Anthropology and Colonial Violence in West Papua

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West Papua has been described as "an earthly paradise for anthropological research" where indigenous societies are "untouched by Western culture." (de Bruijn, 1959) Colonialism has often been considered a force that can corrupt indigenous societies. Perhaps it's not surprising, then, that early anthropologists who thought of themselves as the first to touch a "virgin" Papuan culture experienced cognitive dissonance about their own roles in the colonial project. These anthropologists simultaneously imagined that they had the power to destroy indigenous cultures and the scientific prowess to preserve them forever.

Most 19th century anthropologists who participated in violent colonial encounters reinforced popular prejudices, depicting Papuans as inherently violent savages. Others, however, wrote critiques, and even conducted letter campaigns, about the savage nature of the "civilizing mission." When Indonesia invaded West Papua in 1962 it portrayed the Dutch as poor colonists who had not yet conquered Papuan savagery. (Machlin, 2000 [1972]) Anthropological theory was appropriated by Indonesian nationalists who thought Papuans were at a lower rung on the ladder of human development. Like colonial anthropologists, the mission of Indonesian nationalists in West Papua was, and still is, Janus-faced: they have been simultaneously combatting what they envision as Papuan primitivism while attempting to preserve regional ethnic identities.

In 1874 Russian explorer Miklouho-Maclay selected the Kowiai Coast as the site for one of the first anthropological studies in West Papua. He chose this site because he imagined the Kowiai to be pure savages: "It was told that the natives savagely attacked anybody who landed on the shore, plundered and killed and tortured. All these terror stories told by the Malays [Indonesians] of the savage and cannibalistic habits of the coast of Papua Koviai [Kowiai] induced me to select this district as it seemed likely that there I would meet the pure-blooded Papuan population I sought." (Maclay, cited in Greenop, 1944 [1874]) The Kowiai, to Maclay's disappointment, were not "pure-blooded": He found that several of the Kowiai had ancestors from Ceram and other islands further west in the Indonesian archipelago. (Maclay, 1982 [1874]) And he found no conclusive evidence to support suspicions that they were cannibals.

The Kowiai's violent reputation, Maclay came to believe, was not due to inherent savagery. Instead it came from a long history of colonial contact. In 1828, nearly 50 years before Maclay began his study, the government of the Netherlands East Indies had founded Fort du Bus on the Kowiai Coast as their first colonial outpost in West Papua. The Netherlands had, however, indirectly asserted state authority in West Papua since 1660 through the Sultan of Tidore. The Sultan periodically sent hongi fleets to the Papuan coast, where they forcibly collected tortoiseshell, birds of paradise, sea cucumbers, rice, and other forms of tribute. (Huizinga, 1998) Each dugout canoe in the hongi fleet was paddled by more than 30 indigenous warriors. When the hongi met with resistance from local Papuans, violence usually ensued; locals captured during the fighting were taken back to Tidore as slaves. (Huizinga, 1998) Visits by European vessels to the Papuan coast during the same period resulted in encounters characterized by "armed conflict [following] quickly after initial tenuous contacts." (Knauft, 1990)

Russian literature celebrates Maclay as a humanist and a scholar who acted "through kindness and truth, not through guns and vodka." (Ogloblin, 1997) His astute perception that Papuans do not have an inherently violent nature set him apart from many of his contemporaries. His legacy, however, is not uncomplicated. Maclay's initial attempts to conduct research among the Kowiai were mediated by an armed entourage. On March 1, 1874, he wrote: "After breakfast, armed with a notebook, an umbrella, and a revolver, I set out for the shore in a native canoe. I was accompanied by Sangil, armed with an old cutlass, and David, carrying a shotgun and a small India-rubber mat." (Maclay, 1982 [1874]) Maclay's interlocutors were, understandably, terrified of him. Later that month he wrote:

"[D]espite the generously distributed tobacco, they did not feel safe on the urumbai [cabin boat], and as I got busy writing down the words, listening carefully to the accent, all the Papuans, one after another, slipped quietly into their canoes. The native who was dictating the words to me got a terrible fright when he noticed that he had been left alone. Forgetting even the tobacco he had received, he jumped into his canoe, whereupon the Papuans started paddling hard without a word."

Maclay departed from the Kowiai Coast about two months later following a flurry of violence. One hundred Papuans attacked Maclay's base camp while he was away on an expedition. Maclay's men told him that the body of a young girl was cut into pieces inside of his house: "The cut-off head with part of the body and a dangling arm were stuck on a spear and triumphantly carried into the mountains." (Maclay 1982 [1874]) Three weeks later, on April 23, Maclay wrote that he captured the Papuan leader who allegedly organized the attack on his base camp by "catching the captain by the throat and pointing my revolver at his mouth." Maclay soon beat a hasty retreat.

