



The Marginal Role of West New Guinea in the Unitary Indonesian Project: a Historical Perspective

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Abstract:

In this paper, the role of West New Guinea within the constitution and consolidation of the Indonesian Republic will be investigated. The outlying position of this Papuan province has not helped in the process to incorporate the region into the Indonesian national project. However, there are other factors that have radicalised its marginality. These include its late inclusion, ethnic and religious issues as well as the incredible wealth of its natural resources, which has led to West New Guinea being seen merely as an object of international desire. This wealth, combined with the highly strategic geographical position of the island, has meant that it was considered a key asset by the Indonesian government. At the same time, the Papuan people have been perceived as bearing guilt for their collaboration with the former colonial power and obstructing national economic interests. The purpose of this article is, therefore, to widen the historical analysis to understand the origins of this exclusion and examine more in depth the centre-periphery relationship Jakarta-Papua.

Keywords: Exclusion, Liminality, Dutch Colonialism, Natural Curse, Centre-periphery.

THE MARGINAL ROLE OF WEST NEW GUINEA IN THE UNITARY INDONESIAN PROJECT: A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Roberto Costa

Abstract

In questo articolo viene analizzata la posizione della Nuova Guinea Occidentale nell'ambito della costituzione e del consolidamento della Repubblica Indonesiana.

La posizione geograficamente periferica della provincia di Papua nell'arcipelago indonesiano non ha certamente facilitato il processo di incorporazione della regione nel progetto nazionale indonesiano. Tuttavia, vi sono altri elementi che hanno accresciuto la sua marginalità. Questi includono la sua tardiva inclusione nello stato indonesiano, fattori etnici, culturali e religiosi, e soprattutto l'abbondanza di materie prime che ha attratto sin dalla loro scoperta numerose mire internazionali. Tale ricchezza, unitamente alla posizione altamente strategica di questo territorio, ha costituito un asset fondamentale per il governo indonesiano. La popolazione locale, invece, è stata ritenuta colpevole di collaborazionismo con il governo coloniale olandese e di agire contro gli interessi economici nazionali.

Il proposito di questo articolo è quindi quello di allargare storicamente l'analisi per rintracciare le cause di questa marginalizzazione e per approfondire la relazione centro-periferia tra Jakarta e la provincia di Papua. Osservazioni finali concludono l'articolo.

Introduction

West New Guinea¹ has been incorporated into the Indonesian national project since independence. In this respect, West Papua has always been perceived by Indonesian nationalists as an integral part of a whole, the last outpost of the Indonesian State in the east. It has been seen as a strategic territory that delimits the boundaries between the East and the Oceanic area, not only geographically, but also culturally, mostly in relation to the nation-building of the post-colony.

Two months before the declaration of the *Republik Indonesia Serikat*², on December 27, 1949, the Netherlands and the embryonic leadership of the Indonesian Republic headed by Soekarno joined the “The Hague Round Table Agreement” (November 2, 1949), that followed another agreement, the «Dutch-dominated» (see: *Sievers 1974: 164*) “Roem-Van Royen Agreement”. In the Round Table Agreement, among the three concessions agreed by Indonesians to the advantage of the Dutch, there was the «exclusion, for the time being, of Irian Barat, or Western New Guinea, from the United States of Indonesia» (see: *Sievers 1974: 165*). In other words, the Dutch were to stay in West New Guinea and continue develop a region that only a few decades earlier received only scant attention from the colonial government. By the time of the of the decolonisation negotiation, the region consisted of «half a dozen posts dotted along the coast and on some offshore islands» (see: *Chauvel 2004: 2*).

In the following years, Indonesian claims on the territory escalated to higher levels and although the UN General

1 The names West Papua, West New Guinea, Netherlands New Guinea, West Irian and Irian Jaya denote all the same region. They will be employed alternatively in this paper according to the context.

2 Republic of the United States of Indonesia.

Assembly rejected the petitions of Jakarta, global and in particular US popular consensus against the Dutch coloniser increased dramatically and the West New Guinea dispute was perceived by the masses and international public opinion as the continuation of the revolution which had already attained the independence and the international recognition of the Republic³.

