Identity Struggle and Ethno-Social Conflict in Papua: Uncovering the Root of the Problem and Finding Sustainable Solutions

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Abstract

Background: Papua Province is a region rich in diverse ethnicities and has complex social dynamics due to significant ethnic differences. Social conflicts in Papua are not only conflicts between individuals, but also reflect broader changes with cultural, political and socio-economic aspects.Objective: The purpose of this study is to examine and analyze the determinants of social conflict in Papua based on ethnicity and to propose strategies for achieving sustainable social harmony.Method: This research employs a qualitative method focusing on indigenous Papuans, selecting informants such as traditional leaders, community leaders, youth, women, religious figures, and bureaucrats through in-depth interviews and literature studies conducted from July to August 2023.Results: Papuan ethnic identity is shaped by their unique cultural values and traditions, distinguishing them from other ethnic groups in Papua. However, the government's development programs fail to address this identity, contributing to the marginalization of Papuans.Conclusion: The conflict in Papua stems from Papuans fighting for their basic rights tied to their ethnic identity, rather than economic or political issues, highlighting the need for future research on development policies that respect this identity.

Keywords: *Ethnicity, Social Conflict, Papua, Identity, Sustainable Development*

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is a country with great cultural diversity (1), which proves that Indonesia is rich in different cultures, tribes and languages (2). Cultural, ethnic and linguistic differences in the identity framework of the Indonesian nation are united in the motto "Bhineka Tunggal Ika", which plays an important role as a symbol that unites ethnic differences in Indonesia in solidarity, which also strengthens the spirit of nationalism and strengthens the identity of the Indonesian nation (3), and unites the diversity of cultural values in Indonesia (4). The diversity of cultural values found in a large country like Indonesia and identity politics have adapted both socially and institutionally over the course of this country's long history (5). Since independence (1945) to the present, Indonesia has constantly faced various events of social conflict and separatist movements involving ethnic, cultural, religious and factional identities (6).

Nowadays, identity politics in line with the religion and heterogeneity of the region has emerged as a central phenomenon in contemporary Southeast Asia (7). In Indonesia, the debate over Islamic identity in the period 1900–1942 reportedly (8) shows a lack of consensus among Muslim scholars as well as between Islamists and secular nationalists, focusing on issues of unity, nationalism and role from lies women, polygamy and independence and the role of women and polygamy. While Javanese-Islamic syncretism and colonial carceral policies act as external constraining factors affecting the expression of Islamic identity by Islamists, it also simultaneously increases the value of racial transcendence among nationalists as an inclusive Indonesian identity. Since independence (1945) to the present, Indonesia has constantly faced various social conflicts and separatist movements involving ethnic, cultural, religious and factional identities (6). Indonesia's diverse and competing cultural identities bind together large groups of people but also marginalize many others, such as China, Aceh and Papua (9). The racist treatment of minority cultural groups in Indonesia began to form racial formations throughout the region (10).

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In Papua, the question of nationalism or the spirit of Indonesian nationalism is a question mark. Is there no sense of Indonesian nationalism there? Or perhaps there is still little understanding of the meaning of nationalism. Nationalism is considered a major problem as there is a movement in Papua that wants to separate from Indonesia (11). The Papuan ethnicity was exploited by the colonial powers as they explained racial differences by declaring themselves the "Pacific Negro" and embarking on the wave of African decolonization (12). In the West Papua conflict, fear fueled ethnonationalist sentiments among Papuan and Indonesian nationalists (13).

The aim of this study is to describe the factors that shape the Papuan people's perception of ethnicity and ethnic identity, as well as their differentiation from other ethnic groups, in the context of Indonesian nationalism. In addition, this study also explains how Papuan ethnicity interacts with social conflicts that impact development deficiencies in the region.

Participants & Methods

This research is a qualitative research that deals with indigenous Papuans as an object representing the perception of ethnicity and the identification of their identity. Although all Papuans were used as research subjects, only a few people were selected as informants for the survey. Respondents were identified from a sample of individual targets who were perceived to have the ability and ability to provide information (14). Respondents were selected based on criteria such as traditional leaders, community leaders, youth and women leaders, and religious leaders and bureaucrats. The data research process was conducted from July to August 2023 using in-depth interviews and literature studies.

