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**West Papua and Indonesia in the 21st Century--
Resilient Minnow? Implacable Minotaur?**

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Papua's banned
Morning Star flag

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"Unity in Diversity"¹
[Indonesia's coat of arms]

¹ "*Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*" derives from a Javanese phrase, "(Although) in Pieces, yet One."

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Since 1999 democratically elected presidents and parliaments in Indonesia have failed to seriously tackle endemic corruption, reform the armed forces, or extend justice to the victims of Suharto-era—or post-Suharto--repression. Following the failure of special autonomy in Papua since 2001, discussed below, and the Aceh peace settlement of 2005 the indigenous people of West Papua stand out as prime victims of all three of these momentous failures of *reformasi*. Their cultural and political resilience is now under grave threat from the current expansion of large scale multinational mining and gas production, legal and illegal logging and the booming oil palm plantation sector; unchecked arrival of settlers from Java, Sumatra and Eastern Indonesia; continuing buildup of military and other repressive presences; the divide and rule practices and hyper-corruption synonymous with special autonomy;² the disruption and repression of university and church life, and the new accommodation between the Indonesian government and military and the Australian government expressed in the Lombok Treaty of November 2006—which may, however, be as transient as the Keating government's Agreement on Maintaining Security with Suharto's Indonesia, which was torn up in Jakarta in September 1999 as an Australian-led and UN-backed InterFET force prepared to land in Dili, East Timor.

The paper will explore the sources of Papuan resilience in traditional life-ways, Dutch encouragement of self-determination, a universally shared sense of historical injustice about the years between 1962 and 1969 (when the UN-supervised “Act of Free Choice” gave them a theoretical chance to exercise a right of self-determination) and subsequently. There is powerful resistance implicit in church and human rights NGO protest activity as well as explicit in both armed and non-violent political movements for independence. But I will argue that multi-dimensional repression and discrimination (economic, military, police, judicial and ethnic), which has driven successive generations of cultural, civic and political leaders in Papua to exile, jail or death, together with “demographic inundation” by new Indonesian settlers (now numbering probably half of Papua's 2.7 million people), jeopardizes Papuan survival, and that effective resistance to the pressures of the Indonesian occupation has become crucial to that survival.

A key question is whether the ostensibly still reforming regimes in Jakarta can be induced or pressured by Papuan, domestic Indonesian and/or international forces into seriously taking up the issue of Papuan survival, or whether some other route of escape from Jakarta's pressure is possible for the Papuans.

Resilient Minnow?

² Peter King, ‘*Korupsi dan Disintegrasi in Indonesia since Suharto*’, *Policy and Society*, Vol. 25, No. 4, December 2006

We may summarise the sources of Papuan resilience in a Papuan perspective as follows:

1) Papuan identity

There was of course no Papuan identity as such, just as there was indeed no Indonesian identity, before the late colonial period. But after Papua (West New Guinea) was withheld from the transfer of colonial authority to an independent Indonesia in 1949 the Dutch drive to prepare the Papuans for independence in the 1950s crystallized not only a distinct local identity among the Papuans but also a sense of solidarity with the other Melanesians of the South Pacific, especially the inhabitants of the Australian territory of Papua and New Guinea whose political development at the eastern end of New Guinea Island lagged considerably behind that of “West Melanesia”, as one faction of the independence movement would later designate the Land of Papua.

It was this emerging Papuan/Melanesian identity which alarmed the first President Sukarno in the late 1950s and which helped crystallize the Trikora—his three commands to “liberate” West Irian, as he called it, and legitimate Indonesia’s sovereign claim at the point of a gun. This indeed did happen under American pressure and via a UN interim administration (1962-3) and the UN-supervised “Act Free of Choice”, as the Papuans call it, and for Jakarta the fate of the Papuans was finally sealed.

