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#Papuanlivesmatter: black consciousness and political movements in West Papua

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ABSTRACT

After the brutal killing of George Floyd sparked antiracism protests worldwide, Black youth organized protests in West Papua, Indonesia's marginalized and easternmost region. In 2019, Papuans protested against entrenched racism in Indonesian society, when Papuan students in Java were subjected to racist epithets. Since then, Papuans have used the hashtag #Papuanlivesmatter to articulate their connection with broader antiracism protests across the world and bring the Papuan experience to #BlackLivesMatter movements. While global Black political movements have long shaped Papuan identities, the new Papuan Lives Matter movement shows how digital media have played an influential role in the spread of antiracism protests and how Blackness has been understood and articulated, not only in relation to white supremacy but also to postcolonial claims of multiculturalism in Asian societies. This article discusses the specific context in which protests under Papuan Lives Matter emerged and its relationship with the global Black Lives Matter movements. This article also explores the idea of Blackness in West Papua that stems not only from the influence of and conversation with American Black political movements and African liberation movements but also lived experience as a Black people under Indonesian occupation.

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Introduction

In August 2019, a group of Papuan students in Surabaya, East Java, Indonesia, was subjected to racist epithets. The incident began with a rumor that the Papuan students had flushed the Indonesian flag down the drain. Others said that they pulled down the flag and replaced it with the Morning Star flag – the flag of the Papuan independence movement. On the evening of August 16, on the eve of Indonesia's Independence Day, a crowd of Indonesians, mainly members of paramilitary groups and Indonesian security forces, surrounded and screamed at the Papuan students and told them to go back to West Papua. Police also tear gassed the students' dormitory. Following this incident, forty-three Papuan students were arrested and accused of desecrating the national flag.

For Papuans, this incident was not new. A similar incident had occurred in Yogyakarta in Central Java in July 2016, where Papuan student Obby Kogoya was arrested



Figure 1. American racism versus Indonesian racism.¹

Credit: MartoArt. Used with permission.

on the charge of resisting arrest. At that time, security forces also surrounded the Kamasan student dormitory in Yogyakarta – the oldest Papuan student dormitory in Indonesia, established in the 1960s – in anticipation of Papuan students’ plan to rally in support of West Papua’s international campaign for independence in the Pacific.

In these two instances, the accusations proved to be unfounded. Nonetheless, the Surabaya incident sparked massive protests in West Papua and elsewhere in Indonesia as Papuans interpreted this abuse within the context of a long history of humiliation, racism, and killing at the hands of the Indonesian government. These 2019 protests, called the “West Papua Uprising,” swept across twenty-three towns in West Papua, seventeen cities in Indonesia, and three overseas cities from August 19 to September 30. After the brutal killing of George Floyd that sparked antiracism protests worldwide in May 2020,² Papuans continued this series of protests using the hashtag #Papuanlives-matter. Black youths of West Papua organized and spoke of their fate as Indonesia’s George Floyd (Figure 1). Elvira Rumkabu, a Papuan scholar commented,

It’s interesting to see just how much Papuans are relating to #BlackLivesMatter. Papuans share the anger of Black Americans, and we are demanding now that people around the world, but especially Indonesians, realize that we have the same suffering here.³

West Papuans have been struggling for independence since their territory was forcibly transferred from the Netherlands to Indonesia in 1963. In 1965, a pro-independence armed group was formed in Manokwari in the western part of the region. Since then, the West Papua Liberation Army has waged a low-level insurgency against the

¹NKRI (*Negara Kesatuan Republik Indonesia*) translates as the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia.

²Tapol 2020.

³Varagur 2020.

Indonesian central government. To counter this, the state governed West Papua as a military operation zone (*daerah operasi militer*, DOM) from 1977 to 1998, the first area in Indonesia to live under such a long military occupation. Today, West Papua continues to be the most militarized area in the country, with human rights abuses committed by state forces a daily occurrence. In addition, despite being one of the country's wealthiest provinces in terms of resources, West Papua has always occupied the lowest ladder of the Indonesian development index. For Papuans, this shows the failure of regional autonomy and more broadly, Indonesian development programs in the region.⁴

In a global context, Papuans' response to Black Lives Matter (BLM) is not unique, as BLM has spread to more than twenty countries worldwide. Papuans witnessed the resistance against anti-Black racism in the United States through Facebook, Twitter, and other digital platforms. Yet, the enduring and recurring identification of Papuans as racially Black and their connection to the Black global movements merits more reflection. Why do Papuans frame their protests in terms of their identity as Black people? Who are the Papuans? Why do they feel global solidarity with Black Lives Matter movements? What is the relationship between Black Lives Matter as a global antiracist movement and Papuan Lives Matter as a Black social movement and an anti-colonial struggle? What does this tell us about Indonesia and Black identity in Indonesia and Asia more broadly?

In this article, I chronicle the root of Papuans' Black identity and its relationship with the politics of race in Indonesia. Tracing historical narratives and contemporary articulations of Papuans' Black identities, I also address how Papuan Lives Matter expresses Papuans' constant engagement with the global and regional Black liberation epistemologies and movements. West Papua's case poses a fascinating question to scholars of race, Black studies, and regional specialists of Southeast Asia as race, especially Blackness, is rarely used as an analytical category in regional scholarship. In Southeast Asian studies, the analytic of race is commonly used to refer to the colonial period when race was the epistemic foundation of colonial societies.⁵ In the postcolonial period, the analytic of race is used to understand the ongoing supremacy of whiteness, for instance, in Indonesian conceptions of beauty⁶ or the legacy of racial hierarchies in postcolonial states, as reflected in government policies governing race relations in Southeast Asian countries such as Singapore, Malaysia, and Indonesia.⁷ Even then, conversations on race are highly restricted. In Indonesian studies specifically, the study of race has focused on ethnic Chinese, while the racial dimensions of West Papua have only received scholarly attention recently. Most observers consider West Papua in terms of ethnicity, and similar to their analyses of autonomy movements in places such as Aceh and South Moluccas,

⁴While West Papua has one of the highest gross domestic regional product rankings in Indonesia, it also has the lowest human development index ranking, the highest poverty rate, and the highest maternal and infant mortality rates (BPS 2019 and 2020). West Papua has one of the world's largest gold and copper mining operations (run by American company Freeport-McMoRan), the largest gas reserves in Asia (leased by British Petroleum), and the world's largest palm oil plantation (owned by Korean company Korindo). In 2001, the Indonesian central government granted special autonomy status to West Papua, but this status has not improved these development indicators. See Widjojo and Entus 2010.

⁵Furnivall 1948; Stoler 1995 and 2002; Anderson 2006.

⁶Saraswati 2016.

