

CHAPTER 5 : ‘MAMA PAPUA’-WOMEN’S LEADER AND INDEPENDENCE LEADER

We Papuan women also fight, so that there is a brighter future for our children (Koibur, 2000, Interview).

Introduction

This chapter is based upon an interview with Beatrix Koibur Rumbino conducted in late August 2000. The writer met her in Brisbane, where she and other members of the Presidium of the Papuan Council were on their way to New York, to the United Nations General Assembly meeting in September. Beatrix has wide experience as a women’s church leader, and is now one of two women on the *Presidium Dewan Papua*, the executive body of the West Papuan Council. She speaks for one important dimension of West Papuan women’s involvement in the struggle for independence.

The chapter discusses Beatrix’s early years during Dutch rule, her involvement in the Protestant church, and her politicisation within the nationalist movement. It examines her views on gender relations within the movement, and more broadly within society. Finally, the commentary on the interview, presents an analysis within the context of the theoretical perspectives outlined in chapter 3.

Formative Years

Beatrix Koibur Rumbino was born on July 10th 1939, on Miokbundi, a small island to the east of Biak, and her own background and outlook reflects the influence of Dutch Protestant missionaries. She began her schooling with three years at Primary school on her home island. She says it was difficult, for girls particularly, to receive an education. Beatrix told me: ‘I am very grateful to my parents who agreed to my education, and to the church who provided the opportunity for me to attend school’.

In 1950, at the age of eleven, having passed the grade 6 exam after completing only grade 5, Beatrix entered a Girls Domestic Science School as a boarder. The teachers there were Dutch missionaries, and she graduated in 1953. As one of the brightest girls to complete the three year course, she and her friend were chosen to go to a missionary teachers college in Serui. As the first woman graduate in 1956, Beatrix was qualified as a Primary teacher and Bible

Study leader. At that time, this was the highest level of education available to Papuan women.

In 1960, Beatrix married Koibur, a Protestant Minister, and when their first child was six weeks old, the family went to Holland for Koibur to further his theological studies. However, instead of staying the intended four years, their stay was cut short by the Dutch withdrawal from the territory. In response to a request by the Church Synod, they returned to West Papua in 1962, arriving there when it was under UN administration.

Women's Resistance

In May 1963, the UN Temporary Executive Authority came to the end of its period, and control passed to Indonesia. Beatrix says her involvement in the nationalist struggle began in 1963, but at that time she was not able to express her views candidly. However, she and other Papuan women often gathered together, and asked themselves: would the time come when they were no longer part of the Indonesian Republic? The reason they asked this question, was because Papuan women were not given many opportunities in society, for example to be leaders of women's organisations. It was only within the church that women had the confidence and courage to become leaders. Government positions were given to women from Java and other parts of Indonesia, despite the fact that many Papuan women were capable of filling them, particularly those who had graduated from the Domestic Science Girls Schools.

Many women joined the guerilla movement in the forest, the OPM. Also in 1980, several women raised the Morning Star flag in Jayapura and were subsequently jailed. As for women in the current movement, Beatrix says they are an integral part of the struggle.

Therefore, in the presence of God, women must work together with men in the movement. The Presidium emerged as a result of *reformasi*¹ and we are very thankful that one of the pillars or components of the Presidium is women.

In various parts of West Papua, women are beginning to speak out about military repression. In the past, if they spoke out they would be arrested. Since late 1998 with *reformasi*, Beatrix has been called 'Mama Papua'.

This is because in *reformasi* I emerged. I emerged and spoke strongly to the governor, the military commander, and all the parties in Papua. In Jayapura, also the central government in Jakarta. In

¹ Reformasi or reform, was the catch-cry of the student-led democracy movement which helped to bring down the Suharto regime in May 1998. It refers to the post-Suharto era.

front of the military commander, in front of the President, in front of the Vice-President, I have said: enough is enough! For 38 years we Papuan women have been crying. We have spilled our tears because our husbands have been killed, massacred and tortured. Many of our sons have been killed, massacred and tortured. Many of our daughters have been tortured, massacred and raped. And now we have shed enough tears from all the killings....Because of this, we will no longer sacrifice our children to Indonesia. Our children will be for our country, *Tanah Papua*.²

The Role of the Church

According to Beatrix, the churches give great strength and hope to West Papuans, because they have a duty to speak on their behalf. Church leaders play a pastoral role, and give comfort to those who are sad and in difficulty. In this way people's faith is strengthened. The churches can also tell the Indonesian government of Papuan people's freedom aspirations. So Papuans have great hope in the voice of the churches. As a result, Minister Herman Awom, as deputy head of the GKI³ Synod, has emerged and is on the Presidium. More than 99% of Papuans as Christians are pleased with this stance. They are thankful that as a moderator of the Presidium, he will be able to heed the aspirations for freedom of Papuans.