Entitlement of Indonesia to take charge of the Western portion of the island was based on the idea that the territorial dimensions and boundaries of former colonial possessions had to be the same for the post-colonial order. This explains why the Indonesian nationalist movement was staking its claim over West New Guinea, whose territory was integral part of the Dutch Indies (it was called Netherlands New Guinea). Another factor that underpinned the insistency of the claim was the character of Indonesian nationalism that professed the «unity and indivisibility of Indonesia» (see: *Lijphart 1961: 10*). This national unity was later supported and institutionalised by President Suharto's New Order. This New Order was fundamental to the new regime's ideology and alongside similar propositions, such as the “archipelagic principle” (*Wawasan Nusantara*), “Unity in Diversity” (*Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*), and “national resilience” (see: *Bertrand 2004: 197*) West New Guinea came to be seen as a symbol of the final outpost of the oppressor⁴.

Moreover, in 1960s there were many Indonesian leaders who were still suspicious that the Dutch held «Machiavellian designs for reconquering Indonesia» (see: *Lijphart 1961: 12*). Hence, the continued presence of the Dutch recalled the

3 «late in 1950 the United Nations accepted Indonesia as its sixtieth member» [30:165].

4 As regarding the symbol of oppression, we have to remark that West Irian was used during Indonesian independent uprisings as a penal colony site where many Indonesians were confined. Hence the symbolic place acquired a more emphatic connotation. See Lijphart [21].

recent struggle for independence and raised the spectre of an unstable future. After all, even in the Indonesian post-independence era, the Dutch had constantly been a thorn in the side of the Jakarta government, supporting any rebellion that could harm the new Republic's stability while still holding on to highly profitable business such as the oil industry. It is not surprising then that for instance Indonesia was very upset about the unsuccessful separatist bid of South Moluccas, where the Ambonese fought under the Dutch Lieutenant Governor-General Hubertus van Mook against Soekarno's revolutionary army (see: *Anderson 2006: 132*), in the period from 1950 to 1964. However, a number of other autonomist uprisings took place and the Dutch were always ready to fuel any subversive action and plot against the Indonesian national project.

All in all, the physical and economic⁵ presence of the Dutch in the Archipelago was portrayed and came to be seen as the root of evil and used conveniently to explain faltering nation-building. In fact, Jakarta was not only concerned about military conspiracies, but also the persistent role of the Dutch and their initiatives to promote development of the area they controlled. President Soekarno's Guided Democracy and Guided Economy had failed to overcome political and economic instability in Indonesia and, by way of blaming the other, it began to engage in some kind of "performance anxiety" that induced the Indonesian government to conclude that the "yoke" of the oppressor must be eradicated once and for all.

Climbing «back on the rails of the Revolution» (see: *Sievers 1974: 177*) the West New Guinea issue was the pretext for respectively claiming the full decolonisation of the Archipelago. Thus, West New Guinea became a nationalistic

5 Up to 1957 the Dutch maintained their economic position in Indonesia. Starting from 1958-59 Dutch properties were expropriated and nationalised.

issue, and in a crucial historical moment for Indonesia, when Soekarno seemed incapable of dealing with several centrifugal forces within the new political set up, West Irian represented a “juicy” occasion to stir up the patriotic and romantic sentiments of the temperamental irrationality that prevailed in positions of power.

It should be noted that whether West New Guinea should or should not be included in the Indonesian Republic was the subject of discussion. As Lijphart (see: *Lijphart 1961: 13*) reports, in July 1945, on the occasion of the second meeting of the Committee for the Study of the Preparation of Indonesian Independence, «three possibilities regarding the size of a future Indonesian state were discussed: (1) the Dutch East Indies plus a number of adjoining territories, such as Malaya, British Borneo, and Portuguese Timor; (2) the Dutch East Indies minus West New Guinea; and (3) the Dutch East Indies». For this reason, the inclusion of West New Guinea in the project was one of the options. Nonetheless, as we have pointed out above, the dispute over West New Guinea was pivotal in the minds of the Indonesian ruling class. Anti-Dutch sentiment could be useful to soak up the widespread discontent among the masses. Furthermore, many Indonesians have come to believe that Papuans were still victims of Western imperialism; therefore, the Indonesians had an obligation to liberate their Papuan “brothers” from the colonial yoke.

