History of Local Civil Society in Papua: Running Through Modernity, Marginalisation, and Hostility

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Abstract

To what extent do local civil society groups influence modernisation and nationalism? Modernity requires indigenous people to adopt different ways of life to survive, while nationalism emerges as a form of resistance to deal with drastic changes of modernity initiated by colonial power. In the case of Papua, Indonesia’s easternmost area, this paper argues that civil society was not merely an ingredient of the Dutch modernisation project but also an agent of resistance to oppressive power, leading to the independence movement that remains today in Papua. Social groupings, chiefly Christian churches, become the foundation for Papuans to create a sense of belonging to specific groups during the Dutch colonial period. These groups then formed various social groups, such as musical bands, non-government organizations, and political groups which continued under the repressive Indonesian regime. Under the Dutch regime, local CSGs did not appear as an important political and social force to resist the colonial power. However, under Indonesian governance, Papuan sociopolitical groups have become a prominent challenge to state domination. The paper draws on archival records and interviews with NGO staff and Papuan activists who have dedicated their life to improving conditions in Papua. The paper also draws on two case studies to explain the roles of local NGOs and activists in defending Papuan interests.

Civil society groups (CSGs) began to emerge in Papua following the arrival of Christianity in the nineteenth century. Scholars have criticized the historical role of Christianity, particularly its missionary work, which largely catered to the interests of a specific audience in Europe rather than indigenous communities (Ballard, 1999; Derksen, 2016: 114). However, missionary archives, notes, and testimonies are undoubtedly crucial to explaining the formation of local CSGs and elites in Papua in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, as I explain later in this paper. The church and Islam laid a foundation for creating shared ties for Papuans. Such ties evolved into forms of identity through long-standing discrimination and marginalisation during the Dutch and Indonesian periods of rule in Papua. The formation of shared ties among Papuans involved three elements—boarding schools, informal associations, and employment bonding—that were crucial to reducing Papuans’ former
isolation and pacifying the indigenous community. During the New Order period, these foundational elements determined how Papuans organised themselves in grassroots groups and NGOs to assist the state in its development programs, to criticise such programs, or even to challenge the state’s authority in Papua.

This paper argues that the rise of local civil society groups in Papua was a consequence of and a response to authoritarian systems both under the Christian missionaries and the Dutch colonial period (1855–1962) and under Indonesian rule (1962–1999). Social groupings become the foundation for Papuans to create a sense of belonging to specific groups during the Dutch authoritarian period. These groups took on the form of musical bands and non-government organisations, which continued under the repressive Indonesian regime. Under the Dutch regime, local CSGs did not appear as an important political and social force. However, under Indonesian governance, Papuan social and political groups become a prominent challenge to state domination. The research draws on archival records and interviews with NGO staff and Papuan activists who have dedicated their lives to bettering conditions in Papua. The paper is organised in the following manner. First, it discusses the origin of social groupings in Papua during the Dutch administration. It then examines the conditions for the rise of local civil society groups in Papua under Suharto’s New Order regime (1970s–1990s). The state development agenda and tight control over Papuans and Papua resulted in various grassroots initiatives, ranging from musical groups to indigenous NGOs, to address pressing problems affecting Papuans’ livelihood. Two crucial cases are then presented—a large-scale plantation plan in Merauke, and human rights abuses in Timika—to illustrate the roles of local NGOs and activists in defending Papuan interests. The advocacy work and approaches of various NGOs in dealing with state-/company-initiated problems is then discussed.
Figure I. History of Papua Civil Society Groups

- **1855-1960s**: Church Missionary
- **1910-1959**: Social Grouping
  - Boarding School
  - Informal Association
  - Employment Bonding
- **1960-1962**: Political Transition
  - Local Political Parties/Groups
- **1970-1980**: Cultural Movement
  - Mambesak
  - Black Brothers etc.
- **1980-1990s**: Local NGOs
  - YPMI-LBH-YAPSEI
  - ELSHAM-YALI
- **1988**: Environmental Issue
  - Scott Paper Case
- **1995**: Human Rights Issue
  - Munninghoff Report
- **1999-2001**: Papua Spring
  - Re-emergence of Political Space-Organizations
- **2000s**: Oona

**Political Conflict**
A. Roots of Social Groupings in Papua

There are three crucial elements that must be discussed to understand the roots of social groupings in Papua: boarding schools, informal associations, and employment bonding among workers during the missionary and Dutch colonial period.

A. 1 Boarding Schools

From the late 1910s to the 1990s, both protestant and Catholic missionaries under the Dutch education system established boarding schools covering training school or VVS (Vervolgschool, the extension of the 3-year primary school) and HBS (Hogere Burgerschool, secondary school of five-year program) in Kokonao, Mansinam Island, Epouto, Sentani, Fakfak, Bintuni, Ayawasi, Merauke, Mindiptana, Tanah Merah, Manokwari, Sorong, Wamena and Senopi (Hambur, 1998). The first boarding school was established in 1909 for Papuan children from the Marind tribe in Merauke; four years later, the church built another school in Okaba. Dormitories were located at the Catholic mission stations in order to monitor indigenous pupils easily. In 1918, Protestant minister Izaac Samuel Kijne established a training school for evangelical teaching on Mansinam Island, transferring it to the Wandaman region in 1923 (Kamma, 1994). Around 200 Papuans received religious training and education, later forming the early generation of Papuan elites (Veur, 1999: 56).

For girls, the Catholic missionary orders, particularly the Daughters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart (PHBK), established the first women’s boarding school in Merauke in 1928 (Steenbrinck, 2015: 342-343). Later, PHBK also set up women’s boarding houses in Mindiptana, Tanah Merah, Kepi, Agats and Kimaam. From 1950 to 1962, the schools’ teachers were non-Papuan missionaries from Kei Island, Tanimbar and Ambon, and a few Papuans. The boarding schools instilled not merely the values of discipline, religious spirit, and hard work but also a sense of collectiveness as Papuans.

Catholic missionaries believed that indigenous people had to be ‘civilised’ before they were converted through baptism (Derksen, 2019: 53). The missionaries provided pre-conversion ‘civilisation’ encouraging Papuans to adopt new cultural standards and abandon activities that were at odds with western values, such as infanticide, headhunting, blood feuds, physical abuse of women, vivisection, and traditional sexual practices (Veur, 1963; Pouwer, 1999). In addition, the Catholic church provided extended education and vocational training. The priests taught the catechism in preparation for baptism, as well as basic reading, numeracy, biology, geography, biology, Malay language, and physical exercise (Derksen, 2016). In the afternoon, the boys and girls spent their time
working in the gardens with Catholic brothers and sisters, as the latter believed this would improve the former’s work ethic and discipline (Derksen, 2016: 129; Derksen, 2019: 54). The Catholic teachers, who mostly came from the Kei Islands and Tanibar, played an intermediary role at boarding schools or village schools (Derksen, 2016). They occasionally disciplined the children by force or using derogatory words, resulting in disputes with and protests from Papuan elders (Pouwer, 1999: 163). Their aim was to ensure children’s behaviours were in line with the Dutch system.

The boarding school system had two obvious effects. First, education was an instrument to disrupt indigenous knowledge and social organisation by introducing Western values, particularly Catholic values and standards. ‘Civilised’ education through the adoption of new disciplines and schedules undermined indigenous social foundations. This undermining was reinforced by the introduction of a new village system in the 1920s that resettled Marind people to a new living space called the model village (*kampung*). The Dutch government and the missionaries agreed to place boarding schools in new villages across South New Guinea (Papua). To this end, the Church received financial support from the government to intensify education for indigenous pupils while keeping them alienated from their origins (Derksen, 2016: 128). The village and boarding house models were a necessary part of regional development in Papua since the Dutch administration required a more organised society. However, the Dutch authorities knew that the project of creating an organised society based on homogeneous and coherent communities was unrealistic (Visser, 2001). Thus, organising a parallel government system at the village level to control indigenous Papuans was not a priority, particularly in highland areas. The focus was to have administrative services operating in designated areas with support from the government. Indigenous civil servants were the main instrument in delivering such services, since they knew how to communicate with the locals and understood the local context. However, creating a more homogeneous society merely resulted in ineffective implementation and more resistance. The endeavours of the new ‘civilising schools’ (*beschavingsschool*), vocational practices, and domestic arrangements through the village model had resulted in an increasing resistance, particularly from parents, towards the colonial mission (Derksen, 2019: 69 Pouwer, 1999: 164).