However it seems that despite a 46-year occupation, including nine years of *reformasi* and six years of special autonomy, their dictated Indonesian identity has still not “taken” with the Papuans who, by and large, as I have said elsewhere—so far without contradiction—do not regard themselves as Indonesians and are not regarded as such by other Indonesians.³

2) Papua’s Struggle

The right of self determination in a Papuan perspective is not abstract—it is validated by a decade or so of preparation under the Dutch, a 34 year guerilla-led struggle for independence under authoritarian Indonesian occupation and a ten year non-violent struggle under the ostensibly democratic dispensation of *reformasi*.

This struggle has its *memoria passionis*—its bitter memories of loss, injustice, displacement and death in the struggle--which already involved pitched battles following insurrection in the mid 1960s and again most bloodily in the Papuan central highlands during *tuju tuju*—the year 1977. One hundred thousand were dead before *reformasi* by the standard narrative, and it is inconceivable that there will never be a proper accounting of the sacrifice. Hence the demand in negotiations with Jakarta over special autonomy in early 2001 for a ‘Commission for the Rectification of Papuan History’ under the control of the government of Papua. The special autonomy

³ For a litany of racist abuse of Papuans by Indonesian police see ‘Violence and Political Impasse in Papua, Part V: The Abepura Case’, *Human Rights Watch*, Vol. 13, No. 2 (C), July 2001

law of October 2001 however only proposes a ‘Commission for Truth and Reconciliation’ to be set up by the central government. As of 2007 it has not been.⁴

Nowadays the historical issue is barely acknowledged in Jakarta, which has also put the mass political killings of 1965-6 under Suharto in a too-hard basket. And the Papuan martyrs of the whole period also have found no rehabilitation through justice—most strikingly the leader of the Papuan cultural revival of the 1980s, Arnold Ap: anthropologist, museum curator, musician—and secret minister in an underground government set up by a main faction of the OPM, the guerilla-led Free Papua Movement.⁵

3) Unity

Faced, as many of them see it, with a threat of cultural and political extinction under Indonesian occupation, Papuans are always keen to celebrate their supposed unity in the struggle against that threat. The reality has been considerable tension and disarray in both military resistance since 1963, the date of Indonesian occupation, and political resistance since *reformasi* in 1998. Disunity is at once regional (coastal vs highlander), tribal (there are 250 altogether) and strategic—an argument between the OPM partisans of a guerilla led national resistance and (since 1998) the Papua Council Presidium leadership, which favours a non-violent struggle for independence.⁶

The main division today among Papuans is between the OPM leaders, who accepted the turn to non-violent struggle for a few years after 2000 but have now repudiated it by and large, and other diehards and true believers in independence (highlanders, students and exiles), and the new political leadership being offered by Agus Alua, chairman of the all-Papuan “upper house” of the local parliament of Papua province, the MRP (*Majelis Rakyat Papua*), belatedly set up under the special autonomy law in 2005. Agus (who remains secretary-general of the Papua Council Presidium) has transformed the straightforward struggle for independence into a campaign around the failed promises of special autonomy, including the splitting of Papua province in two without consultation of the MRP. There is a clear implication that these failures justify reopening the case for self-determination or at least a dialogue with Jakarta in which Papua’s claims and grievances would be directly addressed.⁷

4) International Sympathy and Solidarity

⁴ Peter King, *West Papua and Indonesia since Suharto: Independence, Autonomy or Chaos?* University of New South Wales Press, Sydney, 2004, Chapter 2

⁵ Ap was shot after an alleged escape attempt from a Jayapura jail in April 1984. *ibid*, p 46

⁶ Actually the Second Papua People’s Congress of May/June 2000, which elected the current Papua Council Presidium, declared “non-integration” rather than independence. *ibid*, p 89

⁷ Agus A. Alua, Chairman of MRP, *The Schema of Implementation of the Special Autonomy Law in West Papua, Indonesia*, Presentation to Members of Parliament in Canberra and Indonesian Solidarity/West Papua Project Conference, Sydney, August 6-10, 2007