⁷Hirschman 1986 and 1987; Hefner 2001; Suryadinata 2005; Goh 2012; Clammer 2019.

they frame Papuan activism as an ethno-nationalist movement seeking independence from the Indonesian nation-state.⁸

The lack of analytical attention to race points to the difficulty of situating West Papua within disciplinary and area boundaries, which indicates the strong legacy of an imperial and racialized history of anthropology and Asian studies.⁹ While recent historical and literary scholars on Asia have attempted to address the global connection between Asia and Black identity,¹⁰ the place of Black Melanesians in Asian Studies is still ambiguous, as they are not considered to be proper “Asians.”¹¹ To put this assumption plainly, “Asians” are assumed to not be Black. In addition, the emergence of Transpacific Asian studies that deal with a broader understanding of area studies has not resulted in new scholarship on transregional engagement with the Melanesian world.¹²

Within anthropology and Melanesian studies, questions of race have become an important subject of scholarship.¹³ However, the most prominent focus has been on the racial relationship with Euro-American whiteness, with a few exceptions.¹⁴ I attempt to fill this disciplinary and regional gap by narrating the entanglement of the Melanesian society of West Papua with the Indonesian state and the politics of race between Asia and Melanesia. An analysis of West Papua’s case contributes to the newly emerging field of race study in Asia, and specifically, Indonesia, beyond the studies of Chinese-Indonesians as racialized subjects. In this case, the articulation of Papuan Blackness indicates a new form of anti-Black racism beyond white supremacy and European colonial history. In the broader context, the study of anti-Black racism in Asia contributes to global studies of racism and counter-movements. Moreover, Papuans’ Black identity and conversations with members of the BLM movement demonstrate that the global Black movement has been responded to locally and is shaped by the production of Black epistemologies. Lastly, understanding the relationship between Papuans and the Indonesian state in terms of race can have a practical policy value, as countries like Indonesia have denied their racism problems.

Before discussing Papuans’ production of Black identity, some introductory context is necessary. West Papua, previously known as the Netherlands New Guinea during Dutch rule (1898–1962), is the easternmost and marginalized area of Indonesia. West Papua occupies a total area of 459,411.67 km² or about twenty-three percent of Indonesian territory. As of 2020, West Papua’s population was about four million, nearly half of whom were Indigenous Papuans. This Indigenous category comprises more than 260 ethnolinguistic groups who have lived on the island of New Guinea for at least 40,000 years (see [Figure 2](#)).

⁸See, for instance, Bertrand 2004. Some exceptions include Munro 2018 and Rutherford 2019.

⁹I would like to thank one of the reviewers for suggesting this argument.

¹⁰See Keisha Brown’s scholarship on the Africa-China nexus during the Cold War (Brown 2016 and 2019) and historical and literary scholarship on Japan (Hanscom and Washburn 2016; Onishi and Sakashita 2019; Bridges 2020). In addition, racism and the making of race in Asia have been studied by scholars including Manickam 2009; Fujitani 2011; and Keevak 2011.

¹¹The root of Orientalist and racist views of Asia and Asian societies can be traced back to Marx’s definition of “Oriental despotism” and other studies generally grouped under Orientalism. See Said 1978; Cheah 2001.

¹²For an authoritative introduction to Transpacific studies, see Wilson and Dirlík 1995; Hoskins, Leong, Nguyen, and Yoo 2014; Espiritu, Lowe and Yoneyama 2017. In all these studies, Pacific Islanders are primarily dominated by Polynesians who are understandably more engaged with the United States (as migrants or colonial subjects).

¹³Lattas 1998; Robbins 2004; Bashkow 2006; Douglas and Ballard 2008; Solis 2015; Rutherford 2019.

¹⁴Cf. Howard 1991; Giay 2011; Munro 2018; Karma and Soenmi 2014; Yoman 2020.



Figure 2. Map of West Papua.

Credit: Mandavi (Wikimedia). Used under the Creative Commons license.

The Dutch East Indies Company established itself in the Moluccas, West Papua's western neighbor, in the sixteenth century CE, while Germany and the United Kingdom occupied the eastern part of New Guinea. West Papua was left to itself until the nineteenth century. European Christian missionaries arrived in 1855, fifty years before the Dutch colonial government set up their permanent post. By the time that the Dutch colonial government finally integrated West Papua into the Netherlands East Indies in 1898, these Christian missions had established themselves as significant political actors in the region.¹⁵ Although Indonesia was internationally recognized as an independent state by 1949, West Papua was retained by the Dutch until 1962.¹⁶ After Indonesia persuaded the Soviet Union to aid its ambition to liberate Papuans from European colonialism, the U.S. government brokered an agreement between the Dutch and Indonesian governments in 1962 that transferred administration of West Papua from the Netherlands to Indonesia. During this process, Papuans were not consulted as American, Dutch, and Indonesian authorities considered them to be too primitive to have a stake in the decision, let alone have their own nation-state. According to the 1962 agreement, Indonesian authorities would organize a referendum to allow Papuans to decide whether they wanted to be part of Indonesia or have an independent state. Instead, Indonesia selected 1026 local representatives to decide West Papua's integration into Indonesia. This decision was upheld and formally approved by the U.N. General Assembly in 1969. Papuan activists, however, continue to challenge this decision. They argue that West Papua's incorporation into Indonesia was a direct result of international, but especially American, racism.

¹⁵For a comprehensive overview of West Papua's history, see Vlasblom 2004; Drooglever 2009; Chauvel 2005.

¹⁶Indonesian revolutionaries declared independence on August 17, 1945, but Dutch military forces fought the rebels until late 1949. The Dutch-Indonesian Roundtable Conference, held at The Hague from August until November 1949, resulted in Dutch recognition of the United States of Indonesia and formal transfer of sovereignty on December 27, 1949. However, under the terms of this agreement West Papua remained under Dutch control.

Politics of race in West Papua

The sources of Papuan political and cultural identities are manifold. While slavery and colonialism are considered to be the most important factors that shape racial politics in most former European colonies, the situation is more complicated in West Papua. There is no doubt that Euro-American Christian missions and scientific and colonial epistemologies have shaped Papuan identities, as has the slave trade that involved regional politics and local actors. Papuans are highly conscious of this history. Natalius Pigai, a human rights defender who has suffered frequent racist attacks and harassment in Indonesian media, argues that racism against Papuans is rooted in outsiders' views of them:

Visitors to West Papua wanted to distinguish themselves from us, the Papuans. They used phenotypes, especially skin colors as a marker of difference. This difference came with just one word: the Negro, which means black, but later, that word would be associated with being dirty, ugly, primitive, and stupid.¹⁷

In West Papua, European explorers initially used the term “Oceanic Negro” to refer to Papuans, which indicates Africa as their cardinal comparison.¹⁸ They also used terms like “savages,” “pigmy,”¹⁹ and “Stone Age”²⁰ to refer to the indigenous population. Yet, nineteenth-century detailed descriptions and classifications also point to a comparison with Malays. Alfred Russel Wallace, a British anthropologist and biologist who traveled between Singapore and Malacca to West Papua from 1854 until 1862, distinguished Papuans from the population of the Malay Archipelago. He wrote:

