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Source: *Pacific Affairs*, Vol. 74, No. 4 (Winter, 2001-2002), pp. 507-528

Published by: Pacific Affairs, University of British Columbia

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3557804>

Accessed: 02-12-2015 01:48 UTC

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“Already Sovereign as a People”: A Foundational Moment in West Papuan Nationalism¹

David Webster

Thousands of people in the territory of West Papua² took part in ceremonies raising a banned flag on 1 December 1999. The day of action, which by some accounts included the majority of the indigenous population, marked “the thirty-eighth anniversary of the West Papuan nation.” People gathered in stadiums and churches across the territory to raise the flag, sing an anthem (“O Papua, My Homeland”) and recite prayers in support of their demand for independence from Indonesia. “December 1 is a special day for the Papuans,” one activist said. “It’s the day when the people proclaimed independence from the Dutch.” Another recalled the formation of “a new independent state called West Papua” (*negara baru yang merdeka yang disebut Papua Barat*). The nationalist Papuan Congress insisted: “The people of Papua are already sovereign as a people and as a nation, and have been since December 1, 1961.”³

In fact, West Papua was never independent. The day being commemorated, 1 December 1961, saw the name West Papua proclaimed and the West Papuan flag hoisted for the first time. But the flag flew below the banner of the Netherlands, still West Papua’s colonial ruler. Independence was promised, but the Netherlands had yet to set a target date. And Papuan voices were ignored when the territory was handed over to Indonesia in 1962-63. December 1 was certainly an important day, as, afterward, local nationalist symbols began to be accepted by the colonial regime. It is only in retrospect, however, that this day has been seen as West Papua’s independence day, from among several other possibilities. In 1999, West Papuan nationalists

¹ The author is indebted for comments and assistance to Jacques Bertrand, Leslie Butt, Caroline Ford, Octavianus Mote and the anonymous referees.

² There are several names given to the territory in question, each carrying a weight of political baggage. West Papua is the name preferred by nationalists and hence is used here, but it is also referred to as West New Guinea, West Irian and Irian Jaya. Shifts in name have converged with shifts in regime. On the etymology of Papua and Irian, see J.H.F. Sollewijn Gelpke, “On the Origin of the Name Papua,” *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde*, no. 149 (1993), pp. 318-32; Makkateru Syamsuddin, *Asal Mula Nama Irian (The Origin of the Name Irian)*, (Jakarta: Kita Usama Murni, 1975).

³ Agence France Presse (1 Dec. 1999); Tom Beanal, *Amungme: Magaboaat Negel Jombeï-Peibeï* (Amungme: The Ways of the People Who Belong to the Hills) (Jakarta: WALHI, 1997); Resolution of the Second Papuan Congress (3 June 2000).

demanding independence read back their claim to a newly-minted foundational moment, which was recalled in symbols and collective memory as the awakening of their nation. By raising their flag, singing their anthem and declaring themselves “already free,” they re-enacted 1 December 1961: a date that marked not an administrative decolonization but a decolonization of the mind. They recalled a key date in the birth, not of a nation-state, but of a nationalist movement, which has not (or not yet) achieved a state.

In this light, the movement should be set within theories of nationalism that have been developed first for Europe and, more recently, for the non-European world. Most European-derived theories, seeing non-European nationalism as essentially derivative, still bear the stamp of “eastern nationalism,” to use Hans Kohn’s phrase: a movement of the twentieth century – in less developed areas, acting as a protest against existing states whose borders do not coincide with those of nations, with its first expressions cultural.⁴ The idea of a progression from cultural explorations to elite political programmes to mass movements is also found in the work of Miroslav Hroch as endorsed by Eric Hobsbawm, and fits well with Anthony Smith’s models of elite political entrepreneurs.⁵ Yet this schema does not fit the West Papuan case. Its progression is rather in the other direction, with political nationalism a product of modernity and cultural rediscovery coming only later, a general Third World pattern described by Rupert Emerson.⁶ Here again, however, West Papuan nationalists have shown none of the rejection of their own traditions, none of the “die a tribe and be born a nation”⁷ rhetoric that characterizes the mid-twentieth century Third World liberation movement – quite the reverse, in fact. A better fit is offered by Benedict Anderson’s idea of an “imagined political community” that is both sovereign and limited. Educated colonial elites, he argues, coalesced along linguistic lines at the highest administrative centre to which they could be sent, the peak of their “looping pilgrimages.” Anderson makes West Papua an example of the pirating of nationalist models, highlighting the crucial role of territorial borders in both the Indonesian quest to integrate West Papua and the West Papuan nationalist movement. The map, he argues, served as a logo for both nationalist struggles. Indonesian nationalism lacked an ethnic basis and thus asserted a claim to everything inside the borders of the Dutch East Indies, making the map a logo for the nationalist struggle,

⁴ Hans Kohn, “Western and Eastern Nationalisms,” in John Hutchinson & Anthony D. Smith, eds., *Nationalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), pp. 162-65.

⁵ E.J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality*. Second edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Anthony D. Smith, “Nationalism, Ethnic Separatism and the Intelligentsia,” in Colin H. Williams, ed., *National Separatism* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1982), pp. 17-41.

⁶ Rupert Emerson, *From Empire to Nation: The Rise to Self-Assertion of African and Asian Peoples* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962).

⁷ The phrase belongs to Eduardo Mondlane, founding leader of the Mozambique Liberation Front (Frelimo), but is typical of anti-colonial liberation movements engaged in identity-building projects.

and the same has been true for West Papuan nationalism.⁸ Yet this picture clouds the external factors that have been formative in West Papuan nationalism. While the West Papuan imagined community is seen as both limited and sovereign, its borders have not sealed it off; rather, nationalism has emerged in the international arena, in the small space afforded between the millstones of greater powers, and has made a transition from an anti-colonial movement displaying “Third World” characteristics to one that could better be termed “Fourth World.”

So while 1 December 1961, might be seen as an elite political ploy by Hobsbawm or Smith, as an abortive step to decolonization by Emerson, as the acceptance of the logo-map principle by Anderson – and as not all that important by any of them – the real significance of the day was that it marked the foundation of a West Papuan nation-of-intent, to borrow a concept from Shamsul A.B.:

By nation-of-intent I mean a more or less precisely defined idea of the form of the nation, i.e., its territory, population, language, culture, symbols and institutions. The idea must be shared by a number of people who perceive themselves as members of that nation, and who feel it unites them....In some aspects, conceptually, “nation-of-intent” is not dissimilar to Anderson’s concept of “imagined political community.”...However, nation-of-intent is a more open-ended concept. It is more positive, proactive and forward-looking. It has a programmatic programme of action articulated in realpolitik....⁹

The realpolitik in this case is international. West Papuan nationalism emerged in the context of a bitter struggle between Indonesia and the Netherlands for control of the territory and perforce had not only to respond to these more powerful forces but constitute its identity in international terms. Much the same was true for Indonesian nationalism in a slightly earlier period, as Jan Aart Scholte has suggested in developing his thesis that international factors have been constitutive of nations. Striving for a nation has always been grounded, Scholte argues, in claims of difference from other nations, the definition and exclusion of outsiders, defensive reactions against foreign intrusion, through a degree of encouragement from outside (international solidarity), and the fact of the nation-state as a central organizing principle of the international system.¹⁰

⁸ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. Second edition (London: Verso, 1991), pp. 6-7, 114-15, 176-78. The degree to which the map has been logo-ized, without reference to indigenous names or people, is well illustrated in Chris Ballard, “Blanks in the Writing: Possible Histories for West New Guinea,” *Journal of Pacific History*, vol. 34, no. 2 (1999), pp. 147-55.

⁹ Shamsul A.B., “Nations-of-Intent in Malaysia,” in Stein Tonneson and Hans Antlöv, eds., *Asian Forms of the Nation* (Richmond, U.K.: Curzon, 1996), p. 328-29.