The key components and sustainers of international solidarity for the Papuan cause are the activist exiles in Australia, Papua New Guinea, Vanuatu, the US, UK, Holland and Sweden; sympathetic politicians especially in the US, UK, Australia, Vanuatu and New Zealand; solidarity and support groups-- national, local and also regional in the South Pacific (for instance, the Pacific Concerns Resource Center in Suva, Fiji), North America and Western Europe; the major human rights group actors (Human Rights Watch, Tapol, the RF Kennedy Center); the UN Human Rights Committee and the Secretary General's Special Representatives. The degree and depth of international support and "pre-mobilisation" for Papua is often belittled but in my view is adequate for the kind of showdown with Indonesia experienced globally in September 1999 when the people of East Timor were threatened with having their referendum vote for independence nullified by TNI (the Indonesian armed forces).

As in East Timor Australia is probably key to successful international intervention in Papua: there is little prospect of even a Labor government showing real solidarity with the Papuans except under duress from local and international civil society.

Implacable Minotaur?

We may summarise Indonesia's claims to the loyalty of all subjects and, hence, supposed sources of national strength as follows:

1) Democracy

The prime symbol of Indonesian nationalism—the emblem of the neo-Sukarnoist PDI (P), the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle, still led by Sukarno's daughter Megawati—is, indeed, a bull. According to Wikipedia's account of the "Garuda Pancasila" national coat of arms:

In the upper left quarter, on a red background, is the head of the Javanese wild **bull**, the *banteng*. This represents the fourth principle of [the five principles of the official national philosophy] *Pancasila*, **democracy** by deliberation and consensus [*musjawarah*] among representatives.⁸

Unfortunately for the Papuans their experience of *musjawarah* in the 1969 Act of Free Choice was of an angry bull assembling a consensus at gunpoint.⁹ And many other Indonesians have discovered what Papuans and Acehnese know best—that the impact of democracy drops off sharply outside the magic circle of nationalist and corrupt party politicians, legal and administrative officials and military generals who, together with the wielders of conglomerate power, still rule the Garuda bird's roost pretty much unchecked despite *reformasi*.

In Papua the election of governors, regents and district heads under special autonomy has produced Papuanisation of the upper levels of the bureaucracy but has had close to no effect in producing popular empowerment and welfare. Up to now

⁸ 'Coat of arms of **Indonesia**', *Wikipedia*, July 2007

⁹ John Saltford, *The United Nations and the Indonesian Takeover of West Papua, 1962–1969: The Anatomy of Betrayal*, Routledge Curzon, London, 2002.

democracy has been comprehensively trumped by new and old corruption and residual and reviving militarism throughout Indonesia, but above all in Papua.

2) Multiculturalism and Religious Tolerance

Pancasila lays out two other bases on which Papuans could be asked to bow down before the *banteng*. To quote Wikipedia again:

The black shield bearing the golden star at center corresponds to the first Pancasila principle, belief in one God. The color black is commonly thought of as representative of **Muhammad**, the prophet of **Islam**, the most common religion in **Indonesia**. Upon this shield at center is a golden, five-pointed star. This is a **symbol** common not only among **Indonesia's** sanctioned faiths of Islam, **Christianity**, **Hinduism** and **Buddhism**, but of the secular ideology of **socialism** as well.

This tenet of Pancasila has always been controversial, for it suggests compulsory religious belief as well as compulsory **monotheism**. Supporters of Sukarno's legacy, however, believe that this tenet was meant to unify **Indonesia's** population, who have diverse faiths and beliefs.