In spite, or perhaps because, of the violent setting for his research, Maclay viewed civilization as a corrupting force. He depicted returning Papuan laborers from European plantations as violent agitators who disrupted an otherwise peaceful and pristine lifestyle. (Maclay, 1982 [1874]) Maclay had several ideas for saving the Papuans from what he saw as the evils of colonialism; one was to establish a utopian Papuan community in a zone free of colonial control and exploitation. (Ogloblin, 1997) Underlying Maclay's liberal concern for the people he studied was the idea that simple Papuan societies would be destroyed by more sophisticated European societies or by the "contaminating influence" of Indonesian civilization. (Greenop, 1944)

Shortly after Maclay concluded his research, Luigi Maria D'Albertis ascended the Fly River on three voyages in 1876 and 1877. (Some sections of the Fly now serve as a natural boundary between West Papua and the independent country of Papua New Guinea.) In 1876, D'Albertis was the first European to venture far into the uncharted territory beyond the coastal regions of New Guinea.

Unlike Maclay, D'Albertis upheld the orthodox belief that Papuans were inherently savage. On his expedition D'Albertis brought one rifle, four six-chambered revolvers, dynamite, 2,000 small-shot cartridges and bullets, rockets and other fireworks, and nine shotguns. (Souter, 1964)

During his first ascent of the Fly in 1876, most Papuans living in small hamlets and villages along the river fled to the forest when they saw D'Albertis' 52-foot steam launch, the Neva. (D'Albertis, 1880b) D'Albertis treated "abandoned" houses as an opportunity to appropriate food for his crew and ethnographic artefacts for European museums. Pigs, sweet potatoes, sago palm flour, bows and arrows, stone axes, bark bags, ancestor skulls, and dead bodies were taken by D'Albertis and his crew. (D'Albertis, 1880b)

Not surprisingly, the Papuans eventually began mounting attacks against the Neva as it passed their homes. On June 1, 1887, during D'Albertis' second voyage, the Neva was ambushed in the pre-dawn hours as the crew slept. D'Albertis was not able to discern the number of attackers in the darkness, but he counted 45 arrows embedded in the Neva. In response, he fired 120 shots with his double-barrelled guns. One of D'Albertis' Chinese crew members was wounded and at least one of the Papuans was killed.

In late 1877, on his third voyage, D'Albertis managed to travel 580 miles up the Fly River. (Souter, 1964) By this time the Papuan inhabitants along the banks of the Fly had organized themselves in defense against the Neva. At one point, 400 to 500 people appeared on the shore, and as the Neva steamed by several dozen men piled into canoes and gave chase. Only after one of the Papuans was shot in the arm did the fleet of canoes abandon their pursuit of the steamboat. During D'Albertis' return journey to the coast a fleet of Papuan canoes met him in the same area. D'Albertis and his men became increasingly terrified of Papuans: In several instances they shot at canoes carrying Papuans who had given no indication of hostility. (D'Albertis, 1880b)

During his second voyage up the Fly, D'Albertis took the head of a Papuan killed by one of his crew members. The head had been severed from the man's body and preserved in spirits. The methods D'Albertis used to collect and preserve this head bear striking similarities to the methods he used to collect and preserve insect and plant specimens.

By today's standards D'Albertis's methods would be unethical, if not illegal. Surprisingly, the first volume of his travelogue concludes with a liberal plea to support and guide the Papuans: "They should be treated as friends, not as slaves; they should be cherished, not destroyed." (D'Albertis, 1880a) Unlike Maclay, who wanted to preserve Papuan culture from the destructive influences of the labor trade and other European incursions, D'Albertis viewed the colonial project as an opportunity to replace Papuan savagery with civilization.

During the early part of the 20th century, anthropological research in West Papua was largely conducted as part of large militaristic expeditions. A Dutch/Mimika wordlist composed in October 1904 during a Dutch military expedition near the site of Maclay's research clearly illustrates the dual role of anthropologists as preservers and destroyers of culture. Selections from this word list are: good people (goed mensch), bad people (slecht mensch), widower (weduwnaar), widow (weduwe), cry (roepen), dead (dood), living (levend), sick (ziek), wound (wond), ghost (geest), grave

(graf), machete (parang), slave (slaaf), war (oorlog), murder (vermoorden), shoot (schieten), headhunting (koppensnellen), peace (vrede), sharp (scherp) and blunt (bot). (Anonymous, 1904) The list highlights the violence surrounding anthropological research of this period.

