



SPECIAL ISSUE ARTICLE

Four Decades of Papuan Diaspora Campaigning for Papuan Independence in the Pacific Region

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ABSTRACT

This study examines four decades of Papuan diaspora efforts to campaign for Papuan independence in the Pacific region. It analyzes campaigns beginning in the 1980s with figures such as John Otto Ondawame and Andy Ayamiseba, later continued by leaders like Benny Wenda. Through a historical approach, the research investigates how these pro-independence campaigns spotlight the controversial cession of Papua to Indonesia in 1969, subsequent political violence, human rights violations, and the role of Melanesian solidarity. The study argues that the Papuan diaspora has been instrumental in internationalizing the Papuan issue and rallying support from a wide range of actors, including state officials, traditional leaders, and civil society groups. Findings reveal that, despite inconsistent backing from state actors, the sustained diaspora campaign has significantly raised regional and global awareness of Papuan independence. This research fills a gap in literature by highlighting the impact of diaspora activism on the Papuan independence process.

KEYWORDS

Melanesian Solidarity; Papuan Diaspora;
Papuan Issue; Pacific Region



INTRODUCTION

The word *Diaspora* comes from the ancient Greek word meaning spreading or scattering ([Yanti, 2021](#)). “Spreading” or “scattering” can very much be seen in understanding diaspora today, as diaspora from many parts of the world “spread” and “scatter” to many places. Nowadays, the term diaspora is often used to describe a transnational migration by an individual or group due to factors such as transportation, information and technologies, international trade, and labour movements, which resulted in a development of new settlements or communities ([Bhandari, 2021](#)). With the development in information and technology, as well as the convenience in today's mass movements, diaspora is more than merely “scattering” or “spreading”, it plays a much more significant role. In certain cases, diasporas have become a nation's new force with their significant economic or political impact. By living abroad, they are able to interact with the international community more easily, so their impact will be much greater than those who only live within the country. An example can be seen in how the Aceh diaspora sought recognition for Aceh's independence through the international communication they established abroad ([Rasyidi, 2019](#)). Today, a similar phenomenon can be seen in the ongoing case of Papuan independence.

The prolonged conflict in Papua since the cession of Papua into Indonesia to date has made quite a number of Indigenous People of Papua (*Orang Asli Papua* / OAP) leave Papua to settle in other countries, which are included in the diaspora category. However, specifically in this study, the author will limit it to the pro-independence Papuan diaspora, which in its political activities consistently seeks to internationalize the Papua issue and influence actors in the Pacific region. The main objective of the diaspora's internationalization of the Papua issue is to gain support for Papuan independence from Indonesia.

Countries in the Pacific region are one of the destinations of the pro-independence Papuan diaspora. The choosing of countries in the Pacific region is inseparable from a number of factors. First, the Pacific region is geographically very close to Papua, even in 2006, 42 OAPs sailed from Papua by ship to Australia ([Nainggolan, 2016](#)). Papua New Guinea is also a country directly bordered by Papua which has become the entranceway for the Papuan diaspora to enter countries in the Pacific region ([Zocca, 2014](#)). Waves of refugees from Papua to Papua New Guinea have occurred since the 1960s when there was combat between the Indonesian army and the Dutch. During the enforcement of the Military Operations Area (DOM), many Papuans fled to Papua New Guinea. According to the World Refugee Survey in 2008, Papua New Guinea hosted around 10,000 refugees from Papua. Most refugees came in the years 1984-1986 ([Suara Papua, 2020](#)).

Second, the Melanesian ethnic similarity factor between the Papuan diaspora and residents in the Pacific sub-region, namely the South Pacific region, such as PNG, New Caledonia, Fiji, Vanuatu and the Solomon Islands. This ethnic similarity is expected by the Papuan diaspora to become a unifying identity and arouse Melanesian solidarity to help the



Melanesians in Papua who are still seeking independence from Indonesia. This idea of Melanesian solidarity has been consolidated in the last three decades ([Lawson, 2016](#)). Third, there is the regional organization of the Melanesian Spearhead Group which has had a commitment since the beginning of this organization: independence for all Melanesians ([Cain, 2015](#)).

The pro-independence Papuan diaspora has been campaigning and lobbying in the Pacific region since the 1980s. The pro-independence Papuan diaspora is the main actor in efforts to seek support for Papuan independence abroad. Since the 1980s, countries in the Pacific have also provided protection for pro-independence Papuan figures who fled from Indonesian authority, such as Andy Ayamiseba and John Otto Ondawame (see [Webb-Gannon, 2014](#)). Not only protection, countries in the Pacific also provide residence permits and freedom of political activity to the Papuan diaspora, even John and Andy died in Vanuatu.