Emergence of Papuan Nationalism

Indonesia’s claims to the sovereignty over West New Guinea never convinced the local Papuans. Conversely, it triggered an increase in separatist sentiment. Papuans did not feel part of Indonesia’s nation-building project and soon many, in particular those who had joined the Dutch attempts to prepare the region for self-determination, began to opt for

immediate political autonomy. Hitherto, Papuans had never felt the need or necessity, to pursue political independence. It was only on December 1, 1961 that the New Guinea Council, a national legislature, was formed in Hollandia, the capital of West New Guinea. Promoters and members of this Council were a tightly-knit group of well-educated Papuans who had come to the fore at the end of the Pacific War. As a result hundreds started to cultivate pro-independence sentiments (see: *Fernandes 2006: 53*), and following rapid Dutch intervention to structure the colony as an autonomous state, Papuan nationalism began to convince even the pro-Indonesians. A flag, the *Kintang Kejora*, or “Morning Star”, became the official flag of the aspiring nation-state, and an anthem, *Hai Tanah ku Papua* (Oh my land of Papua) [ibid.] expressed the ambitions of Papuan nationalists.

Since the bilateral negotiations between Indonesia and the Netherlands were not successful in finding a resolution, the West new Guinea dispute increasingly acquired international relevance because and was, as said, escalated to the UN General Assembly by Indonesia with the support of the US. Under pressure from the US the Dutch Foreign Minister, Joseph Luns, presented his plan that envisaged the withdrawal of the Dutch from West New Guinea “in exchange for” a UN supervised independence referendum. The plan was rejected since it did not reach the required two-third majority, but an agreement, known as “The New York Agreement”, was signed and ratified through the mediation of Ellsworth Bunker on behalf of President John F. Kennedy, just a couple of years after the “Luns plan” (August 15, 1962). According to this agreement control of the area would be transferred to the first UN government, the United Nation Temporary Executive Authority (UNTEA) from October 1, 1962 to May 1, 1963 and following this, control, but not sovereignty, would be taken over by Indonesia after which a

plebiscite could be held in 1969 under UN supervision.

The New York Agreement was clearly a victory for Indonesia. Prior to this, on December 19, 1961, Soekarno had proclaimed the determination of Indonesia to take control of West New Guinea in the “TriKoRa” speech⁶. The TriKoRa (*Tri Komand Rakyat* – People's triple command) was a military command established to liberate Papuans and West Irian from colonial power under the command of General Soeharto (*sic*) and its aim was to eventually raise the Red and White Indonesian flag in Papua. Commandos had been already sent into West Irian in 1960 and troops in early 1962, (see: *Sievers 1974: 187*) and they were ready to begin a belligerent action to gain control the Papuan “trophy” and expand Indonesian dominance into the Malay area. Very soon, the New York agreement halted this warlike escalation but allowed Indonesia to occupy the area.

In 1963, during the Indonesian takeover, many Papuans, who increasingly worried about their future under Indonesia, began to openly resist the Indonesian occupier. The raising of the Morning Star Flag in Imbi Square in 1961 had fixed the significance of being Papuan in many minds. Once the new Papuan elite consolidated this achievement, their determination not to give way rose dramatically. The growing resolution to self-determination grew from a quasi-teleological path, for which centuries of dominations and invasions had been necessary to finally reach a national consciousness that had to lead to a new nation-state: West Papua. Previous to the aforementioned events, West New Guinea had been ruled by a peculiar «dual colonialism (...), in that the Dutch had ruled through Indonesians rather than indigenous Papuan elite» (see: *Chauvel 2009: 202*). These

6 In this speech Soekarno asserted «Government's determination: a) to thwart the formation of a puppet state in Papua by the colonial power; b) to raise the Indonesian red and white flag in Papua; c) to prepare a general mobilisation to defend national independence and unity» [13:55].