The second effect of the boarding school system was that Papuan children and youth met peers from outside their tribes and communities for the first time. Although in their initial ‘blending’ Papuan boys and girls had quarrels stemming in part from belonging to different clans, the missionaries and teachers helped them to overcome such problems and find ways to live in harmony. Living in dormitories exposed these boys and girls to the outside world and inter-clan interactions.
The boarding schools generated close interaction between indigenous people from the highlands and those living in coastal areas. For the first time, vocational skills and educational training enabled indigenous children to learn about cultures outside their own clans or villages. Although the intra-cultural exchange was not a primary objective of the missionary-run boarding schools, its impact helped liberate indigenous Papuans who for years had been isolated in their own societal and cultural systems. Boarding schools with dormitories were also instrumental in raising indigenous elites. These elites later received extended formal education at administration schools, such as the Native Civic Administration College (NCAC), the school for indigenous administration (Osiba), and police training schools in Jayapura and Manokwari. Collectiveness and bonding resulting from the dormitory system helped the early generation of Papuan elites recognise and work with other Papuans from coastal, lowland, and highland areas.

A. 2 Informal Associations

In their spare time, Papuan boys and girls were involved in various informal activities, such as sports and gardening. The churches and, later, the Dutch government facilitated such leisure activities. The government believed Papuans from isolated areas needed to engage in various outdoor activities to improve social integration, community development, and nation-building under the Dutch colonial system. Papuans were involved in hiking, tracking, exploring surrounding areas, and playing games to develop character traits such as courage, independence, and teamwork (Zondag, 2017: 62).

Scouting was one informal activity the Dutch government promoted to discipline and control Papuans in line with the colonial system. The Dutch government encouraged Papuan boys and girls to engage in scouting and other outdoor activities to foster new friendships and adapt to social advances. There were four different scouting organisations in Papua from the 1950s to the early 1960s (Zondag, 2017: 63-64): a Protestant organisation for boys (Nederlandse Padvindersvereniging or NPV), a Catholic one for boys (Verkenners van de Katholieke Jeugdbeweging or VKJB), and two similar ones for girls (the Protestant Nederlandse Padvindstersgilde or NPG and the Catholic Nederlandse Gidsenbeweging or NGB). These organisations were scattered across the present-day Jayapura, Manokwari, Serui, Biak, Sorong, Teminabuan, Fak-Fak and Merauke. Papuan scouting members were chiefly organised in the boarding schools of Catholic and Protestant missions. The Dutch investment in Papuan youth was based on a perception that elders were ill-suited to guide Papuans from their ‘backwardness’ to the new world. This perception received mixed responses, however, with some Papuan youth refusing to participate in scouting activities.
Scouting and other informal activities were based on a racialist perception that saw Papuans as unfit for the modern world. This perception disregarded Papuan communal ways of life that promoted self-reliance and independence through daily activities. Gardening, war, hunting, traditional dancing, music, *sikoko* (spear games), pig racing, *barapen* (stone roasting as a way of cooking large amounts of food), and a roast pig feast have enhanced Papuan capacity to engage with their surrounding areas. Scouting was appreciated for its exposure to collective interactions between different Papuan tribes. Nevertheless, the Dutch scouting activities were merely an instrument to pacify Papuans, as their social traits were assumed to be at odds with Western values (Penders, 2002). They were part of an acculturation process that sought to introduce Papuans to new ideas, habits, spirits, and social ties (Zondag, 2017) with the aim of replacing indigenous values in Papua.

Some Papuan youth who participated in scouting later joined the Osiba school, extending their friendship with other Papuans from different geographic locations (Visser, 2012; Zondag, 2017). Papuan civil servants found scouting a relaxing activity to enhance their resilience and courage in dealing with the demanding tasks of the colonial system. Scouting became an important social activity that encouraged collective bonding between Papuans and non-Papuans and among Papuans themselves.

### A. 3 Employment Bonding

In the 1930s, many Papuans were employed in the plantation and mining sectors. This employment later paved the way for social interactions and communications among Papuans from different areas. The *Nederlandsche Nieuw Guinea Petroleum Maatschappij* (Dutch New Guinea Oil Company), a joint venture of Royal Dutch Shell, the Standard Vacuum Oil Company, and Standard Oil Company located in Sorong, employed around one thousand Papuans, particularly during its exploration activities in the 1930s (Veur, 1972). Another Dutch company, *Nederlandsche Maatschappij voor Nieuw Guinea* (Negumij), established a plantation in Papua in 1937 (Penders, 2002: 61). A significant number of indigenous Papuans working in the oil and plantation sectors enjoyed diverse interactions with non-Papuans, including Dutch workers. These interactions evolved into labour associations, thanks to European workers who realised the importance of trade unions in Papua as in Europe. The first union protests occurred in the late 1940s and early 1950s due to high unemployment rates and economic uncertainty in Papua (Kroef, 1960: 523-524). The Protestant trade union *Christelijk Werknemers Verbond Nieuw-Guinea-Perserikatan Sekerdia Kristen di Nieuw-Guinea* (CWNG-Porsekidin), and the Catholic Labour Union of New Guinea were prominent in launching protests over employment conditions at oil companies and plantations in Jayapura, Sorong, and Manokwari (Veur,
1963). These protests reflected collective ties among workers in relation to their jobs and conditions at the time.

Such unions became the first civil society groupings in Papua. Strikes and demonstrations against the mineral resource companies led both Papuans and non-Papuans to understand the importance of grouping together to advocate for their rights (Garnaut & Manning, 1972). In addition, during the Second World War there was increased demand for labour to fill jobs in infrastructure projects, such as barracks, airstrips, ports, hospitals, theatres, and stores to support the arrival of 140,000 American and Australian troops in Jayapura (Dexter, 1961: 801). The increase in labour-intensive jobs led to more interactions among Papuans, which in turn led them to form various social associations, such as in sports and cultural spheres.

These social associations created a sense of belonging to a wider group, but they did not provide a solid foundation for engaging with structural change in Papua following the end of the war and a new era of Dutch-oriented development programs. This change required more indigenous administrators, who were prepared through formal education. In 1944, the Dutch government built the first administrative college, NCAC, in Sentani to educate Papuans to be placed in various administrative posts across Papua. In the mid-1950s, Papuans were also selected and enrolled in Osiba, equivalent to senior high school but specifically focused on administrative skills. Accordingly, the teachers taught Papuans to govern their land by occupying positions such as assistants and sub-district and district heads (Visser, 2012).

Papuan civil servants had multifunctional roles. They had administrative, financial, and political responsibilities to maintain order, administer justice, conduct research, and provide advice on health, education, and agricultural issues (Visser, 2012: 11-13; Garnaut & Manning, 1974). These Dutch-trained civil servants had the advantage of understanding local culture and communicating with local dialects (Boekorsjom, 2012). Along with the church-trained Papuans who received boarding-school educations, these indigenous civil servants formed the embryo of social activism in Papua. These civil servants later joined other educated Papuans from the missionary schools to become the first generation of Papuan elites to play a critical role in the 1960s.

Social associations and local civil servants who turned to social and political organisations later formed the basis for more formal civil society groups in Papua. Social associations, such as work unions and church-related groups, were part of the government system. Although they could launch protests against injustice in the workplace, they lacked an independent voice to articulate their
interests and powerlessness in the face of companies or the government. Furthermore, such associations had a narrow focus, did not reflect Papuans’ broader interests, and were led by Europeans or non-Papuans.

Boarding schools, voluntary associations, and employment provided new opportunities and avenues for previously isolated Papuans to encounter other Papuan clans and tribes. This was essential to the development of social capital and social consciousness among Papuans. New bonding activities fostered new friendships. From the 1920s to the early 1960s, most Papuans felt disconnected from other tribes, villages, and areas. Thus, initial social engagements through boarding schools, voluntary association, and employment helped indigenous Papuans who otherwise lived in isolation scattered across Papua to connect with their fellow Papuans. Strengthening the social fabric became a priority for Papuans who wanted a governable autonomous territory (Zondag, 2017; Visser, 2012).

Social ties and shared experiences from these three elements help drive Papuan aspirations in various area. The social capital derived from, and social connections developed during, boarding school helped Papuans organise themselves into large political and social organisations. Such collective experiences became a foundation for shaping their future during the decolonisation period and after becoming part of Indonesia in the late 1960s. The 1960s marked a critical phase for Papuans and the idea of self-determination, as the Dutch government opened a space for a more political dynamic in the area (Pouwer, 1999; Jouwe, 1978).

The first generation of Papuan elites emerged in the 1950s as they graduated from the missionary-controlled schools and boarding houses. This group of elites worked in various sectors, becoming government employees, teachers, religious figures, and private workers. Changes in the government system and political context determined how these local elites interpreted their roles in society. Some were involved in political organisations, while others worked for the churches or in voluntary sectors.