In the end, the diasporas also “spread” and “scatter”, not only just themselves physically, but also their mind and idea. Their struggle and also their hope. Therefore, the research question to be answered in this study is who are the Papuan diaspora and how were the steps taken by the Papuan diaspora in the attempt to achieve their independence over the past four decades. For this reason, there are two things that will be the focus of this research. First, to explain the profile of pro-independence Papuan diaspora figures in the Pacific region. Second, to explain the issues campaigned by the pro-independence Papuan diaspora in the Pacific region.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The most important literature in researching the root causes of the conflict in Papua is the book entitled “Papua Road Map”, written by [Widjojo et al. \(2010\)](#). The book explains the history of Papuan integration, political violence and human rights violations, development failures and marginalization of indigenous Papuans which are sources of conflict in Papua. In this regard, [MacLeod \(2015\)](#) also mentions five factors that make Papuan resistance to Indonesia, namely historical issues, issues of human rights violations, economic injustice, transmigration and finally the issue of racism. These five factors are very important for the authors to build thoughts on the various factors that cause Papuan resistance to Indonesia. The Papua conflict according to Situmorang in a journal entitled “International dimensions of the West Papua complexities”, explains that from the sources of the Papua conflict above there are international dimensions such as human rights violations ([Situmorang, 2015](#)). This human rights dimension, according to Jim Elmslie, has led to genocide, which is also campaigned by Papuan independence struggle actors such as Victor Yeimo who called it as ‘slow-motion genocide’ or Benny Wenda who also called it as ‘Silent Genocide’.



Another article entitled “Updating Papua road map: proses perdamaian, politik kaum muda, dan diaspora Papua” is an article that became the entrance for researchers in seeing the Papuan diaspora pro-independence ([Pamungkas & Rusdiarti, 2017](#)). This article contains data on the Papuan diaspora and their political activities. These data and writings are very important for researchers because they are required in building this research. They reiterate the role of the diaspora in their efforts to achieve independence. For example, in the case of the Papua Peace Conference held in 2011. This peace conference was attended by various parties ranging from experts, academics, representatives of religious groups, members of PPN (*Papua Tanah Damai*), government officials, and so on. The Papua Peace Conference produced the so-called Papua Land of Peace Indicators which discuss politics, security, law and human rights, social, cultural, economic and environmental issues. In addition, the conference emphasized the role of the diaspora in the struggle for independence. This can be seen from how the conference selected Papuan diasporas such as Rumakiek Rex, John Ondawame, Leoni Tangahma, Octo Motte and Benny Wenda who each live scattered in Australia, Vanuatu, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, and the United States to represent the negotiations of indigenous Papuans with the Indonesian government. These diasporas are also the ones trusted to sign the declaration of the Papua Peace Conference.

Another literature used by the author is a journal article entitled “The Papua Conflict: The Different Perspectives of The Indonesian Government and International Communities – Review from The English School Theory”. This article analyses the Papua conflict, focusing on the Indonesian government's claims to sovereignty and the international community's human rights concerns. The Indonesian government portrays pro-independence forces as separatist and opposes outside involvement, framing the conflict as a matter of sovereignty. In contrast, international actors, especially Pacific countries and global human rights advocates focus on humanitarian concerns, highlighting human rights violations and the self-determination rights of the Papuan people. Within the larger political narratives of sovereignty and human rights, the article helps in understanding the ongoing international support for Papuan independence in detail ([Rosyidin et.al., 2022](#)). It lacks limited attention to the goals and motives of Papuan diaspora actors who advance narratives of independence. Thus, this research fills the gap by examining the motivations underlying the diaspora's focus on Indonesia's claimed violations of human rights. This view of diaspora activities offers a better understanding of how pro-independence activists use global platforms to maintain a consistent strategy that appeals to international human rights standards as well as Melanesian nations' shared ethnic and regional solidarity, in addition to using them to win sympathy.

Furthermore, a journal article, "The Politics of History in West Papua - Indonesia Conflict" talks over the complex interplay between historical narratives and political legitimacy in the conflict between the Indonesian government and West Papua nationalists. There are two critical historical aspects that can be considered: West Papua's colonial past as

part of the Netherlands East Indies and the contentious 1969 referendum known as the Act of Free Choice. Both sides use these historical occurrences to support their positions; the Indonesian government claims that West Papua was an integral part of its territory, while West Papuan nationalists refute this claim by highlighting their unique cultural identity and their 1961 declaration of independence. A rebirth of the Papuan independence movement has been made possible by Indonesia's post-1998 democratization, which has also made it possible to articulate counter-narratives that contradict the Indonesian state's prevailing historical record. It implies that in order to comprehend the conflict in West Papua, one must recognize the different historical interpretations that continue to influence the identities and ambitions of the Papuan people in their struggle for independence ([Viartasiwi, 2018](#)).

A chapter, the Pacific Diaspora, from a book titled "Migration and Development: Perspectives from Small States" published by Commonwealth Secretariat also examines the dynamic emigration patterns from Pacific island nations, emphasizing the diaspora's distinct dynamics. The Pacific Diaspora includes the migratory trends and experiences of individuals from different Pacific Island Countries (PICs), especially Polynesia and Micronesia. It draws attention to the sizable diasporic communities that have grown out of these areas, their remittance contributions, and the socioeconomic effects of migration on their native nations ([Connell, 2015](#)). Connell gives a thorough summary of the Pacific Diaspora, but it does not include the Papua diaspora, which is a crucial component of the larger Pacific problem. A number of events have led to increased interest in the Papua diaspora from the Indonesian province of Papua. The Papua diaspora has particular difficulties, like resolving the socio-political problems that impact their communities and negotiating the complications of identity and belonging in Indonesia. It needs more analysis, particularly as the Papua diaspora continues to become more prominent and relevant in conversations on Pacific-related issues. This research might offer a more thorough grasp of the many experiences and effects of issues within the diaspora in the Pacific context by filling this knowledge gap.

