

The Papuan Civil Servant as development broker: Governing New Guinea between 1950 and 1962.

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At the Round Table Conference in 1949 the former Residency of New-Guinea was exempted from being included in the transfer of sovereignty over Indonesia from The Netherlands to Indonesia. During the following years from 1949 to 1962 Western New-Guinea was headed by a Dutch governor and a mixed Dutch-Papuan staff governing the districts and sub-districts.

Papuans today usually do not speak of these final 17 years of Dutch rule as colonization (*penjajahan*). Also, the Dutch administrators themselves saw it as their duty to give priority to “the improvement of the mentality of the Papuan which would give him the feeling to be capable of something, and to launch a demographic policy which placed the Papuan at the centre”.¹ Young Papuans became actively involved, first in junior positions and later, towards the end of the 1950s, also in senior positions of the public administration. A *community development* policy was introduced in the early 1950s.² Vlasblom speaks of the years 1950-1958 in terms of a *inhaalmanoeuvre* or ‘catching up’ because of the government’s endeavour to increase the standard of living and the livelihoods of the Papuan people.³

The books by Schoorl and by Vlasblom are both Dutch narratives of a historically unique era of Dutch overseas governance, differing in global political context, time frame, personnel, intention, and interaction with the indigenous population from the Dutch rule over Indonesia before World War II. Yet, except for a few accounts,⁴ there is little account of the everyday practice of the Papuan public administrators. Especially in the case of the 1950-1962 Dutch governance of New-Guinea we feel that the ‘history of governance’ is incomplete without a better insight into the participation of the indigenous Papuan elite in governing New-Guinea. Therefore, a series of interviews were held in 1999 and 2000 by Jos Marey and by myself with 15 Papuan administrators and several other civil servants like clergymen, a policeman, and a head of school at the time. They extensively narrated about their education, everyday administrative and developmental tasks, inspection tours, dramatic or hilarious events, their relationship and collaboration with their Dutch superiors and colleagues, and the political and bureaucratic changes since 1962. Together, these narratives provide a unique picture of the everyday practice of the development administration of Western New-Guinea since 1950 at central, district, and sub-district levels. This paper contains a short sketch of

the role the indigenous governing elite. Who were these administrators or *tuan bestir*⁵ of the 1950s and 60s? How did they perceive their tasks, and how did the actual governing take place? Under what social conditions did they perform their tasks?

The training of Papuan civil servants

Since 1948, Papuan school leavers were regularly selected by their headmasters to be admitted to the School for Indigenous Administrators (*Opleidingschool voor Inheemse Bestuursambtenaren* or OSIBA). The Dutch development priorities and presence along the north coast resulted in the selection of a majority of Biak and Sentani pupils. They were often the sons of local leaders⁶, they should have good school records, and be in good health. Like the name suggests, it was a school for indigenous people. Non-Papuan students, like Javanese, Batak or Moluccan students were not admitted, and mixed Chinese-Papuans were only admitted under the condition of being accepted together with a Papuan pupil from the same class (called 'twinning'). The government paid for the school fees, including a yearly holiday trip home. The 4-year curriculum of the OSIBA provided a general education, introducing the young students to subjects like public administration, law, but also to ethnology and *adat*; to agronomy, world history, economics, and health. Classes were taught in Dutch. It is important to note that the third year of the curriculum was spent in the field where the future administrators were engaged in the actual practice of governing. After their practical training they returned to the classroom for a final year.