Some Papuan elites\(^1\) born out of social and educational interactions formed and joined social-political organisations (Savage, 1978), such as the Democratic Popular Party (DVP), the National

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\(^1\) Frans and Markus Kaisepo, Nicholas Jouwe, Eliezer Bonay, Johan Ariks, Marthin Indey, Lukas Rumkorem, Silas Papare, Moses Rumaninum, Toon Meset, Lodewijk Jakadewa, Frits Kirihio, Baldus Mofu, Obeth Manupapami, Herman Wajo were among the first Papuan elites who received education at the missionary schools. Some of them became members of scouting teams and of labour organisations (Veur, 1963: Jouwe, 1978). Marthin Indey, Lukas Rumkorem and Silas Papare supported the two Indonesia-oriented political organisations, namely KIM in Jayapura and PKII in Serui. Indey was a Papuan scout in Depapre district (Aditjondro, 1989: 57). Markus Kaisepo and Johan Ariks were GPNG’s founding figures in Jayapura (Veur,
Party (Partai Nasional or Parna), the Committee of Independence Indonesia (Komite Indonesia Merdeka or KIM), the Indonesian Freedom Party for Irian (Partai Kemerdekaan Indonesia di Irian or PKII), and the New Guinea Unity Movement (Gerakan Persatuan Nieuw Guinea or GPNG).

Following Indonesia’s annexation of Papua in 1969, the new government imposed strict control over Papuan political aspirations, which led to the banning of political organisations in Papua. Suharto’s authoritarian administration began implementing a development policy while maintaining a security-focused approach to deal with any political expression of nationalism, particularly from militant groups operating underground and the OPM (Ondawame, 2006). Such groups publicly challenged the government through armed resistance. Although Papuans had developed common ties and shared experiences, they began to realise that discrimination, pacification, marginalisation, and racism imposed through the civilising schools and informal associations, and experienced under employment conditions, needed to be eliminated. Papuans needed to be empowered to respond to and challenge the residuum of the Dutch period as well as the authoritarian regime of the new Indonesian government.

B. The Emergence of Papuan Civil Society

From the 1960s to the 1970s, church-affiliated organisations were the mirror of local CSGs in Papua. The various churches established the Protestant Educational Foundation (YPK) in 1962, the Foundation of Education and Schooling of Irian Jaya Baptist Church (YPPGI) in 1963, the Catholic Educational Foundation (YPPK) in 1974, and the Saint Antonio Foundation (Yasanto) in 1979, while the Bethesda Health Foundation (YKB) began operations in Papua in 1979 (Kabar dari Kampung, 1991; Interview with Broek, 2022). Although these CSGs were relatively dependent on the church, they had specific organisational focuses that were not part of the traditional church’s role in religious matters. YPPK, YPPGI, and YPK were prominent in promoting and delivering education to indigenous Papuans. Yasanto was established in Merauke to advocate for development programs using a community development approach. It was instrumental in meeting the vocational needs of Papuan youth and pivotal in addressing social and environmental problems resulting from 1963). Markus Kaisepo and Toon Meset were members of CWNG-Persekdin and dominated the leadership of Parna in the early 1960s. Both figures, along with Eliezer Wettebossy, Dick Sarwon, and Tobias Gebze, were also among the Netherlands New Guinea delegates at the South Pacific Conference in October 1959 in Noumea, New Caledonia (South Pacific Commission, 1960).
development programs in Merauke. Meanwhile, YKB played a significant role in providing medicines to Papuans in coastal and remote areas.\(^2\)

Initially, the churches had specific working bureaus to provide basic education and health services in Papua. However, as the bureaus’ workload increased, the churches helped transform the bureaus into semi-autonomous foundations. YPPK, YPPGI, YPK, Yasanto, and YKB had relatively independent structures, enhancing their ability to design and implement specific programs and seek funding from outside the church (Interview with Broek, 2022). Despite this, the churches were still influential in the foundations’ work, providing facilities, logistics, and networking, although the last increasingly also involved various donors, including the government.

The work of the local churches and church-affiliated foundations remained within the boundaries set up by the Suharto government. Following the formation of a new government in Papua in the late 1960s, which was tightly controlled by the Indonesian military, local CSGs had limited scope to articulate Papuan interests and concerns. Thus, it is worth understanding the regime’s characteristics in governing the area from the 1970s to the 1990s.

B. 1 Local Civil Society in Papua during the New Order Period

Before the implementation of the 2001 special autonomy law, the role of civil society in Indonesia was tightly constrained by the central government’s interests in Papua, particularly during the New Order period. The state maintained close oversight over the activities of national and local CSGs, with the objective of maintaining stability. Local criticism of government policies or projects often elicited a repressive response from the security apparatus.

There are two important considerations for understanding civil society in Papua during the New Order period. First, civil society, particularly the service-providing NGOs, assisted the state in ‘modernising’ Papuans through developmental projects at both the provincial and village levels. With the view that indigenous Papuans were underdeveloped, the government, along with international developmental agencies, focused its work on developmental programs, such as providing access to

\(^2\) According to Theo van der Broek, the first director of YKB, the foundation was supported by eleven local church denominations, including GKI, the Baptist church, and Catholic churches in Papua. The organization received its initial funding from Memisa (today Cordaid Memisa), a healthcare donor which is based in Netherland. The sole focus of YKB was to provide affordable medicines in remote locations through church networks across Papua. The churches initiated a collective fund to support the availability of medicines. YKB’s prominent role and reputation attracted donors from the government and international agencies to support the foundation’s work. The financial support was helpful and instrumental in expanding YKB’s efforts to hire and train more medical staff and enhance medical services for needy people in Papua (Interview with Broek, 2022).
education and health, improving the quality of local bureaucrats, and building infrastructure projects concentrated in coastal areas.

The Koteka Operation is an example of how the central government attempted to modernise highland Papuans. Highland Papuans wore traditional *koteka* (penis gourds) to express their cultural aspirations and also to signify their Melanesian culture within the Malay-based culture adopted by other areas in Indonesia (Giazebrook, 2008: 51). In supporting the Koteka Operation carried out by the Indonesian army in Papua, the Institute of Anthropology-Cenderawasih University, in its bulletin *Irian: Bulletin of West Irian*, highlighted the operation’s importance in ‘helping the people in the central highlands upgrade their economic and social conditions by providing practical training in such matters as improved gardening method, animal breeding, better housing, health, hygiene, and so on’ (Siregar, 1972: 52). In this regard, the Koteka Operation overlooked the local wisdom of Papuans living in harmony with nature.

The main objective of Suharto’s policy in the New Order’s early days was to attract foreign capital by exploiting natural resources, including in resource-rich Papua. The initial contract between the Indonesian government and Freeport that gave the company a concession to exploit gold and copper in Mimika, Papua, exemplifies how the government embarked on an open-door policy regarding foreign investment. In addition, Suharto’s ‘Look East’ policy in the early 1990s, which included Papua and several provinces in the country’s eastern areas, was strongly focused on development in these areas (Elmslie, 1995).

In the educational sector, the central government imposed Bahasa Indonesia (the official Indonesian language) as the medium of instruction in all schools. On the one hand, many Papuans already spoke Malay and interacted with Moluccan societies for 100s of years (before the Dutch arrived). On the other hand, the intensive introduction of Bahasa also affected Papuan’s traditional culture, which unavoidably had to accommodate Malay-based culture into local traditions. In addition, schools were established predominantly in coastal areas. There was a significant improvement in students’ participation in primary schools, from 80% in 1972 to 97.5% in 1992. The number of primary schools during the same period also grew from 1200 to 2095, with a teacher-student ratio of 1: 21 (Browne, 1998: 10). Indonesian-built schools competed with the Christian schools run by Catholic and Protestant missions, such as YPK, YPPGI, and YPPK, which operated in both coastal and highlands areas. As noted above, the role of the churches in Papua did not only focus solely on religion; their approach to educating Papuans provided room for local cultures in their programs, unlike the central government’s ‘Indonesianisation’ programs.
It is not engagement with ‘Malay culture’ that is problematic, but forcing endeavours to Indonesianise indigenous Papuans is. Indonesianisation’ was the process by which local culture in Papua was suppressed and supplanted by Indonesia’s national culture through the introduction of the Indonesian language and culture in the early period of Suharto’s regime. Some commentators have (Aditjondro, 2000; Savage, 1982) identify it as a major factor in the negative image of Indonesia that emerged among indigenous Papuans (Savage, 1982; Aditjondro 2000). In the educational sector, many local students of the Cendrawasih University protested against the penetration of the Indonesian-oriented educational curriculum, leading to their dismissal (Savage, 1982: 19). In addition to this penetration, there was a massive wave of immigration from other regions of Indonesia during the mid-1970s as the central government launched projects to build infrastructure and boost the local economy in Papua. Although such internal migration had been initiated by the Dutch administration in the early 1960s, particularly for Moluccans, the process was selective, and the migration rate was kept very low (Aditjondro, 1989), unlike the process implemented by the Indonesian government.