¹⁰ Jan Aart Scholte, “The International Construction of Indonesian Nationhood, 1930-1950,” in Hans Antlöv and Stein Tonneson, eds., *Imperial Policy and Southeast Asian Nationalism, 1930-1957* (Richmond, U.K.: Curzon Press, 1995), pp. 191-226.

West Papuan nationhood was constructed internationally, marking out an outsider (Indonesian) in much the same way as Indonesian nationalism before it, and asserting itself as a defensive reaction against perceived intrusions by that outsider. Like other nationalisms, West Papuan nationalism looked both forward and backward, promising a better future and turning to history to bolster claims that West Papua had been a nation in the past. The way in which history was used by an emergent nationalist movement is not only central to understanding the origins of growth of West Papuan nationalism, but is also constitutive of West Papuan identity. Thus nationalist demands for “rectification of history” should be understood as not simply a demand that the record be set straight, but as an assertion of Papuan identity. Under Indonesian rule, an elite political identity (West Papuan) formed under Dutch rule filtered through to the mass of the population as an expression of opposition to Indonesian colonial-style rule. It then asserted itself in cultural forms that were shaped by currents flowing through the Southwest Pacific in the 1980s in the form of a new cultural Melanesianism that attempted to both embrace local identities and give them wider expression as part of a national identity.

Between Jakarta and the Hague

West Papua was colonized late. The Netherlands claimed the western half of the island as a buffer zone for its East Indies colony to forestall expanding German and British presences in the east, but only established its own administrative posts on the coast after 1898. There was little Dutch interest: even in 1942, there were just fifteen Dutch posts. Such colonial rule as was experienced was carried out mostly by ethnic Indonesians in Dutch employ, so anti-colonial sentiment was as much anti-Indonesian as anti-Dutch. Eastern Indonesians played a middleman role and faced similar resentment in Dutch New Guinea to that reserved for ethnic Chinese and “loyal minorities” such as the Ambonese elsewhere in the Dutch East Indies. All this made pan-Indonesian nationalism far less attractive.

Papuan identity formation can be said to have started with the Pacific War, when 140,000 people in New Guinea were displaced but, in the process, saw an unimagined world of wealth and an American army where black men were apparently treated as equals, not colonial subjects.¹¹ It was in this wartime context of a world turned upside down that cargo cults began to take on a “proto-national” colour throughout Melanesia.¹² In Biak and much of the

¹¹ John Ryan, *The Hot Land: Focus on New Guinea* (Melbourne: Macmillan, 1969), p. 19; H.C. Brookfield, *Colonialism, Development and Independence: The Case of the Melanesian Islands of the South Pacific* (Cambridge: University Press, 1972), pp. 88-96; Gabriel Defert, *L'Indonésie et la Nouvelle-Guinée Occidentale: Maintien des Frontières Coloniales ou Respect des Identités Communautaires* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1996), p. 105.

¹² Peter Worsley, *The Trumpet Shall Sound: A Study of “Cargo Cults” in Melanesia* (New York: Schocken Books, 1968).

northern coast of West Papua, the Korero millenarian movement experienced a massive revival. The movement quickly showed an avowedly political face, declaring an independent state, using a flag that was the Dutch red-white-blue tricolour turned upside down (a move justified since the Dutch had stolen the flag from Papuans, according to Korero belief). The sacred morning star was then added to the flag, and it was announced that “the whole of New Guinea from Gebe to Hollandia and Merauke [the borders of the Dutch colony], will fall under the protection of the new flag.” Although a Biak Korero prophet was named as Queen of New Guinea, tribes were to be left their own leaders. “Isolation is not allowed. The Biak people must show that all the peoples of New Guinea are one.”¹³ While the movement was aimed at indigenous control of their own lives and land, it operated within a limited area within an indigenous understanding and under the leadership of customary rather than Western-educated elites, and hence can hardly be described as nationalist in the European sense. Nevertheless, its language of independent states had begun to be framed with the awareness of a wider world, within the context of the international state system.

The Korero movement was crushed by Japanese forces and the tiny Papuan elite was soon caught up in the flash-flood of Indonesian revolution against Dutch rule in 1945-49. Educated Papuans were the product of a handful of Dutch institutions, most notably an administrative school where the new elite was both “westernized” and “Papuanized,” coming to see themselves as part of a wider unit, Dutch New Guinea. They reacted in two streams: a *kaum kanan* (right group) that favoured the Dutch and acted much as did “loyal minorities” in other parts of the Indies, and a *kaum kiri* (left group) that supported the revolution, with West Irian (as they renamed it) perhaps holding some form of autonomy within an independent Indonesia.¹⁴ The important thing for them was to end Dutch colonial rule. In the words of one West Papuan writer, they “saw Indonesia as a potential partner to get the Dutch out of West New Guinea.”¹⁵ There was considerable movement between the two tendencies, however, which suggests that the debate was over whether Indonesia or the Netherlands made a better patron for the ultimate goal of local control. Despite their names, the real distinction was not so much right-left, ideological distinctions that meant little to Papuans. Rather, *kiri* (left) stood for progress, for breaking with the past, for *merdeka* (freedom). In the end, it raised the possibility that those who demanded

¹³ Worsley, *The Trumpet Shall Sound*, p. 123-45; Freerk Ch. Kamma, *Korero: Messianic Movements in the Biak-Numfor Culture Area* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1972); Nonie Sharp, *The Morning Star in Papua Barat* (North Carlton: Arena Publications, 1994).

¹⁴ Paul W. van der Veur, “Political Awakening in West New Guinea”, *Pacific Affairs*, vol. 36, no. 1 (1963), pp. 54-73.

¹⁵ cited in Robin Osborne, “OPM and the Quest for West Papuan Unity,” in R.J. May, ed., *Between Two Nations: The Indonesia-Papua New Guinea Border and West Papuan Nationalism* (Bathurst, N.S.W.: Robert Brown & Associates, 1986), p. 51.

freedom as part of Indonesia might easily come to see Indonesia too as a foreign ruler, which makes it easier to understand the haemorrhage of *kaum kiri* Papuans from the Indonesian side once Indonesian rule became a reality. *Kanan*, on the other hand, stood for step-by-step progress towards local control, a good fit with the emerging Dutch gradualist stance on decolonization.

In 1949, the Dutch agreed to Indonesian independence but held on to West Papua. They hoped to build what one parliamentarian called “a model state in Southeast Asia which would stand out like a lighthouse above the decayed area around it.”¹⁶ The burst of energy came as a sharp contrast to the pre-1949 period of neglect. This “New Deal period” stressed economic development and cultural preservation of Papuan cultures, leading to a virtual government by anthropologists that reified and reinforced tribal divisions.¹⁷ The years after 1949 left three main legacies. First, they were dominated by an escalating international struggle between Indonesia and the Netherlands over who had the right to sovereignty over West New Guinea. Inevitably, Papuan nationalists were forced increasingly to choose one side or the other. Both streams of Papuan nationalism faced rejection by their patrons in 1956. The *kaum kanan*, working for increased local control under Dutch tutelage, protested bitterly when the Dutch Reformed Church suggested talks with Indonesia over the future of West Papua.¹⁸ Indonesia, meanwhile, rejected the declaration of an autonomous province of West Irian by Silas Papare, who like most of the *kaum kiri* had fled into Indonesian exile, in favour of an “autonomous province” headed by the Sultan of Tidore (best known for his dynasty’s slave trade of Papuans). Second, the leading voices of Papuan nationalism were highly derivative, taking on the language and style of their respective patrons. Third, the discourse of race began to play an increasingly important role. Challenged to justify continued colonial rule over one part of their old empire when the rest was now an independent country, the Dutch resorted to the argument of racial difference, insisting that Indonesians were Asian and the people of New Guinea were dark-skinned, curly-haired Melanesians. In vain did Indonesian leaders protest that Indonesia contained a spectrum of ethnic groups and was not a racially defined state (and their

¹⁶ Arend Lijpardt, *The Trauma of Decolonization: The Dutch and West New Guinea* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966), p. 167.