This practice-oriented education, plus their own intimate knowledge of the language and culture of Papuan societies was what the 17-18 years old boys could rely upon when they were sent to their first post. They would closely collaborate with, and be guided by their Dutch superiors who later, during the years of Papuanisation, often became their colleagues. Being educated in a weberian style of bureaucracy, the Papuan administrators indeed perceived of themselves as public administrators⁷ who were primarily the servants of the people (*hamba masyarakat*). One aspect that often misses or is under-exposed in the Dutch narratives is the dependency of the Dutch administrators on the language and cultural communication skills of the Papuan staff, especially in their contacts with the local population. The people called the indigenous administrator *tuan bestir* with a mixture of awe and appreciation. During his patrols he would walk great distances to their village, eat and sleep in their huts. Knowing their customs and being Papuan like them, especially the inhabitants of the interior regarded the Papuan administrator as a development broker, a mediator between their society and the state, in a modernizing and urbanizing environment dominated by the Dutch.

The oral histories we gathered show that in the everyday practice of governing New-Guinea the organization of government administration can hardly be separated from the social context of governing. But for the sake

of clarity of this short paper we nevertheless propose to deal with these two aspects individually.

The social context of governing

State formation was still in its infancy, and the effectiveness of the public administration of Western New Guinea depended very much on the capacities and capabilities of the administrators to reach out to the Papuan inhabitants. This was especially the case in the interior and in the South. One could say that in the 1950s New-Guinea had people, but no state. It was the task of the government administrators to bring the state to the people, in order to make them aware of, and acknowledge the state in the form of governmental rule.

In the early 1950s, the young administrators who had just arrived from The Netherlands could learn as much from their Papuan assistants as the latter were guided by the Dutch. Even for those who had served in Indonesia before the Japanese invasion of 1942 and who joined the civil service in New-Guinea after 1945, the social, cultural, and economic environment of New-Guinea was rather new. The Dutch administration was still in the process of being settled there. Under such conditions, the work of making the first contacts was left to Dutch junior officials, who had to closely collaborate with the indigenous administrators. That had been true in the 1920s for the academically educated⁸ civil servant Friedericy in South Celebes. In *De Raadsman* (1958), the novel based on his experiences, he describes the ambiguous relationship with his local assistant, which he pointedly called his *Raadsman*, his 'Councillor'. Though endowed with the political, legal and administrative powers of colonial rule, he himself as a young, foreign and inexperienced administrator felt in many respects fully dependent upon the help of his assistant, being a scion of the local nobility whose power was legitimated by local history and his royal descent. In New-Guinea, about thirty years later, similar relationships between junior and senior, foreign and indigenous administrators could be found, despite the different international political conditions of the 1920s and 1950s. According to the narratives of those interviewed, many among the Dutch and the Papuan administrative staff were younger, single men. All had had a rather comparable, modern- Western education. Outside office hours they would go for a swim and have fun together, which created a sense of equality, mutual trust and respect that supplemented the hierarchical work relationships with non-Papuans, with which most Papuans were historically not familiar.

In the translation of abstract notions like 'state' and 'society' to tangible events of communication between their representatives, the visibility and brokerage of the Papuan administrator or *tuan bestir* were vital elements. He would be out of office three times more often than inside going on *tournee* or patrol, which regularly meant walking up and down hills through the jungle for days on end or taking a boat to reach the upland and coastal villages. He would stay overnight in villages, getting

a first-hand impression of the social, natural, and health conditions, and he would talk, teach or 'advise' (*nasehat*) the people about keeping their huts and living environment clean, about schooling, and the need to live together in larger communities to be more accessible and to obtain access to 'development'. Here, the language used was not the language of the state (Dutch) spoken in the office, but Biak or another contact language more easily understood locally.

The representatives of the state were not coming empty-handed. In the beginning they would bring the so-called contact-articles, but later more structural, material development would be organized. For example, the local administrator of Kaimana arranged for the KPM freighters to make a call at Kaimana. And when the first ship moored at Kaimana harbor in 1952, he was there to meet the captain. *Kita punya Bestir ada datang!*⁹ Roads were constructed, bridges and schools were built, and new seeds and crops introduced.

No abstract notion of 'the state', but tangible material development mediated by the administrators of the districts and sub-districts. Schoorl¹⁰ correctly speaks of the of the Dutch civil servants, who carried out a multiplicity of functions, as agents of development. I would add that the agency of the Dutch governance of New-Guinea during the 1950s and the early 1960s very strongly relied on the development participation of their Papuan staff and the communities involved.

