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West Papua's Soft Civil Wars

*The Civilisational Psycho-Cosmocide Virus and the Architecture of Collective
Fragmentation and Collapse*

Yamin Kogoya

Two thousand years ago, a Jew rabbi, Yeshua uttered a warning that has echoed through history:

"A house divided against itself cannot stand."

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Abstract

In conventional political science, civil war is defined as organised armed conflict between factions competing for control of the state. Drawing on the Psycho-Cosmocide paradigm, this article reconceptualises civil war as a spectrum comprising three forms: hard civil war (open armed conflict), medium civil war (institutionalised and intermittently violent struggles for power), and soft civil war (a largely invisible process of psychological and civilisational fragmentation). Using comparative historical evidence from Rwanda, Nigeria, the former Yugoslavia, the United States, Lebanon, Sri Lanka, and Zimbabwe, the analysis first develops these three ideal types before applying them to West Papua, where they appear to operate simultaneously. Rather than viewing the conflict solely as one between Papuans and the Indonesian state, the paper argues that it also involves layered struggles among Papuans and over the future of Papuan society, reinforcing the wider dynamics of a settler-colonial order. By reconstructing more than a century of Papuan political fragmentation—from precolonial territorial plurality and Dutch missionary partition through the 1961 national moment, the 1969 Act of Free Choice, the Rumkorem–Prai schism, the Special Autonomy era, successive organisational splits, and recent civilian killings—the paper argues that the Civilisational Psycho-Cosmocide Virus (CPCV) is among the most enduring and least visible obstacles to Papuan self-determination. More broadly, it suggests that the concept of soft civil war provides a new framework for understanding how colonised and postcolonial societies can reproduce fragmentation from within while remaining engaged in wider struggles for political liberation. The paper concludes by considering the philosophical and psychological resources required to recognise and interrupt a form of civil war that has no declared battlefield.

Keywords: West Papua; Soft Civil War; Civilisational Psycho-Cosmocide Virus (CPCV); Psycho-Cosmocide; Collective Fragmentation; Settler Colonialism; Collective Memory; Decolonisation; Political Philosophy; Indigenous Studies; Social Ontology; Architecture of Reality.

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I. Introduction

Civil war is usually imagined as a distinct, identifiable event: a breakdown of political order in which organised groups take up arms against one another to control territory, government, or sovereignty. Historians catalogue civil wars through campaigns and treaties, while political scientists measure them in battle deaths, territorial control, and regime change. This paper begins from a different premise, drawing on the Psycho-Cosmocide paradigm. From this perspective, what historians call civil war is the most visible manifestation of a much older and broader conflict: the struggle within a community over its shared destiny, who has the authority to define it, and whose memory of the past will be accepted as true and legitimate. Any collective project organised around a shared language, religion, ideology, or vision of history contains the potential for internal conflict because a shared destiny must continually be negotiated, and agreement is never guaranteed. Where that disagreement erupts into armed confrontation, we readily recognise it as civil war. Where it unfolds through institutional manoeuvring, legal coercion, and selective violence, we may, if we look closely, recognise it as a subtler form of civil war. Yet when it gradually fragments a people into rival churches, tribes, political parties, armed groups, and competing elites—each convinced that it alone speaks for the nation—we rarely identify it as civil war at all. It is this hidden form of conflict that the Psycho-Cosmocide paradigm seeks to explain.

