

YABON THE PIG — SYMBOL FOR JUSTICE, PEACE, AND FREEDOM IN WEST PAPUA by Louise Byrne, Dec 2001



YABON LEADING THE WEST PAPUA DELEGATION TO THE YUMI WANTAIM SEMINAR IN WURRUNDJERI PARK ON THE BANKS OF THE MARIBYRNONG RIVER ON 15 SEPTEMBER 2001 (PHOTO—KEL DUMMETT)



THE AGE, 27 AUGUST 2001 (HEATH MISSEN). WALKIE-PORKY: YABON, PICTURED IN MELBOURNE'S CITY CENTRE, IS A VERY IMPORTANT PIG RIGHT NOW. IT WILL BE HIS JOB TO HEAD THE WEST PAPUA DELEGATION TO THE YUMI WANTAIM SEMINAR, COINCIDING WITH PNG'S 26TH ANNIVERSARY OF INDEPENDENCE, WHICH BEGINS ON SEPTEMBER 15 IN WURRUNDJERI PARK ON THE BANKS OF THE MARIBYRNONG RIVER.

Yabon, the hero of this story, was born in the temperate climate of rural Victoria, bred to be vacuum-packed in a Coles Christmas hamper. Instead he became an important source of information and a symbol for justice, peace and love in West Papua. He belonged to Jacob Rumbiak, a West Papuan, who'd arrived in Australia on a RAAF plane after the referendum in East Timor in 1999. People were telling him it would take a massacre, like the Santa Cruz in East Timor in 1991, to spark interest in his homeland's independence struggle. To cheer him up, someone bought him a baby pig, which he named Yabon in honour of the village where he was born. "Then things started looking up. I walked Yabon every day to exercise him and people talked to me. Teachers asked me to address their students. Journalists rang for stories. It was amazing to watch my pig creating space for West Papua

in Australia. Then an old chief from home rang and said ‘Son, are you really taking our culture to that country?’”

In the highlands of New Guinea, the Bird of Paradise-shaped island on the western rim of Melanesia, men coat themselves in pig fat to keep out the cold, and little girl-mothers grieve when their pets are trussed, ready for market or for sacrifice. Pigs are the centre-piece of religious and social life. Their blood sanctifies land for ceremony, and opens negotiations between families for a marriage. They are financial capital, and if cash is required, perhaps to pay school fees or fund a funeral, a pig will be sold. They underpin the village economy, and are still the most popular form of compensation in the art of Melanesian peace-making.

“When our people from the islands meet a family from the highlands, we cook *barapen*, have a feast. We cook pig—which the mountain people usually eat, and fish—which is more usually the diet of the islanders. In that way we share our customs, and eat together. That’s our polite form” says Jacob Rumbiak, former lecturer at Cendrawasih University in West Papua, who endured ten years of isolation in Indonesian jails, including Cipinang Prison with East Timor’s Xanana Gusmao. “It’s been difficult to be Melanesian since the Indonesians occupied my country in 1963. One of the first things they did was massacre the pigs”.

In East New Guinea (Papua New Guinea), pigs lost some of their value when the framework of the new nation state was assembled in 1975. Hundreds of small socio-political units were destabilised by the swift elimination of their autonomy, and have not yet settled as bigger, regional identities in the national parliament. Similarly, the institutions of the modern state, which weren't built upon Melanesian foundations, don't yet communicate effectively with their constituents in the mountains. A boar's head, printed on the twenty kina note, reminds an increasingly frustrated people of the exchanges that had been central to a kaleidoscope of relations. Pigs facilitated dialogue between families, between communities, between man and nature, and between man and god. If communication broke down, there were repercussions. Someone would die, perhaps the gardens would fail. Blood sacrifice helped resemble equanimity and order. Papuans continue to believe

that the quality of atonement garnered by ceremonial slaughter of a pig cannot be achieved when bits of paper are passed around instead. The architects of independence in 1975 may have been short-sighted when they marginalised the sacred from their new order.

On the other side of the border, in West Papua, pigs are still the king of the castle, although not for the Indonesian Military, who are mostly Muslim. Why Indonesia's first president colonised the western rim of Christian Melanesia is a matter of debate. He claimed that West Papua was part of the Dutch East Indies, and therefore, automatically, of the post-colonial republic as well. The Netherlands, which had scheduled self-determination for their Non-Self-Governing Territory in 1970, say its well-funded development program was betrayed by the international community in 1962. America claims its diplomatic manoeuvring diverted a belligerent Sukarno from seeking more support from communist Russia and escalating the terrifying drama of the Cold War. President Kennedy told the Dutch Ambassador in Washington "those Papuans of yours are just 700,000 and living in the stone age".

Australia, as Administering Power of the Non-Self-Governing Territory of East New Guinea (in 1975 the independent state of Papua New Guinea) supported West Papua's self-determination in the fifties and co-operated closely with the Netherlands administration. In 1961 it changed policy, following America's new policy of appeasement, proclaiming "Australia cannot break off relations with a neighbour of 125 million (Indonesian) people on behalf of those few people".

West Papuans were not consulted about the expulsion of the Netherlands from their territory, which the UN-sponsored New York Agreement brought about. Nor were they privy to a contract between the new Indonesian administration and the US Freeport-McMoran mining company, signed in 1967, two years before the scandalous Act of Free Choice ballot which concluded the New York Agreement. They reject the claim that the Dutch East Indies was automatically Indonesian. What, they ask, of the Dutch colonies of Surinam in South America, Barbados in Central America, and Guinea Bissau in Africa?