The next literature is a journal article titled "Indonesia's Interests in the Pacific Region". This article describes Indonesia's involvement in the Pacific, focusing on its diplomatic relations and cooperation with Pacific countries. The conflict surrounding Papua's self-determination movement, which has drawn interest and backing from several Pacific nations, has become a major area of concern. Since some Pacific countries support Papua's freedom of choice because of their common Melanesian history and claims of human rights abuses by Indonesia, Papua's independence movement has gained worldwide attention. Racial and cultural ties have been used by organizations like the United Liberation cause for West Papua (ULMWP) to gain support from nations like Vanuatu and the Solomon Islands. These countries have voiced their concerns about Papua's human rights, frequently taking the matter to international conferences like the UN (United Nations). Indonesia has

proactively joined regional groups, such Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG), to strengthen its sovereignty and combat separatist inclinations to lessen these challenges ([Buiney & Wambrauw, 2024](#)). Although this article examines Indonesia's actions in the Papuan independence movement, it lacks the grassroots and international efforts spearheaded by Papuan diaspora leaders for four decades because this article mostly concentrates on Indonesia's state-centric tactics. By concentrating on the Papua diaspora's sustained advocacy and activities, this research seeks to close this gap.

[Wanggae and Lawson \(2021\)](#) explain in their article "The West Papua issue in Pacific regional politics: explaining Indonesia's foreign policy failure" that the issue of an independent Papua is now more widely discussed not only among state officials but also among NGOs, lower-level political leaders, Pacific-based journalists, and members of grassroots communities, let alone activists. Ronald May further explained about the Melanesian Spearhead Group regional organization in the Pacific. One of the goals of the MSG organization since its establishment is to promote the issue of decolonization and anti-colonialism and imperialism values and support the independence of ethnic Melanesians, because for MSG ethnic Melanesians have experienced colonialism and continue to promote human rights values ([May, 2020](#)). This value is certainly directly related to the efforts of the pro-independence Papuan diaspora to liberate Papua, which is filled with ethnic Melanesians.

Furthermore, Tess Newton Cain, in her article entitled "The Renaissance of the Melanesian Spearhead Group" discusses how the MSG has made direct efforts towards the independence of Melanesian countries and West Papua in particular. For example, in 2012, the MSG facilitated young men (indigenous New Caledonians) who were expected to lead their country if New Caledonia one day became an independent state. Similar support is also seen in the case of West Papua's independence. In 2013, the MSG discussed membership for the West Papua National Council for Liberation during the Leader's Summit held in Noumea, New Caledonia. Then this support was also seen again in 2015 where they discussed the membership of the United Liberation Movement for West Papua in the MSG.

The complex dynamics of West Papua's political status in connection to Indonesia and the Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG) are examined in another paper called "West Papua, Indonesia and the Melanesian Spearhead Group: competing logics in regional and international politics." The historical background of West Papua's admission to Indonesia is a further significant aspect of the Papua conflict. It also includes the continuing struggles faced by the Papuan people, including human rights violations and a lack of international support. Initially founded on principles of anti-colonialism and Melanesian solidarity, the MSG has had difficulties addressing the West Papuan issue because of competing national interests among its member states, particularly in their relations with Indonesia. Although there have been calls for Indonesia to be put under more diplomatic pressure regarding its actions in West Papua, real-politic logic often hinders these efforts ([Lawson, 2016](#)).

METHODS

This research uses a qualitative case study method. In case study research, as defined by Creswell as a qualitative strategy, researchers examine a program, event, activity, process or one or more individuals in more depth ([Creswell, 2016](#)). Michael Quinn Patton considers a case study as a research strategy, methodology, comprehensive research strategy, or an effort to collect, organize, then analyse certain findings related to specific cases ([Ul Haq et al., 2023](#)). This study focused on literature that was most relevant to the activities of the pro-independence Papuan diaspora, particularly their campaigns, lobbying efforts, and interactions in the Pacific region. Using framework analysis, the researcher identified recurring patterns in how the diaspora operates, the issues they focus on, and the results of their efforts. These patterns were then compared with case study data to create a clear and consistent narrative.

In this study, firstly, researcher will focus on the pro-independence Papuan diaspora as a group. Secondly, the focus will be on the issues campaigned by the pro-independence Papuan diaspora in the Pacific region. Thirdly, the time limit is from the 1980s to 2024. In the 1980s, figures like Andy Ayamiseba and John Otto Ondawame led the Papuan diaspora in organizing global lobbying efforts. Around the same time, significant geopolitical shifts occurred in the Pacific, including the founding of the Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG) in 1988, which later became a key platform for the diaspora's advocacy. To capture the most recent developments, the study extends its analysis through 2024, providing a comprehensive look at the diaspora's efforts and their impact over the past four decades. In collecting data, researchers focus on literature studies.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Pro-Independence Papuan Diaspora Actors in the Pacific Region

Since the 1980s, the pro-independence Papuan diaspora has been interacting with countries in the Pacific. In 1970, there were two figures: John Otto Ondawame, an intellectual and a key figure in the Free Papua Movement (*Organisasi Papua Merdeka*/OPM), and Andy Ayamiseba, a musician who was quite famous in Indonesia as part of the band Black Brothers. These two Papuan figures were two initial figures who began to lobby countries in the Pacific to help and support Papuan independence from Indonesia, and they have even moved around in various Pacific countries since the 1980s ([Elmslie, 2015](#)).