Beatrix Koibur is head of the Women's Christian Association of Indonesia in West Papua. In this position, since *reformasi* began in 1998, she has felt empowered to speak out. She has spoken to the head of this organisation, and told of her experiences as an older Papuan woman who has lived through the Dutch period, and through Indonesian rule. She has also felt empowered by her position as the wife of a Protestant Minister, who was secretary general of the GKI Synod for three terms, and the first Papuan to hold this position.

With regard to other women representatives and women's organisations, Beatrix says that there are three Papuan women in the provincial parliament, all of whom she trained in her organisation. She is pleased that they all speak out for Papuan independence. There is a GKI organisation called *Pusat Pendidikan dan Pelatihan Wanita* (Centre for Women's Education and Training), and an Women's NGO called *Kelompok Kerja Wanita* (Working Women's Group), both of which are concerned with women's empowerment. There are also women working in the Human Rights organisation ELSAM / IHRSTAD (Institute for Human Rights

² *Tanah Papua* or the Land of Papua, is the term Beatrix and others use when referring to her country.

³ *Gereja Kristen Injil*, or Evangelical Christian Church is the largest in West Papua, with 506,000 members (Balazo, 2000:24).

Study and Advocacy). Within the church, women leaders all want independence, but within government organisations, Beatrix says women leaders approach individual Papuan women, and invite them to join the movement. Now, through the Presidium, and through the Panel of the Papuan Council (consisting of 501 representatives, about 60 of whom are women), women are able to fight.

We want to fight so that we, like women in other countries, have self-esteem as Papuan women, who have also been created by God. We want to say that as Papuan women, we wish to live in peace...We want to live in peace, with love, in order to develop our country, *Tanah Papua*. And that is our hope.

In July 1998, following the Biak massacres, FORERI (Forum for the Reconciliation of Irian Jaya Society) was formed by the three main churches, with the aim of creating a 'national dialogue' to pursue political solutions for West Papua. From FORERI, came the Team 100, which met President Habibie in February 1999 to demand independence. Beatrix was the only woman on the team. She had been horrified by what she had witnessed whilst leading a church team to care for women and children survivors of the massacres. In villages all over Biak, there were many naked mutilated bodies which they wrapped, prayed over and buried. This experience further empowered her to speak out.

Implications of Satgas Papua

According to Beatrix, the emergence of the *Satgas Papua* (Papuan Taskforce) in early 1999, was in response to a need. The leadership of the movement, particularly Theys Eluay, decided that there should be such groups called *Satgas Papua*, to guarantee security. These groups, who are not armed, initially grew out of *Lembaga Adat* (Tribal Councils), in order to protect the safety of Papuans. Later on, *Satgas Papua* was seen to be important in ensuring security at the *Mubes* (Large Consultation) in February 2000, at which the Presidium was formed. Whilst *Satgas Papua* were accepted at the May-June Congress, it does not form a component of the Presidium. Beatrix believes there are positive aspects to the formation of *Satgas Papua*. She sees it as a chance for young unemployed men and women to receive training, and to provide security for Papuans.

Peter King (2000) writes that young men and women have joined *Satgas Papua* in their thousands. What is of concern to many observers, is that much of the funding for *Satgas Papua*, comes from Yorris Raweyai. A Chinese Papuan from Serui, Yorris has played

prominent roles in Jakarta politics as head of the *Pemuda Pancasila* (Golkar youth organisation involved in criminal activities), and a Suharto crony. Yorris is a close associate of Theys Eluay, and was eventually elevated to the position of Presidium member, though this was controversial (p.5-6). Apart from the source of funding for *Satgas Papua*, it is also of concern that the TNI (Indonesian Armed Forces) are involved in their training. The recent establishment of the TNI backed *Merah Putih* militia, which is explicitly anti-independence, suggests that elements within the TNI are fomenting horizontal conflict within West Papua by supporting both militias (p.12).

Future Plans, Aspirations and Strategies

Regarding the planned trip to the UN General Assembly in September, Beatrix stated:

My primary hope is that the UN will want to give some hope to Papuan people. I hope that God will open his heart and eyes, and also the UN representatives. Because as a result of the event which took place in 1969, the Act of Free Choice, - many Papuans were killed. We hope that the UN will take responsibility for this matter; that they will be courageous enough to say at the General Assembly that they were wrong. They made a mistake in 1969 in *Tanah Papua*. Because of that, - come Holland, come America, come Indonesia, we must all sit down together and talk about the Papuan people. That is my hope.