They reminded me of a party of demure and well-behaved children suddenly broken in upon by a lot of wild romping, riotous boys, whose conduct seems most extraordinary and very naughty ... *The sooty Blackness of the skin, the mop-like head of frizzly hair, and, most important of all, the marked form of countenance of quite a different type from that of the Malay,* are what we cannot believe to result from mere climatal [*sic*] or other modifying influences on one and the same race. The Malay face is of the Mongolian type, broad and somewhat flat ... The face is smooth, and rarely develops the trace of a beard, the hair black, coarse, and perfectly straight ... Between the Malayan tribes, among whom I had for some years been living, and the Papuan races, whose country I had now entered, we may fairly say that *there is as much difference, both moral and physical, as between the red Indians of South America and the negroes of Guinea on the opposite side of the Atlantic.*²¹

This passage primarily focuses on Papuans' anatomy to mark and demarcate Malays from black Papuans. Simultaneously, Wallace drew relationships between the physical attributes and moral and intellectual capacities of these two groups. This approach, relatively new at the time, coincided with the introduction of a more systematic Dutch state project of colonization in the East Indies.²²

¹⁷Natalius Pigai for the webinar “Democracy, Human Rights, and Racism in West Papua,” February 27, 2021. The webinar was organized by the Association of Papuan Students in Jakarta, Depok, Tangerang, and Bekasi (*Imapa Jadetabek*). Archived and transcribed by the author.

¹⁸Cuvier [1857] 1978; Ballard 2008.

¹⁹Wollaston 1912; Stirling 1943; Ballard 2008; Bijlmer 1935.

²⁰Slama and Munro 2015; Rutherford 2019.

²¹Wallace [1869] 2014 (emphasis added).

²²Giay 2016.

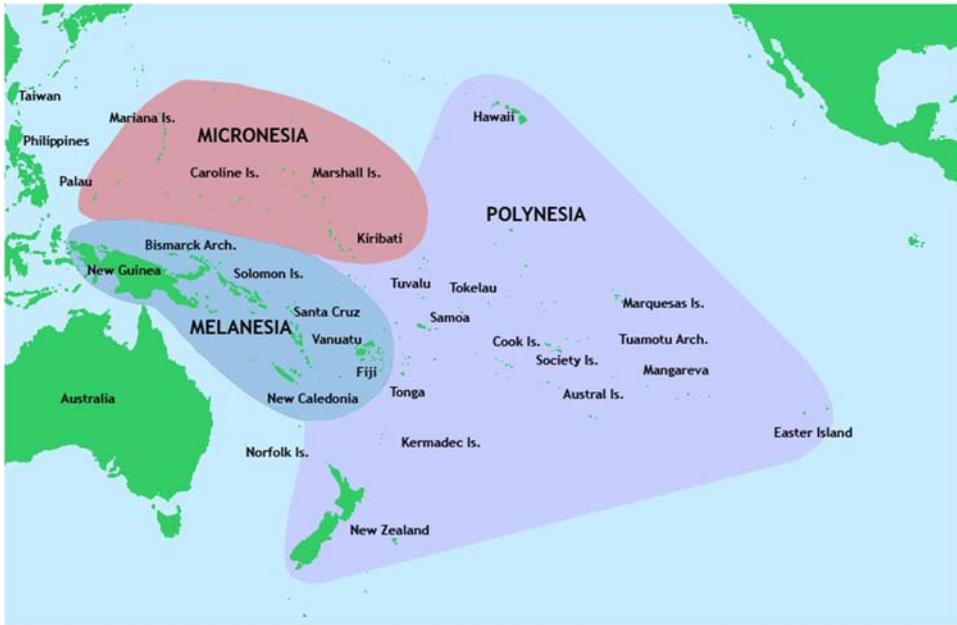


Figure 3. The three culturale areas of the Pacific.

Credit: Kahuroa (Wikimedia).

This notion of Papuan difference maps onto the larger mapping and categorization of the Pacific by European explorers and anthropologists. The Pacific's current division into three cultural spheres relies on European racial epistemologies, with Polynesia (many islands) and Micronesia (small islands) defined by their geography, yet Melanesia (Black Islands) defined in relation to their racialized inhabitants²³ (see Figure 3). Anthropology has used these three spheres to categorize cultural and social differences among Pacific Islanders, with Melanesians generally being perceived to rely on small-scale polities, egalitarianism, and ceremonial exchange.²⁴ While it is true that, as Nicholas Thomas has suggested, this division is a colonial artifact,²⁵ it holds some rhetorical and actual power in the contemporary Pacific, as I will discuss later in the article.

Various documents from the sixteenth century show that Papuans were part of a slave trade in which Europeans and Malay groups such as Makassar, Bugis, and Moluccans played equally important roles.²⁶ Indeed, a regional network of slave trading linked various coastal groups, including Papuans. These groups often raided and captured inland peoples in the western part of West Papua, then sold them in slave markets as far afield as Mauritius and Réunion.²⁷ This trade points to the difficulty in designating

²³See Urville, Ollivier, De Biran, and Clark 2003; Lawson 2013; Kabutaulaka 2015.

²⁴Sillitoe 1998; Knauff 1999.

²⁵Thomas 1989.

²⁶Kalff 1920; Warren 1981; Andaya 1993; Reid 1988; Miedema 1988; Vink 2003.

²⁷Both Makassar and Bugis ethnic groups played a significant role in slave-raiding, but peoples from Sulawesi also made up over thirty percent of the Dutch East India Company's slave population in the 1680s. See Martinez and Vickers 2015, 52.

race as the sole source of slavery in the region during that period.²⁸ One thing clear is that when Dutch colonial authorities managed to assert their dominant hegemony in the region in the late nineteenth century, they banned slavery and transformed the politics of race that was based on so-called scientific epistemologies and local rumors of slave raiding tribes into a state and missionary project of civilization.

Dutch colonialism relied on a racial politics that put indigenous Papuans at the lowest ladder of colonial society, while “native” Indonesians and Chinese played the role of colonial and mission mediators. Both Christian missionaries and Dutch colonial rulers brought teachers and ministers from the Moluccas and Minahasa, Christian areas in the then-East Indies, and made them masters and teachers of the native Papuans.²⁹ This colonial politics distinguishes Papua from the rest of the inhabitants of the former Dutch East Indies, where ethnic Chinese became the mediators of colonial rule. According to Papuan scholar Benny Giay:

The Malays are truly *amberi*. *Amberi* comes from a verb, *amber*, which means to take without permission, to steal. The Malays come to steal and rob the Papuans. In the old-time, they came to raid us, the Papuans, and sold us as slaves. The Papuans used to hide in the hinterlands. After the *hong*i ships³⁰ left, they returned to their home on the coast. However, what did they find? Those *amberi* again. Those who were brought by the Dutch to rule us.³¹

The Dutch colonial rulers used various ethnological and cultural differences to distinguish Papuans from Malay speakers. In a 1962 report, for instance, the Netherlands Ministry of Home Affairs described Papuans, as “a variant of the sub-race of the Eastern or Melanesian Negroids.”³² This description is a clear departure from Dutch colonial categories in the East Indies and shows how colonial authorities attempted to understand Papuans’ ethnological and racial differences by comparing them to the population in eastern New Guinea and Africa. This conception also shows most clearly in the arbitrary construction of race and the institutionalization of racial identification through colonial ideology and practice.