Table 1. Profile of Research Informant

Initial name	Age	Gender	Work	Position
DW	50	Man	Self employed	Youth Leaders and Community Empowerment Activists
KM	80	Man	Self employed	Chairman of the Papuan Customary Council Region III Domberay
DJ	55	Man	Civil Servan	Head of the National Unity and Political Service
DS	70	Women	Self employed	Female Characters
MT	48	Man	Pastor	Religious Leaders

The obtained data was then grouped using NVIVO software to distinguish, sort and select relevant information (15). The main basis for data analysis is interpretive understanding, which involves explaining data and facts related to ethnic identity and social conflicts. This explanation is based on a theory developed by Max Weber, which explains that ethnicity is one of the factors that influence the formation of individual identity. People who feel connected to their ethnic group may have their individual freedom restricted. Conflicts can arise when people of different ethnicities clash while trying to defend their freedom and identity (16).

Findings

The results of the study show that perceptions of Papuan ethnicity are determined by four factors, with the four factors found in Figure 1.
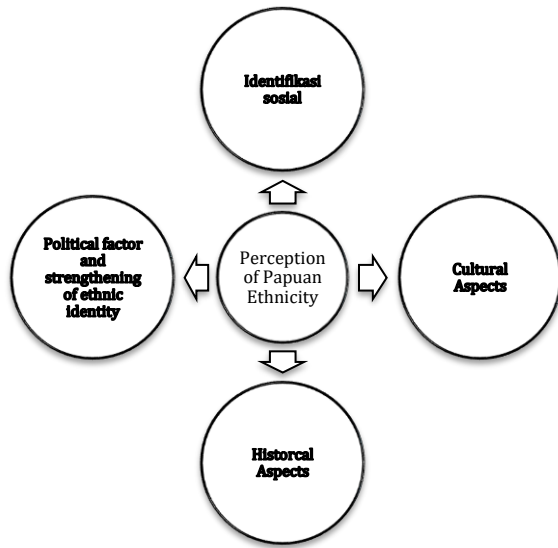
Figure 1. Factors that shape the perception of Papuan ethnic identity

SOCIAL IDENTIFICATION

Strengthening ethnic perception based on the social identification of the Papuan population based on the results of the study is influenced by several aspects, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Results of NVIVO Social Identification data processing

IMPORTANT DETAIL
code\ethnicity perception\social identification
customary territories
geographical location

In Papua, the division of indigenous tribes occurs through social identification based on traditional areas, which are divided into seven traditional areas. Figure 2 shows seven indigenous areas in Papua.
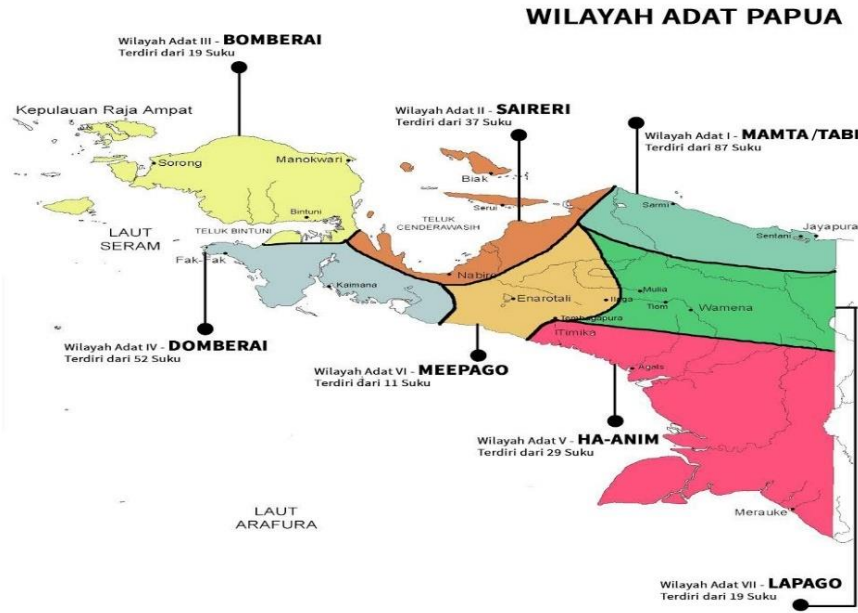
Figure 2. Map of the division of Papuan customary territories

Source obtained from (17)

The classification of habitual areas is based on Figure 2; further details can be seen in Table 3.