The analysis proceeds in four stages. It first defines three ideal types of civil war—hard, medium, and soft—and situates them within a broader intellectual tradition concerned with collective fragmentation, from Durkheim's concept of anomie to Fanon's analysis of the colonised psyche. It then tests the explanatory power of these ideal types against comparative historical evidence: hard civil war through Rwanda, Nigeria, the former Yugoslavia, and the American Civil War; medium civil war through Lebanon, Sri Lanka, and Zimbabwe; and soft civil war through patterns of postcolonial elite fragmentation and the internalisation of colonial hierarchies. Third, it reconstructs a century-long history of fragmentation within Papuan society, treating it not as a single historical rupture but as the cumulative layering of political, institutional, and organisational divisions extending from precolonial territorial plurality through the Act of Free Choice, successive schisms within the resistance movement, the Special Autonomy and *pemekaran* era, the unresolved 2023 split within the United Liberation Movement for West Papua (ULMWP), and the disputed killings of 2024–2026. Finally, it applies this three-part typology to the contemporary Papuan crisis, arguing that the West Papuan case is theoretically significant because all three forms of civil war operate simultaneously—layered upon one another, each simultaneously concealing and reinforcing the others, and unfolding primarily within Papuan society rather than as a conventional two-sided war against Indonesia.

The method is comparative, historical, and philosophical, not quantitative. Because soft civil war, by definition, resists direct measurement, the paper does not attempt to gauge its incidence. Instead, it seeks to make the concept visible by examining cases in which its underlying logic has already been partially documented by historians, journalists, and human rights investigators. The reconstruction of West Papua draws on English-language academic monographs and journalism, Indonesian-language scholarship, statements from the Papuan

movement, and Indonesian security and policy writing. A phenomenon as contested as this cannot be reconstructed responsibly from a single linguistic or political standpoint. Where sources disagree, or where an author's institutional position may shape an interpretation, those differences are acknowledged rather than resolved by silently privileging one account over another. Because West Papua remains a politically sensitive subject, the paper presents the documented historical record with careful attention to the contrasting perspectives of the Indonesian state, Papuan resistance movements, and Papuans themselves. The Psycho-Cosmocide framework then directs attention to a different question: to what extent has fragmentation itself, rather than an external enemy alone, become the greatest threat to the Papuan collective project?

II. The Psycho-Cosmocide Paradigm: Theoretical Foundations

The Psycho-Cosmocide paradigm is based on the observation that the destruction of a people does not necessarily require the annihilation of all its members. Rather, what is required is the disorganisation of the collective mind that would otherwise resist destruction — the capacity to imagine, remember and act as a 'we'. Where hard power fails or proves too costly, softer instruments can achieve the same result by redefining how a community perceives itself, its history and its enemies. This is not a wholly new insight. Émile Durkheim's concept of anomie describes how the weakening of shared moral regulation leaves individuals disoriented, competitive and prone to self-destructive behaviour, even in the absence of an external threat.¹ Antonio Gramsci's theory of cultural hegemony explained how domination is sustained less through coercion than through the internalisation of the dominant group's categories, to the extent that subordinate groups participate in their own subordination as though it were common sense.² Frantz Fanon built on this idea, applying it to clinical psychology. He argued that colonialism dispossesses a people not only of land, but also of their sense of self, producing a fractured identity in which the colonised subject simultaneously idealises and despises both the coloniser and themselves.³ Fanon's later, harsher warning — that the national bourgeoisie of a newly independent state tends to reproduce the very hierarchies and rivalries it inherited from the coloniser in miniature, converting the anti-colonial struggle into a scramble among elites for the perquisites of the departed power — anticipates what this framework calls 'soft civil war' almost exactly.⁴

The Psycho-Cosmocide paradigm unites these traditions within a single analytical framework comprising three ideal types. These are understood in the Weberian sense as conceptual constructs against which messy historical reality can be compared rather than as watertight empirical categories. *Hard civil war* is armed, public and total in its aspirations. It seeks the physical elimination, expulsion or capitulation of a rival community that is defined as an

¹ Emile Durkheim, *Suicide: A Study in Sociology*, trans. John A. Spaulding and George Simpson (New York: Free Press, 1951), 246–54.

² Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, ed. and trans. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (New York: International Publishers, 1971), 12, 55–60.

³ Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Charles Lam Markmann (New York: Grove Press, 1967), 109–40.

