

Hope and Resurrection¹ **Muridan S. Widjojo**^{2*})

The Morning Star flag holds special meaning for the people of Irian Jaya (popularly called Papua). Fluttering in the air, it symbolizes the noble call of their ancestors to liberate them from the miseries of mundane life.

The Morning Star appears to recite a series of endearing poetic verses: "Let thy kingdom come, deliver us from the bullets and the bayonets, let our land be fertile with *batatas* and taro. Let the forests thrive with sago trees and let them abound with boars that will serve to meet my needs and the needs of my people. Clean my rivers so the fish and prawns can scuttle onto my boat once more."

If that freedom remains a remote dream when the flag is unfurled, then the Papuans assemble to carry out introspection of what went wrong with the religious rites. Yet these people do not relent and fly the flag on another occasion.

This phenomenon behind the flag raising ceremony, according to anthropologists and theologians, is related to cargoism. Followers of cargoism believe a new era of abundance will come with the arrival of a leader dispatched by their ancestors. And the raising and fluttering of the Morning Star flag is a rite to summon the spiritual leader. In Irian, the cargoism movement has been in existence since 1860 and is manifested in different formats. According to John Strelan (1977), there were 200 cargoism movements in Papua in 1860.

Cargoism has spread well among the Papuans, with their 250 distinct language groups, and has survived up to today. For instance, the spirit of the Koreri Movement was very much alive when the Morning Star was hoisted in Biak in July 1998. For five long days, the Papuans launched a 'war' against the Indonesian Military and the police. The incident claimed the lives of several Papuans who died for the Morning Star. For five consecutive days, they danced, sang and chanted as they circled the flag post in a ceremony to herald the coming of their spiritual leader. At the time, there were rumors that the 'brother-in-law of the Papuans', Secretary-General of the United Nations Kofi Annan, would be arriving soon to endorse the independence of Papua.

Certainly, not every Papuan has placed the issue of independence for Papua and the hoisting of the Morning Star flag in the context of the ideology of cargoism. The educated elite of Papua has at least three ways of looking at the movement behind the hoisting of the Morning Star.

Firstly, the movement serves as a strategy to boost the bargaining position of the leaders of Papua in its dealings with the central government to enhance the issue of human rights, politics and economy ignored in the past. Secondly, the movement strives to adopt a position in matters pertaining to the sins of political involvement in the era of the New Order. Thirdly, the movement sets the precondition of a political movement to wrest independence as a new nation as reflected in the movement's ardent attempts to question the status of Papua as an integral part of the Republic of Indonesia.

As in the case of the New Order government, these complicated facts, evolving from the combined products of history, culture and the political and economic failure, have been identified as a separatist stigma by the new Indonesian government. Indeed, a flag is a symbol of the sovereignty of a country. However, what is the significance of a symbol if it is not backed by a structured political movement, if it lacks a trained army to take over power? At present, there is no political party that is ready to take over from the formal leadership in Papua. Does flying hundreds of

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thousands of the Morning Star flag throughout Papua automatically eject the Papuans from the Republic of Indonesia?

In certain ways, Gus Dur's (President Abdurrahman Wahid) strategy of tolerating the presence of the Morning Star flag and the change of name of Indonesia's most eastern province of Irian Jaya to Papua has checked the escalating tension. It also created a precondition leading to dialogue. Unfortunately, the national political discourse later developed to place Gus Dur in a tight spot. Consequently, his strategy was not backed by a further process that could have led to dialogue and reconciliation. Though having an extremely strong cultural and mystical color and not showing itself as an institutionally strong political movement, the Free Papua Movement (OPM) has the potential of becoming a significant political force. Consolidation at grassroots level and lobbies to gain international sympathy will continue as long as the Indonesian government continues to refrain from holding dialogue and the police continue to take repressive measures.

In such circumstances, differences and conflicts arising from different political discourse related to the stigma of separatism and the phenomena of the Morning Star flag will not be productive. In fact, they only tend to encourage new violence. Political issues relating to Papua need to be speedily shifted in a direction that will lead to dialogue. The majority of Papuans, with a tradition unique among highland communities, have a strong capacity to carry out negotiations. There is no need for alarm if the leaders of Papua come up with the highest demands and offers at the start of dialogue. To the people of Papua, every conflict can be solved by smoking together and lighting the cigarettes from the same fire. This process of negotiation could go on for weeks or, if necessary, even for years, until a common solution is achieved. Decisions coming from such negotiations would be a genuine social contract to be observed by all the relevant parties.

The future of Papua now depends entirely on the capacity of the political elite to learn how to negotiate with the leaders of Papua. The first thing they have to do is understand the symbolic character and political language of the leaders of Papua. Secondly, they have to learn to listen and patiently understand, as well as manage the negotiations that may last for months or years. Thirdly, negotiators representing the government must be acceptable to the leaders of Papua. The government negotiators must also have adequate authority from the central government and must be ready with concrete political and economic concepts of bargaining that can be implemented after the negotiations are over.

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