



FLOWERS IN THE WALL
Truth and Reconciliation in Timor-Leste,
Indonesia, and Melanesia
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Facts, Feasts, and Forests: Considering Truth and Reconciliation in Tanah Papua

TODD BIDERMAN AND JENNY MUNRO

In this chapter we are interested in what sorts of “truths” are included in “truth and reconciliation” and from whose perspective. We also consider what sorts of reconciliation are already taking place in Tanah Papua, even amid ongoing violence. In Tanah Papua we have the problem of a multi-dimensional conflict and a state that is very dedicated to controlling what is said about that conflict. It is worth considering how “non-truth” plays out in local reconciliation attempts and who or what institutions are defended or marginalized in this dynamic.

Tanah Papua has been the site of low-level, endemic conflict since the 1960s. Despite Indonesia’s efforts to eradicate Papuan nationalism, Indigenous aspirations for independence have persisted. The Free Papua Movement (Organisasi Papua Merdeka or OPM), a network of poorly armed fighters based in remote areas that has staged sporadic attacks on Indonesian forces, has gained much attention from Indonesian authorities. However, the OPM is only one of many groups that criticize Indonesian rule and draw attention to social injustices and human rights abuses. The vast majority of Papuans do not participate in any OPM-related activities and most are not in favour of violence as a means of achieving independence. More recently, organizations such as the West Papua National Committee (Komite Nasional Papua Barat, or KNPB) have put forth a vocal critique of

Indonesian abuses, while the United Liberation Movement for West Papua (ULMWP) seeks to bring attention to political conditions in Papua on an international stage.

Politics in Tanah Papua is not reducible to the historical context by which Indonesia came to govern. Rather, Papuans critique the social, economic, environmental, and political conditions that have emerged under Indonesian rule. The Indonesian state, especially the police and military in Papua, has been intolerant of such criticisms. Criticism of Indonesian governance is branded as “treason,” suppressed through violence, murder, and intimidation, and often punished through arbitrary detention and imprisonment. There is denial about the actions of the military and police in Papua at the highest levels of Indonesian governance, and human rights violations have not been addressed. Indeed, truth, denial, secrets, and impunity are at the heart of the political conflict in Papua. Indonesian non-truth is central to Papuan experiences and grievances. Yet scholars have argued that non-truth is exceedingly common in approaches to conflict resolution throughout Indonesia, including in Papua, and even for community actors drawing on local understandings.¹ Still, for Papua, one question that arises is how non-truth as an approach is valued or enforced in response to incidents of state violence, even as Papuans and their supporters continue to criticize non-truth as a broad political practice of the Indonesian state because it denies history, rights, and current conditions.

In looking at the concept and practice of truth and reconciliation in Papua, we first acknowledge that Papuans and their supporters have been doing work that reflects the principles of truth and reconciliation in spite of ongoing conflict. Their work, as we discuss later, is mainly of local inspiration and derivation, but also reflects international connections and experiences.

Papua’s diversity provokes questions about how international, national, or otherwise high-level processes can engage appropriately with local voices, world views, and cultural values. What, then, are Papuan approaches to reconciliation, and what is the role of truth? Because conflict is ongoing, the Papuan case also gives us an opportunity to ask what has to take place, or what conditions have to be created, in order for reconciliation to occur and so that truth may be spoken.

There are three aspects to highlight about approaches to truth and reconciliation in Papua. The first aspect is the present landscape and state

of Papuan approaches to conflict resolution. The second aspect, extending from that, questions what needs to be resolved and why. One area we highlight is the impact of economic development projects, namely resource extraction and land exploitation, on Papuan identity. Thirdly, given these points, and exploring some recent examples of small-scale reconciliation in the wake of state violence, we ask what truth and reconciliation processes in Papua might look like.

In this chapter we make use of secondary sources on the conflict and resolution-related actions, present some views from people we have worked with in Papua, and generally draw on over a decade of experience working with Papuans. Truth and reconciliation is a topic we have come to by way of a keen interest in inequalities in Tanah Papua and a commitment to community-based and Indigenous-led efforts to ameliorate inequalities. Todd Biderman comes from a development and social- and ecological-justice background, largely in Indonesia. Over the last eight years he has been working with Papuan civil-society groups and communities. Jenny Munro is an anthropologist who works on gender, health, and education in Papua, particularly in the central highlands of Papua province. We have also collaborated on developing an Indigenous-led HIV prevention strategy for Tanah Papua.²

Understandings of the Conflict in Tanah Papua

Before we can discuss what approaches have been taken towards resolving the political conflict in Papua, it is important to note that there is disagreement about the nature of the conflict itself, and therefore what needs to be resolved, by whom, and why. This situation partially underpins Papuans' calls for truth, or "straightening history" (*pelurusan sejarah*), described in more detail later. In general, there are dominant Indonesian and dominant Papuan perspectives on the conflict. The Indonesian perspective is mainly represented and put forward by government officials and some commentators. The Papuan perspective includes Papuan scholars, some political leaders and representatives, and everyday Papuans. There is also diversity within Indonesian and Papuan views.