¹⁷ Defert, *Novelle-Guinée Occidentale*, pp. 49, 140; Jan Pouwer, “The Colonisation, Decolonisation and Recolonisation of West New Guinea,” *Journal of Pacific History*, vol. 34, no. 2 (1999), p. 167; Netherlands New Guinea Bureau for Native Affairs, *Anthropological Research in Netherlands New Guinea Since 1950* (Sydney: Australasian Medical Publishers, 1959), p. 7; Anton Ploeg, “A Colonial Governor in Dutch New Guinea,” *Journal of Pacific History*, vol. 26, no. 2 (1991), pp. 363-65; S.R. Jaarsma, “Your Work is of No Use to Us...: Administrative Interest in Ethnographic Research (West New Guinea, 1950-1962),” *Journal of Pacific History*, vol. 29, no. 2 (1994), pp. 153-71.

¹⁸ Markus Kaisiepo, letter of protest in Sharp, *The Morning Star*, p. 119-22; see also the documents gathered in *Nieuw Guinea Spreekt zich uit (New Guinea Speaks Out)* (Hollandia: Netherlands New Guinea Administration, 1956).

efforts to refute the racial taxonomies in play in some ways reinforced the idea that nineteenth-century social Darwinist constructs of “race” were relevant). The Dutch discourse of race had a long history,¹⁹ and now was pressed into service in an international political battle. So while Dutch administrative politics stressed internal “tribal” difference within West Papua, Dutch international political goals undercut that by stressing Papuan “racial” homogeneity and difference from Indonesians.

Dutch rule created a new colonial state that could then be the incubator for a new nation, offering a common language (Malay/Bahasa Indonesia), institutions, infrastructure, administration and so on, and even (through extensive missionary work) the beginnings of a common religion. Yet much of this could have been mobilized in the interest of union with Indonesia, in particular the common language, raising the question of why emergent nationalism was eventually realized on the lines of West Papuan rather than Indonesian identity. Without separation from Indonesia, it seems unlikely that Papuan nationalism would have emerged, at least not in the same form. Both “pro-Dutch” and “pro-Indonesian” streams existed within Papuan elites. It was events in the 1960s that determined West Papuan identity as the decisive one.

Decolonization

In 1960 the Dutch announced a ten-year plan for local control and the ground of the debate on West Papua shifted from colonialism versus liberation to a question of whether West Papua would gain independence as part of Indonesia or as an independent state. This included a “Papuanization” programme that saw locals holding three-quarters of administrative posts by 1962, slated to hit 95 percent by 1970.²⁰ A new nationalist movement free of pro-Dutch or pro-Indonesian sentiments emerged in this period in the context of Indonesian-Dutch struggle. The Papuan elite, promised progress towards independence, began to force the pace of decolonization. The Dutch held elections for a New Guinea Council in which Papuans won 22 of the 28 seats and Nicolaas Jouwe and Markus Kaisiepo of the *kaum kanan* shared vice-presidential duties.²¹ In this period, a number of indigenous political parties sprung up, most notably the National Party (Parna) modelled on other Third world independence parties and seen by some colonial officials as pro-Indonesian (its programme, however, called for independence by 1970).

¹⁹ Frances Gouda, *Dutch Culture Overseas* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1995), p. 118-56.

²⁰ Peter Savage, “Irian Jaya: Reluctant Colony,” in *Politics in Melanesia* (Suva: University of the South Pacific, 1982), p. 5; Robin Osborne, *Indonesia’s Secret War: The Guerrilla Struggle in Irian Jaya* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1985), p. 22.

²¹ Papuan membership of the Council is listed in *Netherlands New Guinea: A People on the Way to Self-Determination* (Rotterdam: Netherlands New Guinea Institute, 1960).

The basis of the nation was unclear. If it had been defined as “not Indonesian,” that suggested moves to federation with other Melanesian areas (the path that was indeed preferred by some of the most pro-Dutch leaders, such as Jouwe, and indeed by the Dutch themselves).²² The idea of a Melanesian Federation, however, was eventually nixed by Australia, which had previously advanced the idea. There were fairly extensive efforts to use “race” as part of identity formation and this was also asserted internationally. Papuan leaders reached out to African states and black organizations such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) as part of a global anti-colonial quest based on skin colour and the assertion “Dutch New Guinea is New Africa.”²³ They received support from a number of African governments, but when the Dutch decolonization plan came to a United Nations vote, only those countries associated with the conservative Brazzaville group voted for Papuan self-determination. The division came not on lines of support for Papuan self-determination, but on lines determined by international political alignment. Indonesian Foreign Minister Subandrio declared that his country had backed African independence movements and they should now return the favour and vote with Indonesia regardless of the merits; this argument proved decisive in preventing a resolution for Papuan self-determination from achieving a two-thirds vote. The failure of the Papuan quest for international support forced them back on their own resources.

The 1961 Papuan National Congress can be viewed as the first autonomous action of a new nationalist movement. The Congress concerned itself first of all with symbol. West Papua was to be sewn together as European and, now, Asian states were, with fabric and song: an anthem and a flag which remodelled the Koreri banner and gave pride of place to the morning star.²⁴ The call was a (perhaps unconscious) echo of Indonesia’s 1928 Youth Oath: one nation Indonesia, one people Indonesians, one language Indonesian (and summing it all up in symbol, the red-and-white flag which looked like a European-style banner and the new anthem, “Indonesia Raya”). The call “from Sorong to Numbay” also went up, a counterclaim to the Indonesian slogan “from Sabang to Merauke.” The day when the Dutch accepted these new symbols was 1 December, the retrospective founding moment. At the

²² Freedom Committee of West Papua/West New Guinea, letter to the UN, 22 Sept 1969; Nicolaas Jouwe, “Conflict at the Meeting Point of Melanesia and Asia,” *Pacific Islands Monthly* (April 1978), p. 12; June Verrier, “Australia, Papua New Guinea and the West New Guinea Question, 1949-1969” (Ph.D. dissertation, Monash University, 1975), p. 203.

²³ *Voice of the Negroids of the Pacific to Negroids throughout the World*, (Hollandia, 1961); Justus M. van der Kroef, “Ethnic Self-Perception and Political Action: The Papuans of Indonesian West New Guinea,” in Tai S. Kang, ed., *Nationalism and the Crises of Ethnic Minorities in Asia* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1979), p. 107-108.

²⁴ *Voice of the Negroids of the Pacific*, p. 23-24. Within a year, the new flag was recognized by 95 percent of students; P.W. van der Veur, “Questionnaire Survey Among the Potential Papuan Elite in 1962 West New Guinea,” *Bijdragen tot de Taal, Land- en Volkenkunde*, no. 120 (1964), p. 445.

time, it was seen as simply one more step on the road to independence, which Parna and others demanded be granted on a stepped-up timetable.

So far, so derivative. But Papuan nationalists were not simply pirating, there was a real and emerging feeling of being Papuan in a fast-growing elite group that proved to be highly responsive to international currents. “I don’t think the Indonesians realize or recognize the position of West New Guinea Papuans – we are not the same people we were fifteen years ago,” one educated Papuan said. “We know what future we want now. We want independence.”²⁵ The New Guinea Council put more effort into foreign affairs, formally outside its purview, than it gave to domestic policy. Once it became clear that the Dutch were going to accede to an American-authored plan for handover to Indonesia with self-determination postponed, most of the Papuan elite proved highly adaptable, shifting its efforts to ensuring that Indonesia would grant the promised self-determination. Papuan leaders who posed as pro-Indonesian were, almost without exception, merely waiting on the promised act of free choice or else seeking autonomy within Indonesia.