Monotheism is no problem for the overwhelmingly, sometimes almost alarmingly, Christian Papuans--who, however, are mainly interested in a God who guarantees their Exodus from the unitary state of NKRI-- *Negara Kesatuan Republik Indonesia*. But, even though there is a small but long-established Papuan Islamic community in the coastal Western Bird's Head region, Islam is a worry for the Papuans because Islamic as well as Red and White (patriotic Indonesian) militias have been a part of the steady surge of Indonesianisation since Jakarta's policy took a nationalist and "security" turn in 2000 following the Second Papua Congress.¹⁰

Likewise the coat of arms claim about "unity in diversity" seems shallow in a Papuan perspective:

At the upper right quarter [of the shield, says Wikipedia], on a white background, is the **banyan** tree (Indonesian, *beringin*). This **symbol** corresponds to the third Pancasila principle, the unity of **Indonesia**. The banyan is known for having expansive above-ground roots and branches. The Republic of **Indonesia**, as an ideal conceived by Sukarno and the Nationalists, is one country out of many far-flung cultural roots.

The trouble for Papuans is that their roots have often only been able to flourish underground (in the guerilla movement), and in any case have been a fling too far for

¹⁰ Alua, *The Schema of Implementation of the Special Autonomy Law*, p 6.

But Muridan Widjojo points out that Papuan Muslims have resisted efforts to designate the new (2004) province of West Irian Jaya (currently being renamed West Papua, capital Manokwari, as 'the Land of the Bible'. "Papuans are not all Christians and Melanesians...many Muslim Papuans trace their ancestry to the Moluccas, a group of islands not always acknowledged by Papuans as Melanesian", he comments. See 'Papuan-ness, victim, and politics in Papua', *Identity Research* (Blog), May 2007

some of Indonesia's leaders. One founding father of the nation (Vice President Mohammed Hatta)--and an engaging group of present-day liberal commentators—have even argued that Papuans should be left alone to go their own Pacific way.¹¹

3) Wellbeing : Humanity and Social Justice

In the bottom right quarter, on a red background, is a chain made up of square and round links. This chain represents successive human generations, with the round links representing women and the square links representing men. The chain corresponds to the second principle of the Pancasila, of belief in a commonly bound humanity.

In the lower left quarter, on a white background, are a gold-and-white paddy and cotton. These represent the fifth Pancasila principle of social justice. The [rice](#) and [cotton](#) represent sustenance and livelihood. (*Wikipedia*)

It is perhaps this claim to Indonesian “soft power” which rings most hollow in Papuan ears.

We may sum up Papuans' perceptions by referring to the frank advice given them by the notorious “intelligence general”, Ali Murtopo, during the Act Free of Choice (as the Papuans like to call it) exercise in 1969:

Indonesia, as the strongest military power in Southeast Asia, is able to strike fear into any country. [We are] not interested in ... Papuans but in West Irian as a territory.¹²

This was a territory, we might add, whose most lucrative resource, the Freeport gold and copper mine, was already in the gift of an American multinational and the magic circle of Suharto corporate cronies and foundations.

Neglect of the great mass of Papuans—their health, education and economic opportunity--has been merely underlined by the government record under special autonomy whereby large new resource revenues--from taxation of the Freeport mining operation preeminently--have flowed into Papua only to be swallowed up by indigenous Papuan official corruption, illegal military exactions (for operations against the Papuan freedom fighters and their supporters!) and kickbacks to Jakarta.¹³

¹¹ King, *West Papua and Indonesia since Suharto*, Chapter 3

¹² Cited in *ibid*, p 27

¹³ See John Wing with Peter King, *Genocide in West Papua? The role of the Indonesian state apparatus and a current needs assessment of the Papuan people*, Report prepared for the West Papua Project at the Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies, University of Sydney, and ELSHAM Jayapura, August 2005. See also Sofyan Yoman et al [seven Papuan church leaders], *West Papuan Churches' deepest*

It is time, therefore, to take note of hard power available to Jakarta in dealing with the strongest surviving redoubt of “separatism” in the republic.