On 1 May 1963, as the United Nations handed the administration of West Papua to Indonesia, President Sukarno declared the territory a military zone. The next day, his Minister for Culture lit a bonfire in the main square of the capital, and forced ten thousand Papuans to witness the incineration of flags, books and cultural artefacts. Entire villages were massacred, death promised to those accused of subversion. By the time of the Act of Free Choice, six years later, a generation of West Papuan leadership had 'disappeared', thousands of villagers were dead and hundreds of villages had been strafed. Pigs (and the Dutch guilder) had been replaced by the worthless Indonesian *rupiah*. Indonesian soldiers, predominately Muslim appalled by the prominence of the animal in highland households, had slaughtered thousands of them.

In 1971, Brigadier-General Sarwo Edhie, head of the military in West Papua during the Act of Free Choice, presented a planeload of pigs to the Ekari people in the Central Highlands.¹ The pigs were infected with *taenia solium* (tapeworm) a parasite which triggers a pathological condition in humans called cerebral *cysticercosis*. In 1972, Indonesian medical staff recorded malaise, epilepsy, psychosis and death in the Ekari. An Australian, Dr David Hyndman, in his article *Transcultural tapeworm trafficking—the Indonesian introduction of biological warfare into West Papua*, claimed the parasite had infected most of the Ekari by 1975, had spread to the Western Dani of the Baliem Valley, and had reached Ok Sibil on the PNG border. In 1985, twelve cases of *cysticercosis* were reported in refugee camps in Papua New Guinea.

¹ SARWO EDHIE ALSO ORCHESTRATED THE MASSACRE OF THREE MILLION INDONESIANS AFTER THE COUP AGAINST PRESIDENT SUKARNO IN 1965. 'IN TERMS OF THE NUMBERS KILLED THE ANTI-PKI MASSACRES IN INDONESIA IN 1965-66 RANKS AS ONE OF THE WORST MASS MURDERS OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY, ALONGSIDE THE SOVIET PURGES OF THE 1930S, THE NAZI HOLOCAUST DURING THE SECOND WORLD WAR, AND THE MAOIST BLOODBATH OF THE 1950S' (*INDONESIA 1965: THE COUP THAT BACKFIRED*, HELEN LOUISE HUNTER, CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY, 1968; ALSO IN *THE UNITED STATES AND THE OVERTHROW OF SUKARNO, 1965-1967*, PETER DALE SCOTT, PACIFIC AFFAIRS, VOL. 58, No.2, 1985:239-264).

West Papua has been closed to the international community since 1963, so there has been little monitoring of the arrests, disappearances, killings and massacres. Churches estimate 400,000 people have been killed. Families continue to be uprooted from self-sustaining lifestyles on traditional land and set on the fringes of unhealthy urban sprawls. A million *transmigrasi* from other Indonesian islands are surviving badly-planned barely-managed migration programs. Papuan students learn an Indonesian-language curriculum devised by Javanese; many have not seen a map of their own country. The military work with commercial operators, clear-felling ancient wood from the heart of unique forests, levelling mountains to extrude precious minerals, sucking gas and fish from a marine environment that was pristine until the sixties.

The deeply Christian West Papuans continue to pursue their non-violent campaign for independence, a movement nurtured by a network of disciplined organisations that criss-cross the territory's tribal, political, and cultural landscapes. They emphasise dialogue-generated negotiation, a conflict resolution technique central to West Papuan indigenous thinking, which Dr Thomas Waingai, one of West Papua's most powerful intellectuals, developed in the eighties as a national strategy of resistance. Dr Thomas' first disciples were West Papua's big men, the leaders of the traditional religions, who were able to coalesce a basic tenet—to love rather than hate your enemy—with the laws and discipline of their indigenous heritage. With non-violence central to both Melanesian and Christian philosophies, this movement has attracted the support of Pacific kin nations, and, increasingly, the rest of the international community.

In 1996, Dr Thomas died in Cipinang Prison in Jakarta, defeated by Indonesian barbarism, but having triumphed as a remarkable strategist—for by then West Papuans had developed a network of organisations working for independence through non-violent means. This includes the traditional leadership, Christian church groups, women's groups, student organisations, academics, political parties, non-government organisations, and a *transmigrasi* group called AMBERI. Even the military wing of the OPM (Organisasi Papua Merdeka) is pledged to defend, but not to attack.

Freeed porker, not free Papua, hogs limelight



Pork walk: Yabon the pig with his owner, West Papuan independence fighter Jacob Rumbiak. Picture: AAP

By ROYAL ABBOTT

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At a meeting in the Victorian Parliament, the leaders urged Prime Minister John Howard, who is making his first official visit to Indonesia, to back the movement for self-government in the Indonesian province of Irian Jaya. Independence advocates refer to the province as West Papua.

Roman Catholic Bishop Hilton Deakin chaired the gathering, which drew together officials from the ACTU and Victorian Trades Hall Council as well as representatives from all main Australian churches and a sizeable number of ethnic groups.

At the close of the formalities, attention shifted to Yabon the pig, the companion of West Papuan independence fighter Jacob Rumbiak.

For five weeks, Mr Rumbiak has shared his St Kilda flat with Yabon as a reminder of home while he tries to muster Australian support

for self-determination in his homeland.

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unimpeded, Yabon's absence did not go unnoticed.

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But that did not detract from his plea that Australian support was essential for independence for Irian Jaya.

For too long now, West Papuans have had no voice in international forums, he said. It was time Australia extended a hand to help its neighbor, he said, trying to hold a squealing, struggling Yabon. AAP

**Freed porker, not free Papua, hogs limelight
The Age, 14 Aug 2001, Royal Abbott, Picture AAP)**

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