In November 2000, Beatrix is planning to organise the first Papuan Women's Congress in Jayapura. The aim of the congress will firstly be to discuss what women need to do to achieve independence. Once independent, according to Beatrix, it is clear what the role of women in development will be. Starting within the family, women will give birth to a new generation of sons and daughters. Also in society, it is hoped that women will become leaders of organisations and plan programs. But first and foremost, Papuan women must work out how to regain the sovereignty and independence obtained in 1961. According to Beatrix: 'I always say, we Papuan women also fight, so that there is a brighter future for our children'.

Gender Relations

Within the nationalist movement, Beatrix believes the issue of gender relations must be recognised, because men and women were created equal by God. Women in fact do more than men do. Once married, women are wives and mothers within the family. They also have roles in society, such as teachers, nursing sisters and doctors. But they should not forget that

their first duty is to their family. Therefore, men also must accept their wives as equal partners in life, and support them in their pursuit of new opportunities. It is evident that Papuan women want to advance. They must make use of the talents God gave them, and not be shy. For skilled and talented Papuan women are greatly needed, particularly in rural areas. Beatrix believes that village women are far more likely to listen to Papuan women leaders than to Javanese women who go to work in rural areas. Because of this, Papuan women leaders must be encouraged, and their husbands must support them.

In response to the question of women's input at the Congress in May-June 2000, Beatrix says that women delegates did not have a particular focus. What was discussed at the Congress came from materials that had been prepared by the Presidium. The women supported this prepared material, and contributed to the discussion, giving their thoughts. Finally, the resolutions were decided upon in the sessions and commissions. The four commissions were: future political strategies, consolidating the Presidium components, the straightening out of history (that is, dealing with the way Papuan's history went wrong in the 1960s), and the basic rights of the Papuan people. About the 1969 'Act of Free Choice', Beatrix stated the following:

With regard to my experiences and my thoughts about that process, I want to say I feel sad. I feel sad because the terms of the New York Agreement were not carried out. Papuans were forced at gunpoint to do what the Indonesians wanted. It should have been one person, one voice, but it wasn't. Only a small number of representatives were chosen, and then forced to choose integration with Indonesia. And until now that is what makes Papuans resentful. Holland, the UN, America, - their actions towards Papuans were not humane. Our self - respect, our identity as Papuans were disregarded.

Beatrix hopes that in the future, once Independence has been achieved, more opportunities will be made available to Papuan women in the fields of education, health, agriculture, and the economy, so that women are involved in many areas of development.

If we have the chance to achieve true independence, we Papuan women must stand up in order to accomplish development in many areas. Because women from other places cannot speak for me and say what I want. I must speak for myself.

Commentary on the Interview

The resentment felt towards non-Papuans leads Beatrix to be unequivocal about the right as West Papuan women, to be able to speak for themselves. It is clear that Beatrix's Christian

faith forms the basis of her belief in human dignity and gender equality. In her discussion of the ways in which Pacific women give voice to their aspirations, Martha Macintyre (2000:155) notes that these owe much to Christian missionary influence. She writes :

women's appeals to 'women's rights as human rights', their attention to the nurturant roles of women, and to the centrality of motherhood in defining the feminine, all stress equality in the sight of God and draw on the Christian ideals of liberty and of personal autonomy.

West Papuan women are represented amongst the Protestant clergy, and the other woman on the Presidium, Ketty Yabansabra, is a minister. Beatrix sees the churches as playing a central role in the nationalist movement.

With regard to gender power relations within the movement, Beatrix's comments indicate that West Papuan women are playing a supportive role, whilst the important political decisions are being made by the male majority leadership. As has been discussed in earlier chapters, this has been the usual pattern in nationalist movements, and is likely to result in women being marginalised in any future independent state. As Siapno says so succinctly:

Most independence movements once in power tend to reproduce the kinds of mechanisms of paternalism, fear of government, and normalisation of abuse of authority exercised by former colonialists, including hierarchical and patriarchal practices which maintain, justify, and legitimise existing structures of domination (2000:2).

Whilst it has been argued in chapter three that the militarisation of a nationalist movement tends to privilege masculinity to the detriment of women, Beatrix's support for the *Satgas Papua*, or Papuan Taskforce implies that she does not agree with this position. She pointed out that these groups were not armed, but suggested that they may need to become so in the future.

Conclusion

Beatrix's overall view is that women are an integral part of the struggle for independence, and must be given every opportunity to contribute to the future development of *Tanah Papua*. She believes that educated West Papuan women have a vital role to play in rural community development and education, and that West Papuan men have a responsibility to support them in their endeavours. Finally, she believes that West Papuan women and men must work together for a brighter future for their children and grand-children.