4) Unity at Gunpoint if Necessary

Military impunity, police impunity and also “intel” impunity--a speciality of Kopassus, the army special forces, but also of the unreformed BIN (*Badan Intelijen Nasional*--the State Intelligence Agency)--remains a means of last but also often first resort for controlling Papuan dissidence and other unruly democracy-minded elements of Indonesian civil society. The intel operations which were central to the “successful” conduct of the Act of Free Choice in 1969 and the forced incorporation of East Timor in the republic during 1975-76 were conducted by the notorious Opsus (*Operasi Khusus*—special operations) command led by General Ali Murtopo and seconded in sophisticated fashion by his civilian front organization, the “highly regarded” Jakarta think tank, CSIS (Center for Strategic and International Studies).¹⁴ CSIS remains at the forefront of efforts to bring the virtues of Indonesian “good governance” to the salvation of Papua today, as 28 years ago, albeit now by other means.¹⁵

Jusuf Wanandi (Liem Bian Kie), co-founder (in 1971) of CSIS, chairman of the board of the *Jakarta Post*, brother of the “well-respected” Sino-Indonesian tycoon Sofyan Wanandi (who experienced real danger in the military-inspired anti-Chinese pogroms which preceded and accompanied the fall of Suharto), is an ostensible friend of Papua despite his prominent role as intellectual architect of efforts under the Suharto dictatorship to make its (and East Timor’s) forced integration internationally respectable as well as domestically durable.¹⁶

concern and appeal to the international community: Special Report, Jayapura, June 2007

¹⁴ **On the role of Ali Murtopo and his successor at Opsus, General Benny Murdani, who later rose to be TNI chief, as well as Jusuf Wanandi’s** (movie) in the glory days of CSIS, see Benedict R. O’G. Anderson, ‘[Scholarship on Indonesia and Raison d’Etat: Personal Experience](#)’, *Indonesia*, Vol 62, October 1996, pp 9-15

¹⁵ However an Australian academic (Richard Chauvel) invited to address a CSIS forum on good governance in Wamena, capital of Papua’s Puncak Jaya regency, last July was forbidden to speak by police intervention, despite an invitation from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the local *bupati* (regency chief). See Peter King, ‘Paths to Peace, Justice and Prosperity: West Papua 2007’, Report on [a conference organised by the West Papua Project of CPACS \(the Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies\) in coordination with Indonesian Solidarity](#), 9-10 August 2007, International House, Sydney University, in *PeaceWrites*, CPACS Newsletter No 2, September 2007, p 10.

¹⁶ See Jusuf Wanandi, ‘Papua Problem and the International Community’, *Jakarta Post*, 3 September 3, 2005.

In 2005 he called for renewed attention to Papua's problems by a neglectful and inattentive Jakarta in the wake of the Aceh peace settlement. However 36 years on he still found nothing amiss with the Act of Free Choice:

The people of Papua opted to stay within Indonesia. This was confirmed by representatives in the representative assemblies across Papua in accordance with the August 1962 agreement between Indonesia and the Netherlands. The Report of the UN Special Representative to the UN General Assembly in 1969 on the implementation of the Act of Free Choice was accepted by the majority of the UN General Assembly (Nov. 19, 1969, Resolution 2504). [Apart from the preposterous idea that the "people" of Papua had a say in 1969—those who tried to speak out were promptly beaten up, arrested and/or "disappeared"—in fact the General Assembly merely "noted" the Special Representative's report.]

Moreover, Wanandi says:

The problem of Papua is not the same as that of Aceh. There has never been a major armed struggle for independence in Papua as was the case in Aceh. There is also no critical mass in Papua as the populace lives in small tribes spread over such a large region with many valleys and mountain. [As I have noted there were catastrophic (for the Papuans) major armed struggles in the sixties and seventies, and a major uprising in Jayapura in 1984. And a (very critical) "critical mass" in Papua has been repeatedly evident since 1998—for instance when 20,000 Papuans attended the Second Papua Congress in May/June 2000, and when the Papuan Tribal Council's march of 10,000 people to the parliament in Jayapura on 12 August 2005 called for "handing back" special autonomy to Jakarta.¹⁷]

Finally, Wanandi:

However, NGOs, the media and some politicians, instigated by some vested interest or ideologically driven groups could greatly distort the picture. It is true that the government needs to give greater attention to the development and welfare of the Papuan people. This is the essence of the problem. Secession is not the answer.