After World War II and the independence of many Asian and African nations from European colonialism, including Indonesia, the Dutch promoted Papuan identity as

²⁸Several historians, however, point to the origin of the word “Papua” to refer to the racial politics outside the Euro-American epistemology of racism. This scholarship broadly argues that the word “Papua” is used by Malays to refer to Papuans’ hair, *pua-pua*, which means “frizzly-haired” (see Kuntjaraningrat and Bachtar 1963). This claim about the Malay origin of Papuan-ness has been challenged, but it does not discount the possibility that Malay speakers contributed to the formation of the Papuan stereotype (see Gelpke 1993; Ploeg 2002; Ellen 2003; Widjojo 2009; Knaap 2010; Giay 2016).

²⁹Following the German and Dutch Protestant missions that arrived in West Papua in 1855, a Dutch Catholic mission arrived in the late nineteenth century. Anglo-American evangelical missions arrived in 1938 and worked mainly in the Central Highlands. See Steenbrink and Aritonang 2018.

³⁰*Hongi* was initially used by local rulers in the Moluccas to mobilize tributes from their subjects. During the spice monopoly in the Moluccas in the eighteenth century, the Dutch East India Company (*Vereenigde Oost Indische Compagnie*, VOC) used *hong*i expeditions to control smuggling and pacify rebellious locals. In many cases, these *hong*i expeditions whose personnel were mainly local, carried out brutal raids, burnt down villages and spice trees, and captured slaves. See Widjojo 2009 for a discussion of *hong*i expeditions in West Papua.

³¹Giay 2011, 22. In an interview in 2020, Giay reiterated this story by citing Adriaan Bout’s account of slave raids in Fakfak in the western part of West Papua. Bout was a Dutch missionary and wrote several booklets on his experience and work in West Papua. Benny Giay’s definition of *amberi* also stands in contrast with the more positive connotation of the *amberi* among the Biak of West Papua, as Rutherford 2003 wrote. Until today, many Papuans frequently refer to Indonesians as Malays (*Melayu*).

³²The Netherlands Ministry of Home Affairs 1962, 6.

Melanesians regionally. After Indonesia became formally independent in 1949, West Papua, which remained under Dutch control, participated in the South Pacific Commission, a regional group established by six developed countries with a strong interest in the Pacific.³³ The New Guinea Council (*Nieuw Guinea Raad*), which was established by Dutch authorities in 1960 to prepare Papuans for independence, was actively involved in the Commission. During this period, Dutch and Australian colonial bureaucrats also talked about the possibility of creating a Melanesian Federation that would unite all Papuans. Since the 1970s, Melanesian identity claims have circulated in urban centers in West Papua and regional networks in the Pacific.³⁴ This was not unique as similar discussions had emerged elsewhere in Melanesia, such as in New Caledonia and Vanuatu.³⁵ The idea of Melanesian identity then should be situated in the larger context of pan-Africanism and global Black movements.³⁶

Conversations on Melanesian identity have a bearing on Papuans' Black identity in West Papua, especially in sharpening the racial differences between Papuans and Indonesians, or Melanesians and Malays. Even though Papuans were prohibited by Indonesian authorities from using the terms "Papuans" and "Melanesians" from 1963 until 2000, Papuan-ness and Melanesian-ness continued to circulate in the public sphere. The most overt expression of this Melanesian identification was the establishment of the Republic of Western Melanesia by two Papuan intellectuals, Thomas Wainggai and Alberth Kailiele. Wainggai and Kailiele organized a flag-raising ceremony in the Parliament Office in Jayapura on December 14, 1988, to launch this Republic.³⁷ After Dr. Wainggai's death in a Jakarta prison in 1996, the popularity of Melanesian-ness returned in 2015 and 2016 when West Papua independence movements campaigned at the regional grouping of Melanesian countries, the Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG).

In 2014, the three largest West Papua pro-independence organizations, namely the Federal Republic for West Papua (NRFPPB), the West Papua National Coalition of

³³The South Pacific Commission was established in 1947 when six countries with a strong interest in the Pacific signed the Canberra Agreement. They were Australia, France, the Netherlands, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, and the United States. They sought to "strengthen international cooperation in promoting the economic and social welfare and the promotion of the welfare of the peoples of the non-self-governing territories in the South Pacific." See <https://www.nla.gov.au/selected-library-collections/south-pacific-commission>.

³⁴After 1975, Papuan intellectuals propagated the idea of Indigeneity through the conception of the "Melanesian Way" (see Lawson 2013, 13). Bernard Narokobi popularized this concept in a series of articles in Papua New Guinea's *Post Courier* published between 1976 and 1978. In 1980, he published *The Melanesian Way* with critical commentaries and a foreword by Henry Olela, a Papuan philosopher who was well versed in Négritude ideas (Osborne 1990). Bernard Narokobi had worked as an attorney for several Papuan refugees in Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea. He was also active in West Papua solidarity networks.

³⁵New Caledonia is still under French rule. In the French administrative system, New Caledonia is governed under the status of "collectivité" (as a substitute for "territoire d'outre-mer" which might have amplified its colonial status). In 1976, Jean-Marie Tjibaou, a Sorbonne-educated anthropologist and leader of the Kanak and Socialist National Liberation Front of New Caledonia (*Front de Libération Nationale Kanak et Socialiste*, FLNKS), wrote a book entitled *Kanaké: Melanesians of New Caledonia* (1976). FLNKS's members consist mainly of indigenous Kanaks and former students who were radicalized after the 1968 Paris movement. Tjibaou trained as a Catholic priest but left his career as a pastor to become a full-time political activist. In 1980, Father Walter Lini, an Anglican priest who would become Vanuatu's first prime minister, articulated his ideas on Melanesian socialism, which were partly influenced by Julius Nyerere's African socialism in Tanzania. See Tabani 2000.

³⁶This regional identity, for instance, has also been promoted by Aimé Césaire (Martinique) and Léopold Sédar Senghor (Senegal) with the idea of self-determination without state sovereignty, or a "democratic federation in a transcontinental polity." It is not a coincidence that Senghor was a supporter of West Papua independence. See Wilder 2015.

³⁷Dr. Wainggai, an America-trained scholar, worked as a civil servant in the provincial government in West Papua. French filmmaker Jean-Luc Godard made a short film in his honor entitled *Pour Thomas Wainggai* (1991). This film was part of the *Lest We Forget* project and commissioned by Amnesty International.