INDONESIAN VIEWS

The dominant, official perspective in Indonesia is that there should be no question about the legitimacy of Indonesia's hold on Papua. In this view, Papua never should have been retained by the Dutch in the first place, as the Netherlands was obliged to return the entire former East Indies colony to the new independent government of Indonesia. From this point of view, Papua is critical part of a complete Indonesian nation, and indeed bringing Papua into its fold was an important emphasis of early Indonesian actions. Thus, one analysis of Papuan desires for independence suggests that the Indonesian agenda of generating a feeling of national belonging and common identity has failed. A less sympathetic view holds that "radicals" (the OPM and other groups that have been branded as terrorist organizations), who are presumed to represent a violent minority of Papuans, refuse to accept Indonesian authority, actively wage war on the state in order to achieve independence, and need to be eradicated through violent means.

Related to this, another dominant, official Indonesian viewpoint on the conflict holds that Papuans are aggrieved by conditions of underdevelopment and poverty. Not being part of the Indonesian national trajectory of economic growth and increased prosperity is in some ways another manifestation of exclusion. But more generally, this perspective suggests that the source of Papuan grievance is mainly economic. Papuans are also said to be envious of the economic achievements and dominance of Indonesian migrants. Thus, there is a social dimension to this economic understanding of the conflict. In this view, Papua is often said to be rich in natural resources that have not yet been exploited to advance the social and economic conditions of the Indigenous inhabitants.

Researchers have also described how some Indonesians hold related, but unofficial views of Papua as a land of riches to be exploited, a frontier economy where profits can be made quickly and easily. These perspectives were present twenty years ago,³ and are probably even more prevalent today. Slama and Munro for example, describe conversations with Indonesian businessmen in Jakarta who were eager to gain access to lucrative development, construction and other sorts of *proyek* (project) in Papua.⁴ These ambitions suggest Indonesian (and other) entrepreneurs, managing agencies, and contractors are angling to capture some of the trillions of rupiah that make up decentralization funds in Papua.

PAPUAN VIEWS

Dominant Papuan views of the conflict tend to diverge from Indonesian understandings, though certain understandings are shared with progressive actors and agencies in Indonesian society. From a historical perspective, Papuans find Indonesian control illegitimate, noting that their leaders declared independence in 1961, and that their right to self-determination was obliterated in the sham referendum of 1969.

Where the Indonesian view holds that Papuans ought to feel a sense of belonging in a diverse nation, some Papuans argue that their cultural and ethnic distinctiveness from the rest of Indonesia undermine Indonesia's right to govern. Related to this, Papuans have also increasingly been drawing attention to experiences of stigmatization, racism, and discrimination that challenge those who claim that Papuans are valued as equal cultural citizens. Papuan critiques also draw attention to the in-migration of Indonesians and other practices related to "Indonesianization" as proof that notions of national belonging are little more than political rhetoric.⁵

There is a perception that Indonesian claims of nationalistic feelings or the desire to develop Papua are false claims that cover up true intentions. For example, a key element of Papuan understandings of the conflict is that Indonesia wanted Papua in order to develop and profit from newly discovered gold deposits.⁶ Many Papuans suggest that Indonesia is not interested in improving Papuan lives and would rather Papuans were eliminated to make access to resources easier. State violence, neglect of health and welfare issues, including a burgeoning HIV epidemic, the in-migration of Indonesians (particularly Muslim Indonesians) that has reduced Papuans to a minority in cities, and the birth control agenda are held up as examples of how Papuans lives are not valued. Leslie Butt has analyzed what might be called a "conspiracy theory" among Indigenous highlanders that argues that Indonesia has deliberately introduced HIV-infected sex workers to decimate the Indigenous population.⁷ Through her research she demonstrates that the term *conspiracy theory* is misleading because highlanders have good reason to question what they are told by Indonesians about HIV based on observations and rational assessments. For example, sex work is illegal, and yet highlanders can see that it occurs with the acknowledgement of government authorities and the involvement of military protection.

Understandings of the conflict also draw attention to local situations. In the highlands, for example, Indigenous leaders frequently lament the chaos in the Indonesian system, and that their previous strategies for leadership, land issues, and social and economic needs are in disarray.⁸ The Indonesian system has normalized corruption, the role of money in politics, and poor governance, and this continues to permeate local governance. Thus locals also express frustration that members of parliament fail to represent their constituents' interests and that democratic processes are allowed to be openly flaunted. This leads to a deepening of resentment towards Indonesian rule and Indonesian migrants, as well as tensions among Papuans.

State Approaches to Conflict Resolution

Generally speaking, Indonesian governments have taken two approaches: those of "security" and "development." The security-led approach was based on the idea that the conflict is being generated by particular armed groups, and is being inflamed by those who report on human rights abuses and other forms of repression. Indonesia usually claims that these reports are false and are just being made to increase support for Papuan independence, both among locals and among foreign audiences. Foreigners are often accused of "false reporting," supporting banned groups, and otherwise promoting separatism. This has been the justification for both the earlier designation of Papua as a "military operations zone" (*daerah operasi militer*), which restricted access, and the persistent reluctance to allow access to both domestic journalists and observers and foreigners. The ostensible need to control these activities has been the justification for continuing to increase the presence of the military, police, and special forces.