⁴ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (New York: Grove Press, 1963), 148–205.

existential enemy. It leaves unambiguous material evidence, such as mass graves, ruined cities, refugee flows and war crimes tribunals, and it typically produces a decisive, albeit often unjust, resolution: victory, partition or exhaustion. *Medium civil war* is a struggle for institutional and political authority in which violence is real but instrumental and bounded, not exterminatory. One faction usually has enough coercive or institutional superiority to stop the conflict from escalating into total war. The rival faction is contained, co-opted, marginalised or periodically punished, but not annihilated. Elections, courts, patronage and selective repression substitute for open battle as the principal instruments of struggle.

The most theoretically distinctive contribution of this paradigm is *soft civil war*, because it denies the two assumptions that make hard and medium civil war recognisable as war: a declared adversary and a visible battlefield. In a soft civil war, the community fragments into competing individuals, denominations, tribes, professional classes, commands and political factions, who direct their energy against one another instead of an external power. Each faction continues to see itself as the authentic guardian of the collective. The Civilisational Psycho-Cosmocide Virus (CPCV) describes the process by which this occurs: a reorganisation of perception carried out through institutions, religious life and everyday narratives that makes internal rivalry seem like loyalty and makes recognising a common cause seem, perversely, like naïvety or even betrayal. A people gripped by the CPCV does not experience itself as losing; each fragment experiences itself as powerful, righteous and heroic — a defender of the collective dream — even though the whole is being slowly and comprehensively dismantled from within. The paradigm argues that this dynamic makes soft civil war the most dangerous of the three forms, not because it kills more people, but because it allows a people to be persuaded that everything is normal while the community is, in fact, dying.

Definition: (Civilisational Psycho-Cosmocide Virus): *The CPCV is a socially transmitted, parasite-like process of cognitive, symbolic and behavioural reorganisation that colonises a people from within the very structures through which they perceive reality. Reproduced through a civilisation's symbolic systems, including language, images, myths, education, religion, law, the media, bureaucracy and everyday life, it takes root within another people's architecture of reality. This reshapes how they understand truth, memory, belonging and their own future. This transformation is realised when the host community reproduces the conditions of its existential displacement through its own institutions and convictions, while genuinely believing this unmaking to be progress, salvation, development, necessity or truth. The CPCV describes a process, not an agent, and it may be cultivated through external domination, inherited from prior structures of power, or reproduced through a community's own internal dynamics.*

Four terms require clarification because they refer to different stages of the same process. 'Architecture of reality' refers to the cognitive and symbolic structure through which memory, legitimacy and belonging are organised. It is the site that the CPCV infects, not an outcome that can be observed directly in the historical record. 'Collective disorganisation' names the erosion of a people's capacity to imagine, remember and act as a 'we' — the intermediate psychological process that follows from that infection. 'Collective fragmentation', the term used throughout the historical and comparative sections that follow, refers to the observable social and political outcome of this disorganisation: the splits, rival factions, parallel leadership

groups and organisational schisms that can be documented in the archive. 'Civilisational fragmentation', used more sparingly, refers to this same outcome on the scale of a whole people's shared institutions and self-understanding rather than on the scale of a single organisation or faction. The subtitle, 'The Architecture of Collective Fragmentation', captures the central concern of this study: how an altered architecture of reality produces collective disorganisation that eventually becomes visible historically as the fragmentation documented here in West Papua.

A civilisation rarely dies when its people disappear. More often, it dies when its people can no longer recognise what made it their own.

Soft civil war differs most sharply from its hard and medium counterparts not in its violence, but in its refusal of clarity. Hard civil war, however catastrophic, eventually establishes a clear outcome that the community itself can recognise: a declared enemy, dead or living combatants, winners and losers. This outcome is sufficiently visible that even a defeated people can identify what happened to them. Medium civil war draws that line more slowly, through courts, elections and selective repression, but it too eventually produces a legible record of who held power and who did not. Soft civil war denies the community even this. As no adversary is ever identified, individuals and factions are unable to establish the kind of unified power capable of confronting whatever holds the collective in check. The ability to organise such power is precisely what a serious external authority is most keen to prevent from consolidating. Betrayal, rivalry and even killing continue at the individual and factional levels, but this energy never accumulates into a collective confrontation that could resolve the question of who the community's real adversary is once and for all. In this sense, soft civil war can generate a more corrosive and lasting enmity among a people than a hard war fought between two clearly opposed sides. This is partly because it never allows the community to distinguish between traitor and defender or enemy and ally, which would enable the conflict to be recognised, contested and eventually brought to an end.