The influx of migrants from western Indonesia during the New Order period was part of the government’s developmental policies. These migrants worked in various sectors in Papua, including mining, construction, local fisheries, retail trade, and local bureaucracy. They provided a new source of labour, sidelining local indigenous people. Although Sukarno initiated this government-sponsored transmigration, it was under Suharto’s regime, through a presidential instruction in 1970, that hundreds of thousands of non-indigenous individuals migrated to Papua. In 1971, the proportion of immigrants in the total population of Papua was 4%, but by 1990 this had increased to 21% (Trajano, 2010: 21). As a result, Papuan society became more prone to social tensions and disruption, particularly between the indigenous people and the immigrants, who constantly competed for resources and land (Wangge, 2015).

All the aforementioned developmental projects related to education, culture, and transmigration posed a challenge to the state’s legitimacy in managing citizens from different backgrounds. As the government sought to build its legitimacy on the basis of a natural affinity among Indonesian people that transcended their multi-ethnicity (Glazebrook, 2008: 52), it undertook projects, such as the Koteka Operation and educational initiatives, in an effort to inculcate this affinity, particularly between Papuans and those from other parts of Indonesia.

The second important feature for understanding civil society in Papua during the New Order period is the militarisation of the area to ensure national stability and unity under the banner of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia. Since it became part of Indonesia in 1969, Papua has
never been free of repressive measures conducted by the security apparatus, particularly the military. Before the Act of Free Choice referendum (*Pepera*), which Papuans consider a flawed process, the Indonesian military conducted massive operations to infiltrate the former Dutch colony. Under the presidency of Suharto, the military approach was the main instrument, seen, for example, in the military operation zones (*Daerah Operasi Militer* or DOM) enforced by military campaigns from 1969 to 1998. During the New Order period, the repressive approach reached its peak with ten official military operations to repress the Papuan Liberation Organization (OPM) and other Papuans and civil society organisations that aspired to independence.


Given the structural condition of pursuing developmental projects and maintaining national stability, with the military as the main instrument, the New Order regime in Papua presented a repressive character to indigenous Papuans. Two aspects of modernising and militarising Papua, in particular, prompted responses from various CSGs. Reflecting Eldridge’s category of the high level-grassroots cooperation and Aspinall’s description of the semi-corporatist organisation, the CSGs that emerged in the New Order period focused mainly on boosting and criticising the governmental program of integrating and modernising Papua (*Eldridge*, 1995; *Aspinall*, 2004). The organisations in this category included Yasanto, Yapsel, Irja Disc, YPMD, KKW, the Papua Environmental Foundation (*Yali*), the Legal Aid Institute (LBH), and the Institute of Human Rights Studies and Advocacy (*Elsham*) Papua. However, this category does not capture the full range of civil society’s role in Papua, which also includes politically militant groups operating underground. The existence
of these local militant groups was a response to how the state and its agencies operated through the development agenda and the security approach in Papua.

B. 2 Crafting Indigenous Movements and Groups: From Music to Indigenous NGOs

The 1970s marked a crucial period in the emergence of local CSGs initiated by Papuans in relation to the conditions in Papua. Music formed the embryo of the rise of local groupings in Papua. The Papuan musical group *Mambesak*, with Arnold Clemens Ap, an environmental anthropologist-cum-folk musician, as the leading member, performed traditional songs in reaction to Indonesia’s cultural domination and as a symbol of resistance (Ruhukail, 199; Aditjondro, 1988). Ap and his folk band found a space to perform music to society, given supportive conditions at the time. State agencies saw music as an avenue for reducing tensions amid conflict following the formal ‘integration’ of Papua into Indonesia in 1969 (Wibisono, 2017). Accordingly, the Indonesian Navy formed the *Varunas* Band, the provincial military command (Kodam) its *Tjenderawasih* Band, and the provincial government formed the *Pemda* Band. However, these bands primarily performed Malay songs, which appealed chiefly to non-Papuans.

*Mambesak*, a name taken from the Biak language and meaning ‘holy bird’ (Cenderawasih bird), was formed on 4 August 1978 in response to the state-imposed nationalism project implemented through the education curriculum, historical narrative, and cultural products. Arnold Ap and his fellow Papuans countered the state’s domination through cultural songs and performances (Aditjondro, 1989). Using traditional instruments, such as the *tifa* drum and ukulele, Mambesak transformed the local musical heritage into a source of pride for indigenous communities. Folksongs became a trademark of Mambesak as it sought to revive shared ties among Papuans. Other Papuan bands, such as Black Brothers, became widely popular across Indonesia. Ap was also active in

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3 Sam Kapissa, Constantin Ruhukail, Arnold Ap, Tony Wolas Krenak, Joel Kafiar, and Berth Tenawani set up Mambesak at the Museum of Anthropology, Cenderawasih University, Jayapura, Papua in 1978. The following year, Demianus Wariap Kurni, Eddy Mofu, Marthin Rumabar, Auleman Rumbewas, and Danny Mandowen joined the group and intensified its activities on singing, dancing, holding exhibitions, and recording songs at the museum (Ruhukail, 1985).

4 In the 1970s, Papuans’ revival through music became the subject of a cultural movement in Papua. Along with Mambesak, the Black Brothers band, previously known as *Iriantos*, expressed Papuan identity through music in both Papua and Indonesia more broadly. Black Brothers had five members, Hengky Sumanti Miratoneng (vocal), Agustinus Romaropen (guitar), Benny Bettay (bass), Yochi Patipeiluhu (keyboard), Amry Kahar (Trumpet) dan David Rumagesan (saxophone), and Stevy Mambor (drum). The main difference between Mambesak and Black Brothers was that the former aspired to and promoted folksongs inspired by injustice and grievances in Papua. In contrast, the latter used the Papuan context as the basis of its popular songs, mostly for non-Papuan audiences (Bettay, 2019). Formed in 1974, Black Brothers received its first professional musical contract to perform in Jakarta in 1976. From the late 1970s onwards, however, Black Brothers were subjected to state intimidation due to its political aspiration and network (Bettay, 2019), which
advocating on environmental issues in Papua, such as cleaning up marine pollution in Cenderawasih Bay and stopping a hydro-power project in Sentani that would have dislocated thousands of indigenous Papuans (Ruhukail, 1985; Aditjondro, 1989). The cultural movement initiated by Arnold Ap and Mambesak symbolises indigenous pride and cultural resistance to the Malay-centric culture imposed on Papuan society (Giazebrook, 2008: 33). State-imposed restrictions on cultural expression were in line with the government’s perception of Papuan culture as uncivilised and in need of modernisation. Accordingly, Indonesian traditions, language, history, and cultural practices were introduced in order to ‘civilise’ Papuans (Scott & Tebay, 2005: 603). The central government perceived Mambesak and the cultural movement it represented as a threat, which led to the killing of Ap and his friend Edy Mofu by army special forces (Kopassandha) in 1984 (Aditjondro, 2000).

Despite Ap’s death, Mambesak’s spirit and critical performances have inspired awareness among Papuans and highlighted the need for collective work to respond to the conditions in Papua under the repressive government.

The 1980s became an important milestone for the role of local NGOs in Papua. Pressing issues, such as marginalisation of and the human rights abuses experienced by indigenous Papua prompted the local churches—the Catholic church and the Indonesian Christian Church (GKI) Papua—to establish Kelompok Kerja Oikumene (Ecumenical Working Group, KKO) as an informal indigenous group in 1980. Initially, the group aimed to increase Papuans’ bargaining role in decision-making processes regarding economic development in Papua. KKO’s founding members were prominent activists of the local churches, such as Arnold Ap, Theo van der Broek, Agus Rumansara, Phil Erari, Fintje Yarangga, Cliff Marlesy, Michael Manufandu, and Tony Rahawarin. KKO focused on spreading and educating Papuans on social issues, such as transmigration, village funding, individual rights, customary land, and human rights abuses. KKO became an alternative channel for Papuans suffering from marginalisation in their own land to express and articulate their interests.

However, the work of church-affiliated foundations was not optimal for addressing social problems in Papua. One reason for this was a lack of expertise and staff. As a result, church figures began to approach activists outside Papua to address problems in Papua (Interview with Broek, 2022). George Aditjondro, a leading Indonesian environmental and social activist, agreed to visit and work later prompted the band to seek refuge in PNG, the Netherlands, Vanuatu, and Australia. The Black Brothers band was highly significant in the Papuan independence campaigns in the Pacific region. Benny Bettay is the only living member of the Black Brothers, and he still actively performs music with other Papuans in Australia at the time of writing.
in Papua. Aditjondro helped to strengthen the role of KKO to advocate local interests (Interview with Broek, 2022; Kambai, et.al., 2007). The increasing attention to development and social issues was reinforced by the establishment of the Irian Jaya Development Information Service Center (Irja-Disc). In the mid-1980s, the Asia Foundation signed an agreement with Cenderawasih University (Uncen), a local university in Papua, to set up Irja-Disc as a consultancy agency for development. Agus Kafiar, a Kansas University graduate with a degree in media education, was the only Papuan on the steering committee that designed the programs focusing on collecting information and developing agricultural and nutritional aspects (Aditjondro, 1989). Two critical programs dealt with nutritional counselling for women and family planning for Papuans in Papua. Under the leadership of Aditjondro, Irja-Disc not only gathered information and published survey reports, but also advocated on pressing issues, such as transmigration, corruption, and the environment. As a result of its critical role and dependence on government funding, Irja-Disc later came under pressure from the state through Uncen’s rector or university president (Aditjondro, 1989).