Yet, as noted above, an increased military presence often means more restricted democratic social and political spaces, including restrictions on people's right to protest and communities' right to organize. This not only incites feelings of injustice among Papuans but for Indonesia it also necessitates the further surveillance on Papuans and the deepening involvement of security agents in policing everyday life as well as community, NGO, and other civil-society activities. Repression of civil-society expression and activism has also resulted in repeated abuses of human rights. The security approach to conflict resolution thus generates increased and deepening

conflict. This has long been recognized by Papuans and others, leading to calls for peacebuilding, dialogue, and political solutions. Despite acknowledging that Papuan grievances might amount to more than just a few so-called terrorists who disagree with the historical conditions of incorporation, the Indonesian government continues to allow security forces to play a dominant role in managing conflict in Papua.

The security approach has been coupled with the “development” (*pembangunan*) or “prosperity” (*kesejahteraan*) approach to conflict resolution, which is derived from an understanding that conditions of underdevelopment, poverty, and lack of economic development contribute to Papuan desires for independence. However, the Indonesian state has a particular view on what sort of development is lacking in Papua, and what is therefore needed to improve “prosperity.” No doubt there are differing opinions within this approach to conflict resolution, with some focusing more on Papuans’ poverty, economic inequalities with Indonesians, and lack of services, while many others take the need for development to mean investment into Papua through capital projects, often funded by foreign aid. The Special Autonomy Law of 2001 reflected the view that profits from Papuan resources had been flowing to Jakarta with very little being retained in the way of development returns or outcomes. The central government thus saw the problem as one of unequal development, not of self-determination. It mandated transfer payments, through which billions of dollars have been poured into projects to improve governance, infrastructure, health, and education.

Special autonomy had some input from Papuan representatives, but at the time most Papuans saw it as an unwelcome alternative to independence, and many were opposed to it from the start: it was seen as Jakarta’s solution, not theirs. There is very little evidence of how much money has remained in Papua and how much has flowed back out again to Indonesian contractors tasked with delivering development (especially infrastructure) projects.⁹ Some critiques centre on the fact that the funds have contributed to the growth of a Papuan political elite, and have not been used to benefit Papuans more generally.¹⁰ However, Papuan leaders have also criticized the implementation of special autonomy, declared it deceased, rejected it, and symbolically “returned” it to Jakarta. For example, in 2010 protesters carried a banner that said, “Special Autonomy (Otsus) has failed; Papuan peoples’ right to life is threatened.”¹¹ More recently, in

March 2016, the Civil Servants Association of Papua declared its support for “the Governor and Vice-Governor of Papua to return Special Autonomy to the central government.”¹²

Beyond financial transfers, special autonomy was supposed to guarantee Papuan leaders some authority to increase the numbers of Papuans in government and to empower Papuans more generally. Richard Chauvel among others notes that Papuan policy efforts have been hampered by power dynamics in Jakarta.¹³ Anecdotally, the presence of Papuans in government has increased, but there is no research to specify how and where this has occurred, and what effects it has had in terms of authority or decision-making power.

Along with special autonomy provisions there has been a decentralization program that aims to bring development outcomes for communities (in part through direct village development funds) and facilitate better access to government services. A new province, West Papua, was carved from the western tip or Bird’s Head region of Papua province. Within that, further devolution has occurred through the creation of new regencies (*kabupaten*) and districts. In West Papua province prior to 2003 there were six regencies and now there are fourteen, with more on the way. Within that, there are districts that are also subdivided. The official logic behind the creation of new regencies and districts is that it brings services closer to people and makes large or rugged areas more manageable from a logistical and governance standpoint, but at the same time the division of these areas results in the fracturing of communities and cultural groups. Competitive angling among Indigenous people (mainly men) for funds and political power has led to new violence and marginalization. It has also fed into the narratives of those commentators who wish to blame Papuans for the failures of governance in the era of special autonomy.

In some ways, the development approach to conflict resolution in Papua also brings increased securitization, building on a tradition of military involvement (official or clandestine) in development. For the thirty years of Suharto’s rule Indonesia was run by a military-backed dictatorship, with police and military tasked with implementing development. In Papua, the security sector continues to be heavily involved, both legally and illegally, in corporate activities, especially resource extraction and development projects in remote areas. President Joko Widodo (known as Jokowi) has expanded the role of the military as a development actor in Papua,¹⁴ and

signed off on far-reaching security policies that take the military into more regions of Papua/West Papua, in greater numbers, with permanent bases, and with less oversight from Jakarta¹⁵—exactly the opposite of what most analysts say is needed to overcome abuses of power. Jokowi also failed to address an incident that occurred in Papua mere weeks after he took his oath, when unarmed school students were reportedly shot by police in the highlands during a protest against military abuses.¹⁶

A controversial effect of decentralization and the creation of new districts is that these processes result in an influx of soldiers filling new command posts and bases at each level of administration.¹⁷ Increased military and increased money is a dangerous combination that has historically led to conflict and rights abuses in Papua. At the same time, there is a lack of recognition of historical violence, ongoing violence, and heavy-handed support of that development program.

After years of Indonesia’s “security” and “prosperity” approaches, the land of Papua still ranks among the poorest regions of Indonesia and is the least developed according to the UN Human Development Index. At the same time, there is a continued closure of democratic and civil-political space. There are, within the five-decade history of this conflict, obvious and well-documented cases of killings, rape, torture, of political disappearances, of gross violations against segments of Papuan society.¹⁸ These are the obvious issues that will come to the fore of any truth and reconciliation process—if we get that far.

