

# The Politics of Decolonization in West Papua: Indigenous Perspectives in the Pacific



West Papua, an Indonesian province located on the western half of the island of New Guinea, has been entangled in a protracted struggle for decolonization and indigenous self-determination. The region's complex historical and political landscape, coupled with ongoing human rights concerns, has made the decolonization process a contentious and challenging endeavor. This article delves into the intricate politics of decolonization in West Papua, exploring the perspectives of indigenous Pacific peoples and examining the complexities surrounding their fight for independence.



## Morning Star Rising: The Politics of Decolonization in West Papua (Indigenous Pacifics) by Leland Ware

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### Historical Context

West Papua's colonial history dates back to the mid-19th century, when the Dutch established control over the region. Dutch colonial rule lasted for over six decades, leaving a lasting impact on the indigenous population and their traditional ways of life. Following Indonesia's independence in 1949, West Papua was incorporated into the new nation despite protests from the local population.

The Papuan people, the indigenous inhabitants of West Papua, have consistently resisted Indonesian rule, advocating for self-determination and the right to govern their own affairs. However, their aspirations have been met with harsh repression by Indonesian authorities, resulting in ongoing human rights violations and the loss of countless lives.

### Indigenous Perspectives

Indigenous Pacific peoples play a pivotal role in the decolonization movement in West Papua. They have long advocated for their right to self-

determination, seeking to establish an independent state that respects their cultural identity and traditional practices.

The United Liberation Movement for West Papua (ULMWP) serves as the primary political umbrella for Papuan independence groups. The ULMWP has consistently sought international recognition for West Papua's right to self-determination, engaging in diplomatic efforts and seeking support from regional and global organizations.

In addition to political activism, indigenous Papuans have also employed cultural and artistic expressions to raise awareness about their struggle. Music, dance, and traditional rituals have become powerful tools for preserving their heritage and asserting their identity in the face of colonial oppression.

## **Complexities and Challenges**

The decolonization process in West Papua is fraught with complexities and challenges. Indonesia's firm stance against Papuan independence, coupled with the region's strategic economic importance, has made it difficult for the indigenous movement to gain traction.

Moreover, the Indonesian government's heavy-handed approach to dissent and its history of human rights violations have created a climate of fear and intimidation in West Papua. Many Papuan activists and leaders have been subjected to arbitrary arrests, torture, and extrajudicial killings.

The presence of multinational corporations in West Papua, extracting valuable natural resources such as gold and copper, further complicates the political landscape. These corporations often operate with little regard

for indigenous rights and environmental sustainability, exacerbating tensions and fueling resentment among local communities.

## **Regional and International Responses**

The decolonization movement in West Papua has garnered support from various regional and international organizations. The Pacific Islands Forum, for instance, has consistently called on Indonesia to respect the rights of the Papuan people and to engage in meaningful dialogue with the indigenous leadership.

The United Nations has also expressed concern about the human rights situation in West Papua and has urged Indonesia to address ongoing violations. However, these international efforts have faced resistance from Indonesia, which maintains that West Papua is an integral part of its territory.

The politics of decolonization in West Papua remain a complex and challenging issue, with indigenous Pacific peoples at the forefront of the struggle for self-determination. Despite ongoing repression and international pressure, the Papuan people continue to assert their identity and aspire to a future free from colonial rule.

The resolution of the West Papua conflict requires a fundamental shift in Indonesia's approach, a genuine willingness to engage with indigenous aspirations, and international support for a just and equitable solution. As the world's largest archipelago, with a diverse array of cultures and histories, Indonesia has the opportunity to set a transformative example by embracing diversity and fostering a truly inclusive society.

Only through a comprehensive and inclusive approach, one that respects the rights and aspirations of indigenous Pacific peoples, can West Papua achieve meaningful decolonization and reconciliation.



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