Understood in this way, soft civil war has an important structural relationship with social identity theory in psychology. This theory has been demonstrated experimentally to show that human beings will favour an in-group over an out-group, even when the groups are arbitrarily defined and no material interest is at stake.⁵ The CPCV, as theorised here, describes how external powers perpetuate this state, causing a colonised or postcolonial people to expend their political energy on themselves instead of on the power that caused their division.

⁵ This dynamic is consistent with Social Identity Theory, which argues that social categorisation into groups establishes the psychological foundations for in-group identification, intergroup comparison, and conflict. In colonial and authoritarian contexts, these divisions are often institutionalised or politically manipulated, enabling enduring forms of social fragmentation and competition. Henri Tajfel and John C. Turner, "An Integrative Theory of Intergroup Conflict," in *The Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations*, ed. William G. Austin and Stephen Worchel (Monterey, CA: Brooks/Cole, 1979), 33–47.

Diagram 1. From Hard Civil War to Cosmopolitan Collapse

Hard civil war

Open, armed, and total. The enemy is declared, and the battlefield is visible.

Although the tragedy, loss, death, and massacre are horrific, the line between opposing forces can often be clearly drawn. The brutality may generate a shared recognition that it must never be repeated, providing the basis for collective recovery.

Medium civil war

Institutionalised and selectively violent. The battlefield shifts into institutions.

Law, bureaucracy, education, religion, media, economics, and political power regulate conflict. The people survive, but increasingly within systems that shape memory, identity, imagination, and collective agency.

Soft civil war

No declared adversary and no visible battlefield.

The community fragments against itself through struggles over titles, legitimacy, ideology, religion, tribe, family, prestige, ambition, and competing truth claims. Collective purpose steadily weakens.

Civilisational psycho-cosmocide virus (cpcv)

Reorganises perception so that internal rivalry feels like loyalty.

Symbolic systems reshape the collective mind until self-defeating behaviour appears natural, virtuous, necessary, and even patriotic.

Collective fragmentation

Churches, tribes, parties, commands, and elites each believe themselves to be the true defenders.

Suspicion is directed toward rival factions instead of the wider forces driving fragmentation, consuming the energy needed for collective survival.

Civilisational and cosmopolitan decline

The community loses the shared memory, language, consciousness, authority and moral capacity required to act as a unified 'we'. Instead, the collective survives only as fragmented individuals, rather than as a living civilisational community.

The Psycho-Cosmocide paradigm's escalation ladder proposes that each stage does not require the one above it. Hard, medium, and soft civil war represent distinct but overlapping forms of collective conflict. Soft civil war and the Civilisational Psycho-Cosmocide Virus (CPCV) can operate beneath, alongside, or independently of hard and medium civil war, progressively producing collective fragmentation and ultimately civilisational and Cosmopolitan decline.

III. Hard Civil War: Open Armed Fragmentation

Hard civil war is the form that lends itself most readily to conventional historical narration because it announces itself. Four cases illustrate its logic and limits.

The Rwandan genocide of 1994 is one of the clearest modern examples. The Belgian colonial administration had solidified a fluid pre-colonial distinction between the Hutu and Tutsi peoples into rigid, state-enforced racial categories that were formalised on identity cards and outlived colonial rule itself.⁶ In 1994, when extremist Hutu Power elements seized control of the postcolonial state, this administratively manufactured division became the organising principle of a campaign to exterminate the Tutsi minority and moderate Hutu. An estimated eight hundred thousand people were killed in roughly one hundred days. The genocide was hard civil war in its purest form, involving a declared enemy, a public and total campaign of destruction, and a decisive military resolution when the Rwandan Patriotic Front took power. However, the case also demonstrates the limitations of the hard/soft distinction: the genocide itself was the eruption of a division — the Hutu/Tutsi conflict — that had been cultivated for decades. This suggests that hard civil war is often the result of a soft civil war that has been smouldering unrecognised for a generation.

