

YUMI WANTAIM 2000: CEREMONY FOR WEST PAPUA

Summary by Louise Byrne of a Solidarity Ceremony for West Papua in Melbourne three days before the South Pacific Forum in Kiribati



PHOTO-STORY, SUNDAY HERALD SUN, 22 October 2000. West Papuan visitor Pastor Martin Luther Wanma, with Morning Star in gold Ferrari on the Grand Prix track in Albert Park

It's dusk on Tuesday 24 October 2000 and feels sacred in RMIT University's Capitol Theatre in Swanston Street Melbourne. The Morning Star flag of West Papua rises, and hangs suspended beneath the theatre's spectacular ceiling. Another flag, black, green, and red, with fourteen smaller white stars, also rises. It's less familiar, but dear to the Papuans because it identifies them as Melanesian. From the stalls, the Victorian Trade Union choir murmurs West Papua's anthem *Hai tanahku Papua* (Papua is my homeland). Bearing witness to all this is a coalition of Australian public institutions—religious organisations, representatives from four universities, trade unions, schools, nongovernment organisations, the Commissioner of the Australia & Torres Strait Islands, friends from Papua New Guinea, Vanuatu and Fiji. Also Dr Martin Luther Wanma, Director of the Gereja Kristen Alkitab Church in West Papua, and Jacob Rumbiak, an independence leader who has spent a quarter of his life in Indonesian jails, but has lived in exile in Melbourne since 1999.

The West Papuan flags are hoisted by Shaka and Zadrack Adadikam. Their father, Alfonsius, landed in Docklands (Melbourne) in 1982 on the *Granada*, the first Indonesian ship to dock in Australia since the Maritime Union lifted its protest-ban against the UN's 1969 Act of Free Choice (by which Dutch New Guinea became Indonesian Irian Jaya). Alfonsius was one of the engineers, and he met an Australian-born Sulawesi woman who arranged for him to marry her daughter Natalie Lewier. Alfonsius has been in Melbourne ever since. He's a member of the Uniting Church that talks to *Gereja Kristen Injili* (GKI), the biggest church in West Papua. Ironically, four days after the YUMI WANTAIM ceremonial, the GKI declared it was independent of its mother church in Indonesia.

The ceremony actually began in the street outside the theatre. Two gold Ferrari sports cars, carrying Jacob and Pastor Wanma, flew past the theatre, ignoring speed limits and several cops. Their presence challenges the perception of West Papuans as penis-gourd men with bows and arrows. A journalist wonders why Melbourne's business elite is involved with the independence movement. One of the Ferrari owners, Jon Kozeniauskas, a Collins Street dentist, replies "If my Ferrari can do anything to help prevent in West Papua what we were forced to witness in East Timor, then I'll ring my friends and get ten more".

Inside the theatre, The Victorian Trade Union Choir sang *all* the Melanesian anthems while representatives from PNG, Fiji, and Vanuatu raised their colourful flags and exchanged gifts. The name of the ceremony 'Yumi wantaim' is PNG pidgin for 'you, me, one time together'. The language is significant, for of all the Melanesians, PNG people suffer the most shame for abandoning their kin in West Papua. Isabella Tree in her novel *Islands in the Clouds* claims West Papuans "silently observe (independent) Papua New Guinea like captives willing on the success of a runaway slave ... while PNG has barely cast a glance in the direction of the border". The situation is complex. PNG governments are pressed by Australia to respect Indonesia's claim over West Papua, and are also bribed by Indonesia to ignore its cruel military meter. West Papuan refugees cluster on the PNG side of the 141 meridian where the resistance has headquarters. They are hunted by the Indonesian military, which destroys PNG villages that harbour exiles. Both PNG and Indonesia ignore or manipulate their regular border agreements.

There's a Fiji kava ceremony, with representatives of Australia's Aboriginal nations, as well as secular and religious institutions, sitting cross-legged on a woven mat to imbibe the sacred nectar. Fr Raass Asaeli, a Divine Word Missionary student at Yarra Theological College, dressed in the beautifully woven drama of his ancestors, prepared them for the quiet transcendental moment. Dr Robert Wolfgramm from Monash University, draped in academe's rich red robe, sieved the kava powder, fruit of the Mother, through waters owned by Father Sky. Twelve drank from the cup—community leaders, political analysts, a bishop, university lecturers, pastors, schoolteachers, students, and young mothers. It was a spectacular moment. Solidarity became sacred and secular,

modern and traditional, christian and indigenous.