Describing West Papuan nationalism in this period as elite nationalism is not intended to suggest a model of elite political entrepreneurs who were unrepresentative of a mass of “backward” tribal peoples. Rather, I recognize that those with access to “modern” education were those whose political experiences fit most closely with the concept of nationalism, as was the case throughout Africa, Asia and the Pacific.²⁶ West Papuan nationalism and identity were the invention of an educated coastal elite, but an elite that had not yet been severed from the bulk of the population, since its leaders came from substantially the same class background (although concepts of class sit uneasily with the reality of Papuan societies). Thus a picture of an “educated petty bourgeois leadership [which] has now allied with the proto-peasant masses,” to quote one interpretation, misses the point.²⁷ Local traditions were not rejected by an elite that had lost touch with its own culture; rather, they were mobilized in the service of an elite political identity that, under Indonesian rule, would come to encompass all social groups.

From Acceptance to Resistance, 1962-69

A U.S.-brokered deal saw West Papua transferred to the United Nations in October 1962, with a handover to Indonesia in May 1963. An act of self-determination was promised by 1969. The UN Temporary Executive Authority (UNTEA), seen by both sides as simply a holding operation created only to save Dutch face, began to choke off Papuan nationalism – it was

²⁵ S.B. Hindom, cited in Ryan, *The Hot Land*, p. 194.

²⁶ George Kahin, *Nationalism and Revolution in Indonesia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1952); Emerson, *From Empire to Nation*.

²⁷ Peter Savage, “The National Liberation Struggle in West Irian: From Millenarianism to Socialist Revolution,” *Asian Survey*, vol. 18, no. 10 (Oct. 1978), p. 995.

UNTEA that first banned the Papuan flag. Even the most anti-Indonesian leaders were willing to see UN rule terminated early, so that the struggle could go on.

Indonesia took possession above all in the symbolic realm. A bonfire of Papuan flags was one of the new regime's first acts. West Irian was to become a "normal" province, reoriented westwards from a Pacific to a Southeast Asian outlook. A quarantine was slapped on in order to lock out non-Indonesian influences. Since all Papuans were "indigenous Indonesians", able to avail themselves of the benefits of assimilationist Indonesian nationalism, there was no need to reserve special treatment for them. The Papuanization programme therefore stopped dead in its tracks, creating heavy resentment among the elite. Papuans eventually numbered just 20 percent of government employees.²⁸ At the same time, their unfamiliarity with the increasingly Javanized "guided democracy" framework and ingrained Indonesian prejudice against *Papua bodoh* (ignorant Papuans) limited their ability to actually make any inroads in the wider Indonesian setting. Nor, with Papuan political parties all dissolved and no local elections of any sort, could they exercise any local control. A process of mutual disillusion took place: West Papuan elites realized that Indonesia would not be able to deliver a better life; in fact, it could barely insulate the newest province from the economic chaos engulfing Indonesia and was certainly not going to allow any form of local control. Indonesians soon came to fear postings in the hostile and remote region – "life here has taught us how happy we were in Jakarta," as one official said.²⁹ They also saw that the "return of West Irian to the motherland" neither made Papuans feel any more Indonesian nor helped to solve Indonesia's own problems, on hold during the military confrontation with the Dutch.

Before 1962, it had been largely the elite that was affected by outside rule. With the coming of Indonesian rule, the bulk of the population was brought into nationalist debates for the first time. Indonesia tried something that the Dutch had never bothered with: actual administration of the interior. The first foreign rule imposed on many Papuans was Indonesian. These administrators, advocates of an ostensibly egalitarian-assimilationist but actually Javanized centralizing nationalism, overturned the preservationism of the Dutch in favour of a new civilizing mission. The Papuans were seen as Indonesians still living in a more primitive time, the largest infusion yet into Indonesia of *suku terasing/terbelakang* (alien/backward tribes), in need of development and modernization. Having liberated the Papuans from colonialism, the next step was to liberate them from backwardness. Indonesia's policy, in the words of Foreign Minister Subandrio, was to "get them down out of the trees, even if we have to pull them down."³⁰ It was this

²⁸ *West Papua: Plunder in Paradise* (London: Anti-Slavery Society, 1990), p. 31; "Indonesia Puts Up Obstacles for WNG Travellers," *Pacific Islands Monthly* (Oct. 1963); Pouwer, "Colonisation of West New Guinea", p. 172.

²⁹ "Disillusioned Indonesians Face WNG Problem," *Pacific Islands Monthly* (July 1963), p. 47.

³⁰ Cited in Osborne, *Indonesia's Secret War*, p. 136.

attitude that was reflected in the highlands during *Operasi Koteka*, the derisive Indonesian name for the penis-gourd worn by Dani men and many other highlanders, and its less-publicized counterpart *Operasi Busana* (Operation Wear Clothes). Wearing clothes was associated with being educated and progressive (*berpakaian = berpendidikan dan maju*). President Suharto symbolically handed 800,000 garments (roughly the indigenous population) to the provincial government. The campaign to dress up the Dani was conducted in a notably brutal fashion by “civic action” teams from the army.³¹

Rather than being divided by colonial policy, tribes were increasingly drawn together in a common defensive reaction to colonial rule. Even the school system designed to create a homogenized Indonesian identity had the effect of bringing West Papuans together across tribal divisions.³² The symbols of Papuan nationalism were there for them, ready to be adopted. Jakarta, seeing the failure of its project in West Papua and the reality of a nationalism it had rejected as the work of Dutch stooges, announced in 1965 that it was cancelling the act of self-determination it had promised the United Nations, in fact, that it was leaving the UN. With international avenues cut off, Papuans turned to arms. The first rebellion against Indonesia was tribally based, the 1965 Arfak rising, which declared a free state of West Papua centred in Manokwari, a rebellion with echoes in all districts of West Papua.³³ Indonesia saw it all as a Dutch “time bomb”³⁴ and responded harshly. Military repression, not surprisingly, made more converts to the nationalist cause.

One by one, members of the Papuan elite defected from their acceptance of Indonesian rule, which had been conditioned on eventual self-determination, to an oppositional stance that still looked to 1969 as the year of deliverance. Eliezer J. Bonay, the Parna figure named as the first governor of West Irian province, was fired after two years for being “unreliable” and then jailed for distributing pro-independence leaflets. One member of Parliament sought UN mediation. Even Silas Papare, leader of the *kaum kiri*, denounced military operations against the Arfak.³⁵

³¹ Nurinwa Ki S. Hendrowinoto, *Acub Zainal, I Love the Army* (Jakarta: Sinar Harapan, 1998), p. 98; Defert, *Nouvelle-Guinée Occidentale*, p. 271-72; M.A. Jaspén, “West Irian: The First Two Years,” *Australian Quarterly*, vol. 37, no. 2 (1965), p. 16; van der Kroef, “Ethnic Self-Perception,” p. 108.

³² Defert, *Nouvelle-Guinée Occidentale*, p. 362. On the “Indonesianization” program, see Dale Gietzelt, “The Indonesianization of West Papua,” *Oceania*, vol. 59, no. 3 (March 1989), pp. 201-21.

³³ Fernando Ortiz Sanz, Report to the UN Secretary General on the act of free choice, UN document A/7723, 1969, p. 49-52; John Djopari, *Pemberontakan Organisasi Papua Merdeka (The Free Papua Movement Rebellion)* (Jakarta: Grasindo, 1995), p. 2; van der Kroef, “Ethnic Self-Perception,” p. 112; Brian May, *The Indonesian Tragedy* (Singapore: Graham Brash, 1978), p. 171; “More Trouble in Indonesia’s West N. Guinea,” *Pacific Islands Monthly* (May 1967).

³⁴ Indonesia, Department of Information, *OPM, Aftermath of Colonialism* (Jakarta, 1976).