The Nigerian Civil War (1967–1970), fought over the secession of the Eastern Region as the Republic of Biafra, is another example of this. Ethnic massacres of Igbo civilians in northern Nigeria in 1966 catalysed the secession. The ensuing war was characterised by a punishing federal blockade and mass starvation in Biafra, resulting in the deaths of between one and three million people, primarily from hunger and disease rather than combat.⁷ The war ended in a federal victory and the region was reintegrated. However, Nigerian federalism has continued to manage, rather than resolve, the underlying regional and ethnic fragmentation that produced the war. This again illustrates that a decisive military outcome does not necessarily terminate the deeper civilisational struggle.

The wars that accompanied the breakup of Yugoslavia in the 1990s demonstrate how civil war can emerge directly from the disintegration of an artificial multinational federation once its unifying ideological and coercive structures have collapsed. Competing national projects — Serbian, Croatian and Bosniak — pursued ethnic cleansing and, in the case of Srebrenica, genocide in the name of rival visions of which community had the legitimate right to the contested territory.⁸ Although the war ended with a negotiated partition in Dayton, scholars of the region have long observed that the underlying struggle over memory, education and historical narratives among Serbs, Croats and Bosniaks continues in a manner that more closely resembles what this paper refers to as ‘medium’ or ‘soft’ civil war.

Finally, the American Civil War (1861–1865) was fought over the constitutional destiny of a single nation-state: whether the United States would remain a slaveholding republic or become

⁶ Mahmood Mamdani, *When Victims Become Killers: Colonialism, Nativism, and the Genocide in Rwanda* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 87–119.

⁷ Chinua Achebe, *There Was a Country: A Personal History of Biafra* (New York: Penguin Press, 2012), 76–98.

⁸ Laura Silber and Allan Little, *Yugoslavia: Death of a Nation*, rev. ed. (New York: Penguin, 1997), 241–70.

a nation committed to the abolition of slavery, albeit imperfectly.⁹ Although its resolution was militarily decisive, the subsequent century of Jim Crow segregation, disenfranchisement and racialised terror demonstrates the pattern anticipated by this framework: a hard war can be won on the battlefield, yet the underlying struggle over legitimacy, memory and status can continue for generations in medium and soft forms. This struggle is evident today in disputes over monuments, textbooks and the naming of the war's cause.

Across these four cases, a consistent pattern emerges. Hard civil war produces the clearest evidence and the most legible resolution. Yet, in every instance, the war itself was preceded — and, in most cases, survived — by an unresolved struggle over identity and legitimacy. This struggle was not settled by the armed conflict, but rather temporarily suppressed or violently expressed.

IV. Medium Civil War: Institutionalised and Contained Struggle

Medium civil war substitutes institutional and selective coercive advantage for open extermination. Three cases illustrate its characteristic combination of contained violence and structural domination.

Lebanon's confessional political system, established under the French mandate and formalised upon independence in 1943, allocates political offices according to religious sect, balancing the interests of the Maronite Christian, Sunni, Shia and Druze communities.¹⁰ For three decades, this arrangement contained intercommunal rivalry through legal and institutional mechanisms, punctuated by episodes of limited violence — most notably the 1958 crisis — before demographic change, regional interference and the presence of Palestinian armed factions overwhelmed the system's capacity for containment, precipitating the hard civil war of 1975–1990. The Taif Agreement that ended the war reinstated a revised confessional formula, returning Lebanon to a state of medium civil war. Since 1990, political life has been characterised by assassination, sporadic street violence and crippling institutional deadlock among sectarian factions. None of these factions has proven capable, or perhaps willing, of eliminating the others outright.

