institute).

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Hartweg’s relationship with his superiors only worsened with time. The death of his two-year-old daughter in a dysentery epidemic that Hartweg’s family lacked the money to flee was a particularly difficult blow. He left Biak abruptly, and we hear little of him in official mission histories, even if North Biaks in the early 1990s still remembered his visits to their communities.

⁶⁷ Elsewhere, I have argued that the mission post appeared to Biaks as a dangerous and alluring site to acquire the treasured media through which local persons and social groups were produced. See Rutherford, *Raiding the Land of the Foreigners* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002).

simple sense the product of isolation. Elsewhere, I have explored how a tendency to fetishize the foreign served to reproduce a mismatch between Biak perspectives and outsiders’ points of view.⁶⁸ Juxtaposed in the accounts produced by officials and missionaries, one finds evidence that the Papuans have embraced Dutch authority—and the authority of the Lord—and evidence that they have turned their interactions with these outsiders to very different ends. But in this essay, following Furnivall’s lead, I have approached this gap in understanding from a different angle, to shed light on the forces that fueled Dutch imperialism in this enormous, “neglected” land.

In assessing these forces, one should not underestimate the impact on Dutch officials of serving in this difficult corner of the Indies. In 1884, A. Haga, a Resident of Ternate, ended his two-volume history of New Guinea on a despondent note: “Sovereignty brings heavy duties and great responsibilities and only over the course of an extended time will any great changes in conditions be foreseen.”⁶⁹ Rather than governing New Guinea in this unbearably ridiculous fashion, some administrators suggested that the Netherlands should simply sell the territory off. But others, like Feuilletau de Bruyn, did not despair. In the 1930s, Feuilletau de Bruyn joined with former Residents of Ternate, Governors of the Moluccas, and right-wing Dutch politicians in calling for a renewed policy in New Guinea, in part as a way of opening the territory to Indo-European migration.⁷⁰ In essays published in *Tijdschrift Nieuw Guinea*, a journal he edited for several years, Feuilletau de Bruyn backed the idea of imposing a penal sanction in New Guinea, which would provide jail terms to coolies who broke their contracts, and of limiting the Papuan’s rights to land.⁷¹ Feuilletau de Bruyn’s draconian proposals were never adopted. But the publications and institutions of the period set the stage for the Netherlands’ retention of New Guinea by providing a justification for separating the territory from the rest of the colonial state.⁷²

Arend Lijphart has suggested that the Netherlands’ decision to cling to western New Guinea when Indonesia gained independence was a symptom of the “trauma of decolonization.”⁷³ Operating at a deficit, the Dutch experiment in post-war New Guinea could be read as an effort to compensate for the Indies’ sudden loss through the salvation of this long “neglected” land. A memoir recounting the

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ See Haga, *Nederlandsch Nieuw-Guinea en de Papoesche eilanden*, vol. 2, p. 435.

⁷⁰ See Rutherford, “Trekking to New Guinea: Dutch Colonial Fantasies of a Virgin Land 1900–1940,” in *Domesticating the Empire: Race, Gender and Family Life in French and Dutch Colonialism*, ed. Frances Gouda and Julia Clancy-Smith (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1998).

⁷¹ See Feuilletau de Bruyn, “Economische ontwikkelingsmogelijkheden van Noord-Nieuw-Guinea in het bijzonder door kolonisatie van Europeanen en Indo Europeanen,” *Koloniale Studiën* 17 (1933): 514–39; Feuilletau de Bruyn, “De bevolking van Biak en het kolonisatievraagstuk van Noord Nieuw-Guinea,” *Tijdschrift Nieuw Guinea* 1 (1–6) (1936–37): 169–77.

⁷² This decade also saw the founding of the New Guinea Studiekkring, an organization chaired by van Sandick, a former governor of the Moluccas, and the publication of the first edition of a three-volume compendium on New Guinea. See W. C. Klein, *Nieuw-Guinee*, 3 vols. (Amsterdam: J. H. de Bussy, 1937).