³⁵ Ryan, *The Hot Land*, p. 242; Nonie Sharp, *The Rule of the Sword: The Story of West Irian* (Malmsbury, Victoria: Kibble Books, 1977) pp. 13, 20; “Indonesia Sends Troops to Quell Papuan Revolt,” *New York Times* (7 May 1969); Carmel Budiardjo and Liem Soei Liong, *West Papua: The Obliteration of a People*, Third edition (London: TAPOL, 1988), p. 78. For other criticisms of this nature, see van der Kroef, “West New Guinea: The Uncertain Future,” *Asian Survey*, no. 8 (1968), pp. 699-700.

The Arfak rebellion and similar uprisings by highland tribes, including the Dani, showed surprising military sophistication (they always started by plowing under or placing bamboo stakes in airstrips in order to prevent Indonesian troop landings). It had no chance of success, but provided the foundation of a guerrilla movement, the *Organisasi Papua Merdeka* (OPM, Free Papua Movement). Founded by Arfak leader Johan Ariks, a veteran nationalist associated with the *kaum kanan*, the OPM spread quickly under independent local leaders drawn mostly from the old elite and the Dutch-trained Papuan Volunteer Corps. The OPM was only an organization by the longest stretch of imagination – in fact, the name may have been invented by Indonesian army intelligence to describe disparate bands.³⁶ Its importance is less military than symbolic, “We are all OPM,” remains a common saying. A Papuan joins the OPM not by signing a membership card, but simply by taking up arms and calling himself OPM.

The Act of Free Choice

The New York agreement between Indonesia and the Netherlands had made transfer of West Papua conditional on an eventual act of free choice in which all the inhabitants of the territory would choose to remain with Indonesia or sever all ties. The Sukarno government was never happy about this condition, since it implied that other provinces should have the same right, so it was no surprise when the pledge was abrogated. After Sukarno was overthrown, however, the new regime, under General Suharto, rejoined the UN. Suharto’s government was no more democratic, but it was far keener on close ties to the United States and on attracting foreign investment. In 1967, once it had consolidated its hold on power, it agreed to hold the act of free choice after all. However, Indonesia never accepted that the Papuan people had the *right* to self-determination, since all of Indonesia had exercised that right in 1945. The act would be held, rather, to demonstrate that Indonesia could be trusted to abide by international treaties.³⁷

There was another reason for this decision that was not mentioned by Indonesian officials. The Dutch had agreed to grant \$30 million to a specially created Fund of the United Nations for the Development of West Irian (FUNDWI). When Indonesia left the UN, this money was no longer available. The Suharto regime, by agreeing to respect the New York agreement, was able to gain access to a large fund that it hoped to use to win the hearts and minds of West Papuans by ending endemic chaos and corruption and delivering tangible benefits. This was much in line with the regime’s strategy

³⁶ Djopari, *Pemberontakan OPM*.

³⁷ Speech of Foreign Minister Adam Malik to the UN, *General Assembly Official Records*, meeting of 13 Nov. 1969, A/PV.1810; Indonesia’s report on the act of free choice, Annex B to UN document A/7723; “Indonesia Accepts Plan for Vote in West Irian,” *New York Times* (1 Oct 1966); “Irianese Begin ‘Act of Free Choice’ on Whether to Remain Part of Indonesia,” *New York Times* (7 July 1969).

in Indonesia proper, in which the military justified its political role by the promise of development (*pembangunan*).

Indonesia decided to hold an exercise called the *Penentuan Pendapat Rakyat*, literally an act of determining the opinion of the people, usually translated in English as the “act of free choice.” The act was held not through a referendum, as many Papuans were demanding, or even by the indirect “whispering ballot” used by the Dutch in rural areas of high illiteracy, but by *musyawarah*, deliberation leading to consensus, a system based on the Javanese village assembly. This was justified on the basis that the Papuans were too primitive to vote, although their cousins in the Australian-ruled Territory of Papua and New Guinea had already voted directly and they would themselves be considered advanced enough to do so in the Indonesian elections in 1971. UN monitor Fernando Ortiz Sanz was able to observe the “election” of only a small portion of the eight regional assemblies that eventually agreed unanimously by *musyawarah* to remain with Indonesia. Each assembly, Ortiz Sanz reported, heard from a number of high Indonesian officials including the minister of home affairs who “asked the members of the assembly to determine their future with courage and full responsibility, bearing in mind that they had one ideology, *Pantja Sila*, one flag, one Government and one country stretching from Sabang to Merauke.”³⁸ One officer told villagers “I will shoot dead anyone who is against us.” This was in line with Suharto’s order that the act “must not betray or harm the Indonesian people and the Government.”³⁹ General Ali Murtopo, army head of special operations and the man in charge of the act, told one group that

Jakarta was not interested in us as Papuans but in West Irian as a territory. If we want to be independent, he said, laughing scornfully, we had better ask God if He could find us an island in the Pacific where we could emigrate. We could also write to the Americans. They had already set foot on the moon and perhaps they would be good enough to find us a place there.⁴⁰

In short, there was never any doubt as to the outcome of this stage-managed exercise. Still, the occasion served a rallying point for nationalists. There were a host of pro-independence petitions sent to Ortiz Sanz and widespread pro-independence demonstrations, and the OPM seized control of several towns in the Paniai Lakes district and raised the Morning Star flag.⁴¹ When the act came to the UN for consideration, the majority of African states

³⁸ Ortiz Sanz report, p. 60.

³⁹ B. May, *The Indonesian Tragedy*, p. 179; “Irian Flare-ups Worry Australia,” *New York Times*, (3 May 1969).

⁴⁰ Recollections of delegate, cited in Budiardjo and Liem, *Obliteration of a People*, p. 25.

⁴¹ John Saltford, “United Nations Involvement with the Act of Self-Determination in West Irian (Indonesian West New Guinea), 1968 to 1969”, *Indonesia*, no. 69 (April 2000): 71-92; “Indonesia Reported to Reject U.N. Plea for an Irian Amnesty,” *New York Times* (11 May 1969).

refused to endorse it (lingering evidence of the international West Papua lobby), but a resolution noting the report passed easily, and Indonesia had international legal recognition of its sovereignty.

The OPM's Biak group responded on 1 July 1971, by declaring the independence of "West Papua New Guinea" under the leadership of Seth Rumkorem, the highest-ranking of several Papuan defectors from the Indonesian army.⁴² The style of this declaration, and indeed of the OPM in general, was highly derivative of the symbols and structure of the Indonesian army (much as the Indonesian army had adopted the style of the imperial Japanese forces that sponsored its creation). The OPM independence declaration marked a new wave of nationalism that has been dubbed the 1969 generation, determined to fight where their forerunners of the 1962 generation had sought to achieve their goals by accommodation.

In the Bush: Symbolic Nationalism

Most rural West Papuans, as noted, experienced colonial rule for the first time at the hands of Indonesia. Indonesians look and act differently, and have quickly come to be seen as foreigners. This has been especially the case because Indonesians can be seen to be alienating land. Land struggles, as elsewhere in Melanesia,⁴³ have probably done more than any other factor to create resentment that is channelled into nationalist aspirations. Most often the demand for "free Papua land" (*Tanah Papua Merdeka*, an expression that has become more common than *Negara Papua Merdeka*, Independent Papua State) has been expressed through symbolic raisings of the banned Morning Star flag. Indonesian nationalism looks at West Papua and sees *terra nullius*, an empty land to be filled up and developed for the benefit of all Indonesians, including the "backward" Papuans themselves. The result has been a clash of values along the same lines experienced by other "fourth world" peoples.

Part of the Indonesian effort to integrate West Papua has been to continue an old Dutch programme called transmigration, originally aimed at relieving population pressures in Java and Bali by moving excess populations to the sparsely-populated outer islands. Although the programme cannot keep up with population increase, it is hoped that it can serve as a means of alleviating poverty by giving land to poor Javanese peasants who are also expected to teach their farming techniques to outer islanders – although settlements

⁴² Seth Rumkorem, *Proklamasi Kemerdekaan*, <http://www.westpapua.net/legality/declare.html>; Osborne, "OPM," p. 54-56.