Indonesians were neighbours from Manado, South Moluccas and Kei islands who held administrative positions in West New Guinea. Mostly working as administrators (policemen, teachers, etc.), they were the intelligentsias of the colony, and, alongside the missionaries, they (and not the Dutch) were the people who “civilised” the Papuans. Friction broke out as soon as the first generation of educated Papuans claimed the posts of the Indonesians who had tended to discriminate against the Papuans, treating them as «animals (*binatang*), and considering them dumb and not able to speak good Malay (Indonesian)» (see: *Chauvel 2009: 203*). By contrast, «the Dutch officials were regarded as bearers of development, of education, Christianity and material progress» [ibid.].

Partisan Faith

Another aspect that should be taken into account to understand the marginalization of Papuans is the question of faith. While this domain might easily be the subject of simplistic speculations, Richard Chauvel (see: *Chauvel 2009*), has argued that this is not the case since the Christianity of Papuans was neither a determining factor in generating the idea of an “ethnic” Papuan identity, (see: *Chauvel 2009: 206*) nor a main cause for hostility. However, different religious beliefs have contributed, on one hand, to emphasising the “otherness” of Papuans in the eyes of most Indonesians and, on the other, the increasing affinity between the Papuans and the other Melanesian populations.

Historically, Christianity was first introduced into West New Guinea in 1855⁷ mainly by Dutch, German and American missionaries (see: *Aritonang 2009: 345*). At the

⁷ There is not any supportive evidence of Christian missions prior to 1855 in West Papua, despite the several Portuguese and Spanish expeditions dated back to 1520 onwards.

time, the Copra business pushed to the island foreign companies that tried also to extend their sovereignty control over the Papuan lands, as in the case of Mapia Islands claimed by Spain and United States (see: *Aritonang 2009: 352*). However, in 1898 the first Dutch colonial posts along the coast were established (Manokwari and Fakfak) and slowly the Netherlands took control over the western portion of the island⁸.

The Christian religion caught on almost immediately in Papua. Its messianic character was often seemingly smoothly fused with the Papuan cargo cult⁹ traditions (see: *Aritonang 2009: 307*) and, according to what Pratt (see: *Pratt 2006*) defines as “transculturation”, ergo the process of cultural transition from one culture to another selecting certain cultural materials to assimilate, Papuan culture absorbed this imported faith extensively.

The major role of the Christian churches was pre-eminently social: in the areas of education, health care and political development, with churches supporting progress in Papuan society. Moreover, the missions, willingly or not, created a situation in which Papuans could preserve elements their own autochthonous beliefs (see: *Chauvel 2009: 215*) while putting a brake on «the aggressive activity of Islamic propagation (*dak'wah*)» (see: *Aritonang 2009: 619*). This point is crucial in the analysis since Christianity was a link to the Western World and in the eyes of the Indonesian nationalists it represented the Dutch colonial heritage. Consequently, being Christian raised suspicions of favouring collaboration with the Dutch and of being anti-Indonesia (see: *Aritonang 2009: 365*). In truth, despite the fact that its population is predominantly Muslim, the Indonesian Republic is based on

8 Nonetheless, for many years the island remained disregarded.

9 «Koreri movements, or “cargo cults”, [are forms] in which prophets promised the arrival of unending quantities of goods. Mansren Mangudi, the central figure in the Koreri mythology, was identified with Jesus Christ» [3:150].

religious tolerance. «Pancasila reassured secular nationalists, both Muslim and non-Muslim, that the new state would not prioritize Islam over other religions» (see: *Ramage 1995: XVI*)¹⁰. Hence, the compromise had to respect the diverse faiths, (especially monotheistic¹¹ faiths) and find a balance among the heterodoxy of the Indonesian population.

This pillar of the *Pancasila* political philosophy has been effectively respected in many cases; for example, there have been several emblematic cases where traditional religions of areas like in Bali or Toraja, were defended by the central government. However there have also been cases that have exasperated religious diversity, such as the sectarian conflict in the Maluku Islands, where *Laskar Jihad* (Warriors of Jihad), an Islamist anti-Christian Indonesian militia, played a role in aggravating the conflict in religious terms. Some Muslim communities have felt it legitimate and responsible to spread the Javanese faith throughout the Archipelago, and have attempted to convert Christians as well Hindus (see: *Bertrand 2004*). However, in Papua religious conflict has often been provoked by the armed forces and thugs who act according to the idea that Christianity represents a pro-Dutch and pro-Western mentality. Hence, social organisations that could be ascribed to the Christian-Dutch sphere often get attacked and the Papuan nomenclature was reset. With a history dating back to the Dutch colonial period, the state supports the program of transmigration (*transmigrasi*)

10 In contrast to this principle, it is important to underline that the Muslims, the majority of the Indonesian population, have usually fulfilled key positions in political and economical spheres. This tendency increased particularly in the latest part of the Soeharto's regime, after his *hadjj* in 1990.