Liberation (WPNCL), and the West Papua National Parliament (WPNP) signed the Saralana Declaration in Vanuatu to form the United Liberation Movement of West Papua (ULMWP). Since its inception, ULMWP has carried out an aggressive campaign at the MSG.³⁸

At MSG, the issue of West Papua is one of the most important matters. While Papuans are recognized as culturally Melanesian, Melanesian states like Fiji and Papua New Guinea are partial to Indonesia's side politically.³⁹ Indonesia also actively lobbies these states and strengthens its presence by providing economic aid. Indonesia also has sought membership in MSG. If West Papua international campaigns use cultural arguments and colonial epistemology to make their case, the Indonesian government capitalizes on its political and cultural power; for instance, Indonesian authorities organized an Indonesian Melanesian festival in 2015 that highlighted five provinces with sizable Melanesian populations: two provinces in West Papua (Papua and West Papua), the Moluccas, North Molucca, and East Nusa Tenggara. The Indonesian government also has mobilized anthropologists and archeologists to defend this political move, and also has appointed some Papuan elites as token representatives in the Indonesian government.⁴⁰

This state-sponsored appropriation of Melanesian identity has had a detrimental effect on West Papuan independence struggles, but it has not changed how most Papuans imagine and frame their relations with other Melanesians and other Blacks. For most Papuans, Melanesia-ness reflects an epistemology of Blackness that is built on the foundation of relationality. Blacks are related to other Blacks in a specific way. Papuans, for instance, point to their shared skin color and hair textures. They also use kinship terms to refer to others. During their campaign for independence in 1962, Papuan leaders used the term "brothers and sisters Negroids."⁴¹ In recent years, Papuan activists have used the terms "brothers and sisters" (*saudara-saudari*) and "family" (*keluarga*) to refer to other Melanesians,⁴² and "brothers or sisters-in-law" (*ipar*) to refer to Africans, African-Americans, and residents of the Caribbean.⁴³ In contrast, they refer to

³⁸The MSG was founded in 1986 by three Melanesian countries: Papua New Guinea, Vanuatu, and the Solomon Islands, to foster and accelerate development in Melanesian countries. As a geopolitical group, MSG uses Melanesian-ness as a political weapon against the dominance of Polynesians in the Pacific political groupings, notably the Pacific Islands Forum. While the group focuses on economic cooperation, it has become a political battleground for decolonization in the Pacific, especially after it accepted a non-state actor, the Kanak and Socialist National Liberation Front of New Caledonia (*Front de Libération Nationale Kanak et Socialiste*, FLNKS), as a member.

³⁹Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, and the FLNKS are strong defenders of West Papua's cause, see Lawson 2016.

⁴⁰This article does not purport to represent Papuans as a single monolithic entity as some segments of Papuan society, especially its elites, have benefitted from their association with the Indonesian government. As Timmer 2007 has narrated, Papuan political elites have actively been involved in some controversial state policies in West Papua such as decentralization. Even then, the identification of this elite with Papuan-ness is unquestionable.

⁴¹See Webster 2012.

⁴²I attended several church services and political rallies where the speakers referred to their fellow Papuans in Papua New Guinea (PNG) as *saudara-saudari kita di Timur* (our brothers and sisters in the east). Reverend Benny Giay (an indigenous Papuan pastor) uses kinship terms more explicitly in his call for solidarity. See Giay 2016.

⁴³This expression is used in a formal context, such as at the United Nations (*ipar-ipar Afrika*, our African in-laws), as well as in informal contexts, such as during the World Cup. During the 2018 World Cup, many Papuans supported the Senegalese team, which they referred to as *ipar-ipar Senegal dorang* (our Senegalese in-laws). In the 1990s, *ipar* (an acronym for *ikut Papua anti Republik* (joining Papua against the Republic of Indonesia)) was used as a codeword to refer to the pro-independence sentiment, in contrast to the Indonesian term *Irian*, a name given to West Papua during the New Order era. For Suharto's New Order government, Irian was an acronym for *ikut Republik Indonesia anti Nederland* (joining the Republic of Indonesia against the Netherlands). In addition, some Papuan intellectuals are highly interested in archaeology and genetics. Some of these writers trace the origin of Papuans from their migration from Africa, which, they argue, demonstrates their kinship. They consider "white" and Malays as foreign, even though they come from the same African migration. See, for example, Wenda and Wenda 2009.

Indonesians as *amber* (see above) or *pendatang* (newcomers, migrants, or settlers).⁴⁴ In its regional and global context, this notion of Blackness suggests “commensurable difference,”⁴⁵ that is the difference that creates complementarity and cooperation. In its radical manifestation, this notion of Blackness transcends the boundaries of nation-states, such as the notion of the perceived kinship of all people from Sorong in West Papua to Samarai in Papua New Guinea, or the use of campaigns slogan such as “Bring back West Papua to the Melanesian Family” and “Melanesia is not free until West Papua is free.” This shows that the term Melanesia, which initially was “a term of denigration,” has become “one of affirmation, providing a positive basis for contemporary sub-regional identity.”⁴⁶

The role of Africans and African-Americans

In 1962, Papuan members of the New Guinea Council traveled to Africa to campaign for independence. A pamphlet they issued entitled “Voice of the Negroids in the Pacific to the Negroids throughout the World” called for racial solidarity with pan-African and global Black movements. The pamphlet declares, “Dutch New Guinea is New Africa.”⁴⁷ Nicolaas Jouwe, a Papuan nationalist who had been trained by the U.S. Army, wrote in the pamphlet:

We Papuans know that we are independent people, and this is the time we want to fight before the international forum to remain ourselves. We do not want to be slaves anymore ... WE ARE PAPUANS AND WANT TO REMAIN PAPUANS.⁴⁸

In the same vein, Papuans appropriated the political lexicon familiar to Black liberation movements, such as “consciousness,” “awareness,” and “abolition.” This awareness originally came from encounters with Black American soldiers during World War II (see Figure 4). In a 2000 interview, Nicolaas Jouwe said:

The most important thing that happened in our part of New Guinea [during World War II] was the presence of the Black Americans, the Negros, which were an engineering battalion that built up Hollandia in one-week time. In one week, they fixed all the roads from Tanah Merah to Hollandia [north coast]. The Black Americans did it. That opened the eyes of the Papuans. “You see, Black people can do those things.” You see, before that point, only white men were capable of doing such things. Black people were to be humble and not do the important jobs. We were sometimes used as slaves by Indonesia. But, in wartime, American Negros came there. They did everything. There were Black Americans, and under them were white Americans serving. That was a surprise. That opened the eyes of the Papuans. Then, at

⁴⁴Siblinghood terms suggest a relation founded on the same and built on the foundation of care. In other Melanesian contexts, the term *wantok* (“one talk”) is also used to refer to the notion of a shared origin. While *wantok* sometimes has a negative meaning (as nepotism or corruption), in West Papua, *wantok* generally has a positive connotation. See Nanau 2011 and Schram 2015. The term “in-law,” in contrast, suggests a relationship that is built on otherness, yet by virtue of the marriage relationship that is marked by exchanges of valuables and lives (in the form of a sister or a brother), it also connotes an intimacy.