Mr Brian Butler from the Australia & Torres Strait Islander Commission talked about the strong rich cultures of the indigenous people of Asia Pacific broadening the region of concern for West Papua. He reminded Australians that "the indigenous people of West Papua are fighting to protect their land, culture and identity ... the same fight that Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander people have also fought for so many years". He didn't mention World War Two, when the Royal Australian Navy and Royal Australian Air Force, as part of General MacArthur's taskforce reclaiming the Pacific from Japan, strafed and bombed the north coast of West Papua in 1944. "Thousands of unexploded WWII bombs still litter the seas and forests around Biak...fishermen who use them to bomb reefs trade them for Rp10-20,000 (aus\$2-4) or sometimes just a packet of cigarettes or a can of beer" (Inside Indonesia, No 63, Jul-Sep 2000). Australia, America and Japan still owe West Papua for these war operations.

Central to the YUMI WANTAIM ceremony was the signing of an historic Memorandum of Understanding by the Australian trade union movement. The two key signatories were Mr Greg Sword, Vice-President of the Australian Council of Trade Unions (as well as President of the Australian Labor Party) and West Papuan independence leader Jacob Rumbiak. The Memorandum calls for a UN-sponsored referendum in West Papua, and an urgent UN Human Rights Inquiry into the suffering and deaths caused by the Indonesian military. It proposes that the UN reviews Indonesia's claim over the independent territory of West Papua, and expresses concern for West Papuans being excluded from benefits generated by the American-owned Freeport-McMoran gold and copper mine. Other signatories to the MOU were: Victorian Trades Hall Council; National Union of Workers; Construction, Forestry, Mining & Energy Union; Communications, Electrical, Electronic, Energy, Information, Postal, Plumbing and Allied Services Union of Australia; Australian Services Union; Australian Manufacturing Workers' Union; Australian Nursing Federation; Textile Clothing & Footwear Union of Australia; and Australian Education Union.

During the ceremony, there were references to the new nation-state of East Timor. Alan Matheson, International Officer of the Australian Council of Trade Unions said "Australians are now recognizing that West Papuans are caught in the same cycle of violence the East Timorese were subjected to our politicians should act quickly to stay in line with public opinion on the treatment of our northern neighbours". Catholic Bishop Hilton Deakin, once vilified by politicians and even bishops for supporting East Timor (but in 2001 invited by the Prime Minister to his welcome-home-the-soldiers party at Parliament House) told Jacob and Pastor Wanma "We will stand with you, so that you can have your fundamental right of self determination". The Trade Union Choir's moving rendition of 'Solidarity' reminded many of the Mass in St Patrick's Cathedral in September 1999 that called attention to the stressful gestation of the new nation, and helped

force Prime Minister Howard to send our troops to assist Indonesian troops back over the border.

Martin Luther Wanma's speech was characteristically simple and straight forward. The West Papuan pastor have been invited to Australia by the Uniting Church for a conference *Religion in Asia Pacific: Violence or Healing?* and said he was yearning and fighting for justice, even in 'new, democratic' Indonesia. He was surprised by the institutional support in Australia for his country's freedom. "*Yumi wantaim* might be an old concept, but it's a new word for me, and I will take it home and tell my people it is a gift from Melbourne". He said he came to Australia "to seek help for young Papuans to study so we can develop our leadership; to find ways to transport our coconuts and fish to markets so we can build our small economies; to observe primary healthcare programs so we can build a healthy generation of Papuan women and children".

As the unusual ritual for West Papua came to a close, people felt good. Many were relieved because a sizeable company of Australian voices was responding more to cries of help from West Papua than to Indonesian justifications for brutality. Melanesians from the South Pacific were happy because they'd actively supported their West Papua kin. Unionists were happy because they'd signed a program that was in accord with their principles. The West Papuans were happy, because they'd found friends in Australia. In fact, one might be tempted—if human rights and self-determination were a commercial business—to hail it as a winwin kindava nait.

Louise Byrne, Melbourne 2001