The government as an exchange partner

Local men and women would bring their skills and physical labour in exchange for the tools and materials provided by the government to build roads and buildings, to construct development. The government and the indigenous people thus became exchange partners in a very similar way to social and cultural forms of exchange relationships as in the case of, for example, the clan groups of the Birds Head. Until today, they exchange women, *kain timur* cloth, land, and other items of wealth through marriage and at funerals, despite clerical and administrative sanctions and without a clear distinction between urban and rural areas. Here, the state has become a partner in the 'exchange' of schools and bridges against labour and land.¹¹

In Papua, like in other Pacific cultures the notion of a highly dynamic, temporary inequity or hierarchy between exchange partners is widely accepted, but under the condition of a mutual understanding and recognition of a long-term equity.¹²

As long as both partners sustain their mutual relationships of gift exchange over time, the people will acknowledge the state and its representatives. If a road has been promised by the provincial government, but no construction has started yet, people may have difficulty complying to yet another demand from the government because the relationships in

the economy of symbolic exchanges¹³ have not yet been balanced. During the 1950s and even in Papua today¹⁴ the notion and the material form of 'development' is very much a part of the social, cultural, and economic conceptualizations of exchange between the various kin groups or between people and the state's representatives. Since the Papuan governing elite who themselves often descended from indigenous ruling *korano* and *ondoafi* families gained access to greater financial wealth since their inclusion in the administration in the 1950s, they also sought to increase their cultural wealth and personal status by becoming involved in the exchange of symbolic goods with local leaders. This pattern may become even stronger in today's networks between government officers and private entrepreneurs or local leaders - although we name it differently - and its scale and frequency have drastically increased.

Thus, one can hardly sustain that the Papuan clans and their leaders in this early period were estranged from their government. On the contrary: they were conditional to the establishment of the state through government rule. The Papuan members of the administration were of course highly conscious of the fact that they were the mediators of that process. They were the *dukun* of a Papuan state, and they felt proud of that role.

Prismatic society?

Especially in the more remote areas the local administrator also functioned as a judge (*alleensprekend rechter*). Legal practice implied here that customary 'law' or *adat* and formal law were applied in some form of integration. One of the persons interviewed who had also been trained at the Indonesian Institute for Administrative Science (IIP) at Malang used the term *prismatic society*¹⁵ to indicate that the administration of Papuan societies and the implementation of formal rules and regulations were to a large extent determined by the social conditions, especially in the interior and along the southern coast, and that these complex conditions varied depending on the angle from which one looks at them, like in a prism. Therefore, he thought that it had been a pragmatic but also a wise decision to integrate *adat* notions of justice in as far as they were in line with formal law, to support and strengthen the modernization of Papuan society. *Adat*, he argued, is the primary moral order acknowledged by all Papuans, especially at times of major social transformation. But he admitted that applying an integrative legal-*adat* standard of justice could also create problems for the Papuan administrator himself in defending his verdict to his superiors. This experience is not unlike those narrated by Schoorl and by Lagerberg, who refers to the fact that the new legal order penalized actions that were licit according to *adat*, like murdering an adversary.¹⁶ The resulting problem was that it was not easy to decide on the punishment in such a case. Should the 'murderer' be sentenced, not sentenced or, if sentenced, for 3 or for 10 years?