Table 3. Details of the division of customary territories

No	Region	Capital
I	Mamta Customary Territory	
1	Jayapura City	Jayapura
2	Jayapura Regency	Sentani
3	Kerom Regency	Arso
4	Sarmi Regency	Sarmi
5	Mamberamo Raya Regency	Bormeso
II	Saireri Customary Territory	
1	Biak Numfor Regency	Biak
2	Supiori Regency	Sorendiweri
3	Kep. Yapen Regency	Serui
4	Waropen Regency	Botawa
5	Nabire Regency	Nabire
III	Bomberai Customary Territory	

1	Tel. Bintuni Regency	Bintuni
2	Manokwari Regency	Manokwari
3	South Manokwari Regency	Ransiki
4	Peg. Arfak Regency	Anggi
5	Fakfak Regency	Fakfak
6	Part of Kaimana Regency	Kaimana
7	Tel. Wondama Regency	Wasior
IV	**Domberai Customary Territory**	
1	Part of Kaimana Regency	Kaimana
2	Part of Timika Regency	Tembagapura
3	Kokonao as part of Timika	Tembagapura
V	**Ha-Anim Customary Territory**	
1	Merauke Regency	Merauke
2	Bovendigoel Regency	Tanah Merah
3	Asman Regency	Agats
4	Mappi Regency	Kepi
5	Mimika Regency	Timika
VI	**Mee-Pago Customary Territory**	
1	Paniai Regency	Enarotali
2	Deyai Regency	Tigi
3	Dogiyai Regenci	Kigamani
4	Intan Jaya Regency	Sugapa
VII	**La-Pagao Customary Territory**	
1	Mamberamo Tengah Regency	Kobakma
2	Jayawijaya Regency	Wamena
3	Lanny Jaya Regency	Tiom
4	Yahukimo Regency	Sumohai
5	Puncak Regency	Ilaga
6	Puncak Jaya Regency	Mulia
7	Tolikara Regency	Karubaga

8	Yalimo Regency	Elelim
9	Pegunungan Bintang Regency	Oksibil
10	Nduga Regency	Kenyam

The perception of ethnicity to form an ethnic identity based on the indigenous territory of the Papuans is common among tribes such as the Biak tribe, the Tabi tribe, the Arfak tribe, the Moi tribe, the Maybrat tribe, the Dani- tribe, the Asmat tribe and the Ngalum tribe. Yali Tribe, Korowai Tribe, Kuri-Wamesa Tribe and other tribes, all comprising more than 250 tribes. The differences between these tribes are known from the area where they belong to the customary areas, divided based on the map of the existing territory. Although divided into traditional territories, the Papuans have a strong ethnic identity that unites all residents of the region as a nation with the same characteristics, commonly called *"comen"* in their term. This term is usually used to identify Papuans with non-Papuans, the term for non-Papuans being *"amber"*.

In addition, the classification of tribes is based on geographical location according to the place where they live. For example, the division of tribes against those who live in the blood, in mountains or coasts, as well as in lowlands or valleys. In Papua, the factor of separation of characteristics and formation of cultural identity based on place of residence is divided into four parts, namely the Central Region of Papua, starting with Jayawijaya, Tolikara, Puncak Jaya, Puncak, Lani Jaya Regency and Nduga and several other districts, which have now been expanded into the mountain province of Papua.

In addition, it is also adapted to coastal areas such as Jayapura Regency, Biak Numfor, Supiori, Yapen Waropen, Sarmi and several districts which are still the mother province of Papua. There are also riverine and swampy areas, which include Teluk Bintuni regency in West Papua province and Merauke, Mappi, Bovendigul and Waropen regencies in Papua province. Lowland and seagrass areas lie in Tambrauw, Sorong regencies and are part of Fak-Fak regency. Grouped geographically, Papuans use the term \"orang gunung\" to refer to those who live in the mountainous part of Papua and the term \"orang pantai\" to refer to those who live in coastal areas. However, when it comes to geographical location, Papuans do not know the standard terms for identifying non-Papuans.

Customary Aspects

The results of this study show that the role of cultural aspects in shaping perceptions of ethnic identity in Papua is divided into three main categories, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Results of NVIVO Customary Aspects data Processing

code\\ethnicity perception\customary factors
IMPORTANT DETAIL
language aspects
aspects of trust
social values and norms

According to (18), there are 312 indigenous languages of local tribes in Papua that are used in daily life. The many local languages show the different cultural identities that exist there. Although they have a linguistic religion, they also use Indonesian as their official language to establish communication between other indigenous Papuan tribes, but also with other ethnic Indonesian tribes. The Indonesian language used as a means of daily communication between Papuans and other Indonesians there is known as Papuan Malay. This type of language is an Indonesian language spoken in the Papuan dialect. For example, in Indonesian, when asking where a person's destination wants to go, they usually say, \"Where do you want to go? \" When this

pronunciation is memorized in the Papuan dialect, it is \"ko pi mana?\" This pronunciation can be misinterpreted as: \"Where's the coffee?\" even if the meaning is to ask \"where are you going?\"