John Otto Ondawame was born on 30 November 1953. John was an activist and academic who has written extensively on the issue of Papua. John's writings such as his dissertation completed at the Australian National University about *One People, One Soul: West Papuan Nationalism and the Organisasi Papua Merdeka (OPM)/Free Papua Movement* have become a reference for many researchers on the Papua issue (see [Ondawame, 2000](#)). John's other writings also focus on the Papua issue such as *Promoting the Collective Rights of Indigenous People to Self-Determination: The West Papua Case*; Regional Round Table

Conference on Education of Indigenous People of the Pacific, Self-Determination: Building a Better Future; Second International Conference on West Papua in Neuendettelsau, Germany, West Papua: Exploring the Prospects of Peace with Justice; and Centre for Peace and Conflict at the University of Sydney, The Future of West Papua.

Since 1980, John Otto Ondawame had been very active in giving workshops on the Papua issue and lobbying countries in the Pacific to pay attention to the Papua issue and support Papuan independence. John in 1980 worked as an international spokesperson for the OPM and during the Second Papuan People's Congress in 2000 John was elected as a member of the Presidium of the Papuan Council ([Pamungkas & Rusdiarti, 2017](#)). In 2000, John also founded the West Papua Project at the University of Sydney Australia with Prof. Peter King and Dr. Jim Emslie, two academics who have been prolific in researching and writing about the Papua issue. The West Papua Project is part of the Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies. There are several goals in the establishment of the West Papua Project. Firstly, the West Papua Project aims to provide knowledge about Papuan issues. Second, to promote peace with justice in Papua. Third, to monitor and advocate for human rights issues of the conflict in Papua, including the right to self-determination. And lastly, to encourage productive dialogue between conflicting parties.

In 2003, John led a Papuan group of delegates to the Pacific Island Forum meeting held in Auckland, New Zealand. John also travelled to Suva, Fiji to meet with government and civil society actors such as students, NGOs and journalists to discuss the Papua issue. In 2005, John founded the West Papua National Coalition for Liberation or the WPNCL ([Institute for Policy Analysis of Conflict, 2017](#)). WPNCL became the political wing of the OPM which is very consistent in seeking Papuan independence through political lobbying.

John is also an important figure for the reconciliation and reconsolidation of the pro-independence Papuan diaspora, which at that time was still divided into various factions so that it became ULMWP. This reconciliation is a response to the request of the MSG regional organization which sees that there are still many OPM factions abroad. WPNCL, the organization founded by John and became one of the factions that joined to form ULMWP, was finally accepted as an observer member in the MSG regional organization at the MSG Summit in Honiara in 2015. Apart from being the founder of the WPNCL, John also served as vice chairman of the WPNCL until 2014. Since the 1980s, John has travelled around the Pacific to provide insight on the Papua issue and lobby Pacific countries to support an independent Papua.

In 2014, John died in Port Vila Vanuatu. It was highlighted by various newspapers in the Pacific, indicating the great attention and appreciation of countries in the Pacific for John's efforts to liberate Papua, even various countries gave official statements condoling John's death, as Vanuatu did through an official statement by the Prime Minister's Public Relations Officer, Kiery Manassah, describing the death of John Ondawame as a great loss to the Papuan people and also Vanuatu ([Ligo, 2014](#)). The Prime Minister of Vanuatu, Joe

Natuman, also attended the funeral of John Otto Ondawam. Various newspapers both print and electronic in the Pacific such as the Vanuatu Daily Post, Radio New Zealand, Digital Pacific, The Fiji Times and various other newspapers reported Ondawame's death which indicates the enormous influence and popularity of the Papuan diaspora figure in the Pacific region.

Another figure who should be noted is Andy Ayamiseba. Andy is a musician who was a member of the Papuan band Black Brothers ([Webb-Gannon & Webb, 2019](#)). Andy was born into an educated family and his father Dirk Ayamiseba was the first Governor and Chairman of the DPRD-GR of Papua. In 1979 after a concert in Papua New Guinea, Andy did not return to Indonesia, but travelled to Manila and managed to gain asylum from the Netherlands with the help of a Dutch diplomat ([Pamungkas & Rusdiarti, 2017](#)). It is interesting and important to note that in 1983 Andy and his personnel built a base in Vanuatu and assisted the campaign of one of Vanuatu's political figures, Walter Lini, until he was elected Prime Minister. There was a political agreement between Andy Ayamiseba and Walter Lini, whereby if Walter Lini was elected PM, the Vanuatu Government would support efforts for Papuan independence and this was proven after Walter Lini was elected as Vanuatu's first PM. In addition, wider access was given in 1986 at the first Congress of the Vanuatu Party, which was founded by Walter Lini, gave a decision to support the OPM ([Pamungkas & Rusdiarti, 2017](#)).

However, the political relationship factor mentioned above is not the sole factor of Vanuatu's support for Papuan independence, there is another factor, namely the ideology of Walter Lini, which he calls Melanesian socialism. Walter Lini is a left-oriented priest who had political ideals to fight colonialism and imperialism experienced by the Melanesians in the Pacific region. For this reason, the 'One Talk belong to me' law was born, which states that Vanuatu does not feel independent if there are still fellow Melanesians who are still colonized. The individual factor of Walter Lini is also an important factor that shows that the relationship between Andy Ayamiseba and Walter Lini is not limited to a political relationship, but furthermore an ideological relationship, a shared idea to bring ethnic Melanesian independence from colonialism.