Papuan-led Strategies towards Dialogue, Acknowledgement, Truth, and Dispute Resolution

Papuan leaders have made initial steps to meet the Indonesian government on at least three occasions since 1998—the year of the fall of the Suharto dictatorship—to try and bridge the gap between independence claims and the Indonesian government. West Papuan leader Octovianus Mote describes 1999 and 2000 as “years of political victory which saw a Papuan leadership take strong direction. Two successive Papuan National Congresses established the Presidium Dewan Papua (Papua Presidium Council) and, in turn, set two paths to territorial independence.” Mote continues:

Following the fall of the New Order military regime ... 100 representatives of the Papuan nation travelled to Jakarta to make their aspirations clear in a peaceful, open, and democratic way to the new President of Indonesia, B. J. Habibie. The whole Papuan nation had united and cast off the ropes of fear that had entangled them for so long. From mountain to coast, from north and south, whether Protestant, Catholic or even Muslim, whether illiterate villager or educated city-dweller—all united and shouted a single word: *merdeka!* or freedom.¹⁹

Thus, a hundred Papuan leaders (sometimes referred to as Team 100) advanced a claim to self-determination for the Papuan people. They hoped this might start a process of positive change in Papua, one that would shift away from the nearly forty preceding years of conflict. After the fall of Suharto, the notion of “straightening” false history, a re-understanding of the events that have happened since the incorporation of Papua into Indonesia in the 1960s, gained prominence among Papuans. Papuan leaders explicitly called for this truth-telling as part of their political activism. They also embarked on an “international political campaign to kick-start the independence struggle for the return and consolidation of basic rights of the Papuan people and nation.”²⁰

Within the Special Autonomy Law of 2001, space was encoded or legislated to ensure a process that would address Papuan calls for correcting history and truth-telling. In 2003, in response to a call from religious leaders in Papua to help them promote peace, justice, and human rights, several faith-based organizations formed a network committed to supporting the campaign of Papuan religious leaders to make Papua a “land of peace.”²¹ The group describes the initiative, which was established by leaders of the Catholic, Christian, Muslim, Hindu, and Buddhist communities in Papua, as follows:

“Papua, Land of Peace” aims to establish a culture of peace. It builds communication ties between the different peoples and religions within Papua and between Papuans and the Indonesian Government. It intends to offer a free and just space, an arena for an open-ended discussion, and a frame for dialogue acceptable to all parties. “Papua, Land of Peace” recognizes

Papua's *memoria passionis*: the remembrance of a history full of violence, neglect and broken promises against the Papuans. It believes that this history needs healing and recognition.²²

Activists and leaders have also taken this agenda forward in various international forums, ranging from religious and civil-society groups who have dedicated their efforts to documenting violence, to calls for international human rights observers. The ULMWP recently called for the Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG) and the Pacific Islands Forum to initiate human rights investigations in West Papua, and this has certainly gained traction among some members of the MSG.

Yet so far, little to no progress has been made towards Papuan calls for historical “truth,” nor truth in response to acts of state violence that continue to occur. For example, human rights organizations continue to call for investigations into widespread patterns of violence but these calls have led to minimal, if any, response. It is worth noting that, broadly speaking, Indonesia has a very poor record of addressing historical human rights violations.²³

In 2009 the Indonesian National Institute of Sciences (LIPI) released a report that outlined a “road map” for resolving conflict in Papua.²⁴ The road map listed four pillars of Papua’s problems, including lack of recognition of historical wrongs and injustices, and offered four recommended solutions. The road map has been a reference point for peace advocates and activists in Tanah Papua, in particular the Papua Peace Network (Jaringan Damai Papua), which has strong backing from church leaders in Papua. Calls for dialogue have been met with reticence under all previous Indonesian administrations.

Under President Jokowi, there has so far not been any movement forward on political dialogue, changing atmospheres of repression and abuse, or truth-telling. To some extent the government has acknowledged that violence occurs in Papua, and that there have been human rights violations, but it considers these violations to be a thing of the past.

Post-Violence Resolution in the Central Highlands: The Honelama and Tolikara Incidents

In this section we discuss the efforts at resolution and reconciliation that took place after two separate incidents of security-sector violence in the highlands. Our objective is to draw out some details on what current, local, and Papuan approaches to resolving state-perpetrated violence look like and to reflect on how they engage with truth, cultural values, and local and government leaders. We invite you to imagine how a truth and reconciliation process or commission might address a fifty-year history of incidents like these.

HONELAMA, WAMENA, 6 JUNE 2012

On 6 June 2012, while Jenny was in Wamena, Jayawijaya regency, in the central highlands, two soldiers from Battalion 756, speeding down a village road in Honelama, struck and injured a child with their motorbike at about 10 am. The child was rushed to the hospital. His relatives, attending a funeral nearby, did not know the child's exact conditions, and began fighting with the soldiers. One soldier was stabbed and died on the roadside, while the other was injured and rushed to the hospital.²⁵ Then, around 12 pm, two truckloads of soldiers from the battalion attacked Honelama village, killing an Indigenous man and stabbing about a dozen people.²⁶ The village, including homes, buildings, and vehicles, was burned to the ground. People fled the area.