Early Dutch colonial administrators of West Papua thought civilizing the natives was more important than preserving distinctive cultures. The Netherlands East Indies government conducted a series of military exploration campaigns from 1907 to 1915 in order to gain knowledge about the interior while displaying "a sufficient show of force to end all kinds of people-hunting and the like." (Overweel, 1998) The expedition teams were to consist of two military officers, 80 soldiers, one health officer, administrative and hospital personnel, 80 convicts with four foremen, a geologist, and two native scouts. (Ibid.) Private expeditions had a similar composition. For example, the 1926 anthropological expedition by Matthew Stirling to discover the "pigmy" tribes of Dutch New Guinea consisted of over 400 men, including Javanese convicts, Dayak porters from Borneo, soldiers from Ambon, and Dutch officers. Like 19$^{\text{th}}$ century anthropological encounters, these expeditions were characterized by violence. More than eight Papuans were killed by members of Stirling's expedition.

Following the systematic "pacification" of people in rural areas of West Papua with punitive raids, scientists no longer felt the need to be escorted by a small army of porters and soldiers. During the mid-20$^{\text{th}}$ century, the heyday of salvage ethnography, the mission to preserve Papuan cultures became an administrative imperative. In 1951 the Bureau for Native Affairs was founded in Hollandia (now Jayapura), and over the next decade it coordinated the research efforts of more than a dozen individual ethnographers throughout the province. (de Bruijn, 1959) Anthropologist Jan van Baal became the governor of West Papua in 1953 and gave further institutional support to ethnographers. (Souter, 1964)

When Indonesia invaded West Papua in 1962, new anthropological research in the region was brought to a standstill. Instead, outdated anthropology and museum ethnography were mobilized to bring West Papua into the national fold. In the Provincial Museum in West Papua's capital of Jayapura, for example, Papuan culture is depicted as being part of a unified, but regionally diverse, Indonesian culture. The message: "we are distinctive as a province, but we are one with the rest of the nusantara (archipelago)." (Taylor, 1995)

As Papuan identity was reconfigured through such cultural engineering projects, anthropology was being used to paint Papuans as second-class citizens. According to a secondary school cultural history textbook, many cultures in Indonesia still live in the age of prehistory. (Koentjaraningrat, 1954) Although the text was published before West Papua was recognized as part of Indonesia, most Indonesians today continue to regard Papuans as stone-age savages.

While preservation of regional cultural identities continues to be a major part of Indonesian national ideology, the civilizing mission also continues to be a powerful force. The self-determination movement in West Papua that desires independence from

Indonesia has been depicted in the media as a gang of savage terrorists. (Kirksey & Roemajauw, 2002) Indonesian soldiers imagine that their role in the civilizing mission is to directly combat these "wild" Papuans. (Kirksey, 2002)

Papuans, like the pacifist anthropologists mentioned above, stand orthodox discourse on its head by portraying the Indonesian state as savage. Many Indonesian military tactics in West Papua are indeed savage by contemporary Occidental standards. For example, soldiers executed a man named Igiyouda near the town of Enarotali in West Papua's central highlands in a grotesque manner. According to witnesses, Igiyouda screamed as he was being killed. "I'm being tortured," he shouted. "They have castrated me." The soldiers heated a long iron rod in the fire until it was red-hot and skewered Igiyouda from his anus to his mouth. During another incident in September 2001, the body of 32-year-old Wellem Korwam was found floating in the sea near the town of Wasior on West Papua's north coast. Like the Papuan whose head was collected by D'Albertis' assistant, Korwam's body was mutilated; he had been cut into seven pieces.

In the words of Arjun Appadurai (1998), "collective violence is partly a product of propaganda, rumor, prejudice, and memory–all forms of knowledge and all usually associated with heightened conviction, conviction capable of producing inhumane degrees of violence." Discourse about savages–whether it is projected onto Papuans or Indonesians, colonial or national agents, natives or anthropologists–has the capacity to ignite new conflicts. In other words, "fighting words" can make people fight. Historically, anthropologists have both produced an elaborate ideology about native savagery and have actually conducted savage physical violence in West Papua. We should think deliberately before throwing stones in our house of glass. The long history of colonial violence in West Papua is indeed relevant to our understanding of contemporary Papuan cultures, but mirroring orthodox accounts of Papuan savagery onto Indonesians, thereby producing heterodox accounts of savage neo-colonial violence, simply perpetuates the myth of the savage native. Further research in West Papua might consider both how violence has been used to service the interests of individuals and institutions, and how violence results from desires for personal pleasure and power.

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