11 The first principle of Pancasila regards the "belief in God" (*Ketuhanan yang Maha Esa*). As President Soeharto declared [28:2], although before the independence many nationalists desired a pure secular state, because of the strong call of "communism" in the "secularism" of a state, Soekarno and Hatta opted for a "middle way": neither any explicit declarations that put Islam as state religion nor any declaration of secularisation.

through which the Indonesian Government sent settlers, mainly Christians from Java, Sulawesi and Sumatra to West Irian in order to take up governmental positions (like in the colonial era) and dilute Papuan nationalism. Following the waves of transmigrants, are spontaneous economic migrants of whom some began to «occupied the senior posts in government and administration» (see: *Bertrand 2004: 367*) and, *de facto*, heightened the isolation of Papuans.

Destiny of an Outsider

When the New York Agreement was signed, on August 15, 1962, the Indonesia Republic had already been in existence for twelve years. Plans for the inclusion of West New Guinea had hitherto never been shared with any of the Papuan leaders and suddenly Papuans had to deal with new horizons for their future, often holding views that were diametrically opposite to the plans envisaged by the new establishment.

As stated by Chauvel, the New York Agreement was clearly «a triumph for Indonesia» (see: *Chauvel 2004: 14*). Since the ratification, Indonesian/Javanese leaders had started to consider West Irian as an integral part of Indonesia, calling it *Irian Djaja* ('Glorious Irian'). The Western oppressor was once and for all defeated and expelled from the Archipelago, and, although the fact that Soekarno accepted the self-determination provisions, he was convinced that by 1969 «Irianese [Papuans], after having seen and experienced the results of Indonesia's struggle, would choose to remain with Indonesia» [ibid.]. He was right.

«The opportunity to exercise freedom of choice»¹² as

12 Article XVIII: Indonesia will make arrangements with the assistance and participation of the United Nation Representative and his staff to give people of the territory the opportunity to exercise freedom of choice. Such arrangements will include: a) Consultations (*Musyawaharah*) with the representative councils on procedures and appropriate methods to be followed for ascertaining the freely expressed will of the population; b) The determination of the actual date

provided for in article 18 of the aforementioned Agreement, was made possible in July and August 1969. However seeing that the Papuan people were «too unsophisticated for a proper ballot [one person, one vote]» (see: *Fernandes 2006: 61*) a series of Indonesian-organised committees selected a number of individual representatives from each region, and the resulting 1,025 traditional leaders had to vote on behalf of the whole Papuan people. The ballot took place and the resulting outcome was unanimous: all the leaders had voted to join the Republic of Indonesia. Was this reality or mockery?

The UN representative of the Secretary General for the Act of Free Choice, the Bolivian Fernando Ortiz Sanz, commenting on the results of the ballot several years after 1969, admitted that «[u]nanimity like that is unknown in democracy» (see: *Fernandes 2069: 60*). Furthermore, he continued by asserting that «[the vote] was just a whitewash. The mood at the United Nations was to get rid of this problem as quickly as possible [...]. Nobody gave a thought to the fact that there were a million people who had their fundamental rights trampled [...]. Soeharto was a terrible dictator. How could anyone have seriously believed that all voters unanimously decided to join his regime?» [ibid.]