Sri Lanka's prolonged conflict between the Sinhala-dominated state and Tamil political movements fluctuated between medium and hard forms over several decades. Post-independence language and university admission policies that favoured the Sinhala majority steadily marginalised the Tamil minority through ordinary legislative and administrative means — a classic example of a medium civil war conducted through institutional advantage rather than open force.¹¹ This slow institutional strangulation radicalised Tamil politics, eventually producing the armed insurgency of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, which led to a hard civil war lasting from 1983 to 2009. This war ended in the military destruction of the

⁹ James M. McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 853–62.

¹⁰ Fawwaz Traboulsi, *A History of Modern Lebanon*, 2nd ed. (London: Pluto Press, 2012), 106–35.

¹¹ Neil DeVotta, *Blowback: Linguistic Nationalism, Institutional Decay, and Ethnic Conflict in Sri Lanka* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 87–121.

insurgency. The Sri Lankan case demonstrates how, if left unaddressed, medium civil war can escalate into hard civil war once institutional grievance no longer finds any legitimate outlet.

Zimbabwe's Gukurahundi campaign of the 1980s occupies an ambiguous position between hard and medium civil war. The Zimbabwe National Army's Fifth Brigade killed an estimated twenty thousand Ndebele civilians in Matabeleland under the pretext of suppressing dissident activity. While it was a campaign of mass killing, it was institutionally absorbed into the post-independence state. This was settled without meaningful accountability through the 1987 Unity Accord, which saw the rival ZAPU party absorbed into the ruling ZANU-PF.¹² Rather than the physical elimination of a defeated rival or a negotiated partition, the absorption of a defeated rival into the ruling party is characteristic of the preferred resolution of medium civil war: dominance is preserved through institutional incorporation instead of visible victory.

The preceding cases demonstrate how medium civil war operates through institutions rather than open battlefields. West Papua presents a different but theoretically important case. Rather than appearing as a single episode, institutional, political, organisational, military, and psychological fragmentation has accumulated gradually over more than a century. Understanding contemporary Papuan soft civil war therefore requires reconstructing the historical architecture through which these successive layers of fragmentation emerged. Diagram 2 provides a schematic overview of this long-term evolution before the detailed historical analysis that follows.

Diagram 2

Historical Architecture of Collective Fragmentation in West Papua (Before 1855–2026)

Phase I — Before 1855: Cosmopolitan Plurality

- Hundreds of autonomous peoples
- Independent customary jurisdictions
- Local cosmologies
- Local languages
- No overarching Papuan state
- Diversity without national fragmentation

¹² Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace in Zimbabwe and Legal Resources Foundation, *Breaking the Silence, Building True Peace: A Report on the Disturbances in Matabeleland and the Midlands, 1980–1988* (Harare: CCJP/LRF, 1997), 1, 34–56.

Phase II — 1855–1898: Missionary Differentiation

- Mansinam Mission
- Protestant expansion
- Catholic expansion
- Literacy
- Malay language
- Different mission territories
- Regional educational systems



Phase III — 1898–1942: Colonial Administrative Fragmentation

- Dutch administrative districts
- Colonial bureaucracy
- Administrative boundaries
- Regional elite formation
- Uneven incorporation

Phase IV — 1942–1961: Political Differentiation

- Japanese occupation
- Dutch reconstruction
- Emergence of Papuan political elites
- Competing political futures
- New Guinea Council
- Morning Star
- Independence Manifesto



Phase V — 1962–1969: Institutional Rupture

- New York Agreement
- UNTEA
- Indonesian administration
- National institutions dismantled
- Act of Free Choice



Phase VI — 1970–1998: Military and Constitutional Fragmentation

- Multiple declarations
- Rival constitutions
- Competing governments
- Organisational splits
- Decentralised armed commands
- Leadership disputes
- Exile politics

Phase VII — 1998–2014: Administrative and Elite Fragmentation

- Reformasi
- Presidium
- Otsus
- Pemekaran
- Political parties
- NGOs
- Churches
- Student organisations
- Peace initiatives
- Rival representative bodies