⁴⁵Gewertz and Errington 2004.

⁴⁶Lawson 2013, 14; compared to Webb-Gannon, Webb, and Solis 2018.

⁴⁷Papuan National Committee 1962, 3.

⁴⁸Papuan National Committee 1962, 5 and 13 (capital in the original). I would like to thank I Nguh Suryawan for making this archive available. See also Pengantara 1962, 1. A 1969 telegram sent from the U.S. embassy in Jakarta to the State Department in Washington states, “Reports indicate expatriate opposition groups attempting to mobilize African sentiment against AFC using race (brown Indos oppressing black Irianese).” See Telegram of Department of State, 920, August 7, 1969, 2.

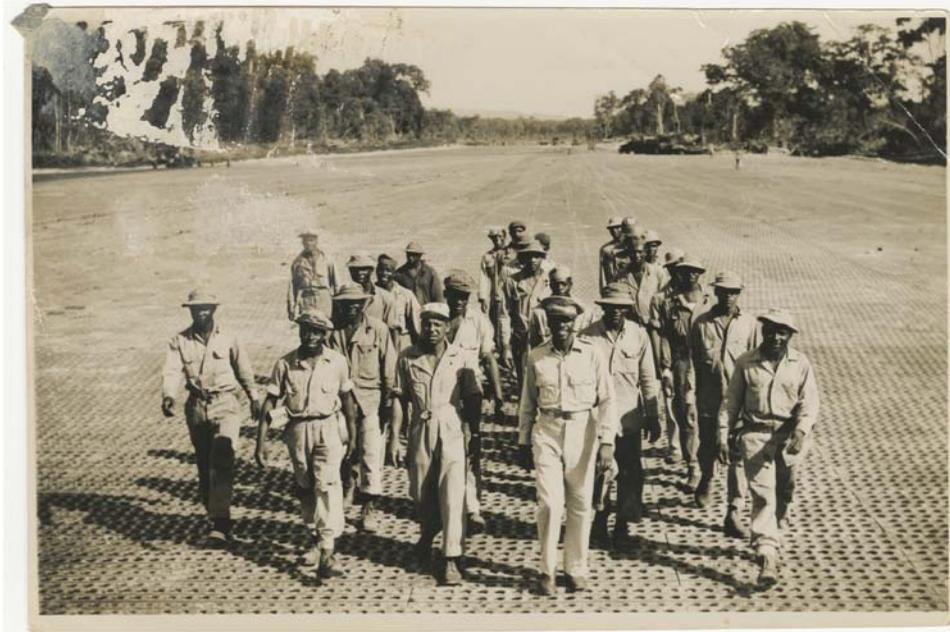


Figure 4. African-American soldiers walking down the newly constructed runway at Hollandia Airfield (current day Jayapura, West Papua), 1944.

Credit: First Lieutenant Gordon Smith, from the collection of The National WWII Museum, Washington, DC. Used with permission.

once, the national feelings came out. We're not Indonesians. Before that, we had very few Dutch. The entire administration was run in the colonial period by the Indonesians. And the Indonesians treated the Papuans like slaves, unlike the Dutch.⁴⁹

In another interview, Jouwe explained the hierarchy more explicitly:

My father was a chief in a *kampung* [village] near Hollandia. He went with the men of the village to see what happened there. We saw how Negroes, Black people like us, built roads, behind wheels of heavy army trucks, and could do all kinds of things as well as the whites. We saw Black pilots, Black sailors, Blacks in fancy uniforms and with bottles of Coca-Cola. Of course, we knew nothing about racial discrimination in the United States, but what we saw opened our eyes. We were always despised, treated like savages. Not so much by the Dutch but by the lower administrative officials. We always had the bottom on the ladder: at the top, the Dutch, then the Chinese, then the hated South Moluccans [“the Black Dutch”], then the Javanese, and eventually the Papuans. The introduction of the coastal population to the U.S. military in 1944 laid the foundation for later political awareness.⁵⁰

These two passages are revealing, not only of the influence of African-American soldiers in West Papua during the war, but also in how Jouwe articulates Papuan identity against Dutch colonial epistemologies of race. The passage also shows how race is an organizing principle of all colonial societies, yet works differently in different contexts. Third, as has been shown in other contexts, the perceived equality of African-American soldiers in the

⁴⁹Farhadian and Babuljak 2001, 157–158.

⁵⁰Vlasblom 2004, 145–146.

U.S. military had sparked a sense of “Black internationalism,” not only for African-Americans but also for the Black population in Asia.⁵¹

In the 1970s, African-American leaders demonstrated their solidarity with West Papuans’ struggle for self-determination. After the United Nations adopted resolution 2504 that granted Indonesia full sovereignty over West Papua in 1969, the leadership of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) wrote a joint letter to U.N. Secretary-General Kurt Waldheim supporting Papuan self-determination:

The Papuans are a Black people living in that South Pacific island now ruled by brown Indonesians ... Black Americans, in general, know little or nothing about the situation of their ethnic cousins in West New Guinea, a former Dutch holding in the South Pacific. The Papuan people resisted Dutch domination but found themselves under Indonesian control after World War II. A fraudulent plebiscite conducted in 1969 was used as a pretext to further cement this unwanted control ... that the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, in accordance with its consistent stand against political domination of subject peoples, urges the United Nations to grant the request of the Papuans of New Guinea for a full and free hearing on their status with respect to Indonesia.⁵²

This eloquent expression of Papuans’ Blackness resists any simple explanation about the root of Papuan difference. We can see that the emergence of Blackness in Papuan political and cultural discourse is multi-scalar. At the local and regional levels, the explosion of the idea of Melanesian-ness in the 1950s and 1960s was promoted by colonial powers, but Papuans’ self-definition as Melanesians and Blacks has been shaped by their transnational imagination and shared experience of racism and anti-colonial struggle.

Papuan Lives Matter and contemporary Black social movements in West Papua

I have pointed out that Papuans’ identification with Black identity and global Black movements is not new, as Papuans have defined their political identity against Euro-American racial epistemologies and a regional, racial hierarchy. What is new about Papuan Lives Matter? Ciko Mofu, a Papuan student active in the movement, explains:

Papuan Lives Matter shares a struggle with the Black Lives Matter movements because both movements fight against racism. We, the Papuans, are victims of racism, like our Black brothers and sisters across the world, especially in the United States. I think the key to our struggle is the fight against discrimination, the fight for equality, regardless of whether we wanted to form a political entity such as a nation-state, or just fight for a better condition [for Black people]. Black Lives Matter movements depart from the racism and discrimination targeted at Black people in the United States. Papuan Lives Matter also originated from racism, but from Indonesia.⁵³

Similarly, Papuan scholar Ira Rumkabu argues that Papuans emphasize their affiliation with Black identity not solely to distinguish themselves from Indonesians:

⁵¹Gallicchio 2000.