Irja-Disc collected a range of data in Papua as the foundation for decision-making processes at the provincial and national levels. The organisation analysed data about issues that greatly affected the lives and livelihoods of Papuans in Jayapura, Manokwari, and Wamena, such as transmigration, large-scale fisheries, logging activities, and the plantation sector (Aditjondro, 1989). Such pressing issues were the main themes of the bi-monthly bulletin of Irja-Disc, Kabar dari Kampung (KdK, News from the Village), first issued in April 1983. KdK was not merely an alternative source of information for the grassroots community regarding various development projects in Papua but also an instrument to criticise the projects. For example, KdK’s report was instrumental in stopping the construction of a road and bridge in Yotefa Bay that would have displaced residents and closed the bay with a stone dyke (Aditjondro, 1989). KdK’s criticism of government projects resulted in it being banned in 1986. KdK also became a source of information for international NGOs, universities, and development agencies that shared concerns about development, the environment, and human rights.

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5 It was two members of KKO, Van der Broek and Tony Rahawarin who met and convinced Aditjondro to come to Papua in 1980. Given his profile as a prominent activist criticized the New Order regime and its policies, the Catholic Diocese of Jayapura helped to take care of Aditjondro and his family’s needs during his stay in Jayapura. Later, Aditjondro was instrumental in setting up a handful of local NGOs in Papua.

6 According to van der Broek, the use of Uncen as an office of the Irja-Disc was most likely due to the personal connection between Phil Errari, a KKO member, and Agus Kafiar who at the time was rector of the university (Personal communication, January 2024).

7 The central government accused KdK of actively politicking via its criticism of government programs, such as internal migration to Papua. In July 1986, the provincial information office (KIP) in Jayapura ruled that KdK did not have an official registration letter, which led to a ban until YPMD, the publisher, provided the letter to the KIP office in Jayapura (Aditjondro, 1986).
in eastern Indonesia (Aditjondro, 1986). This need for information was particularly acute due to the closure of Papua to the international community following annexation in 1969.

For the churches in Papua, advocacy in relation to social and human rights issues became a very sensitive issue, given their need to maintain a good relationship with the state. Nevertheless, individual activists and religious figures still felt an urgent need to initiate a group to support the church’s social role and advocate justice and peace in Papua, including for Papuan women. In 1983, following the return of Johana Rumadas Erari from an international workshop on community development for women, and with the help of other KKO activists, *Kelompok Kerja Wanita* (Women Working Group-KKW) was established to promote women’s rights in the conflict area (Aditjondro, 1989; Kambai et al., 2007). Its funding came primarily from the Asia Foundation, the government, and USAID. KKW was prominent in the Papuan movement, focusing on Papuan women’s problems, chiefly health reproduction, nutrition, and domestic abuse (Interview with Yarangga, 2019).

The government’s concern over the role of Irja-Disc led to declining financial support for the organisation. In response, Papuan activists decided to form a separate NGO in Papua. In December 1984, Papuan activists, church figures, and environmental activists formed YPMD. YPMD was the first local NGO to be relatively independent of the government and of the churches’ influence, relying instead on its internal capacity and external funding. YPMD found opportunities to work despite various constraining factors in Papua, such as injustice and discrimination within Suharto’s development-oriented regime. Papua was the scene of active armed conflict between the OPM and the Indonesian security forces at that time, particularly on the Indonesia–PNG border. Meanwhile, development and investment projects also increased in Papua. Responding to this local dynamic, YPMD focused its work on three main issues: forestry management, land rights, and transmigration. These issues received significant attention and support from national and international donors, including in West Germany, the Netherlands, Japan, the United States, Canada, and New Zealand. All funding from these countries was channelled primarily through foreign embassies in Indonesia (Inside Indonesia, 1986). In terms of organisational structure, YPMD prioritised indigenous Papuans as staff while recruiting other staff from Maluku and East Nusa Tenggara provinces, which shared

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8 In 1985, following its disengagement from Uncen, YPMD received funding from Cordaid, a Netherlands-based development donor to build its office (Personal communication with Van der Broek, January 2024). From the 1980s to the mid-2000s, Cordaid was instrumental in funding a series of local NGOs in Papua working on social and human rights issues.
Papua’s Melanesian culture. This recruitment policy not only enhanced local capacity but also served as a precedent for other local NGOs in Papua to prioritise, recruit, and train more Papuans.

YPMD became quite famous across Papua through its development projects, such as clean drinking water in Depapre district, fishing in Yotefa Bay, a hydro-power project in Sentani district, and plantation projects in Manokwari and Jayapura. These projects, mostly funded by the Asia Foundation and USAID (Aditjondro, 1989; Elmslie, 2005), reflect how state modernisation programs have affected the livelihoods of indigenous Papuans. In the 1990s, YPMD received substantial financial support from international donors, including USAID. According to staff member John Rumbiak, YPMD’s annual budget was about US$250,000. This amount was significant for local NGOs in Papua (Elmslie, 2005). YPMD used this budget to support its advocacy work on the environment, agriculture, law, community development, local economy, and the effect of development programs in Papua. YPMD also focused on improving human and organisational capacities by sending staff to receive training (mainly in Java and Sulawesi), attending international seminars and conferences, and establishing training centres in Papua. It also continued to publish KdK as a strategy to investigate and collect comprehensive data concerning Papuans.

YPMD was part of an international NGO network called the Inter-Non-Governmental Group on Indonesia (INGGI). This network oversaw and advised the Inter-Governmental Group on Indonesia (IGGI). With funding from western countries and the World Bank, IGGI prioritised development programs across Indonesia, including in Papua. As a leading local NGO in Papua, YPMD sent its staff⁹ to participate in international seminars and conferences. These domestic and international networks affected how YPMD and other local CSGs disseminated information to the world and received expertise and solidarity from the international community. This networking later became an important part of YPMD’s strategy to raise awareness and develop tactics to oversee and prevent development projects in Papua that were not environmentally friendly.

With Irja Disc, KKO, KKW, and YPMD, the early 1980s was laid the foundation for the future advocacy work of indigenous NGOs in Papua. In February 1987, the Indonesian Legal Aid Foundation (YLBHI) established its Jayapura chapter to advocate for marginal issues that had legal consequences and to educate Papuans about their legal rights. Some of the YPMD’s staff¹⁰ helped the

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⁹ A year after its establishment, YPMD sent Mientje Rumbiak to represent the NGO and Papuan indigenous women at the 1985 International Women’s Congress in Nairobi (Inside Indonesia, 1986).

¹⁰ Later in the late 1990s and the early 2000s, former YPMD members formed various service-providing NGOs in Papua, such as YPKM and Kipra. Both NGOs are located in Jayapura (Interview with Yarangga, 2019).
YLBHI’s wit its work, since the latter found it difficult to recruit competent employees in Jayapura (Interview with Yarangga, 2019). In the same year, Yapsel emerged as a local NGO to support communities in developing the local economy in response to development projects in Merauke (Overwhel, 1992). The Asia Foundation, Novib (Dutch funding organisation), Bread for the World, Icco, USAID and AUSAID were a handful of funding agencies that supported Papuan NGOs in their early days of advocacy and service-providing work. In 1988, the Foundation of Society Law Education (YKPHM) was established in Jayapura to educate Papuans on national and local regulations and to protect their rights against manipulation (Maturbongs, 1991). In addition, a number of grassroots groups also emerged in Papua, such as fishers’ communities in Yotefa Bay and Jayapura. Given the intensive armed attacks and military operations in the 1980s, these NGOs working for grassroots interests began to promote the idea of dialogue as a solution to the conflict (Kambai, 2007), which gained further momentum in the late 1990s.

In the 1980s and the 1990s, two critical issues—the environmental and human rights—received wide attention and generated solidarity; they also marked the importance of local NGOs dealing directly with Papuans’ interests. The next section examines how local NGOs addressed a mega-plantation plan in Merauke and human rights abuses against indigenous Papuans in Timika, involving multinational companies and state agencies.