⁴³ Marcus Colchester, "Unity and Diversity: Indonesian policy towards tribal peoples," *The Ecologist*, no. 16 (1986), p. 100; Steven V. Harris and Colin Brown, *Indonesia, Papua New Guinea and Australia: The Irian Jaya Problem of 1984* (Brisbane: Griffith University Centre for the Study of Australian-Asian Relations, 1985); Martin Lyons, *The Totem and the Tricolour: A Short History of New Caledonia since 1774* (Kensington: New South Wales University Press, 1986), p. 126; Daniel Start, *The Open Cage: The Ordeal of the Irian Jaya Hostages* (London: Harper Collins, 1997).

have often failed. Transmigration is also seen as a means of knitting the diverse Indonesian peoples into a united nation. Transmigration Minister Martono linked the programme to assimilationist Indonesian nationalism:

On 28 October 1928, a youth congress was held concluding that we are one nation, the Indonesian nation; we have one native country, Indonesia; one language, the Indonesian language. By way of transmigration, we will try to realise what has been pledged, to integrate all the ethnic groups into one nation, the Indonesian nation....The different ethnic groups will in the long run disappear because of integration...and there will be one kind of man....⁴⁴

It was also supposed to benefit the Papuans by teaching them to be settled farmers rather than, in the words of one foreign minister, “nomads running around naked.”⁴⁵

From 1977, West Papua became a major target for transmigration. Actual numbers fell far short of the ambitious targets, but the key point here is the Papuan perception of transmigration as a programme designed to swamp them. Far more important than the government-sponsored programme is the less publicized spontaneous migration of large numbers of Indonesians (particularly from South Sulawesi). The most common figure for non-Papuan Indonesian migrants is 770,000, one-third of the population. A study by the Lavalin engineering group found that two-thirds of the urban population was Indonesian by 1988. General Acub Zainal, provincial military commander and then governor in the 1970s, rather grandiosely claimed West Papua could receive tens of millions of migrants. Governor Isaac Hindom in 1984 predicted that within fifty years West Papuans would no longer have curly hair, but straight hair like Indonesians, and called for up to 12 million settlers.⁴⁶ Transmigration also appeared to serve a military objective, with possible settlement sites clustered in areas near the Papua New Guinea (PNG) border. Almost 6 percent of families under Repelita IV, the fourth five-year development plan, were slated for the border districts of Jayapura and Merauke.⁴⁷

Migration and attendant relocation programmes have seen millions of hectares alienated from their original owners.⁴⁸ There have also been displacements and losses of land due to the operations of multinational mining and forestry companies. The first foreign investor to sign a contract

⁴⁴ Martono speech, *The Ecologist*, vol. 16, no. 2/3 (1986), p. 59.

⁴⁵ “Jakarta’s Plan on Relocation Irks Neighbor,” *New York Times* (29 April 1984).

⁴⁶ Chris Manning and Michael Rumbiak, *Economic Development, Migrant Labour and Indigenous Welfare in Irian Jaya 1970-84* (Canberra: ANU Research School of Asian and Pacific Studies, 1989), p. 23; “Main History,” www.irja.org; Adam Schwartz, “Eastern Reproach,” *Far Eastern Economic Review* (11 July 1991), p. 24; Hendrowinoto, *Acub Zainal*, p. 99; Osborne, *Indonesia’s Secret War*, p. 140.

⁴⁷ H. Arndt, “Transmigration to Irian Jaya,” in May, ed., *Between Two Nations*, p. 172.

⁴⁸ Indonesian Legal Aid Foundation, 1982, cited in Defert, *Nouvelle-Guinée Occidentale*, p. 345.

with the Suharto regime (and still Indonesia's largest foreign investor) was Freeport, an American mining company that wanted to develop the Ertsberg (Ore Mountain) in West Papua. It was on the occasion of the opening of Freeport's mine in 1973 that President Suharto took the opportunity to rename the province Irian Jaya (Victorious Irian). Despite consistent opposition from the local Amungme people, who consider the high peaks to be the head of their mother and therefore sacred, Freeport has levelled whole mountains to extract copper and gold. Its operations alienated 10,000 hectares of land without compensation, and with a concession area initially spanning 3.6-million hectares, Amungme local people faced the threat of forced resettlement. In 1977, locals blew up the main ore pipeline. Their protests have met with a consistent pattern of violence from Indonesian security forces into the 1990s, including the bombing of villages and attacks on local churches, but also received broad international attention when Amungme leaders tried unsuccessfully to sue Freeport in a U.S. court.⁴⁹ There are many other mining companies operating and exploring in remote areas. An even greater threat to land tenure is posed by forestry, with much of West Papua already carved up into logging concessions.

The loss of land to transmigrants and corporations is often cited by OPM members to explain why they took up arms. For many, land and Papuan identity mesh together seamlessly.

I am a native Papuan, and I have the right to live on this land. But other people who have no right on this land come and take over this land, while the native is forced out from our own land and chased into the jungle. This is my own nation and my own land. Why should I be chased from my own land? I will die. My next generation with my hair, my colour of skin, my language, my culture, my arts and dance that characterize this land will disappear forever.⁵⁰

West Papuan identity has been asserted through ceremonies at which the Morning Star is ritually unfurled and raised in jungle clearings, villages and public buildings amongst uniformed marching and reverent treatment of the flag that recalls Indonesian military ceremony. Many believe, much as the Koreroi movements of the past did, that raising the flag is a spiritual as well as a political act, that the flag has actual power and if flown long enough

⁴⁹ Tom Beanal, *Amungme*, Budiardjo and Liem, *Obliteration of a People*, p. 33-37; Forbes K. Wilson, *The Conquest of Copper Mountain* (New York: Atheneum, 1981); Norman Lewis, *An Empire of the East: Travels in Indonesia* (London: Jonathon Cape, 1993), p. 230; "They don't consider us real humans," (interview with Pieter Yan Magal) *Inside Indonesia* (July-Sept. 1996), p. 20-21; *West Papua Information Kit*, Australia West Papua Association, <http://utexas.edu/users/cline/papua.core.htm>; Osborne, *Indonesia's Secret War*, p. 69; report of Gereja Kristen Irian, <http://users.ox.ac.uk/~oprc>; report by Catholic diocese of Merauke, cited in "Will Indonesia Listen?" *Pacific Islands Monthly* (April 1996); interview with John Rumbiak in *Tok Blong Pasifik*, (*News from the Pacific*) vol. 55, no. 3 (2001).

⁵⁰ Ambros Aminin, in *West Papua Action Update*, no. 00 [sic] (1999), p. 2.

can compel the Indonesians to leave.⁵¹ The OPM is sometimes said to stand for *Om, Paik, Mak*: sun, moon, stars. In the words of one activist, “as long as those three objects, the sun, the moon and the stars, are still shining, our fight for liberation will always be there.”⁵²

In the Cities: Cultural Nationalism

In the cities of West Papua, where land is less of an issue, nationalism has been centred on the preservation of cultural identity. George Aditjondro has analyzed West Papuan urban nationalism in terms of waves: first civil servants and soldiers defecting from the Indonesian government, then radical university students, and finally cultural nationalist intellectuals such as Arnold Ap and Thomas Wanggai. The movement “has now reached a point of no return.”⁵³

The urban elite was the target for Indonesian efforts to create a new identity, not Papuan or even Irianese but “Indonesians of Irian Jaya origin.” The idea was to deliver this by providing economic development. A symbolic illustration of the strategy can be seen in the delivery to primary school students in 1970 of kits that contained clothing and writing materials (to dress the primitive and teach them literacy) along with a picture of the president and an Indonesian flag.⁵⁴ Local traditions did not have to vanish, in fact the government tried to legislate common forms of dance, costume and song for the province, which could then be performed by any resident regardless of ethnicity. But expressions of local assertion were to be diverted into efforts for greater development, or to other side channels like sports.