The idea that there may not be some weighty Indonesian—and international-- vested and ideological interests at play on behalf of the status quo in Papua must be particularly laughable and galling to Papuans—not least the ideological and vested interests of the TNI in Papua as a free fire, extortion and exploitation zone after they (at least partly) "lost" Aceh in 2005. The zeal behind these interests may be gauged from the recent remarks of a certain Colonel Burhanuddin Siagian, twice indicted for crimes against humanity in East Timor but never tried, and now appointed as military chief of Jayapura region:

¹⁷ West Papua Advocacy Team, *The West Papua Report*, Robert F. Kennedy Memorial Center for Human Rights, Washington, August 2005, p 1

"What is absolutely certain is that anyone who tends towards separatism will be crushed by the TNI," he told the *Cenderawasih Pos* newspaper on July 7.

"In the interests of the Republic of Indonesia, we are not afraid of human rights. We are quite prepared to imprison anyone, or dismiss them from their posts, whatever is in the interest of Indonesia."

A few days later, Colonel Siagian told the same newspaper: "If I meet anyone who has enjoyed the facilities that belong to the state, but who still betrays the nation, I will honestly destroy him."¹⁸

These remarks, and Siagian's militia-building activities in Jayapura, have passed without contradiction or comment by his military superiors, the (civilian) Minister of Defence, the Attorney General or the President of the Republic. (Or, we might add, sadly, the elected governor of Papua, Bas Suebu.) There is little evidence from his recent statements that the President demurs. In his annual address to Parliament last Independence Day (August 17th) he

...warned that his Government will not tolerate interference from those who want to slow down the development of Papua. Mr Yudhoyono said the state would be strict and there would be no place for anyone pushing separatism that threatens the sovereignty and unity of the state. He said Indonesia was also very serious about stamping out terrorism and it was Indonesia's duty along with the global community to create a safe and peaceful world.¹⁹

Except in Papua, it seems.

Conclusion

So the die seems to be cast. The Papuan minnow as presently threatened and the Indonesian minotaur as presently configured each have the capacity to permanently jeopardize the resilience of the Other—perhaps with a little help in the case of the minotaur's resilience from the militarily dominant Australian dingo (wild native dog), whose role in East Timor's liberation was not of the government's choosing but imposed by an aroused Australian people.

¹⁸ Fabio Scarpello 'Activists attack moves to crush Papua separatism', *South China Morning Post*, 30 July 2007

¹⁹ 'Indonesian President takes hard line on Papua', *ABC News* (Australia), 17 August 2007. Should we sympathise with the ex Lieutenant General President? He himself served in East Timor and has apparently been accused of war crimes there, and is married to the daughter of the most notorious army executioner in the "anti-communist" (read: anti-Left) massacres of 1965-66, Colonel, later General, Sarwo Edhie Wibowo, who also played a major role in crushing Papuan resistance during the Act of Free Choice.

There is another path in Papua rather than the raw exercise of military and intel power by one side and permanent non-cooperative defiance on the other. It is of course the path of genuine reform and genuine dialogue along which the resilience of both sides might be safeguarded. This will certainly require a more active role for international governmental players and civil society than has so far been forthcoming. But the Aceh settlement—and the East Timor example—are ready to hand. Happily some Indonesians see a looser, less coercive and possibly smaller Indonesia as essential to a democratic future for the republic. Radical reform, together with a willingness for dialogue in Papua, would have a salutary impact on the stalled plans of *reformasi* for effectively tackling both *korupsi* and *militarisasi* in the country at large.