Responding to the wave of development projects that began to sweep across Papua in the 1980s, particularly in coastal and lowland areas, local NGOs and churches raised public awareness of the ‘new ecological frontier’ in Papua (Erari, 1988). Papua and its natural resources were a new landscape that required extra effort to protect them from the ‘last economic frontier’ narrative, which was manifested through the government’s PELITA (Five-Year Economic Development) project. Following government-sponsored projects, such as infrastructure and communication, a handful of state-owned, national, and multi-national companies initiated billion-dollar projects, mostly related to mining and exploitative industries. Papua’s coastal and lowland areas were suitable for palm oil plantations and logging. The Djajanti Group of companies operating in Asmat had one of the biggest logging concessions in Indonesia, cutting down thousands of cubic metres of timber in the area (Inside Indonesia, 1986).

Local NGOs demanded the state and its agencies conduct a comprehensive environmental impact analysis before the construction of development projects, including dam projects in Memberamo Regency, palm oil plantations in Arso District, and a hydro-power scheme in Sentani Region (Aditjondro, 1988; Kabar dari Kampung, 1988). During the 1980s, non-church Papuan NGOs
increasingly used networking to advocate for environmental and transmigration issues in Papua. The Japan Tropical Forest Action Network (Jatan) worked with Papuans in Sorong and Jayapura to prevent the Japanese trading company Shoga Shosa from stripping 136,000 hectares of mangrove forest in the Bintuni Bay. The company’s activities generated serious concern among indigenous Papuans in the area (Aditjondro, 1988). Skephi, a Jakarta-based NGO focusing on environmental issues, worked closely with YPMD and Yapsel to block a similar project being undertaken by PT Astra Scott Paper Company to clear almost 200,000 hectares of eucalyptus plantation in Merauke (Aditjondro, 1988; Clearly, 1997). This joint advocacy received support from Australia-based international NGOs, such as the Rainforest Information Centre, the Australian Wilderness Society, and the Environment Centre NT. In 1989, YPMD and local communities advocated for environmental issues when Australian company Asmus-McLean and its local subsidiary, Memberamo Forest Product (MFP), received a logging concession of 600,000 hectares in Memberamo (Setiakawan, 1990; 39). The networking between local NGOs in Papua on environmental issues also extended to other Melanesian countries, such as PNG and Fiji.

The local NGOs’ focus on environmental issues marks an important milestone in civil society work in Papua. The following section discusses the case of the Scott’s Paper Company’s plan to initiate a eucalyptus plantation for a pulp mill project. It reflects how local NGO advocacy was crucial in responding to the state company project in Merauke and raising collective consciousness among Papuans to defend their land, natural resources, and community life.

C. Astra Scott Cellulosa and Multilayer Advocacy for Indigenous Papuans in Merauke

Papuan development policies that rely primarily on exploitation of natural resources have become a defining feature of how state-society relationships operate and shape the role of local NGOs in Papua. Investment-intensive projects have historically been painful for and discriminatory in relation to Papuans, and continue to be so today. As Carolyn Marr (2011: 2) contends, the exploitation of Papuan natural resources has been a critical feature of how the state has intervened in the area via ‘a steady marginalisation of indigenous Papuans, with top-down projects imposed from outside, and often accompanied by the threat of, or the use of violence to enforce plans’.

During the New Order period, logging concessions for plantations became an economic priority to drive investment and develop the area. In 1981, PT Kayu Ekaria began logging operations in Biak, which PT Wapoga Mutiara Timber later took over. These plantation companies not only cut down old-growth forests but also locals’ gardens reserved for future generations (Setiawan, 1990;
In 1989, the Mamberamo Forest Products logging company began its timber estate production in Mamberamo district, close to the Mamberamo Foja National Park. In 1995, Indonesian Research and Technology Minister B.J. Habibie proposed a hydro-power project in Mamberamo to generate 2,000 megawatts of electricity. His proposal raised wide concern within the indigenous community in the area (Hambur, 1997).

During the Otsus period, compensation, limited consultation, and land certification have become common tools to promote inclusive participation prior to implementing mega-projects in Papua. Merauke has been a favourite location for state, national, and multinational companies to initiate million-dollar projects in the agriculture sector. In 2008, the state allocated almost a million hectares for Saudi Arabia conglomerates (Down to Earth, 2008) to develop the Merauke Integrated Rice Estate (MIRE). In 2010, the central government and the Medco group\(^\text{11}\), owned by one of the wealthiest people in Indonesia, launched the Merauke Integrated Food and Energy Estate (MIFEE). In 2018, with the same orientation towards food security, the central government expanded the MIFEE project to palm oil plantations with a wider area (Ginting & Pye, 2013). Indigenous people, such as the Marind, Muyu, Mandobo, Mappi and Auyu tribes, and local CSGs expressed their concerns and protests. However, the state and private companies continue to pursue their development agenda in Merauke. These mega-projects demonstrate that the state’s top-down policy still dominates its orientation towards development in Papua.

All the aforementioned projects in Merauke form historical patterns that only amplify the government’s domination of regional development. In the 1980s, the Indonesian government allowed more investment from international and national companies to outer islands, as these were strategic locations for development projects. Investors were then attracted to Kalimantan, Sulawesi, and Papua to initiate commercial projects. Scott Paper, a company based in Philadelphia, USA, targeted Merauke

\(^{11}\) The Medco group has various subsidiaries in many economic sectors, including energy, agribusiness, finance, manufacturing, real estate, and hotels. PT Medco Internasional Tbk is the biggest oil and gas company in Indonesia. In Papua, the Medco group has operated through PT Selaras Inti Semesta, a joint venture with Korea-based company LG International. The latter has operated on and developed around 300,000 hectares of timber plantation in Merauke; PT Medcopapua Alam Lestari and PT Medco Papua Industri Lestari, focus on wood chipping and pulp production in Merauke (Ginting & Pye, 2013; Omona, 2014). There are another 45 active companies in Merauke, such as Moorin Paper, a South Korea-based pulp and paper company with PT Plasma Nutfah Marind Papua as a local subsidiary in Merauke; Kertas Nusantara, owned by Prabowo Subianto, a former army special force commander implicated in the 1995 Mapenduma tragedy in Nduga; PT Bangun Cipta Sarana, owned by Siswono Yudo Husodo, a former minister in the New Order period, PT Anugrah Rejeki Nusantara, a subsidiary of Wilmar, a Singapore-based agribusiness multi-company; and Artha Graha, owned by Tommy Winata, one of the wealthiest tycoons in Indonesia (Ginting & Pye, 2013; Saturi, 2015; Mongabay, 2022). All these companies have operated in Merauke, focusing on the agriculture and economy sectors.
for a large-scale pulp commercial operation. Astra Pty Ltd, one of Indonesia’s largest companies, joined Scott Paper in Merauke and created a venture called PT Astra Scott Cellulosa (ASC).

In 1989, Scott Paper obtained a permit from the state to initiate a tree plantation and pulp mill in Merauke (AFR, 1989). Merauke was an ideal area for pulp production due to the region’s high rainfall, a nearby port, and generally flat topography, which meant the land could be easily cleared. Most importantly, it had a low population density, most of whom were from undeveloped groups (AFP, 1989; Cleary, 1997). The project aimed to create an integrated timber, chip, pulp, and tissue paper industry in Merauke within ten years (AFP, 1989; Wallace, 1989, Cleary, 1997).

The company wanted to introduce two species of eucalyptus (Eucalyptus camaldulén and Eucalyptus urophylla) from outside Papua to form a monoculture timber estate (Setiakawan, 1990: 38). This plan was potentially harmful to the natural forest ecosystem in the surrounding districts of Edéra, Okaba, Jair, Mappi, Nambooman, Bupul, and Mutin (Setiakawan, 1990, 55). PT ASC promised to conduct an ecological and sociological assessment to avoid disputes and minimise any detrimental effect on surrounding and affected areas. The company began consultations with the national and local governments while approaching influential local NGOs and community representatives. SNC Lavalin International, a Canada-based project management consultant, conducted a feasibility study of the project in 1988 to assess potential benefits and disruption to the surrounding area and its people (Tapol, 1988). The mega-project promised to create around 6,500 jobs (Wallace, 1989) for local people, both Papuans and migrants. Along with jobs, PT ASC also planned to build basic infrastructure such as roads and health facilities for project-affected people. The Malind people in Merauke were very suspicious of the promises of multinational companies, having learned from the experience of indigenous people in Timika where PT ASC’s predecessor, Freeport, had promised to construct basic infrastructure but left the Amungme and Kamoro people in a precarious condition. As a result, the Malind people were concerned about PT ASC following a similar path in Merauke.

Yasanto and Yapsel, two prominent local CSGs, coordinated with national and international advocacy group to block the project. Both NGOs have worked mostly on development programs and their effects on indigenous Papuans. Yasanto and Yapsel, recognised that the mega-project in Merauke would affect the lives of many indigenous people. Yasanto in particular saw an opportunity to enhance the capacity of the Papuans affected by the project and proposed facilitating training for

12 Astra Pty. Ltd had subsidiaries in various business activities in Java and the outer islands, including Papua (Aditjondro, 1988).
Papuans for future employment at the PT ASC factory. Yasanto, the local government, and the company would manage the training. Yasanto even facilitated a field trip for the company officers to talk with the local people and the church in Merauke.