Development, however, has failed in this task. Indonesia’s interest had been in “regaining” the territory of West Irian, not its people, who were seen (to quote Anderson) as “a phantom ‘Irianese’ (*orang Irian*) named *after the map*; because phantom, to be imagined in quasi-logo form: ‘negroid’ features, penis-sheaths, and so on.”⁵⁵ Despite an official ideology of equality among all Indonesians, the reality has often been racism directed at the *Papua bodoh*.⁵⁶ This racism has incidentally entrenched Papuan perception of difference and been met with a counter-racism by many Papuans. Development programmes were not helped by the fact that the main agent of development was the Indonesian armed forces, accused by nationalists of

⁵¹ Osborne, *Indonesia’s Secret War*, p. 99; Andrew Klievert, “Raising the West Papua Flag,” *Inside Indonesia*, no. 56 (Oct-Dec 1998); Mark Worth, “Ancient myth inspires freedom fight,” *Australian* (3 Jan. 2000).

⁵² Henk Rumbewas, in video documentary *Arrows Against the Wind* (USA, 1992).

⁵³ George J. Aditjondro, unpublished communication via newsgroup indonesia-act, (6 July 1998).

⁵⁴ Sharp, *The Rule of the Sword*, p. 25.

⁵⁵ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, p. 178.

⁵⁶ Niles Kebadi Tebey, “Explaining the Papuans’ wish to secede from Indonesia,” part 1, *Jakarta Post* (1 Dec. 1999); Leslie Butt, “Measurements, Morality and the Politics of ‘Normal’ Infant Growth,” *Journal of Medical Humanities*, vol. 20, no. 2 (1999), pp. 81-100.

killing tens if not hundreds of thousands of West Papuans with virtual impunity. The benefits of development have been highly uneven, benefiting migrants from Indonesia above all. The driving turbine of the provincial economy is resource extraction – mining, oil and gas, forestry and fishing – which has created enclave economies in which revenues accrue almost entirely to the central government. Once-poor Irian Jaya became a net contributor to central government coffers in 1980.⁵⁷ It is now one of the three provinces that account for the bulk of Indonesia's export earnings. Former Governor Bas Suebu compared Indonesia to a village, but complained that "the people in the house called Irian Jaya feed those in the other houses but are themselves starving."⁵⁸

Early uprisings were described by Indonesia as "stomach politics," the result of insufficient development. A more recent elaboration is to argue that the problem lies with the distribution of resource income between the central and provincial government levels and can be solved by rejigging the numbers. Blaming nationalist outbreaks on lack of economic development has been a standard part of colonial discourse, both Dutch and Indonesian, and cannot alone explain persistent nationalism.⁵⁹ Certainly economic disparities fuel resentment that nationalism can draw on, but it is cultural currents within the Melanesian world that have played the crucial role in shaping the latest stage of urban West Papuan nationalism. As A.D. Ward has noted in the New Caledonian context, "what are often referred to as the 'economic' claim and the 'psychological' claim were mixed from the beginning of the resurgent Melanesian demand."⁶⁰

After 1960, West Papuan nationalists pointed the way for their counterparts in Papua New Guinea, who lived under a more gradualist Australian administration. It was the shock of seeing West Papua handed over to Indonesia, without any consultation by the colonial power, that did more than anything to stimulate a nationalist independence movement in PNG, led by the Pangu Pati (Papua New Guinea Union Party).⁶¹ In 1980, the new nation of Vanuatu gained its independence from an Anglo-French condominium amidst a French-sponsored armed rebellion put down by PNG troops acting in support of the Vanuaku (Our Land) Pati government. The violent struggle for Vanuatu, the Melanesian solidarity expressed by the two

⁵⁷ Manning and Rumbiak, *Economic Development*, pp. v, 3, 62.

⁵⁸ cited in Adam Schwarz, "Eastern Reproach", *Far Eastern Economic Review* (11 July 1991), p. 24.

⁵⁹ David Webster, "Colonial Rhetoric: The Dutch East Indies and Indonesian East Timor," *Brock Review*, vol. 7, no. 1/2 (1999), pp. 100-18; Ottis Simparief, "Tensions and Conflicts in West Papua," seminar paper presented in Amsterdam, 15 Dec. 1999.

⁶⁰ A.D. Ward, in R.J. May & Hank Nelson, eds., *Melanesia: Beyond Diversity* (Canberra: ANU Research School of Pacific Studies, 1982), p. 536.

⁶¹ Verrier, *Australia*, p. 369; R.J. May, "East of the Border: Irian Jaya and the Border in Papua New Guinea's Domestic and Foreign Politics," in May, ed., *Between Two Nations*, p. 90 and *passim*; Ryan, *The Hot Land*, pp. 8, 138, 195; Brookfield, *Colonialism*, pp. 117-18.

governments, and the “Melanesian socialism” doctrine of Vanuaku leader Father Walter Lini marked a turning point in the region. The three independent Melanesian states, linked by a common language (called Tok Pisin in PNG, Pijin in Solomon Islands and Bislama in Vanuatu) and varying degrees of Melanesianism, soon formed a “Melanesian Spearhead Group” along with New Caledonia’s *Front de Liberation Nationale Kanak et Socialiste* (FLNKS). Both the FLNKS and Vanuaku Pati stressed issues of land and Melanesian identity.⁶²

They also drew on, and elaborated, the concept of a “Melanesian way” originally advanced by PNG philosopher Bernard Narokobi.⁶³ Since one of the tenets of the Melanesian way was diversity, this could not be described as pan-Melanesianism: it recognized a number of Melanesian states and ultimately could be used to justify the creation of new states out of existing ones. However, a common identity was posited. Vanuatu, less vulnerable to Indonesian pressures than PNG, provided active diplomatic support for the OPM. Support has grown within the regional Pacific Islands Forum. Ideas of Melanesianism have also been favoured by influential exiles in PNG and the Netherlands.

Just as a Melanesian way continues to motivate regional support for West Papuan aspirations, the “rediscovery” of Melanesian culture has motivated West Papuan nationalists. Essentially local traditions have been mobilized and expressed in the language of a new cultural Melanesianism. The newly constructed cultural identity “Melanesian” has served to reinforce the political identity “West Papuan.” Locality and nation can be seen reinforcing each other, going (as Celia Applegate has noted for the German case) “beyond the particularities of regionality and the generalities of nationality to rest finally on what both region and nation have in common: the effort, for better or for worse, to maintain ‘community’ against the economic, political and cultural forces that would scatter it.”⁶⁴ In West Papua, the tradition most drawn upon is Koreroi, and the emblem, once again, the Morning Star flag: two symbols originally Biak in origin that now have Papua-wide appeal. Anthropologist Arnold Ap started a cultural organization (*Mambesak*, “bird of paradise” in the Biak language) devoted to singing West Papuan songs and preserving Papuan traditions from both Indonesianization and westernization. Hundreds more groups devoted to indigenous art and music sprang up, a new nationalist constituency. Ap was soon seen as a threat by the Indonesian army command and was arrested. In 1984 Ap and another

⁶² FLNKS declaration of independence, <http://cwis.org/fwdp/oceania/kanak.txt>; Jean-Marie Tjibaou and Phillippe Missotte, *Kanaké: The Melanesian Way* (Papeete: Les Éditions du Pacifique, 1978); William F.S. Miles, *Bridging Mental Boundaries in a Postcolonial Microcosm: Identity and Development in Vanuatu* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 1998), pp. 69-71, 188.

⁶³ Bernard Narokobi, *The Melanesian Way* (Suva: Institute of Pacific Studies, 1980), p. 8.

⁶⁴ Celia Applegate, *A Nation of Provincials: The German Idea of Heimat* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), p. 6.

Mambesak member were killed in custody.⁶⁵ The Melanesianist revival was clearly identified as a threat by the Indonesian military.