Meanwhile, the beliefs that develop in Papua, in this case traditional beliefs, are another aspect that shapes the perception of Papuan ethnic identity. Before the existence of modern religions such as Christianity, Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism, the Papuans held to the animistic belief in the spirits of the dead still residing in the universe, which were believed to still have a relationship with have them. One of the most popular beliefs is the belief in the Biak tribe, known as *Koreri* in the local language. This belief is based on a figure who is considered a person who is considered to be "god" who will save them in the future from life in today's world full of poverty, hunger and discomfort so that they have free access to the natural resources at their disposal stand. The figure considered to be God in their beliefs is known as *Manarmakeri*.

This belief in Papuan identity is a kind of ideology that constitutes a strong spirit of brotherhood. The spirit of brotherhood of Papuans arises from past experiences as victims of human rights violations and underdevelopment. During the New Order government, an armed conflict occurred between the Indonesian military and the Free Papua Organization (OPM), which complicated the community's problems. The complexity of this problem triggered the emergence of liberation movements based on the ideology of the Papuan ethnicity and binding it to the beliefs of the Papuans. The Papuan population's views of non-Papuan ethnic groups tend to be negative. They feel that the presence of non-Papuan ethnic groups does not provide a sense of security and a lack of trust among non-Papuans. For example, in the promotion of positions or the admission of civil servants (PNS) and members of the TNI/POLRI, there is a tendency for the results to be dominated by non-Papuan people. This often leaves Papuans feeling that their rights have been taken away from them by non-Papuans, who they perceive as outsiders taking over opportunities that should be available to local communities. This assumption is rooted in ethnic sentiment in Papua, where local communities believe that because of their faith they have the right to freedom and access to all available resources.

From the perspective of values and social norms in shaping Papuan ethnic identity, it includes several things, namely; *First*, customary land ownership in Papua is known through the communal ownership system. Traditional land is a hamlet owned by a large family. The heirs counted toward ownership of customary land are boys descended from the paternal line of an ancestor, as they are considered successors of *keret*. *Second*, social relationships in traditional structures based on family relationships. Papuans tend to live in their hamlets, in the sense that their family system is built on the basis of *keret*. The meaning of the family system based on *keret* is that there are several clans in a hamlet that have blood relatives, this is of course also related to the possession of customary rights. *Thirdly*, the Papuans' kinship relationship is also established through marriage ties as a medium for forming the perception of ethnicity, since a traditional procession must be carried out at the time of marriage. The difference in dowry payments in Papua is closely related to the traditional procession in which all clans or families that have kinship ties take part. The entire clan is given their property in the form of traditional items, which are considered very valuable as dowry payments. Through this dowry payment, the entire extended family is united into one family.

As for the perspective of ethnic identity compared to other Indonesians based on aspects of values and social norms, non-Papuans are considered immigrants who come to Papua to work and earn a living. Papuans consider themselves landowners, and non-Papuans are people who hitchhike to find food on their land. This term is usually pronounced by Papuans in reference to the results of the Civil Servant Candidates (CPNS) selection or other selections where non-Papuans have a more meaningful degree.

Historical Aspects

The historical aspects that shape the perception of Papuan ethnicity include several events related to the events of Papua's transition period from the Dutch government to Indonesia in the post-colonial period in the region.

Table 4. Results of NVIVO Historical Aspects data Processing

code\\persepsi etnis\sejarah
IMPORTANT DETAIL
pepera tahun 1969
gagasan pendirian negara papua
konflik bersenjata

The three events listed in Table 4 are mainly related to the conflict between Papua and the Indonesian government since 1969 and have not yet been fully resolved. PEPERA or People's Opinion Determination is an opinion poll conducted by Papua in 1969 under the supervision of the United Nations Temporary Executive Authority (UNTEA) in which participants voted for Papua to join Indonesia. However, this result was criticized by other parties as it was seen as not being fairly implemented. Therefore, the idea of creating the state of Papua arose, which led to armed conflict as a form of confrontation with the Indonesian government. On the other hand, movements fighting for Papuan independence, such as the OPM, use the narrative of ethnic identity to support their historical and political claims. They emphasize ethnic identity as a basis for resistance to the Indonesian government while seeking international support based on human rights and principles of self-determination.