Yapsel also pointed out that the large-scale plantation would have detrimental effects. However, it also provided information to locals regarding the potential opportunities that PT ASC would create. Yapsel’s Director, Max Mahuze, argued that the local wisdom and skill levels of Marind people would not match the job requirements of the future PT ASC project. Thus, indigenous people needed more training and education for future employment opportunities. Another NGO, YPMD, also addressed the ecological aspect of PT ASC’s forestry project, arguing that the company’s plan to clean up the areas would remove indigenous communities from their villages and districts. Despite their disagreements with PT ASC in Merauke, these local NGOs could not directly confront the central government and the company, as they knew the consequence would be conflict. Thus, they mainly collected facts and information while continuing to coordinate with international NGOs concerned over the project.

International campaigns against the mega-project in Merauke were reinforced. However, local NGOs had divergent views on dealing with the negative effects of the project and the company’s wide consultation in Merauke. The work of local NGOs, such as Yasanto, Yapsel, YPMD, Sochoma, and Mitra Karya, received support from national and international NGOs including Skephi, Walhi (the Indonesian Forum for the Environment) LBH, Survival International, Probe (Canada) and Tapol (United Kingdom).

Although local and international NGOs shared the same concern over the impact of the eucalyptus plantation on the environment and indigenous communities, the two fronts adopted different approaches. Local NGOs focused on seeking improved conditions for local communities before implementation of the project. Yasanto, YPMD, Sochoma, and Mitra Karya initiated discussions between the indigenous community with PT ASC on crucial issues, such as land leasing, job opportunities, protection of cultural traditions, scholarships for children of indigenous people, and the availability of teachers at local schools. They adopted two main strategies for developing local communities: engaging indigenous people and intensifying communication with the affected communities. Yasanto, Yapsel, and YPMD carried out community engagement through regular consultations with relevant stakeholders, allowing indigenous Papuans to make an informed decision.
Two tactical examples were translating PT ASC project plans into the local languages and preparing the training facility (funded by the Asia Foundation and USAID) for Papuans (Cleary, 1997). These local NGOs also communicated intensively with village leaders and religious figures to help them have informed discussions about the projects. Yapsel was also aware of the impact of direct opposition under the authoritarian system. Thus, it held regular meetings between the local NGOs, community representatives, the local administration, and PT ASC staff to find common ground. Yasanto and Yapsel knew that their direct engagement was crucial to reduce negative impacts on indigenous Papuans and strengthen global solidarity.

While the local NGOs worked directly with the affected people, their international counterparts focused on lobbying and raising awareness, particularly among Scott’s consumers. Information from the local NGOs in Merauke helped the international coalition develop strategies and tactics to target Scott’s interests in the international community. Led by Tapol, the international coalition focused on targeting customers of Scott’s high-volume products, such as tissues and toilet paper. The coalition also promoted a boycott of PT ASC’s plantation in Merauke by linking the plantation to Scott’s harmful ecological activities in Canada, the United States, and elsewhere in Papua. It also urged consumers to write petitions and letters to Scott subsidiary companies.

The strong and sustained pressures from national and international environmental groups resulted in the withdrawal of Scott’s plantation project in 1988. Following the withdrawal, however, the Indonesian government still managed to find other national and multi-national investors to continue the mega projects in Merauke. Despite this, the role of Yasanto, Yapsel and other local NGOs demonstrates a relatively effective strategy for advocating for local interests while maintaining a positive relationship with the government. The development-oriented local NGOs were crucial to bridging divergent interests among stakeholders, particularly local interests in Papua and international concerns, within the boundaries set by the government.

Human rights became a pivotal issue in the 1990s due largely to various grassroots reports of human rights abuses against Papuans without any legal consequences for the perpetrators and international pressure. Local NGOs and individuals found a space to advocate for and raise public awareness of the protection of human rights in Papua. This set a precedent for the rise of local human rights organisations and their future work in Papua.
D. Point of No Return for Human Rights in Papua

Since Freeport began its mining operation in Timika in 1968, the Amungme and Kamoro tribes have been the most severely affected communities. The mining operations have changed various aspects of Papuans’ lives, including the economy, human rights, culture, politics, security, and the environment. The 1990s marked a crucial turning point in how Freeport and the state dealt with the human rights of indigenous Papuans.

In 1984, YPMD conducted research on river pollution around Tembagapura. This pollution, which was closely linked to Freeport’s mining activity, had affected the livelihood of the Amungme and Kamoro indigenous tribes and the ecosystem of plants and animals at the Lorentz National Park (Special Correspondent, 1990). In 1994, the NGO continued its work by commissioning staff member John Rumbiak to research a land rights issue in Timika. Rumbiak found himself in a very tense situation, with human rights abuses prevalent in the area. With the involvement of Freeport, the military was implicated in torturing, arresting, and even killing indigenous Papuans who attended a raising of the Morning Star flag initiated by Kelly Kwalik, an OPM leader in Tembagapura (Browne, 1998; Ondawame, 2006). He then worked closely with the Amungme Tribal Council Agency (Lembaga Musyawarah Masyarakat Adat Amungme or Lemasa),13 a prominent local CSG advocating human rights in Timika, to investigate the matter. Lemasa and other Papuan activists interviewed witnesses and victims, collected information, verified it, and published a report.

While investigating numerous reports of alleged human rights abuses, Rumbiak also interacted with student groups who were strongly critical of the deteriorating conditions in Timika. A student group association called Forum Mimika and Akimuga, whose members were mostly from Amungme and Kamoro, the two tribes most affected by the mining operations of PT Freeport (Elmslie, 2005), group actively argued against the environmental destruction created by PT Freeport’s operations. In March 1995, Rumbiak formed the Papua Environmental Foundation (Yali). This NGO played a supporting role amid the release of a humanitarian report regarding Freeport’s human rights abuses in Tembagapura (Elmslie, 2005). Responding to the report, Lemasa and other Papuan human rights activists decided to adopt three strategies: creating conditions for international pressure,

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13 Lemasa was established in 1994 following collective grievances and deprivation caused by the Freeport mining operation and its effects on the community and livelihood of the Amungme tribe. Tom Beanal, one of its founding figures, directed Lemasa to focus not only on Freeport, but also on the state and the military. The latter was well known among Papuans for discriminating against Papuans and violating Papuan rights (Widjojo, 2008).
launching regular protests, and building a national coalition to investigate the human rights situation in the areas surrounding Freeport’s operations.

The Australian Council for Overseas Aid (ACFOA) released the initial report on human rights abuses in Papua in April 1995. With the help of Australian activist Kirsty Sword, Rumbiak provided ACFOA with the initial report covering selected human rights cases in Timika. ACFOA then published the report in Australia. The report highlighted testimony from a handful of eyewitnesses and survivors of torture, killings, arrests, and intimidation committed by the Indonesian military in Bela and Tsinga Tembagapura (ACFOA, 1995). It also focused on the military’s role in and responsibility for the unlawful killing and torture of Papuans during the unrest following the rise of the Morning Star flag and demonstration in Tembagapura (Irip News Service, 1995). This report prompted the Australian Ambassador to Indonesia to visit Freeport to verify the alleged human rights abuses. The report also pushed the Indonesian government—including the Indonesian foreign affairs ministry, the environment ministry, and the military—to respond to what they described as a baseless report (Irip News Service, 1995; Elmslie, 2005).

Following the ACFOA report, Rumbiak, Lemasa and Jakarta-based NGOs, such as Friends of the Earth, Walhi, and the International NGO Forum on Indonesian Development (Infid), initiated a week-long workshop in Jayapura in May 1995. Fifteen survivors and witnesses of military torture, including Tom Beanal, Mama Yosepha Alomang, Father Nato Gobay, and Bilu Kogoya, attended the workshop. The workshop brought about a united voice against the state and the military, which was a crucial development since many Papuan highlanders still did not trust their fellow Papuans from coastal areas. Rumbiak also organised a meeting with the GKI and Catholic churches to follow up on a report he produced with other indigenous Papuans in Timika. Theo Van der Broek was instrumental in raising the report with Herman Münninghoff, the bishop of the Jayapura diocese, and convincing him to support publication of the report by the Catholic Church in August 1995. Van der Broek selected and edited the six strongest cases to be presented to the bishop while leaving scope for more cases to be added to the report as needed. The Münninghoff report, as it became known, received further attention from national and international media.