Indigenous NGOs, led by the Central Highlands Legal Advocacy and Human Rights Network (Jaringan Advokasi Penegakan Hukum dan HAM Pegunungan Tengah Papua) immediately formed an investigative team and began documenting injuries, deaths, and loss of property.²⁷ The NGOs involved were not specifically legal or political organizations, and included the Jayawijaya Women's Voice Foundation, Yukemdi (the leading HIV NGO), and the Catholic Youth Association. The report contained details of the incident, photos of injuries and eyewitness testimony. It was prepared and disseminated quickly. When it was released, for example, the authors did not know whether the child hit by soldiers was alive or dead. According to the report, the soldiers not only attacked Honelama but then continued rioting down the main streets of town, shooting at buildings,

destroying the homes of both Papuans and non-Papuans, and burning vehicles.²⁸

On 12 June, a group of leaders and officials (*pimpinan daerah*)—including the regent of Jayawijaya, the head of the local legislature (the DPRD) and other parliamentarians, the Jayawijaya representative from the Papua Peoples Assembly (Majelis Rakyat Papua, or MRP), several church and NGO leaders, and traditional leaders—met in Wamena. From the security side, there was the district military commander (Kodim), the head of the Jayawijaya police, and the commander of Battalion 756 (the unit to which the two soldiers belonged). Based on the available descriptions, the security representatives were all Indonesian, and the majority of the local government, NGO, and church representatives were Papuan.

The group developed a joint statement, which they referred to as a “peace agreement” (*kesepakatan damai*), to resolve the incident. It contained eight points (translated below):

1. Their deepest concern and regret at the stabbing incident between TNI Battalion 756 Wimane Sili and the civilians, which caused loss of life and property.
2. All sides agreed to resolve the situation and safeguard security and order in the Jayawijaya region and through the central highlands by respecting the reconciliation process undertaken by the government.
3. The civilian and military perpetrators and the soldier should be investigated and processed according to the law.
4. The circulation of alcoholic drinks by civilians and the security apparatus in Jayawijaya should be stopped to reduce criminal behaviour.
5. The government will document all losses associated with the actions of 6 June 2012 and give compensation to the victims.
6. If a similar incident occurred again, the security apparatus is requested to take a persuasive approach [i.e., not a violent response].

7. If a similar incident were to occur again, the parties to the conflict should not take matters into their own hands nor use weapons.
8. The community and members of the military and police are requested not to provoke one another regarding this incident in the days to come thereby prolonging the problem.

Representatives then signed the statement.²⁹

News reports also state that a traditional feast (*bakar batu*) was held in Honelama. It involved statements and impromptu speeches from the military representatives as well as victims and villagers, and was mediated by church and traditional leaders. The victims requested that the perpetrators from Battalion 756 and the civilians who stabbed the deceased soldier be arrested and processed according to the law. They asked that the legal proceedings be conducted in a transparent manner so that the community at large could be informed. Lastly, they asked the government to compensate them for all of their losses pertaining to the incident.³⁰

Another media report indicates that Battalion 756 provided money to the victims to cover the cost of treating their injuries, and that this occurred at the *bakar batu* in Honelama.³¹ The Jawawijaya district commander expressed regret at the incident and for the injuries caused to civilians as well as the soldiers. The Battalion 756 commander expressed regret at the “emotional and spontaneous” actions of his soldiers who took vengeance on the community, noting that regardless their reasons they would be sanctioned according to the law. Statements of regret were also made by church leaders and representatives from the local Nduga group. Interestingly, they asserted that the civilian who killed the soldier was from Lanny Jaya and had fled into Honelama, causing the residents of the latter to bear the brunt of the violence. They asked that the Lanny Jaya community apologize to the TNI and the people of Wamena.

News reports suggest that the meeting also provided an opportunity to review the facts of what occurred and to correct misinformation. For example, it had been rumoured that the military shot a civilian, and that the regent had confirmed or asserted this information. At the meeting, it was clarified that the regent had not stated this and that the military had not shot any civilians.

Beyond this, however, the investigative team also heard that soldiers were claiming that they attacked civilians because a weapon had been stolen from the injured soldiers. The investigative team found no evidence that villagers had stolen a weapon, strongly opposed this view, and argued that this was being used to justify what had occurred. The team thus demanded that the “TNI Commander examine the actions of the soldiers and clarify again what really happened.”³²

The first part of this particular truth and reconciliation process was a community-led investigation that took place very early on in the incident. Their efforts potentially thwarted an attempt by the military to explain their actions by alleging that people had stolen a weapon. Data and truth were clearly an important part of this agenda. The investigators represented highly respected locals—albeit all men—with extensive community networks and experience mediating between grassroots society and government institutions. Political leaders then engaged in a formal reconciliation meeting that was also attended by church and community leaders to devise the joint statement on the incident. It contains various statements of regrets from both sides and it criticizes the actions of both the civilians who fought with the soldiers and the soldiers who took vengeance. It contains various broader statements related to conditions that might have led to this sort of violence and which could prevent something similar from happening again. It notes the need for compensation and calls for a de-escalation of tensions and the eschewal of any further violence.

Then, a village-level reconciliation, mediated by church and traditional leaders, focused on the military and the local victims and villagers. It centred on a traditional *bakar batu* feast and some forms of compensation were paid, or at least promised. *Bakar batu* is widely recognized as an important Indigenous custom in the highlands. Guests bring pigs, sweet potatoes, and greens, and this is traditionally organized depending on the relationships between the hosts and the guests. The food is covered in banana palms and steamed slowly under hot rocks. When it is opened the food is distributed by the hosts to the guests, who are usually sitting on the ground, grouped according to different kinship relations and families. Men sit and eat separately from women and most of the children.