Societal contextualization of the practice of governing was a necessary condition for effective government in the 1950s and -60s. But the societal

knowledge that was necessary for the purpose could only be obtained if the administrator was *curious*, since there was hardly any documentation on the subject and the necessary ethnographic studies on Papuan societies were written 'on the job' so to speak by Dutch missionaries and a fair number of administrators-ethnographers themselves.¹⁷ Unfortunately, there are still very few Papuan accounts of the years 1945-62, although Vlasblom gives some interesting excerpts from his interviews with several key figures. The forthcoming edited volume by Visser and Marey of the oral history of Papuan former administrators on the governing of New-Guinea should help to start filling this gap. The attitude of the indigenous administrators of the 1950s is clear: an administrator should try to understand people's behaviour by taking interest in the variation and differentiation of the social and economic conditions, power relationships and cultural concepts and practices of his administrative district. An example given is the famous *aksi koteka*: the endeavour of the Indonesian government to modernize Papuan clothing habits by replacing the penis gourd used in the Baliem area by a pair of trousers. But only one pair was provided in this cold upland climate where washing was not easy. Soap was not provided nor available. So after a while, people started feeling filthy. The change to modernity was frustrated by the local people's very civil notion of cleanness, as a consequence of the fact that the government's regulation to wear trousers was not properly contextualized to fit local livelihood conditions.

Internal organization of the government

According to European bureaucratic models, exemplified by Max Weber's *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*,¹⁸ a pre-defined and impersonal hierarchy of tasks and functions is a characteristic of an ideal-type bureaucracy, and certainly the Dutch administration of New-Guinea tended to follow this model. The attitude and knowledge of the Dutch administrators who went to New-Guinea after 1947 differed from those who served in the pre-war Netherlands-Indies. Papuans often express their feeling that they were not colonized by the Dutch. Incidentally, individual Dutch administrators would nevertheless exhibit a certain 'colonial' behaviour that was not in line with local views. Like in the case we recorded where the sight of Papuan women carrying bricks for house construction prompted a remark by the Papuan assistant to the administrator (*Controleur*): 'Why do these women have to do the heavy work?' Whereupon the latter answered: 'Well, the women here are always doing the heavy work on behalf of the men, isn't it?'

Of course there was institutional order and discipline, for example in the production of the monthly reports to the Resident. Written by the district's administrator, succinctly and to the point, on the basis of the information and data gathered by the Papuan patrol officers. The reports would be sent up to the Resident, and sent back again from the upper levels, with comments that would reach the sub-District providing feedback to those accountable. However, the functional hierarchy did not prevent

a Papuan administrator in the region from taking the responsibility for new initiatives. An example is the establishment of a branch of the New Guinea Import-Export Company (NIGIMY) in Wamena by the indigenous administrator to stimulate economic development in the interior by creating access to modern goods for both government personnel and local people.

The 1960s

After the departure of the Dutch in 1962 several important changes occurred in the everyday practice of the government officers. The following examples are mentioned in the interviews:

- No monthly reports were being produced any more because the new Indonesian administrative top did not request them. So, no accounting took place of whether or not procedures were followed and actions carried out. The reports that were made were not systematic any more, since every department (Health, Education) developed its own style. Neither was any feedback given to subordinate levels about the way of reporting and their contents. It gave many administrators who were 'out there' in often remote places, a feeling of isolation and stagnation instead of development.
- The status and income of civil servants was changed immediately upon the transfer of power. They no longer were *Pegawai Negeri* with a fixed position, but temporary officials (*Pegawai Sementara*), and their income changed for the worse accordingly. It demonstrated that the status and functions of the Papuan administrators of what was now the Indonesian province of West Irian were not automatically acknowledged by the Indonesian state.
- The monetary unit was changed from Guilder into Irian Barat Rp (IBRP) within a rather short period of time and in a social-economic environment where a money economy had only recently been introduced. Because of the value difference, Indonesian teachers and others who came to fulfill government services in West Irian, had an economic advantage over local people. They could more easily buy the stocks left behind in the shops after the Dutch had left.
- In the early 1960s, many Papuan administrators were sent to Bandung or Jakarta to upgrade their administrative knowledge in anticipation of a position in the Indonesian system of public administration and government. After 6 months of schooling, they would receive a Hansip uniform and were trained in a military camp, followed by another month of *Pancasila* education. Several persons recount how, during their stay in Bandung, they were shocked by the apparent differences between the social-economic environment of Hollandia or Serui on the one hand, and Bandung and Jakarta on the other hand. In Bandung for the first time they saw beggars who were desperately searching for food - even coming into the classrooms.