During his stay in Vanuatu, Andy continued to make efforts to conduct campaigns in Vanuatu and Pacific countries and to seek funds to run the OPM representative organization in Vanuatu led by Rex Rumakiek ([Pamungkas & Rusdiarti, 2017](#)). Andy lived in Australia from 1991 to 2000 due to the political crisis in Vanuatu. In 2000, Andy returned to Vanuatu and together with Rex and John opened the West Papua People Representative Office in Port Vila and formed the Vanuatu Free West Papua Association. This was a huge breakthrough as the organization was made up of Vanuatu civil society that was concerned with Papuan issues such as indigenous figures, church councils and NGOs. Andy is also an important figure in the WPNCL organization and when ULMWP was founded, Andy held



the position of Deputy Chair of the ULMWP's Legislative Council ([United Liberation Movement for West Papua, 2017](#)).

Both Andy Ayamiseba and John Otto Ondawame are two important figures with ties to Vanuatu Prime Minister Moana Carcasses Kalosil. Prime Minister Kalosil declared his support for the West Papuan cause explicitly from the beginning of his term and supported efforts to push for Papuan representative membership in the MSG. Prime Minister Kolosil asked the WPNCL to formally apply for observer status and facilitated the efforts of Vanuatu-based Papuan diplomats Andy Ayamiseba and John Otto Ondawame to lobby the governments of PNG, Solomon Islands and Fiji. This was the forerunner of a long process of diplomatic lobbying by the Papuan diaspora to successfully become an observer member at the MSG through ULMWP representation.

Another popular Papuan diaspora figure for Papuan independence who has been in the spotlight in recent campaigns and lobbying efforts for Papuan independence is Benny Wenda. Born and raised in Papua, Benny Wenda was the Secretary General of the Koteka Community Consultative Council (Demmak) in the post-Suharto era which was often involved in the dialogue between the central government and the Presidium of the Papuan Council (PDP). However, on June 11, 2002 Benny was arrested in Papua for inciting people to attack TNI-Polri posts in Papua. At the end of 2002, Benny managed to escape from prison and sought and obtained asylum from the UK. Benny Wenda is very active in the Pacific region to provide understanding of the Papua issue and seek support from countries in the Pacific for Papuan independence.

In 2004, Benny Wenda established the West Papua National Parliament (PNWP) in Oxford, England, along with a diplomatic wing, the Free West Papua Campaign. One of the successes of the campaign to gain support for Papuan independence such as the widespread support for Papua in the Pacific region and the acceptance of ULMWP is due to the intensive campaign and lobbying carried out by Benny Wenda through the Free West Papua Campaign. Benny Wenda is also a reconciliation figure for various OPM factions that eventually gave birth to the ULMWP organization ([Pamungkas & Rusdiarti, 2017](#)). In the 2014 ULMWP management, Benny was appointed as ULWMP Spokesperson.

Benny Wenda also initiated the establishment of the International Parliamentarians for West Papua (IPWP), an organization that brings together politicians from various countries to support Papuan independence. Members include four politicians from Vanuatu, four from Papua New Guinea, one from New Zealand, one from the Solomon Islands, and one from Samoa. The involvement of politicians from the Pacific is the result of lobbying from Benny Wenda.

Two Papuan diaspora figures who are also important in lobbying and campaigning for Papuan independence in the Pacific are Jacob Rumbiak and Herman Wanggai. Jacob is a Papuan independence campaigner from Manokwari, who was a political prisoner of the

Indonesian Government, and in 1999, fled to East Timor and received political asylum from the Australian Government.

Jacob is very active in the Pacific region, having founded the Federal Republic of West Papua (NRFPB) in 2011 and serving as its Foreign Minister. Long before 2011, in 2002 Jacob was a member of the Papuan delegation to the PIF meetings in Fiji and New Zealand in 2003. Papuan delegates in these meetings sought to campaign and lobby PIF member states to support Papuan independence. In 2005, Jacob visited Papua New Guinea to lobby the MSG which was holding its annual meeting. In 2006, Jacob met the UN Decolonization Committee in Fiji, and in 2007, Jacob was appointed as the first foreigner to serve as Vanuatu's Malvatumauri council of chiefs and signed the Unity Day declaration with council chairman Maraki Vanuariki. This signalled a very close relationship between Jacob and traditional leaders and councils in Vanuatu. In Australia, Jacob not only settled down but also intensively carried out activist work for Papuan independence by becoming a senior research associate at RMIT in the field of Papua and also founded the NRFPB which received funding assistance from a group of Australian businessmen who sympathized with Jacob's struggle ([Pamungkas & Rusdiarti, 2017](#)).

Herman Wanggai is a Papuan diaspora who also serves as NRFPB ambassador to the UN. Herman is very active in campaigning and lobbying Pacific countries to support Papuan independence. Herman with activist in Fiji, Hilda Lani, founded the Fiji-West Papua Foundation and he was in Fiji for 4 months to work and give workshops on the Papua issue at the NGO Pacific Concern Resource Centre in Suva Fiji.

One thing that caught the attention of the public not only in the Pacific but the world was when in 2005, Herman along with 42 Papuans sailed on a traditional boat to flee to Australia. After days of sailing, Herman and the Papuan refugees arrived at the North Coast of Australia. News of Herman and the Papuan refugees' arrival drew a lot of attention with Torrens News photographers taking photos of them in North Queensland and reporting it to various countries. Australia was deeply concerned about the conditions in Papua and sympathized with Herman's group, leading to the granting of political asylum to Herman and 42 Papuan refugees in 2006 ([ABC News, 2006](#)).