Historically, *bakar batu* was the culmination of marriage and funeral ceremonies through which large-scale exchanges of pigs occurred among clans. Nowadays *bakar batu* remains central at funerals and weddings but

is also common at holiday celebrations, birthdays, and other community occasions, such as church openings, political gatherings, or the inauguration of an official. It is mainly practiced among Indigenous locals, though large-scale celebrations (church events or inaugurations) might attract non-Papuans. Given that it is typically a meal of pork, which the majority of non-Papuans (who are Muslim) do not eat, non-Papuans' participation in *bakar batu* is often limited. *Bakar batu* is normally organized on egalitarian principles, and reflects the view that sitting and eating together generates and affirms social bonds. When *bakar batu* needs to cater for officials and non-Papuans, then sitting on the ground is not considered an option, and chairs and tables are provided. The atmosphere is distinctly less egalitarian, much more formal, and potentially awkward as people who do not normally mix or interact (and who are probably not relatives or neighbours) are brought together. It is unclear from the various reports how, exactly, the *bakar batu* took place in Honelama, whether all sides sat and ate together. But it is important to keep in mind when thinking about this example of reconciliation just how out of the ordinary close interaction between Indigenous locals and Indonesian security personnel is in Wamena, other than potentially negative interactions like surveillance or questioning. Most locals would not have had military officials visit and speak publicly in their village, let alone share in *bakar batu*.

During the ceremony, different groups made statements of regret and impact. Those that were ostensibly concerned with regret contained important, less-conciliatory subtexts, such as the commander's view that the soldiers' "spontaneous" violence was attributable to emotion rather than organized or condoned by their superiors, or the Nduga group's emphasis on the culpability of the people of Lanny Jaya. This assessment reflects tensions between groups from different parts of the central highlands that go beyond the incident.

The Honelama reconciliation process can be said to broadly represent typical reconciliation efforts after state violence in the highlands and perhaps beyond. There is a strong formal and institutional dimension, including the production of a statement for popular consumption, and also a more local or cultural dimension in the use of the *bakar batu* and reference to compensation. At both levels Indigenous representatives, ranging from elite political actors like the regent to more community-based NGO and customary figures, were main leaders.

KARUBAGA, TOLIKARA, 16 JULY 2015

On 16 July 2015, in the town of Karubaga—located in another part of the highlands—a slightly more complex scenario unfolded. A large gathering of Christians from the Evangelical Church of Indonesia (Gereja Injili di Indonesia, or GIDI), many from outside the area, were participating in a religious camp that coincided with the Muslim holiday of Ramadan. GIDI leaders had advised the authorities, including military and police, of their gathering, and requested that the mosque not use its loudspeaker for the call to prayers during the event.³³ Early reports said that, while the police had agreed to this request, this message was not received or was not passed onto the imam. However, later investigations suggest that the situation was more complicated, in part because the GIDI activities had been rescheduled after the request was agreed to.³⁴ There may have been poor communication about the nature and the timing of the request. When the call to prayer came over the loudspeaker, a group of youth from the religious gathering went to the military command post, where the soldiers and police were themselves conducting their morning prayers, to ask why the loudspeaker was being used. Some reports say that the youths were throwing rocks and shouting, “Disperse.” A soldier fired into the air and then others opened fire on the crowd. A Papuan youth, fifteen-year-old Edi Wanimbo, was killed and ten people suffered gunshot wounds. A riot ensued in which a number of shops were set alight by Papuans. The fire spread to the nearby mosque, which was damaged.

Reports travelled around Indonesia that Papuans had attacked a mosque and devotees during Idul Fitri prayers. These reports were soon (ostensibly) accompanied by a copy of a letter from the local GIDI church leader requesting that a number of restrictions be placed on local Muslims, including the banning of the call to prayer and wearing of the head scarf. Reports circulated that Tolikara regency had passed a local law restricting the activities of non-GIDI denominations and religions, but this was discovered to be false. Such a law had been proposed by the regent but had not gained approval from the governor, the district parliament, or the national Ministry of Home Affairs.³⁵

The speed at which these unverified reports spread over the Internet was incredible. News of the incident incited outrage, especially among Indonesian Muslims then celebrating the end of Ramadan. According to an

analysis from researchers at the Centre for Cross Cultural and Religious Studies at Gadjah Mada University in Java, a number of media reports exaggerated (*menggoreng*, literally “fried”) the incident.³⁶ Victor Mambor, a Papuan journalist, later commented that within about two hours the police had already issued a chronology of events, largely based on information from text messages, and without talking to any of the eyewitnesses.³⁷ The violence was described as an attack on Muslims by intolerant, “crazed” (*amuk*) Papuans.³⁸ The news quickly reached Jakarta, and even President Jokowi was asked to comment and take action against the Papuans. A panel of Jakarta-based church leaders (including GIDI) was convened to comment on television. To combat these representations, church and other Papuan leaders, such as Catholic priest and peace advocate Dr. Neles Tebay, soon weighed in, arguing that Muslims and Christians had lived in peace in Karubaga for the past few decades and that there had never been tension or violence. They argued against labelling the incident a religious conflict and requested that outsiders end their provocative statements. Popular opinion on social media further asserted that the matter should be left to locals in Papua to resolve according to their existing relationships and knowledge of the context.³⁹