The critical point of the voting procedure concerned the respect of the “rights of the inhabitants”, as provided by article 22 of the agreement, in which UNTEA fully guaranteed protection of individual rights. During the

of the exercise of free choice within the period established by the present Agreement; c) Formulation of the questions in such a way as to permit the inhabitants to decide a) whether they wish to remain with Indonesia; or b) whether they wish to sever their ties with Indonesia; d) The eligibility of all adults, male and female, not foreign nationals, to participate in the act of self-determination to be carried out in accordance with international practice, who are resident at the time of the signing of the present Agreement and at the time of the act of self-determination, including those residents who departed after 1945 and who return to the territory to resume residence after the termination of Netherlands administration.

transitional period of Indonesian control (from May 1, 1963 to July/August 1969) those rights saw systematic abuse and the lack of international observers following the transfer of administrative power from UNTEA to Indonesia, left Jakarta completely free to interfere in Papuan society, employing sordid methods: violence, corruption and subjugation. An iron hand was wielded by military and paramilitary forces that aimed to prohibit the dissemination of ideas promoting self-determination (see: *Drooglever 2009: 629*). In addition to this, according to the Indonesian *dwifungsi*, the same servicemen had supplementary public functions in the administrative area, increasing the climate of fear among the civilians.

Among the Papuans reactions differed. There were those who tried to escape from West Irian, seeking refuge in the then-Australian administrated Territory of Papua and New Guinea, others accepted the status quo and the new invaders, while others fought against this further alienation. The latter group consisted of those individuals who already had a highly developed sense of Papuan/Melanesian identity. More specifically, a resistance movement, known as OPM (*Organisasi Papua Merdeka*), was formed in 1965 with the aim of pursuing the path towards independence that had begun under the Dutch. Symbolic actions, like the raising of the Morning Star Flag, had been carried out over the years, but they had been bloodily suppressed and members of the “Liberation Front of West Papua” (FPPB) were punished and convicted. Particularly, the FPPB was active in conveying information abroad and since its main aim was to contrast the presence of Indonesian military forces, its members were singled out and attacked by troops with heavy artillery and bomber planes (see: *Drooglever 2009: 692*).

Freeport and the “Natural Curse”

Within the framework described above, there is a further element that is highly relevant to the understanding of the question of Papua. This is the rich reserves of natural resources which extraordinary value attracts the attention of foreign natural resource companies.

It was only relatively recently, at the beginning of the 20th century, that the Dutch discovered oil in the northern part of Papua. Royal Dutch Shell Petroleum began the extraction of this black gold alongside other American and Japanese companies to whom the Dutch had granted limited concessions (see: *Leith 2003: 1*). Another highly significant event occurred in 1936, when a Dutch geologist working for Shell, Jean-Jacques Dozy, came across a «180-meter barren black rock wall» during an excursion [*ibid.*], i.e. a mountain of copper. He wrote reports on this striking discovery, but the war diverted attention until the 1950s, when Freeport Sulphur, an American company, the predecessor of today's Freeport-McMoRan, tried to initiate a dialogue with the Dutch colonial administration in order to obtain rights to work the site. However, due to political instability, resulting from the Indonesian-Dutch quarrel over Papua, Freeport's interest cooled until Indonesia took control over West New Guinea. Thus, in 1967, under Soeharto's New Order regime, Freeport eventually signed a contract, the first with a foreign company since the revolution¹³. Thenceforth, Freeport was authorised to exploit «the largest gold mine and the most profitable copper mine on Earth» (see: *Leith 2003: 3*) and in so doing, became «Jakarta's largest taxpayer, the largest employer in the province and the source of more than 50 per

13 After Soekarno's nationalisation of foreign / Dutch companies, the country was cut out from international investment and for this reason in the first years of 1960s, Indonesia faced the bankruptcy. Thus, the government started to consider necessary to lure investments and aids from abroad.

cent of West Papua's gross domestic product (GDP)» [ibid.].

No doubt the possession of natural resources is a fundamental asset, creating wealth for nations like Norway, or Russia, yet in most cases it is a veritable curse. This is especially true for countries that do not enjoy a stable political apparatus and suffer from international economic pressure. Natural resources bring degenerative processes, such as corruption, violence and environment devastation.

Corruption is particularly innate in business practices of this type. In the case of Indonesia, «for three decades the wealth of the nation, its people, and its resources were plundered by Soeharto's children, his cronies, the favoured *pribumi* businessmen, and the military» (see: *Fernandes 2006: 37*). In order for these companies to conduct their business in the most lucrative way, it was essential to maintain excellent relations with the governmental institutions that provided land and exploitation grants. Hence, the state, instead of being focused on the good management of the *res publica*, became a stakeholder in the private interests of a company whose only goal was to exploit resources to the maximum in the minimum space of time. Private investment was encouraged, not for the benefit of the state, but to increase the wealth of «well-connected individuals» (see: *Fernandes 2006: 26*). In this scheme of things, the core relationship is between the patron and the client, who bankroll each other. Citizens were thus excluded from this system.