Regarding the ethnic identity given to the non-Papuans, based on the historical aspect that they are considered colonizers who came to colonize the Papuans and deprive them of their political and economic rights. Politically and economically, Papuans have been marginalized on their land, leaving them without capital gains to compete with non-Papuans. The presence of non-Papuans there by forming associations in the perception of Papuans has affected their existence and freedom on their own land. This is evident in business expansion, electoral politics and religious events. The dominance of non-Papuans over economic and political resources in Papua has led to the marginalization of indigenous Papuans in their own country.

Political Factor and Strengthening of Ethnic Identity

The results of the study show that the formation of ethnic identity due to political factors and the strengthening of ethnic identity are influenced by several aspects in Table 5.

Table 5. Results of NVIVO Political factor and strengthening of ethnic identity data Processing

IMPORTANT DETAIL
code\persepsi etnisitas\faktor politik
keterlibatan orang papua dalam politik pemerintahan
kebijakan otonomi khusus papua

Before the adoption of Papua's special autonomy, Papuan participation in government policy was still low. The low participation of Papuans in government politics is due to the separatist stigma of Papuans, as almost all Papuans are suspected of being involved in separatist movements. The discriminatory treatment that Papuans experience gradually leads to a feeling of brotherhood as an ethnic group that faces the same problems. This is often a reason for political elites to engage with the issue of ethnic identity politics in order to gain support.

Following the adoption of the Papuans' Special Autonomy Policy, the perception of Papuan ethnicity among Papuans has changed, as Papuans identify themselves based on autonomous regions regulated in government administration rather than customary areas. This ethnic identification is determined based on the phenomenon that occurred at that time, for example, at the time of Civil Servant Candidates admission. Then they began to group themselves based on the tribes that came from the district they came from. Another phenomenon is the provision of study grants by the local government to students using resources from special funds of autonomy. Indigenous students in the district receive tuition assistance from the local government. However, this study support regulation also applies to students who do not come from the local indigenous tribes, but who have their permanent residence in the study support district.

Related to the identification of non-Papuan ethnicity in the context of political factors and the strengthening of ethnic identity related to the concept of "birthright". By birthright is meant the inherent fundamental rights associated with the nature of the Papuan people themselves. For example, in the context of the implementation of Law No. 21 of 2001 on Special Autonomy, which was transformed into Law No. 2 of 2021, where one of its articles explains the definition of indigenous Papuans. One of the verses of the article states that the definition of indigenous Papuans shall also include those who are not Papuans and shall be appointed and recognized as indigenous Papuans. The widespread recognition and adoption of indigenous children by indigenous Papuan tribes over non-Papuans was often met with resistance from other Papuans who disagreed with it. That's why they often raise their voices by saying: Don't sell "birthright", so don't sell your original identity, which are the basic rights of the indigenous Papuans.

The Influence of Ethnicity and Social Conflict on Development Failure

The Papuan ethnic identity, formed as the identity of the Papuans, indirectly distinguishes the Papuans from other Indonesian ethnicities. The ethnic differences between the Papuan ethnic group and other ethnic groups lead to marginalization among them. A rift exists between Papuans and non-Papuans due to inherent ethnic identity and mutual distrust, particularly towards the Indonesian government.

The difference in ethnic identity between Papuans and non-Papuans is also often a conflict dynamic that occurs there. In certain matters such as the acceptance of civil service candidates or selection for entry into the Indonesian military and police, identity politics often becomes a conflict that arises when the selection results are dominated by non-Papuans. Furthermore, in general elections, the dynamics of identity politics are used as a political asset to attract votes. Papuans have more voters than non-Papuans, but these votes can be traded. In this section, the conflict dynamics that arise are related to the concept of buying and selling firstborn rights.

Regarding development errors, based on the results of the research conducted by (19) on the marginalization of Papuans, especially the Kokoda tribe in Sorong town in southwest Papua, it was found that there are four things that related to marginalization. *First*, psychological marginalization is associated with negative stereotypes such as nature destroyers, criminals, and low work ethic. *Second*, political marginalization is related to political monopoly and political victimization. *Third*, economic marginalization is like jobs that only come from nature, such as breaking stones and selling mangroves. *Fourth*, social marginalization includes exclusion and limited information. *Fifth*, the marginalization of education, including education, is very low. The vicious cycle of marginalization experienced by the Kokoda tribe is the result of the hegemony of the dominant group's power.

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