In response, on 24 July, the regent formed a Reconciliation Team (Tim Pemulihan, though later news reports also used the term *rekonsiliasi*⁴⁰) comprised of Muslim and GIDI church leaders, local Indigenous leaders, government representatives, and members of the police and military. The team was to facilitate the distribution of donations that were coming in for those who lost property as well as those who were in hospital with gunshot wounds, to provide psychological support, and to mediate between Christian and Muslim congregations so as to ensure that the atmosphere remained peaceful.⁴¹ On 29 July, high-level representatives from the religious groups issued a joint statement in Jayapura, the provincial capital, by which they conveyed their understanding of the incident (it was characterized a miscommunication, not a religious conflict), mutual apologies, and commitments to rebuilding.⁴²

Prior to this, a team from the National Human Rights Commission also conducted investigations and noted four separate human rights violations related to the case, both on the part of local authorities, who tried to restrict others’ religious practices, and on the part of military and police, who shot at the crowd.⁴³

A number of Papuans were also arrested, and there were calls from the local religious leaders to settle the matter outside the formal legal system and according to custom. The police, however, insisted that the accused be dealt with legally. Two men were ultimately imprisoned for two months.

In early August, the regent described a number of efforts underway to aid with reconciliation.⁴⁴ This included shows of solidarity and support towards Muslims by the regent and other high-level political officials, disbursement of funds to rebuild the shops and the mosque, a community festival, and the establishment of a number of new military checkpoints in town. Thus, even though the regent had seemingly promoted religious intolerance (including of non-GIDI Christian denominations), he quickly backed away from this perspective for the sake of reconciliation when pressed by higher authorities.

There are some parallels here with the resolution arrived at in the Honelama incident, such as the quick formation of a formal group comprised of government, community, and religious leaders, the emphasis on rebuilding, de-escalation, apologies without blame, and yet also simultaneous efforts to seek facts and develop a balanced account of the events. It appears, however, that there was no traditional feast or compensation paid, as occurred in Honelama. There was no explicit focus on a village-level ceremony since the violence took place in the centre of the small town. While Papuans and human rights defenders were critical of the police and military response, the police and military offered no regrets or apologies, and clearly felt that Papuans were the culprits. Thus, what actually might be read as a military-civilian incident was construed as a Muslim-Christian conflict, notwithstanding the fact that some of the Muslims who were praying, and even some who were shooting, were in fact soldiers.

The above examples give some sense of the broad patterns and parameters of post-violence reconciliation in the highlands. These examples focus on the immediate aftermath, which is significant because, given the underlying tensions between Papuans and Indonesians and the high level of militarization in the area, events like these could easily trigger widespread violence. The longer-term view seems to be that incidents continue to happen, and military and police violence continues, if not necessarily in Karubaga or Wamena specifically. Thus these measures secure a modicum of peace for the time being. It is difficult to say how far these approaches to reconciliation address violence that could be construed as “religious” or

ethnic, because such conflict is rare (and it remains unclear to what extent Papuans' actions in Karubaga were directed towards Muslims per se or towards soldiers and police).

The cases above press us to question what "Papuan" or "local" approaches look like while also noting the strong role played by politicians and military/state agendas that were asserted in both cases. Papuans clearly participated, and took leading roles in some aspects of these reconciliation approaches, but many other Papuans were highly unsatisfied with the sort of truth and reconciliation that was demonstrated through the ensuing community performances. There are different degrees and meanings of participation, and ownership is a different matter altogether. None of the broader questions about the actions of police and military or ethnic tensions have since been seriously addressed, and a cynical view may hold that reconciliation was swiftly performed to shut down and exclude an expanding chorus of critical voices demanding real discussions, answers, and responses.

Truth and Place: Integrating Ecological and Cultural Perspectives into Reconciliation

If the above cases give a sense of the standard reactions to violations that occur in local contexts (rather than violation writ large, as in the entire political conflict), this section focuses on asking what might be possible, and what else should be considered.

When we talk about a human rights focus and the individual focus within truth and reconciliation, we are positing relationships with people and places as they are understood in Western, Euro-American legal and civil ideas. Thus it is important to ask how other people, and other communities in other parts of the world, understand themselves. When we talk about ethnic Papuans, we are talking about people who would identify as Indigenous peoples. There are some three hundred distinct languages and communities within just the western part of the island. This is a region, then, known for its remarkable biological, cultural, and ethnic diversity. Culture and heritage are significant in everyday life and as identity markers, and would need to be reflected in approaches to truth and reconciliation.

In Tanah Papua, societies, languages, and ways of being and seeing reflect inter-connected relationships among people and place. These understandings foster identities that may challenge limited notions of “individual rights” commonly addressed through truth and reconciliation processes, even as many Papuans are also educated and versed in other notions of rights and may be dedicated to inherited legal traditions. Honouring the place-based perspectives of Indigenous Papuans, and the integrity of relationships with the natural environment, would require diving deeply into local world views and experiences. Looking at place-based aspects of Papuan communities, particularly the ones that are living in proximity to forests, would perhaps present novel considerations for meaningful truth and reconciliation.