Phase VIII — 2014–2026: Multi-Level Collective Fragmentation

- Political fragmentation
- Military fragmentation
- Customary fragmentation
- Religious fragmentation
- Administrative fragmentation
- Diaspora fragmentation
- Civil society fragmentation
- Leadership fragmentation
- Competing legitimacy claims

The historical evolution outlined above shows that the fragmentation of contemporary Papua did not result from a single political dispute, organisational split or military conflict. Instead, it developed through successive layers of missionary transformation, colonial administration, competing political projects, institutional restructuring, armed resistance, administrative reorganization, and recurring struggles over legitimacy and representation. Rather than replacing one another, these historical layers accumulated over time, producing a condition in which hard, medium, and soft civil wars now operate simultaneously across Papuan society. Within the Psycho-Cosmocide paradigm, this cumulative historical process provides the

conditions under which soft civil war emerges. As internal rivalry becomes normalised, the Civilisational Psycho-Cosmocide Virus (CPCV) progressively re-organises collective memory, identity, legitimacy and authority. This encourages communities to direct increasing amounts of their political and psychological energy towards one another, rather than towards the wider structures that shape their condition. The result is an expanding architecture of collective fragmentation. If left unrecognised and uninterrupted, this progressively weakens the collective capacity to organise, remember and act as a unified people, leading to civilisational decline.

V. West Papua: A Century of Fragmentation

West Papua — the western half of the island of New Guinea, which Indonesia now administers across six provinces — is a case in which all three forms of civil war can be traced not only across the last six decades, but also back more than a century to the accumulating division that began during this period. The historical record does not support the simplistic conclusion that Papuans are divided merely because they belong to many tribes. Instead, Papuan fragmentation has developed through the interaction of several forces operating over a long period, including:

- The inherited autonomy and diversity of Papuan societies.
- Dutch missionary and administrative boundaries.
- Competing Papuan responses to Dutch rule and Indonesian nationalism.
- Indonesian military repression, intelligence operations, patronage and administrative partition.
- Disagreements over political strategy, constitutional legitimacy and leadership.
- The geographical isolation of armed commands from one another.
- Competition for international representation.
- Rivalry over government positions, special autonomy funds and newly created provinces.
- Generational, regional, denominational and diaspora–homeland divisions.

All of these factors have been compounded by the absence of any universally recognised constitutional process for choosing national leadership.¹³ The historical evidence suggests that Papuan fragmentation cannot be explained by indigenous diversity or external intervention alone. Rather, it emerged through the interaction of both indigenous diversity and external intervention: pre-existing local autonomy, historical differences, and personal rivalries met a state system that rewards division, criminalises unified organisation, isolates regions from one another, and selectively recognises compliant leaders.¹⁴

¹³ Richard Chauvel, *Constructing Papuan Nationalism: History, Ethnicity, and Adaptation*, Policy Studies 14 (Washington, DC: East-West Center, 2005), 55–82; Rodd McGibbon, *Pitfalls of Papua: Understanding the Conflict and Its Place in Australia–Indonesia Relations*, Lowy Institute Paper 13 (Double Bay, NSW: Lowy Institute for International Policy, 2006).

¹⁴ International Crisis Group, *Dividing Papua: How Not to Do It*, Asia Briefing No. 24 (Jakarta/Brussels: International Crisis Group, April 9, 2003); Institute for Policy Analysis of Conflict, *Carving Up Papua: More Districts, More Trouble*, Report No. 3 (Jakarta: Institute for Policy Analysis of Conflict, October 9, 2013); Rodd McGibbon, *Pitfalls of Papua: Understanding the Conflict and Its Place in Australia–Indonesia Relations*, Lowy Institute Paper 13 (Double Bay, NSW: Lowy Institute for International Policy, 2006).