Since 2005, Herman has lived in Australia and organized events and agendas to seek support for Papuan independence. Herman founded the West Papua Christian Fellowship and organized two conferences to discuss Papuan issues that received a lot of attention from Pacific countries and academics, namely the Washington Solution in 2010 and West Papua Culture and Human Rights in 2012.

From the explanation above, the researcher noted important findings in this study. First, the interaction between the pro-independence Papuan diaspora has occurred since the 1980s, which means it has been four decades. Second, these interactions are consistently carried out and there is a continuous regeneration of the pro-independence Papuan diaspora campaigning and lobbying countries in the Pacific region. This means that the acceptance of

ULMWP as an observer member in the MSG and the wider support and attention to the Papua issue in the Pacific region is not something ahistorical, but has been pursued by the Papuan diaspora for 4 decades.

The Birth of United Liberation Movement for West Papua (ULMWP)

The Papuan diaspora in political activities in the Pacific region also seeks to consolidate factions of pro-independence Papuan diaspora organizations in the Pacific region. Initially many factions as part of the OPM campaigned abroad for Papuan independence. These factions included The Federal Republic of West Papua (NRFPB), West Papua National Coalition of Liberation (WPNCL) and West Papua National Parliament (WPNP). In January 2013, the WPNCL began diplomacy in the South Pacific region by applying to be the representative of the Papuan people to join the Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG) regional organization ([Fry & Tarte, 2016](#)). In addition, the NRFPB sent a letter to become a member of the MSG. The WPNCL's request was discussed during the MSG summit in Port Moresby when it was decided that elements of the Papuan struggle should re-register but they must meet the condition that they have united into one organization. This was because of the question that arose as to who would represent the OPM abroad as the WPNCL, NRFPB and WPNL had not yet united.

After the WPNCL submission was rejected by the MSG, a period of reconciliation began between OPM leaders abroad who held 5 meetings discussing the unification of all OPM elements and factions abroad. Furthermore, on November 30 to December 6, 2014 with the facilitation from Vanuatu, one of the MSG member countries in the South Pacific to invite and hold a meeting to unite all OPM factions abroad into one organization. A total of 113 people from various OPM faction organizations such as WPNCL, NRFPB, PNWP and TPN attended this meeting ([Pamungkas & Rusdiarti, 2017](#)). Finally on December 6, 2014 this meeting produced the Saralana Declaration ([Saralana Declaration on West Papua Unity, 2014](#)). This meeting also agreed on the management of ULMWP. Oktovianus Mote as Secretary General, Benny Wenda as spokesperson with three members namely Jacob Rumbiax, Rex Rumakiek and Leoni Tanggahma.

There are five objectives of the ULMWP declaration. First, to represent the aspirations of the Papuan people in the struggle for self-determination using peaceful means. Second, to coordinate the goal of realizing Papuan liberation and independence at the international level. Third, to maintain the unity of leaders speaking with one voice by recognizing the diversity of views and personalities and upholding universal human rights principles, democratic values and inclusive leadership, respect for customary and religious differences. Fourth, building support from sub-regional, regional, and international solidarity to seek political support and recognition. Fifth, ULMWP's goal is to gain full membership in the MSG ([Pamungkas & Rusdiarti, 2017](#)).

From the Saralana Declaration there are several points that are important to note. First, this declaration marks a new chapter in the Papuan struggle, especially in the overseas field under ULMWP. Second, the unification of various organizations into ULMWP will be a new challenge for Indonesia because ULMWP's application to become a member in the MSG is no longer divided into various factions. It was proven that at the 20th MSG Summit held in Honiara, Salomon Islands from June 19-26, 2015, ULMWP's efforts to get a place in MSG received a response from MSG, with the acceptance of ULMWP as an observer member.

It is important to understand the MSG organization. In 1988 in Port Villa Vanuatu, the three founding countries of the MSG, namely Vanuatu, Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea, signed the principle of cooperation between Melanesian countries that have become independent and assist Melanesian countries that have not yet become independent. This meeting was the beginning of the MSG organization. Furthermore, in 1996 in Kiriwina, Papua New Guinea, meetings between independent countries in the South Pacific continued to emphasize the promotion of economic cooperation between MSG countries but still did not forget the main focus of the MSG formation objectives, which are regional solidarity and respect and promote Melanesian cultural values and traditions. In addition, it also promotes the issue of decolonization and anti-colonialism and imperialism values and supports the independence of the Melanesians, because for the MSG the Melanesians experienced colonialism and continue to promote human rights values ([May, 2020](#)). In 2005, the MSG member states reaffirmed these principles and signed in 2007 by also completing the organizational structure and secretariat office located in Port Villa Vanuatu. With this complement, the MSG received recognition as an international organization in 2007 ([Cain, 2015](#)). To date, the permanent members of the MSG are Vanuatu, Papua New Guinea, FLNKS, Solomon Islands and Fiji.

The MSG has its own appeal and uniqueness as a regional organization. First, this organization not only refers to the South Pacific region, but also refers to certain ethnicities and cultures, namely Melanesian ethnic cultures. Second, in terms of naming the organization, MSG refers more to Melanesian ethnic culture rather than to the region. Third, this organization since its inception is not only filled by sovereign states, but also accepts entities that are not yet sovereign, namely the Front de Liberation Nationale Kanak et Socialiste (FLNKS), namely the New Caledonian community organization that supports the independence of New Caledonia from France.