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14 According to Rumbiak, this issue stemmed from the attitudes of coastal people, who considered themselves superior to the highlanders. In addition, many soldiers from Biak were involved in killing and torturing the Amungme and other highland tribes (Elmslie, 2004).

15 Rumbiak has stated that Van der Broek initially refused to publish the report under the Catholic Church’s imprimatur (Elmslie, 2005). But Van der Broek disputes this claim, saying that the Church thoroughly supported the draft from the outset. Moreover, he edited the report before presenting it to Bishop Münninghoff in Jayapura and produced the draft as a Church report (Interview, 20 October 2022).
Rumbiak and other prominent Papuan figures and activists adopted a handful of strategies to bring justice to the public. Rumbiak strengthened student groups by providing regular updates and information and connecting them with other organisations outside Papua to support peaceful demonstrations. Student protests occurred in Jayapura, Manado, Makassar, Bali, and several cities in Java, aiming to put pressure on the state and the military to address human rights abuses in Tembagapura. In October 1995, around 500 Papuan students demonstrated in front of the provincial parliament in Jayapura to urge the military to abandon its security-focused approach in Papua. These students were outraged by the rampant abuses and the immunity enjoyed by the Indonesian military in Papua (Interview, Haluk, 2019j). Protests were a means to express broader grievances within Papuan society.

Following the release of the Münninghoff report, Papuans who had experienced human rights abuses and trauma urged Rumbiak to form a human rights institution dedicated to addressing human rights abuse across Papua. Rumbiak discussed this issue intensively with local activists and GKI, Baptist, and Catholic churches while also working with Amungmes and Kamoros to plan the human rights-oriented group or institution. This discussion led to the formation of the Irian Jaya Working Group for Justice and Peace (IRWGJP) in 1995, focusing on investigating and reporting allegations of human rights abuses in Papua (Elmslie, 2005). IRWGJP later formed the embryo of Elsham Papua’s establishment in 1998.

Rumbiak arguably built good communication not only with like-minded organisations and people but also with Papuans working in the Indonesian military as soldiers. These soldiers were then tasked to collect information about military activities in the area. This tactic of approaching Papuan soldiers was crucial in verifying military wrongdoing and preventing the military spying on locals. In the same year, NGOs in Jakarta formed another loose network called the National Forum for Human Rights in Irian Jaya with Philip Erari, a Papuan minister from GKI, as its leader. This forum was complementary to the advocacy work of the Rumbiak-led IJWGJP and Lemasa. This wide coalition then pressured the National Commission on Human Rights, Komnas HAM, to visit and investigate alleged human rights abuses in Timika. In September 1995, Komnas HAM, with Rumbiak’s help in collecting data and interviewing a handful of survivors, produced a report on human rights abuses committed by the Indonesian military in Tsinga, Bela, Alama, and Jila villages. The military was found guilty of six types of violence: killing, torture, unlawful arrests and detention, disappearances, excessive surveillance, and destruction of property (Irip News Service, 1995). Nevertheless, the
report failed to touch upon Freeport’s involvement in the abuses. This omission was widely criticised by Papuans, who wanted Freeport to be held accountable. The implicated military officers were disciplined but received only short prison sentences.

The Münninghoff report helped lay a foundation for human rights and local NGOs in Papua. It established a template for a handful of local human rights groups in Papua to not only investigate and report human rights abuses in Papua but also defend Papuans’ rights despite intimidation and repression. For many Papuans, the release of these various reports brought a deep sense of victory. This collective effort had unified Papuans in a genuine interest in correcting wrongdoings committed by the state, the military, and Freeport. A handful of local human rights NGOs, such as Elsham Papua and the Office for Justice and Peace (Sekretariat Keadilan dan Perdamaian, SKP), have actively promoted Papuan rights by collecting, documenting, investigating, and analysing data while seeking formal recognition of past and contemporary violence (Broek & Szalay, 2001: 79) committed by either the state, its security forces, or armed groups in Papua.

In late 1995 and early 1996, following the Münninghoff and Komnas HAM reports, Lemasa became a critical organization for informing, mobilising, and defending indigenous interests. People from various parts of Papua came to Lemasa with increasing frequency after the reports were released. They included the Papuan highlanders: the Amungme, Kamoro, and Dani; the Ekari; the Moni; the Kamoro; the Nduga; Biak representatives in Timika; and even people from Yapen Waropen. Lemasa became a hub for highlanders and lowlanders to meet, discuss, and initiate strategies to deal with the government and Freeport.

Since Papua’s annexation by Indonesia in 1969, the governance has been authoritarian in nature and has favoured only CSGs willing to align themselves with state ideology and practice. This has limited the role of critical human rights organisations and blocked the political aspirations of militant groups in Papua. From the 1980s to the 1990s, the state made itself the sole development

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16 According to Van der Broek (Interview, 2022), the report gained broad attention, particularly from international media. Freeport was concerned about the effect of the report on its mining operation and safety. As a mitigation strategy, Freeport invited Amungme and Kamoro representatives, along with Bishop Münninghoff and Theo Van der Broek, to visit the area in November 1995 and discuss potential solutions to human rights and environmental issues in the area. In Tembagapura, Bishop Münninghoff conducted a phone interview with an American scholar in New Orleans regarding the human rights report. Asked whether Freeport was directly involved in human rights abuses, the bishop said that he did not know. However, the army used the company’s vehicles and posts to commit human rights violations, as stated in the report. Freeport recorded the interview and spun the bishop’s statement, emphasising that Münninghoff had said that Freeport did not commit human rights abuses towards indigenous Papuans. This spin was effectively used as a public relations strategy to repair the company’s public image and regain the public’s trust.
actor, with non-state actors, including local NGOs advocating community development, playing a peripheral role (Cleary, 1997). However, this did not apply in Papua as CSGs, such as the churches, had operated in the area prior to Indonesia’s presence. The churches and other local NGOs had networks extending from coastal areas to the highlands, where the state’s presence was minimal. It was not a perfect service, but the churches had people and the capacity to reach out to villages and provide essential services to Papuans (Interview, 2022). In addition, the peripheral role of NGOs received a strong response from Papua-based NGOs. In 1991, Papuan-based NGOs established the Cooperative Forum of Papuan NGOs (Forum Kerjasama-Foker Papua) as an umbrella organisation for the many local NGOs in Papua to respond to state’s ‘Go East’ policy focusing on accelerating development in Papua (Kambai et al., 2007). Foker Papua also coordinated the work of local NGOs due to overlapping roles and interests.

In the waning days of Suharto’s regime in the late 1990s, local civil society found a space to pursue more political and human rights issues. Many local non-governmental organisations related their activities to the national situation, with the regime under massive pressure from the elites and civil society organisations. Indonesia’s regime change in this period paved the way for the re-emergence of political organisations, both within Papua and beyond. Another structural condition was that national unity had been weakened, with Timor-Leste holding a referendum on independence in 1999 and the Aceh Liberation Organization in a fierce conflict with the army. Responding to these circumstances, Papua’s elites and CSGs found the momentum to push for a more political agenda vis-à-vis the central government. The so-called Papuan spring (1999–2001), a short period of freedom for Papuans, became a transitional symbol of embracing and enhancing Papuan identity, which had been the subject of discrimination and repression since the 1960s. However, the Papuan Spring was short-lived, with a new military-backed president, Megawati Sukarnoputri, replacing Abdurahman Wahid, the most-favoured Indonesian president among Papuans.

The political change in Indonesia following the downfall of Suharto’s authoritarian regime has led to unprecedented opportunities for Papuans and local CSGs to pursue new strategies more aligned to local conditions. Yet a reform era featuring regional autonomy, such as Otsus, presents more challenges and constraints for Papuans. Administrative barriers, internet blockages, online doxing, political stigma, limited funding, intimidation, discrimination, unlawful killing, and arrest are all challenges faced during the Otsus era.

On paper at least, the new autonomy era that began officially in January 2002 includes a solid commitment to resolving pressing issues in Papua and enhancing democratic avenues for
Papuans. In practice, however, the supposedly accommodating system of Otsus has created more constraints than opportunities for Papuans and local CSGs. The role of local claim-making groups in Papua continues to be highly restricted, particularly concerning indigenous rights.

Authoritarian systems created the opportunity for the rise of local CSGs in Papua. During Dutch colonial administration, social groupings helped to generate social bonding and awareness among Papuans who live in scattered areas, allowing them to begin interacting with their fellow Papuans from different tribes. The repressive regime under Indonesia paved the way for Papuans to realise how they had to respond. The Mambesak musical group, as the first CSG, began by strengthening Papuan identity through music. It was followed by local NGOs, such YPMD, LBH, Yasanto, and Yapsel, which emerged to respond to negative effects of development in Papua and to empower Papuans to deal with development programs. Their advocacy on environmental and human rights issues reflects how crucial local CSGs became in dealing with a repressive regime that ignored the interests of Papuans in Papua.

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