⁵²The Crisis 1972b, 138. The NAACP also included West Papua in a resolution adopted at their sixty-second annual convention at Minneapolis in 1971 (see *The Crisis* 1972a, 5).

⁵³Ciko Mofu for the webinar “#BlackLives Matter and West Papua,” May 31, 2020. The webinar was organized by FRI-WP (The Indonesian Peoples’ Front for West Papua). Archived and transcribed by the author.

Beyond the racial categorization, Papuans are related to Black identity through a sense of common oppression and painful collective memories. It is an aspiration that rejects subjugation and dehumanization ... As a political goal, Blackness symbolizes the liberation from the oppressive and colonial system under Indonesia.⁵⁴

Mofu and Rumkabu represent a generation of Papuans who have grown up under Indonesian rule, received an Indonesian style of education, suffered racism in Indonesian cities as college students, and have been exposed to the global Black movements through the Internet. Their statements not only articulate Papuans' definition of Blackness but also challenge the Indonesian state discourse of a race-blind society, reflected in Indonesia's national slogan, *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* (Unity in Diversity).

During the Indonesian New Order (1966–1998), the government viewed any discussion of what was termed “SARA” (*suku, agama, ras, dan antar golongan*; ethnicity, religion, race, and other societal divisions) to be against this Indonesian nationalist principle. Contrary to the unifying spirit of the slogan, the New Order government enforced a colonial-era law that governed incitements of hatred and blasphemy charges. SARA expressions, for instance, are often punished under articles 156 and 156a of the Indonesian Criminal Code.⁵⁵ Against this political and legal configuration, Papuans' accusation of Indonesian racism and expressions of their political and cultural identities as Black or Melanesian pose a difficult problem for the Indonesian state, since Papuans' claims to racial difference are considered to be a mere legacy of Dutch colonialism.

Between 2019 and 2021, I documented ten public discussions on the topic of racism against Papuans in Indonesia, and during these ten sessions, I witnessed heated and sharp exchanges between Papuans who strongly vocalized their experience of racism, and representatives of the current Indonesian government who denied racism is an issue.⁵⁶ Papuans have identified several main loci of Indonesian racism, including the 1969 manipulative act of free choice that led to West Papua's incorporation into Indonesia, state violence, and discriminatory treatment in the Indonesian legal system, development policy, education sector, and media. Papuan students also mention how cultural domination and assimilation policies mark Indonesian rule in the region, and how any expression and articulation of difference is framed as separatist aspirations.⁵⁷ Indonesian school textbooks used in West Papua do not discuss Papuan cultures, and development policy is oriented towards the supposed supremacy of Javanese culture and primitiveness of Papuan cultures.⁵⁸ State policies are accompanied by overt forms of racism against

⁵⁴Ira Rumkabu for the class “Ethnic Politics,” Georgetown University, February 17, 2021. I compare her statement with her presentation in the talk “Dialogue on Racism and Treason,” June 13, 2020. The talk was organized by Tabloid Jubi. Archived and transcribed by the author. See also Rumkabu 2020.

⁵⁵For the history of SARA, see Dijk 1994. Article 156a of the Criminal Code has been used to punish so-called hate speech and religious blasphemy, for instance, in the case of the former Jakarta governor, Basuki Tjahaja Purnama (“Ahok”), who is a Chinese Indonesian. See Amnesty International 2017.

⁵⁶This stands in contrast with the Indonesian Science Institute's analysis on the four roots of West Papuan problems, namely the different perceptions on the history and political status of West Papua within Indonesia, human rights violations and state violence, the failure of Indonesian development in West Papua, and most importantly, marginalization and discrimination (Widjojo and Entus 2010). The Institute is government-funded.

⁵⁷See the webinar “Blacklivesmatter and Papua,” May 31, 2020 (<https://youtu.be/d8ge9zOn0FE>); “Racial Discrimination and Unfair Trials against Papuans,” June 7, 2020 (<https://youtu.be/1bFLoMITHJE>); “Democracy, Human Rights and Racism,” February 27, 2021 (<https://youtu.be/-jeZvpk9JY8>).

⁵⁸In 1970, the Indonesian government carried out the *koteka* operation in which the government gave modern clothing to what they perceived were naked Papuans. The government also introduced projects that aimed to remove Papuans from their own cultures, such as the introduction of rice as a staple instead of sago and sweet potatoes.

Papuans, both in West Papua and elsewhere in Indonesia, where many Papuan students go to study. Filep Karma, a Papuan nationalist leader, told his story:

When I studied in Java, Indonesians considered us, Papuan students, half-animals. They considered us an illustration of Darwin's theory of evolution, a transitional being from an animal to a human. That's how I felt from my college friends in Solo. This treatment did not come from those who are uneducated, but also those who are highly educated. That's how they treat us (the Papuans). *Sometimes, people yelled at us, "Monkey! Apes!"*⁵⁹

Indonesian denials of racism have become even more acute with the solidification of Indonesian nationalism by the Indonesian security forces through the doctrine, *NKRI Harga Mati* ("The Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia till death!"), a slogan which emerged during the East Timor independence referendum in 1999.⁶⁰ Since then, this slogan has been used and reproduced by the Indonesian military and right-wing paramilitary groups to crack down on political dissent. But to Papuans, *NKRI Harga Mati* is an ideological façade that conceals the actual process of extraction and exploitation of West Papua's natural resources. Natalius Pigai argues:

The origin of Indonesian racism can be traced back to the birth of the Indonesian nation. In 1945, when Indonesia prepared its declaration of independence, Mohammad Hatta argued that Indonesia could not include Papuans because Papuans are Black. Papuans, according to Hatta, belong to a different race, thus Indonesia should have included territory from Aceh to Moluccas only. But in the 1960s, Sukarno invaded West Papua and used racialist terms to justify this invasion. The Indonesian people use the word "monkey" to refer to the Papuans. In addition, if you see the composition of the Indonesian cabinet from 1945 until today, Papuans are rarely there. That is apartheid. That is an Indonesian policy of segregation.⁶¹

Perhaps the best way to understand Indonesian racism against Papuans and how Papuans have responded is through popular culture. In the 1970s, Papuans formed several musical bands with names such as Iriantos Primitive, Black Sweet, Black Papas, and Black Brothers (Figure 5). Papuan youth during that era asserted their different identity and the idea of Blackness into music and t-shirts, hairstyles, dance, and study groups. Terms like *kribo* (frizzy hairs) or *hitam* (Black) were widespread. This popularization of Papuans' Black identity proved to be bothersome for the Indonesian military administration in West Papua. In an interview with the Jakarta-based weekly publication *Tempo*, Andy Ajamiseba, the founder of the well-renowned and famous Black Brothers, said that an Indonesian official asked them to replace their name as "[the name] suggests the backwardness of Papuan people."⁶² But for members of the Black Brothers, "black," which they used to refer to their skin color, connoted power.