The acceptance of the ULMWP as an observing member of the MSG can be seen in the historical context and the initial commitment of the establishment of the MSG. The strong commitment of the founders of the MSG in 1988 regarding decolonization and independence for all Melanesian nations is an argument for accepting the ULMWP and has previously accepted the FLNKS as a permanent member, even though it is still an organization fighting for an independent New Caledonia. MSG is in a difficult choice in terms of the Papua conflict and must decide to prioritize and respect humanity, thereby



supporting an independent Papua or prioritizing developing the potential for political-economic cooperation with Indonesia. Evidently, the MSG chose the first option and accepted the ULMWP as an observer member.

The ULMWP's observer status carries major weight in regional politics. It brings the Papua issue to the forefront of Pacific political discussions, directly challenging Indonesia's efforts to maintain its sovereignty over the region. By emphasizing a shared Melanesian identity and solidarity, the ULMWP has strengthened calls for decolonization and human rights in the Pacific, putting pressure on Indonesia to address ongoing issues of governance and human rights in Papua. This achievement not only validates the diaspora's long-standing advocacy but also reinforces the importance of decolonization and human rights in the region. Looking ahead, the diaspora's ability to maintain momentum will depend on how well it navigates regional diplomacy and counters Indonesia's influence in the Pacific.

Pro-Independence Papuan Diaspora Campaign Issues

There are several issues that are being campaigned by the pro-independence Papuan diaspora and ULMWP in the Pacific region. First, Indonesia is considered to have committed colonialism against the Papuan people who are dominated by Melanesians. The history of Papua's entry into Indonesian territory is considered by the Papuan diaspora pro-independence to be a coercion. Furthermore, when it is in Indonesian control, Papua is treated like a colony from Indonesia with various policies of the Indonesian Government that are detrimental to ethnic Melanesians in Papua.

The ULMWP continues this campaign. In a statement released by the ULMWP during the 80th Anniversary of the KAA on April 18, it emphasized that the ULMWP portrayed Indonesia as having committed colonialism against Papua.

We are often told: Colonialism is dead, Sukarno said in his speech. Let us not be deceived or even soothed by that. I say to you, colonialism is not yet dead. How can we say it is dead, so long as vast areas of Asia and Africa are unfree? West Papua remains unfree, today, 60 years later. It is Indonesia, today, that holds West Papua as a colony. Today, the time has come to end colonial rule and permit West Papuans a genuine act of self-determination. ([Scoop Media, 2015](#))

In the ULMWP statement above, ULMWP firmly emphasized that Indonesia, which heroically said in the Sukarno era that colonialism was dead, was an empty rhetoric, because since the process of integrating Papua into Indonesia, Indonesia has carried out colonialism against Papua to this day. The concept of colonialism of third world countries and internal colonialism in this case is said by many experts, on the pattern of Indonesia's approach to Papua.

For ULMWP, the 1955 Bandung KAA was only used by Indonesia to gain support for colonizing Papua, after Papua was released from Dutch colonization. While Sukarno spoke against the rule of one country over another, his government was using the Bandung conference to build Third World support for Indonesian plans to take over West Papua. The conference called for the end of Dutch rule over West Papua, but it failed to support Papuan self-determination. Instead, the Asian-African Conference, in the context of its expressed attitude on the abolition of colonialism, supported the position of Indonesia in the case of West (Papua). This was a failure to support the 'Bandung spirit' of ending colonialism. Thus, the KAA, with its spirit of abolishing colonialism, instead practiced colonialism in the form of support for Indonesia to bring Papua into Indonesian territory. Thus, the KAA has failed and Indonesia has brought many countries to support the colonialism of third world countries.

Indonesia's colonialism according to the Papuan diaspora and ULMWP towards the Papuan people with systematic policies that violate human rights, torture, coercion, repression, arbitrary arrests, emphasize militaristic approaches, and further try to reduce the Papuan people with transmigration carried out by Indonesia. Self-determination and independence are the only solutions according to the Papuan diaspora and ULMWP that can end Indonesia's colonialism against the Papuan people.

Second, what the Papuan diaspora and ULMWP are concerned about is human rights violations against the Melanesians in Papua. These human rights violations and mistreatment have been committed by Indonesia since it sought the return of West Irian during the Sukarno era until today. For ULMWP and the Papuan diaspora, these human rights violations are said to fall into the category of serious human rights violations because they are considered continuous and will potentially eradicate the Melanesians from Indonesia. Spokesperson from KNPB, Victor Yeimo said:

We don't have to think (an) emergency is like a bomb (or) like war. Systematically, we have...an emergency. People from outside they come and they have places (in our society), and we are dying. Genocide (is) still happening in West Papua. And we are saying that it is an emergency for us. ([Elmslie & Webb-Gannon, 2013](#))

Benny Wenda added one of the important figures in the Papuan diaspora and spokesperson for ULMWP said "that there is a 'silent genocide' taking place in West Papua as the killing of thousands of West Papuans by Indonesian state actors is committed with impunity." Asserting that Indonesia is committing silent genocide against the Melanesians in Papua. Beny Giay, one of the Papuan protestant leaders, is even more firm in calling what Indonesia is doing as genocide, which includes serious human rights violations.