⁷³ See Arend Lijphart, *The Trauma of Decolonization: The Dutch and West New Guinea* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966).

adventures of a minor official on Biak during the 1950s suggests the quixotic nature of this project.⁷⁴ Several chapters in the slim volume are devoted to the tension between the "pseudo-perfectionism" of high-ranking officers in the air-conditioned seat of government in Hollandia, and the "imperfections" their subordinates faced on the ground.⁷⁵ Van den Berg's recollections sometimes call to mind Furnivall's account of Leviathan's antics.⁷⁶ But van den Berg uses humor to defend what he calls the "New Guinea dream."⁷⁷ In a chapter entitled, simply, "Colonialism?" he sets straight a rumor that Biak was home to colonial extremists, by recounting how an incident in which an employer chained a Papuan worker to a flagpole was simply an innocent practical joke.⁷⁸ But if we follow Furnivall, it becomes clear that absurdity is no stranger to the violent exercise of colonial power.

Biaks have made their own jokes about the colonial experience. One I recorded described a suspect pursued by Feuilletau de Bruyn and his soldiers, who hid from the detachment by climbing a tree. When the Dutch officials were distributing tobacco to a group relaxing below, the suspect could not contain his excitement. "Hey!" he shouted to the startled soldiers. "I get some, too!" And so the poor man took his place in the long line of prisoners, bound by barbed wire wrapped around their necks. This story turns on the tension between colonialism's horizontal and vertical dimensions, but from the perspective of those who bore the brunt of their society's "reform."⁷⁹ Furnivall may claim that the colonial state does not have a sense of humor, yet he knew that law and comedy, like law and violence, go together. By assigning *The Fashioning of Leviathan* to his fortunate students, Ben Anderson taught them to approach imperialism from within the Leviathan—where the ridiculous becomes a social fact.

⁷⁴ See G. W. H. van den Berg, *Baalen Droefheid: Biak-Nederlands Nieuw-Guinea sche(r)tsenderwijs* (The Hague: Moesson, 1981). The title is a neologism playing on the name of a famous governor of Netherlands New Guinea that roughly glosses "Bales of Sorrow." See pp. 7-9.

⁷⁵ Ibid., pp. 57-59; 91-93.

⁷⁶ At one point, he describes how drivers who wanted a license had to pass a test that entailed identifying the entire repertoire of traffic symbols, even though the island had only one, unofficial, sign. Ibid., pp. 81-83.

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 134.

⁷⁸ Ibid., pp. 122-26.

⁷⁹ Feuilletau de Bruyn notes that "tobacco" was the "small change" of Biak's "economy"—it is the desire for this that fixes the poor victim in the soldiers' gaze.

A NEW REGIME OF ORDER: THE ORIGIN OF MODERN SURVEILLANCE POLITICS IN INDONESIA

Takashi Shiraishi

Modern popular politics came to the Indies in the early 1910s with the rise of the *pergerakan* (movement). It was expressed in such forms as newspapers and journals, rallies and meetings, trade unions and strikes, associations and parties, novels, songs, theaters, and revolts. Modern surveillance politics followed in the late 1910s, its arrival marked by the establishment in 1919 of the Algemeene Recherche Dienst (ARD, General Investigation Service) in the attorney general's office (*hoofdparket*). Its reach expanded more widely over the empire and penetrated more deeply into the native world in the 1920s with the creation of a regional intelligence apparatus in each residency. Indonesians called this political intelligence the PID (Politieke Inlichtingendienst, Political Intelligence Service). This was not its official name, though its local manifestations—city, regional, and local intelligence units—were often called political intelligence or political investigation (*politieke inlichtingen*, *politieke recherche*).

The PID grew up with the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI, Partai Komunis Indonesia) as its first enemy. Its tradition—its mentality, its thinking, its way of seeing the native world, and its mode of operations—was shaped by this history. It carried this tradition with it to create a state of normalcy after it destroyed its Communist enemy. It was an answer on the part of the Dutch Indies state to the rise of modern Indonesian popular politics. It constituted—along with prisons and the internment camps, a relatively small modern police force (34,000 strong in 1930) and a small colonial army (37,000 strong in 1930)—a new regime of order which was imposed on the population of sixty million (in 1930) captured in a vast archipelagic empire in the 1930s, the time Indonesians called *zaman normal* (age of normalcy).¹ As such it signified the coming of age of modern surveillance politics in the Indies, the legacy of which was strongly felt in Indonesia until very recently. How, then, did this machine evolve? What were its mechanics? What mentality and thinking informed the machine? How did it work and with what consequences?

¹ *Indisch Verslag 1931: II, Statistisch Jaaroverzicht van Nederlandsch-Indie over het Jaar 1930* (Batavia: Landsdrukkerij, 1931), pp. 14, 405-06.

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