To underline this point, consider the words of Neles Tebay:

The forest, for indigenous Papuans from all tribes, has multi-dimensional meanings ... it is first and foremost a member of the community. The Papuan community is composed not only of living people, but also the deceased, spirits, plants, animals, and the whole of nature. That’s why community, both as a tribe and a community within a tribe, always has its own forest with a clearly defined boundary. Culturally speaking, a Papuan can never be separated from the forest. It would be a mistake if the Papuan forest was seen as an isolated thing from the Papuans themselves because the forest and the people form one community. The deeper sense of forest is expressed in the Papuan saying “hutan adalah mama” (the forest is our mother). The forest is respected as a mother who tirelessly cares for, protects and sustains all of the members of the community, including the animals. Papuans cannot imagine life without the forest; emphasizing the deeper meaning of forests they say ... “our forests, our lives.”⁴⁵

Similarly, one of the Papuan communities where we have recently worked lies on the north coast of West Papua province’s Bird’s Head region. There, the Mpur people have a saying: “nek te eyen” (the land is our mother).⁴⁶ When Mpur people say that their land is their mother or that their lives and souls are one with the forests, what they mean is rooted in a way of

seeing and being in which “the quality of intimate relations with non-human and human components of the environment is one and the same.”⁴⁷ There would seem to be a sense of self and a sense of identity that extends beyond their own “individual” body to include the agency of other community members and the living environment around them. Therefore, in thinking about the impact of resource extraction and the exploitation of people and environment that comes with development that is imposed or conducted in conditions of fear, it is important to consider the perspectives on identity, agency, and community held by those who have been violated. These kinds of expressions of coupling between people and place, and the integral meanings which co-arise among them, indicate novel understandings of identity. Individuals are in relationship with community and the more-than-human cohabitants of a place in a holistic way.

Papuan civil-society colleagues emphasize that human rights, development, and environmental issues are integrated and cannot be separated. From working in these realms of ecological, social justice, and community development, it seems to us that development, human rights, and cultural values and experiences cannot be separated. The need to grapple with these interconnections forces us to try to extend the concept of truth and reconciliation and its processes.

Extending the Foundations of Truth and Reconciliation in Tanah Papua

It seems that reconciliation depends first on what sort of truth comes out and how it is facilitated, and what understandings underpin the notion of “truth”; similarly, who or what was reconciled in Honelama and Karubaga, and what has been silenced. What would be the scale at which a future process would operate: village or state? Local or national?

Reconciliation requires modes that capture the complexities of Tanah Papua. We have focused on violence and the violation of identity and place that often occurs in contexts of coercive resource development. But there are many more angles and scales to truth and reconciliation in Tanah Papua that need investigation and consideration. The daily social challenges of ethnic relations, racialized histories, and the day-to-day discrimination will need to be transcended in any meaningful truth and reconciliation

process.⁴⁸ This will not be easy in a country that is reticent to talk about race and racism. In order to get to a place of truth, the Indonesian government—and Indonesian society at large—has to acknowledge wrongdoing. It has to break the pattern of denial, and external actors, like companies and development agencies, need to stop facilitating denials in the name of avoiding political sensitivities.⁴⁹ This is not possible as long as truth and reconciliation in Tanah Papua depends on the will or ability of any particular political leader, who is constrained by conservative and growing neo-nationalist elements.⁵⁰

Another layer of complexity concerns what consensus exists, or might be built, among people in Papua and beyond, given asymmetries of power, alliances, and political entanglements.⁵¹ These entanglements, built over the past several decades, blur the lines between victims and perpetrators, and reflect multiple layers and modalities of exclusion. Religious leaders, community leaders, Indigenous leaders, women, men, ethnic and religious minorities, businessmen and women, government, local elite, non-elite, poor, rich, Javanese, Papuan: all have their own politics, orientations, and perspectives. What are the common denominators and where are the centres of gravity that can serve as the meeting place for this diversity and the hierarchies within it? On this note we find that although a Papuan elite is certainly emerging, Papuan leaders have also demonstrated their ability to build consensus and, to a large degree, unity, despite decades of fractious governance and the current flash flood of cash and power. In our various activities and relationships with civil-society organizations in Tanah Papua, we have consistently found the values of community-building, a sense of justice and ethical practice, and a sustained critique of inequality in all of its local and distant guises. Local experience thus bodes well for an inclusive and meaningful truth and reconciliation process.

Approaches to truth and reconciliation in Tanah Papua would need to consider how to capture and resolve violations of selves (individuals, rights) as well as lived experiences that include connections to the natural world. Such efforts would also need to account for multiple and diverse perspectives. “Truth” itself would have to be seen as somewhat dynamic, given the potential diversity of experiences and priorities. A fact-finding mission or investigative report, while useful for certain purposes, would also not seem fit to reflect Indigenous understandings. Flexibility and

creativity of expression, along with a degree of experimentation, would be important.

If we posit a truth and reconciliation process as a modality for positive social change in Papua, and for individual and collective healing, how do we do that in a way that engages local understandings, needs, and perspectives? How can efforts to do so integrate rather than flatten out all of the complex dynamics and layers? What would a holistic process look like that reconciles the whole spectrum of abuse and violence experienced by individuals and communities across Tanah Papua? Is a more home-grown solution possible? In seeking answers to these questions from a Papuan starting place, perhaps we shed light on global questions of truth and reconciliation.

Notes

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