Third, the pro-independence Papuan diaspora in the last decade has focused on capitalizing on the Melanesian ethnic similarities between Papua and residents in the South



Pacific region. This is related to the political strategy of the pro-independence Papuan diaspora to gain support when submitting an application as an observer member in the Melanesian Spearhead Group regional organization in 2015. Campaigns on the topics of 'Genocide in Papua', 'Melanesian Brotherhood' and 'Bring Back Papua to Melanesian' were intensively delivered by the Papuan diaspora both personally and through ULMWP. In a release made by ULMWP during the 80th Anniversary of KAA, ULMWP also firmly stated "West Papuans have never ceased asserting their identity as a Melanesian, not an Indonesian people." This campaign was considered successful because ULMWP was officially accepted as an MSG observer member in 2015 during the MSG Summit in Honiara, Solomon Islands ([Roden, 2015](#)). In general, the success of the ULMWP in becoming an observer member of the MSG is the most significant progress in the Papuan diaspora campaign in the Pacific region. This means that the success of the pro-independence Papuan diaspora has shaped Indonesia's bad image of Papua in the Pacific region. Wardahni explained that Indonesia's bad image in the Pacific regarding Papua has lasted three decades ([Wardhani, 2023](#)).

The Papuan diaspora in the last decade, both personally and through ULMWP, has focused on building a narrative that ethnic Melanesians are not part of Indonesia, because they are closer to ethnic Melanesians in the South Pacific region. While under the rule and part of Indonesia, ethnic Melanesians in Papua experienced various mistreatments such as political violence, human rights violations and discrimination in various fields. This is the main reason for ULMWP and the Papuan diaspora to say Papua and ethnic Melanesians want to return to their brothers in the Pacific region and ask for the support and assistance of the Melanesian community and countries in the Pacific is to bring the Papuan people out of Indonesian rule.

From the explanation above, the Papuan diaspora and ULMWP consider that ethnic Melanesians are not part of Indonesia because under the rule and part of Indonesia, ethnic Melanesians in Papua were treated badly and arbitrarily by the Indonesian Government. This is the main reason for ULMWP and the Papuan diaspora to say Papua and ethnic Melanesians want to return to their brothers in the Pacific region and ask for support and assistance from the Melanesian community and countries in the Pacific region.

The Pacific is to bring the Papuan people out of Indonesian rule. The jargons and topics of 'Genocide in Papua', 'Bring Back West Papua to Melanesia' as well as 'Melanesian Solidarity' and 'Melanesian Brotherhood' have become the main topics of discussion in the ULMWP campaign in the Pacific region. In a statement made by ULMWP during the 80th Anniversary of KAA, ULMWP also firmly stated "West Papuans have never ceased asserting their identity as a Melanesian, not an Indonesian people" ([Scoop Media, 2015](#)). The campaign of 'Genocide in Papua', 'Melanesian Brotherhood' and 'Bring Back Papua to Melanesian', which is quite intensive to get the attention of Melanesian countries when ULMWP proposes to become a member in the MSG organization as a strategy of Papuan

independence fighters to say that ethnic Melanesians are not part of Indonesia and have been treated poorly while joining Indonesia. In a constructivist perspective, ULMWP in its interactions with MSG and communities in the Pacific is able to generate Melanesian solidarity, which means that it is also able to form a bad image of Indonesia that mistreats ethnic Melanesians in Papua.

CONCLUSION

By outlining the profiles of diaspora figures and the steps they have taken over the last four decades, this research finds that the pro-independence Papuan diaspora is the most important actor in international lobbying, with the main goal of gaining support for Papuan independence. Currently, after 4 decades of campaigning and lobbying efforts of the Papuan diaspora in the Pacific region have shown significant results.

The widespread attention and support for the Papuan issue from state actors and civil society. Several countries in the Pacific such as at the 71st UN General Assembly session in New York in 2016 Vanuatu together with Solomon Islands, Marshall Islands, Nauru, Tuvalu, and Tonga urged Indonesia to give freedom to self-determination to the Papuan nation and urged the UN to investigate human rights violations committed by Indonesia in Papua. The acceptance of ULMWP as an observer member at MSG is also the biggest progress in the history of Papua's struggle in lobbying countries in the Pacific, which means there are 2 representatives of Papua in MSG, the Government of Indonesia and ULMWP. These achievements highlight how Papuan diaspora actors have worked strategically and consistently to gain support from governments and civil society across the Pacific region.

Not only state actors but civil society such as churches, NGOs, academics, journalists are increasingly highlighting the issue of Papua. In Australia there are many research institutions on Papua and academics who focus on the issue of Papua, there is even a debate among academics in Australia to take the choice of real politics by supporting Indonesia or "moral obligation" by supporting an independent Papua and investigating human rights violations in Papua. Churches, NGOs, journalists, students and various elements of civil society in the Pacific region are also increasingly showing attention and even support for Papuan independence. However, all of this will certainly be a fierce competition with the Indonesian Government which is currently also continuing to manoeuvre diplomacy in the Pacific Region to reduce support for Papuan independence. This shared effort has helped keep the world's attention on Papua's fight for self-determination and human rights.

It should be underlined that efforts to achieve Papuan independence are still ongoing today and will be at least in the next few years, considering the consistency of the Papuan diaspora campaign and the continued regeneration of figures starting from Andy and John Otto to Benny Wenda and other figures. Future studies could look into how the Papuan diaspora's strategies are changing, especially outside the Pacific, and how digital platforms are helping to amplify their message. Comparing the success of diaspora-led advocacy in

bringing about political change could also offer valuable insights into international lobbying. Such research would give us a clearer picture of how the diaspora is shaping global opinions and influencing decisions on issues like self-determination and human rights.

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