After Black Brothers, Mambesak, another popular Papuan band, emerged from the University of Cenderawasih, then the only public university in the region. Mambesak was born out of three different forces that played out in the Papuan sphere: an imperative of reforms within the Papuan Reformed Church (*Gereja Kristen Injili*) to return to

⁵⁹Karma and Soenmi 2014, 8 (emphasis added). Munro's study of anti-Papuan racism in Sulawesi also confirms Karma's experience. See Munro 2018.

⁶⁰Nathaniel 2019.

⁶¹Pigai, "Democracy, Human Rights, and Racism in West Papua." "Pigai" refers to the debate among Indonesia's founding fathers on the place of the Papuans within the newly independent state of Indonesia. See Badan Penyelidik Usaha-usaha Persiapan Kemerdekaan Indonesia 1995.

⁶²See Tempo 1979, 25.



Figure 5. Black Bothers album covers.

Credit: Ibiroma Wamla. Used with permission.

Papuan cultures in their liturgy, the political reawakening of educated Papuan elites, and the popularity of radio and the arrival of cassette technology as a mass medium. Mambesak was formed in 1972 but only became popular in 1978. The band performed Papuan songs and dances that they excavated, documented, and inventoried through anthropological research across the region and with the involvement of students from various Papuan ethnic groups. Arnold Ap, Mambesak's founder, shared Ayamiseba's vision of a Papuan Melanesian identity as Blacks. He formulated slogans that became popular among Papuan youth, such as "Black is beautiful," "Black is good," and "Black is black."⁶³ Papuans wore t-shirts with these slogans (Figure 6). As Benny Giay has noted:

They [university students] printed t-shirts and wore them during sports competitions for the commemoration of Indonesian independence every August 17. Who wore those? The University of Cenderawasih students, who at that time were like celebrities. They were proud of their frizzy hairs. They wore *noken* (net bags) everywhere. I remember they wore t-shirts "Black is good" when they played volleyball in front of the military office in Abepura. The message was, it is okay to be Blacks. It is Indonesians who found it a problem.⁶⁴

Papuan youth experiences were similar to those of Black British whom Stuart Hall about wrote in 1988. Hall argued that the term "Black" was coined

a way of referencing the common experience of racism and marginalization ... and came to provide the organizing category of a new politics of resistance among groups and

⁶³Giay 2019.

⁶⁴Giay 2019.



Figure 6. Activist Selpius Bobii wears a t-shirt with a slogan that translates, “There will be a time that from a country of Black men and women will emerge a leader of their own nation.”

Credit: Veronika Kusumaryati.

communities with, in fact, very different histories, traditions and ethnic identities, in this moment, politically speaking.⁶⁵

It was not a coincidence that Papuans followed the arrest and killing of Bantu Stephen Biko, a South African anti-apartheid activist who championed the Black consciousness movement in the 1970s. According to Benny Giay, “The news of the killing stirred the world. We heard it on the radio.” T-shirts and music functioned in West Papua as forms of trans-ethnic national communication, and as vehicles of transnational, cosmopolitan radical Blackness.⁶⁶ The same mode has been replicated in the West Papua Uprising and Papuan Lives Matter movements, in which the Internet has played a strong role in galvanizing Papuans’ identification with Black Lives Matter. While global Black political movements have long shaped Papuan identities, Papuan Lives Matter shows how digital media have played a powerful role in spreading antiracism protests.⁶⁷

⁶⁵Hall 1988, 27.

⁶⁶I want to thank Karen Strassler, who helped me articulate this argument.

⁶⁷Black Lives Matter (BLM) itself was born out of online activism. BLM co-founder Alicia Garza shared the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter following the murder of a young black man, Trayvon Martin, in 2013. Relying on the power of social media, BLM has spread across the world through various digital platforms. See Taylor 2016.

Black Lives Matter and Papuan Lives Matter

The emergence of Papuan Lives Matter is both a specific, local response to Black Lives Matter and a continuation of West Papua antiracism struggles. It shows that the Black experience of racism is shared across geographical reaches, from Minneapolis to West Papua, and that Papuans' antiracism protests specifically speak to the history of their encounter and experience with Indonesian racism. Papuan Lives Matter's political gain, therefore, can be measured locally and globally as the movement has forced, in the words of activist Ciko Mofu, "Indonesian people [to] start talking about discrimination against us. Indonesian people started to listen to us and criticize the government."⁶⁸ The Papuan Lives Matter movement has also put West Papuan issues under the global spotlight, as Ira Rumkabu has noted:

Papuan Lives Matter ultimately speaks to the global audiences, but most importantly, it has forced the Indonesian audience to challenge their pre-conceived notion about the Papuans, to reflect on the Indonesian-Papuan hierarchical relations, and to start asking about anti-Papuan racial discrimination in Indonesia. In the context of conflict resolution, Papua Lives Matter has highlighted the most fundamental problem of the Papuan conflict, which is racism. It is a crucial political moment for the Papuans to highlight their humanitarian problems and importantly, political goals: self-determination.⁶⁹

The Indonesian government points out that Papuans' identification with Black Lives Matter is vague and dangerous because Black Lives Matter does not advocate for an independent nation-state nor is Indonesia a racist nation, or at least not as racist as the United States. The Indonesian government and its supporters also have stated that Indonesia is a multicultural, postcolonial country whose foundation is not built on racial differences. These claims, however, rest on two axes: that racism was part of Indonesia's colonial past and colonialism no longer exists in Indonesia. In contrast, Papuans argue that anti-Papuan racism has shaped Indonesian nationalism and state formation and that racism is part and parcel of Indonesian colonialism in the region. In other words, while Papuans share a global articulation of Blackness, Papuans' epistemology of Blackness is also based on the local relationality of racism and a condition of occupation. If Black Americans use the term "fugitivity" to refer to their escape from slavery, Papuans argue that the establishment of their own nation is an escape from Indonesian domination.⁷⁰ It is thus important to note that in addition to their Black identity, Papuans assume other identities, as a colonized indigenous people, and as Christians in a Muslim-majority country. These other identities distinguish Papuans from Black Americans and their struggle in the United States.

This article shows that Papuan Lives Matter is a project of scale-making, one which aims to frame reality and achieve political goals across various scales: the global, regional, and local.⁷¹ While the ultimate political goal of liberation for West Papua still seems to be far-fetched and the Indonesian state continues to refuse any meaningful engagement with the racism issue, Papuan Lives Matter has opened a new discursive space for talking about anti-Black racism in Indonesia and beyond. Indeed, it is Papuan Lives

⁶⁸Ciko Mofu, "#BlackLives Matter and West Papua."

⁶⁹Rumkabu, "Ethnic Politics."

⁷⁰Hartman 2007; Sojoyner 2017; Moten 2008.

⁷¹See Marston 2000 for a discussion on scale-making.

Matter that has allowed me as a non-Black Indonesian scholar to reflect on and write about how Blackness in West Papua has been understood and articulated in relation to both white supremacy and a postcolonial claim of multiculturalism in postcolonial Asian societies.

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