Violence is another element of the curse and is rooted mainly in the military presence that is needed by the companies. Governmental troops or contractors are usually at the service of the companies that hire them to ensure their business goes ahead with minimal hitches. They oversee company property, such as pipelines, mines, and turbines, and they are ready to quash any tension that may occur with the local communities. The despoilment of land, in fact, is

often contested by local communities and activists also protest against the unilateralism of Governmental concessions. Soldiers act as an “iron wall” between the interests of local inhabitants and the interests of companies. Their methods to control and “pacify” the indigenous population in many cases break the law and disregard fundamental Human Rights, and include «destruction of property, murder, rape, torture, abduction, surveillance, detention, harassment, and the control of movement and association» (see: *Leith 2003: 224*). This military presence, which is better described as military occupation, is thus a crucial factor in the infringement of the basic human rights of indigenous populations who are perceived as an annoying obstacle to the profitable activities of companies and governmental *coteries*.

The final aspect of this natural curse is the destruction of the natural environment by unrestricted and arbitrary use of the land. The unrestrained exploitation of natural resources destroys the ecosystem forever and the local population are left to endure the consequences once the resources have dried up and the companies have abandoned the area. One of the tools that could be used to defend the population against this unconstrained activity should be the law, but all too often the legal system fails when it comes to defending the environment. If there is no real control over compliance with the norms, laws remain «weak and ineffectual» (see: *Leith 2003: 155*) and companies, like Freeport, can continue their business undisturbed, affirming that they operate in full compliance with the terms of their contract. In the case of Freeport, for instance, «there was no pressure from within Indonesia's elite to place environmental concerns» (see: *Leith 2003: 185*) on the operation of the company's exploitation. Therefore, in a framework of pure illegality, the burden once more lies on the local population who are subjected to the

impoverishment of both their present and their future.

Lack of future is a fundamental point to summarize the curse of natural resources. In fact, during these decades the Papuans have been deprived of their rights in the present time but also for their future. The curse, then, marginalises them from the right of to benefit from their own resources, as well as from future prospects. Liminality concerns not only the current state of things, but regards a more intangible sphere, that of hope. The unrestrained exploitation of gold mines, copper mountains and petroleum will last few decades more; after that, the local communities will have to face the consequences of this environmental disaster. This kind of exclusion is thus a “clockwork exclusion” since it will last until the complete impoverishment of the subsoil.

Conclusions

The liminality of West New Guinea in the Indonesian world derives not only from the geographical location of the territory, but also from other factors that have been explored throughout this paper. I analysed how the exclusion of the Papuan voice from the early stages of the Indonesian political project has increased Papuan nationalistic sentiment (supported by the Dutch), and religious faith has contributed to creating a feeling of affinity with other lands further to the east (Melanesia and the Pacific area) rather than with Indonesia further to the west. Moreover, we have seen that the wealth of natural resources, as well as the intervention of international organisations, have definitely brought more harm than benefit to the Papuan people.

Attempts at integration of Papuans into the Indonesian Republic have largely failed but, as stated by Jaap Timmer [36], an ongoing process of Indonesianisation is making things increasingly complex. On the one hand, we have heightened desires for autonomy while on the other we have

many Papuan leaders feeling increasingly happy with Indonesian ways of doing things. Following the fall of the Soeharto regime and the state's loss of Timor in 1999, Indonesia's first political reaction to fears of an "independence hemorrhage" was to adopt a strategy of "reconciliation", involving dialogue with the Papuans and the concession of a degree of autonomy through the Special Autonomy Law. However, the subsequent wave of violence that silenced many Papuan pro-independence voices such as the charismatic Papuan leader Theys Eluay, has consolidated the marginal role of West Papua in the framework of the Indonesian state.

High hopes are now pinned on the current Indonesian President Joko Widodo, who, since taking office in 2014, has been engaged in the attempt to address the Papuan issue.

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