

INTRODUCTION

In researching an essay on West Papua and human rights last year for an Indonesian language unit, I found myself becoming overwhelmed by the horror and injustice of the rape and torture being perpetrated by members of the Indonesian military against West Papuan women and children. These were graphically documented in a report by the Robert F. Kennedy Memorial Center for Human Rights and the Institute for Human Rights Study and Advocacy, which was released in May 1999. This is partly what has led to my research topic towards an Honours thesis, on militarised gender violence, and the intersection between gender power relations and nationalist movements, with a particular focus on West Papua.

My background is in Asia Pacific Studies, including Indonesian language. I make no apology for an obvious sympathy with the independence movement in West Papua, and for this reason I use the names West Papua and Papua, the names preferred by the nationalist movement. My interest in human rights, in particular women's rights advocacy, is what motivates my research, as well as the wish to further my understanding of the relationships between nationalist struggles and struggles for gender equality.

This thesis examines strategies of rule and strategies of resistance within West Papuan nationalist struggles. It looks at the techniques of rule, particularly those involving control through gender relations, and strategies of resistance, particularly those engaged in by women. It argues that without an understanding of the gender dimensions of both repression-resistance situations and nationalist movements, the new state which is won, will most likely replicate the power structures of the old regime.

The thesis uses documentary research, which includes a wide range of data approached from various angles. Firstly, the material covering West Papuan nationalist struggles is drawn from monographs, journal articles, conference papers, and newspaper reports from both the English and Indonesian language press. By subscribing to the electronic news service KABAR-IRIAN (Irian News), I receive almost daily reports which has enabled me to follow contemporary developments. The material on militarism, gender violence and resistance contains feminist theoretical approaches which I utilise in analysing the data on West Papua. This includes monographs, dissertations, conference papers, journal and newspaper articles, supplemented by a semi-structured interview with Beatrix Koibur, a West Papuan women's

independence leader who visited Australia in August-September 2000. The interview was conducted in Indonesian, and translated by the writer.

Several limitations of the study need to be appreciated. Firstly, I have not visited West Papua, and, thus, have not had the opportunity to get to know women and talk with them face to face. My initial plan was to draw upon correspondence with several West Papuan women activists. However, because of the politically sensitive nature of the issues, and the written rather than oral-based nature of the project, to have expected responses from women who don't know me, was evidently unrealistic. Finally, there is very little written by West Papuan women that I have managed to access. However I have been able to use material from similar situations, in particular Aceh, East Timor and The Philippines.

Introducing West Papua

The western half of the island of New Guinea (see map on p.60) was officially part of the Dutch East Indies, which in 1949 became the Republic of Indonesia. Netherlands New Guinea remained under Dutch administration until 1962. Until the 1950s however, the Dutch presence in West Papua had been minimal, consisting mainly of small missionary settlements which provided basic schooling and health care. In the highland areas, where the majority of the population live, the Dutch did not establish a presence until the 1950s (Castles, 2000:11).

The indigenous population of West Papua consists of 244 different tribal language groups (Pigay, 2000:371). Many of these live in isolated highland communities, whose links to other parts of West Papua can only be made by foot, or by small aircraft. In contrast, some coastal communities such as the Biak people have a long history of contact with outsiders. Through their tributary status with the Moluccan Sultanate of Tidore, Biak seafarers had regular contact with Europeans. By the 1930s, Dutch Protestant missionaries were well established in Biak, where most people had converted to Christianity. By the late 1940s, due to these missionary efforts, the great majority of young Biak men were literate (Rutherford, 1999:45), and growing numbers of girls were receiving a formal education (personal communication with Beatrix Koibur, 2000).

During the Dutch administration, Malay was used as a lingua franca (as well as Dutch amongst the elite), and Indonesian (based on Malay) has continued that function under Indonesian rule. The vast majority of West Papuans are Christian, although there is a small

number of indigenous Muslims in Fak Fak (King, 2000:2). As in East Timor, the church has provided one of the few avenues through which West Papuans have felt able to voice their grievances, where they can ‘feel recognised and respected as real human beings’ (van den Broek, 2000:11).

With a total population of approximately 2.3 million (Maniagasi, 2000:1), estimates of non-Papuans vary between half and one million people¹ (Elmslie, 2000:21). These include government-sponsored transmigrants from Java, traders from Sulawesi, government and military officials, as well as Indonesian and foreign managers and workers in large projects, particularly Freeport (McDonald, 2000:2).

With forest covering 85% of its land mass, West Papua is home to huge biodiversity (in the Lorentz National Park alone, there are 350 bird species, and 101 types of mammals), and enormous mineral wealth (Pigay, 2000:361-2). However, West Papuans themselves have derived few benefits from this natural wealth, and have become disempowered in their own land. Their sense of being disempowered and marginalised has created strong yearnings for recognition of identity, dignity, and self-rule amongst West Papuans.

The Thesis in Outline

Following is a brief outline of each chapter. Chapter 1 examines the literature, and comprises two sections. The first, is an overview of the literature on West Papuan struggle, including recent developments since Suharto’s downfall in May 1998. It looks at the resistance of millenarian movements, the armed opposition to Indonesian rule by the OPM (*Organisasi Papua Merdeka* or Free Papua Movement), and the current political movement to gain national independence. The second, examines the literature on militarised gender violence in West Papua, Aceh and The Philippines. It explores gendered approaches to nationalism and militarism, including the ways in which women are constructed in counter-insurgency and nationalist discourses.

¹ Establishing accurate population figures is problematic. According to Dr. Chris Ballard (personal communication 16.9.2000) from the ANU, the 1995 figures give 1,560,000 Christians (mainly Papuans), 405,000 Muslims and about 6000 Buddhists and Hindus (predominantly non-Papuans). According to Iwan Hermanto (personal communication 26.9.2000) from Statistics Indonesia, the preliminary figure from the 2000 population census is 2, 081,124, with no breakdown for Papuans and non-Papuans.

Chapter 2 examines the conflicting Dutch and Indonesian claims over West Papua, and the process of incorporation into Indonesia in the 1960s. Interpretation of this process is fundamental to West Papuans' claims to sovereignty, and constitutes the basis of the current political mobilisation. The chapter looks at the legacy of Indonesian rule, which has created a marginalised, impoverished indigenous population who resent the political and economic dominance by non-Papuans. Human rights violations by the Indonesian military, resource exploitation by non-Papuans, and loss of customary land, all combine to drive nationalist sentiment.

Chapter 3 explores the relationship between militarism and gender violence, and the ways in which women in Aceh, East Timor and The Philippines have resisted this violence. It examines theoretical positions on gender violence and militarism, including how these relate to nationalist struggles, - with a view to asking what relevance these have for the West Papua situation.

Chapter 4 focuses on Yosepha Alomang, the Amungme woman who has been an outspoken critic of the Freeport Gold and Copper mine in the Grasberg mountains, - by far the largest of all extractive operations in West Papua. It outlines the struggle against Freeport by the local people whose land was appropriated for the mine, and the way in which the area has become militarised as a result of resistance to the mine. It looks at the strategies employed by Yosepha Alomang in subverting repressive structures, and in publicising the struggle in which the Amungme and other peoples are engaged.

In late August 2000, I had the good fortune to meet three members of the West Papuan Presidium, the executive body of the recently formed West Papuan Council. One of these was Beatrix Koibur, who agreed to a long interview with me. This interview forms the basis of the final chapter, and conveys the views and hopes of one of the few women independence leaders in the current political structure.