The economic and political situation indeed worsened in Java between 1963 and 1965 (Ricklefs, 1981: 260-69). The Papuans who were confronted

with the political and economic decline when on study leave in Java became acutely aware of the cultural, social, and economic differences between their homeland and other parts of Indonesia (cf. A. Mampioer in Vlasblom, 2004: 390-91). But they also remember that in 1963 there was a food crisis in Manokwari and Biak, and a cholera epidemic in Yapen-Waropen. There was this other side of the everyday existential struggle for food and elementary livelihood conditions which frustrated the ordinary people in Irian, an aspect that is often too implicit and underscored in the primarily political international accounts of the civil unrest in Irian in the 1960s, the Manokwari uprising in 1965, and the growing expectations and disappointments in the years before the 1969 'Act of Free Choice' or *Pepera*.

The picture that I have presented here is not necessarily historically 'true', and it does not need to be. It is a sketch based on the narratives of the real-life experiences, facts, and memories of members of the Papuan governing elite during a particular historical period. They had started their career in the 1950s and many of them continued to be part of the Indonesian bureaucracy in Irian Jaya/Papua until they retired. I have tried to lift a tip of the veil of the social contextualization of the participation of the Papuan administrators through their everyday practice of governance, by taking examples from their narratives of 1999 and 2000. A history of the governance of New-Guinea would not be complete without their contribution.

ENDNOTES

- 1 K. Lagerberg, 'Hollandia en de controleur in het veld' in: P. Schoorl (ed.) *Besturen in Nederlands-Nieuw-Guinea 1945-1962* (Leiden, KITLV-Uitgeverij 1996) pp. 50, 51. Translation of the quotation by L.V.
- 2 D. Vlasblom, *Papoea; Een Geschiedenis* (Amsterdam, Mets & Schilt 2004) p.197.
- 3 Vlasblom', *op. cit.* pp. 187-257.
- 4 e.g. Mampioer in Vlasblom, *op. cit.* pp. 215-219.
- 5 *Bestir* from the Dutch word *bestuur* or administration.
- 6 Like *kepala suku, ondoafi* and *korano*.
- 7 The Dutch term *ambtenaar* bears the notion of being a cog in the wheel of the State.
- 8 H.J. Friedericy studied *Indologie* at Leiden University and was sent to The Netherlands Indies in 1921, right after his graduation and at the age of 21. He was a civil servant (*Ambtenaar Binnenlands Bestuur*) in Celebes between 1921 and 1930.
- 9 Our Government is there!
- 10 P. Schoorl, *op. cit.* pp. 7-40.
- 11 L.E. Visser, 'Remaining poor on natural riches? The fallacy of community development in Irian Jaya/Papua' in: *The Asia Pacific Journal of Anthropology* 2 no 2, pp. 66-68.
- 12 A.B. Weiner, *Inalienable possessions. The paradox of keeping while giving* (Berkeley,

- University of California Press 1992).
- 13 P. Bourdieu, *Practical reason* (Cambridge, Polity Press 1998) pp. 92-98
 - 14 L.E. Visser, *op. cit. passim*.
 - 15 F.W. Riggs, *Administration in developing countries: the theory of prismatic society* (Boston 1964).
 - 16 P. Schoorl, *op.cit.* pp. 16-19, 50-52.
 - 17 See also S. Jaarsma, *Waarneming en interpretatie. Vergaring en gebruik van etnografische informatie in Nederlands Nieuw Guinea 1950-1962* (dissertation Utrecht/ISOR 1990).
 - 18 A. van Braam, *Max Weber/Gezag en bureaucratie* (Universitaire Pers, Rotterdam 1972).