On 14 December 1988, West Papuan intellectual Thomas Waggai, a candidate to be appointed governor, led a ceremony declaring the independence of "West Melanesia," signalled by the singing of the 1961-authorized anthem *Hai Tanahku Papua*, "O Papua, My Homeland", (with Melanesia substituted for Papua). Waggai and thirty-six others were sentenced to lengthy jail terms, but the ceremony was repeated the next year by other West Papuans.⁶⁶ Waggai himself died in prison and riots accompanied his body's return home. Any notion that culture no longer informs today's West Papuan leadership can be dispelled by looking at the case of Theys Eluay, president of the new Papuan Congress, until his death in November 2001. Charged for his role in organizing a public ceremony where the Morning Star flag was raised on 1 December 1999, Eluay arrived for questioning at the head of a motorcade flying the Morning Star, bare-chested and wearing a ceremonial bird of paradise head-dress.⁶⁷

After Suharto

The fall of the Suharto regime brought West Papuan dissent into the open. Flag-raising and similar actions proliferated. Yet the end of Suharto's New Order did not mean the end of state terror: military action against flag-raising continued.⁶⁸ Still, the passing of dictatorship meant new types of politics were now thinkable. President B.J. Habibie's decision to allow a referendum on independence in East Timor sparked a demonstration effect. A delegation of 100 Papuan leaders demanded a referendum of their own when they met Habibie in 1998, voicing an aspiration long hidden beneath the surface.⁶⁹ In the year 2000, West Papuan nationalists convened the new Papuan Congress in Jayapura with broad representation at the local level across the territory. President Abdurrahman Wahid legalized the Morning Star flag and the name Papua and agreed to a dialogue with the Congress. Towards the end of the year, however, Wahid's policy gave way to one backed by Vice-president Megawati Sukarnoputri and the still-powerful armed forces. Harsh measures were taken to prevent another independence re-enactment

⁶⁵ (Anonymous) "Cultural Oppression," *Setiakawan*, no. 4/5 (1990), p. 33; Osborne, *Indonesia's Secret War*, p. 148-54; "In Death's Wake," *Far Eastern Economic Review* (7 June 1984), p. 38-39; "The Murder of Arnold Ap and Eduard Mofu," Appendix II to Budiardjo and Liem, *Obliteration of a People*, p. 125-36; "The Case of the Murder of Arnold C. Ap and Eddy Mofu," *Indonesia Reports* (20 April 1985).

⁶⁶ Amnesty International, "Continuing Human Rights Violations in Irian Jaya," (23 May 1991); "Symbol of Discontent," *Far Eastern Economic Review* (11 July 1991), pp. 24-25; Defert, *Nouvelle-Guinée Occidentale*, p. 370.

⁶⁷ Mark Worth, "Ancient myth inspires freedom fight," *Australian* (3 Jan. 2000).

⁶⁸ For one case, see Danilyn Rutherford, "Waiting for the End in Biak: Violence, Order and a Flag Raising," *Indonesia*, no. 67 (April 1999), p. 49.

⁶⁹ Octavianus Mote, "West Papua's National Awakening," in *Tok Blong Pasifik*, vol. 55, no. 3 (2001).

on 1 December 2000: the flag was banned and top leaders of the Congress were arrested in Jayapura and Wamena. This seemed likely to further radicalize Papuan nationalism by silencing moderate leaders and also threaten the democratization process in Indonesia by re-legitimizing the detention of political prisoners.

Although it spoke the language of unity, the Suharto regime, by stifling any type of dissent, may have actually stimulated separatist sentiment “from Sabang to Merauke.” Under Habibie and Wahid, Jakarta attempted to address troubles in outlying regions by extending offers of autonomy, including “special autonomy” for West Papua and the other separation-minded territory, Aceh. Despite centralizing tendencies inherited from her father, Megawati Sukarnoputri, as president, approved the provincial government’s proposed autonomy package. However, there is continued Indonesian resistance to the idea of revisiting the historical background to integration and to the idea of separate Papuan symbols such as the flag and anthem.⁷⁰ The autonomy proposals can be interpreted as expressing division within today’s Papuan elite on the question of autonomy versus independence, but the view that both camps are expressing West Papuan nationalism seems more useful. Both speak the language of attempting to satisfy the aspirations of the people through an embrace of Papuan symbols (a flag and anthem) and a re-examination of Papuan history, and both seek means to reconcile the preservation of local communities with all-Papuan forms of identity, differing only on whether their political programme accepts an Indonesian level of government. Rather than autonomists and sovereignists, they might better be understood as “two-flags” and “one-flag” streams of Papuan elite nationalism.

It seems clear that in the minds of most West Papuans the imagined community of the nation is already in place, that they are already a notional people, separate from Indonesia, and that no amount of reform on the part of the Indonesian state will alter this. It has often been pointed out that the word “federalism” is anathema to many Indonesians. However, the word “autonomy” is as much anathema to many non-elite Papuans (much as it was to East Timorese voters in 1999). “For them,” says one leading activist, “autonomy is another way of colonizing in the long run.”⁷¹ This is not meant to suggest that Papuan nationalism is now a fixed and eternal identity, merely that autonomy conferred as a gift of Jakarta will do little to resolve the root of the problem.

Conclusion: the West Papuan Notion-State

West Papuan nationalism is a product of colonial rule, first by the Netherlands and then by Indonesia. It developed within a colony with borders

⁷⁰ Special autonomy proposal by the team established by the governor of Papua Province, 2001; “Let Irian Jaya have anthem, flag: observers,” *Jakarta Post*, (20 Sept. 2001). A summary of the autonomy proposal appears in *Inside Indonesia*, no. 67 (July 2001), p. 21.

⁷¹ Protected source, Oct. 2000.

drawn by colonial happenstance. The West Papuan nationalist movement grew in the context of an international trial of strength between the colonial power and newly independent Indonesia, which successfully asserted a claim to fill up the old borders of the Dutch East Indies. West Papuan elite streams, both pro-Dutch and pro-Indonesian, coalesced in the climactic period of this struggle and in the first decade of Indonesian rule to become a full-fledged nationalist movement.

The nation was the creation of the nationalist movement, not of the state. It was united instead by bonds of mental belonging fostered in a common resistance to foreign rule and woven together in symbols that drew on a perceived tradition of resistance, symbolized above all in the Morning Star flag. As is the case for other ethnically diverse units, however, it may depend for its unity on the construction of the other. To be Papuan, under the current form of the identity, one must first not be Indonesian. The perception of racial dichotomy between Indonesian and Papuan is the legacy of colonial (Dutch, then Indonesian) rule, but has been adopted enthusiastically by many Papuans as a mobilizing focus. Certainly the Indonesian presence has made West Papuans far more conscious of themselves as Melanesian and far more receptive to trends within Melanesia.

Although the level of international support for West Papuan self-determination has varied from low to nil, international politics have still played a critical role in determining the course of Papuan identity formation. Had the history been different – had West Papua become part of Indonesia in 1949, or not at all – a different identity would likely have been formed. Thus West Papua provides a good case for the argument that nations are imagined and constructed in modern times. This in no way means that Papuan identity is not deeply held and meaningful, any more than the equally modern creation of Indonesian identity means that Indonesian nationalism is somehow less real than that of older countries. It does, however, go part of the way to explaining why recent history is so central to Papuan identity and why the “rectification” and “straightening” of history are so prominent in the Papuan nationalist programme (and perhaps why many Indonesian nationalists are so resistant to revisiting the historical record). Like other nationalisms, West Papuan nationalism has rested on the promise of a better future; like its counterparts, it also looks to the past to reinforce its claims to national existence; like them, it re-enacts its foundational moments in symbol and ceremony. Born in 1961 as a nation-of-intent, West Papuans are, in their own minds, “already sovereign.” A nation-state is not yet in the offing, but the decolonization of the mind begun in 1961 is complete: a West Papuan “notion-state” already exists. Papuan sovereignty may yet be expressed in a “fourth-world” fashion that does not require all the trappings of an independent state, but it can no longer be denied.

Vancouver, Canada, September 2001