V.1 Before The State: Territorial Plurality as Civilisational Order

West Papua contains hundreds of indigenous peoples, languages, customary jurisdictions, and ecological regions. Historically, political authority belonged primarily to clans, villages, confederations, ritual authorities and territorial communities, rather than to a single pre-colonial Papuan state.¹⁵ This was not, in itself, 'fragmentation' in the negative sense given to the word in later chapters of this history; it was a decentralised cosmopolitan order similar to those documented by anthropologists across both highland and coastal Melanesia. The difficulty arose when colonial and later national state systems required a single representative, border, government and political voice from a cosmopolitan system that had never organised itself in this way. Persistent regional distinctions — between the north and south coasts; the Bird's Head and Cenderawasih Bay regions; the central highlands and the coast; Dutch-educated urban elites and rural communities; and later, between those inside West Papua and exiled leaders — were superimposed onto this plurality as colonial and national institutions arrived unevenly. Richard Chauvel's influential study of Papuan nationalism demonstrates that it developed unevenly across the territory. For example, Fakfak and Serui produced important Papuan nationalists, but they also had strong pro-Indonesian networks, largely due to their longer historical contact with eastern Indonesian trade, religion and administration. This regional and religious heterogeneity is not civil war in itself; rather, it is the raw plurality from which the later fault lines of medium and soft civil war, examined in the following sections, would eventually emerge.¹⁶ Strictly speaking, this pre-colonial plurality is neither a hard nor a medium civil war, since no state yet existed for factions to contest or capture. However, it is important because it supplied the social fabric from which all three forms of civil war would later emerge.

V.2 Colonial Incorporation Without National Unity, 1900–1942

At the beginning of the twentieth century, Dutch control of the territory was limited and uneven. The Netherlands divided Western New Guinea into administrative regions governed from Manokwari, Fakfak and Merauke — boundaries designed for colonial administration rather than derived from any unified Papuan political structure.¹⁷ Missionaries, colonial officials and schools entered different regions at different times. Consequently, some coastal peoples developed literacy and political networks earlier, while many highland societies had little or no sustained contact with colonial institutions for decades. Particular regions became associated with Protestant, Catholic or other mission systems, and Malay and later Indonesian spread unevenly across the territory. Colonial employment elevated small, educated groups

¹⁵ Peter King, Jim Elmslie, and Camellia Webb-Gannon, eds., *Comprehending West Papua* (Sydney: Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies, University of Sydney, 2011); Otto Ondawame, *West Papuan Nationalism and the Organisasi Papua Merdeka* (PhD diss., Australian National University, 2000).

¹⁶ Richard Chauvel, *Constructing Papuan Nationalism: History, Ethnicity, and Adaptation*, Policy Studies 14 (Washington, DC: East-West Center, 2005), 41–82.

¹⁷ J. M. van der Kroef, "Nationalism and Politics in West New Guinea," *Pacific Affairs* 34, no. 1 (1961): 23–38; Lotte Hughes Visser, *Governing New Guinea* (Leiden: KITLV Press, 2012), especially the discussion of Dutch colonial administration.

who were capable of communicating across tribal boundaries.¹⁸ Mission organisations frequently divided territories among themselves to avoid competition, producing enduring denominational geographies whose institutional legacies — Protestant, Catholic, evangelical and, more recently, Pentecostal — persist as major providers of education, healthcare and elite formation to this day. During this period, the Biak region experienced powerful Koreri movements that combined political freedom, spiritual restoration, and social transformation. During the Japanese occupation, the prophetic figure Angganita Menufandu was associated with a significant non-violent movement that opposed colonial labour, taxation, and discipline. While these movements were not identical to the secular nationalism that followed, they supplied a cosmological language of liberation that would later be drawn upon by both the church-based and armed wings of Papuan resistance in different areas. The denominational and administrative boundaries established during this period can be seen as an initial, soft-war-adjacent layer of division. While no faction had yet fought another for national leadership, the institutional geography that would later shape such conflicts was already being established. As no organised faction fought for national power during this period, it does not contain any hard or medium civil wars as defined in the paper. Instead, it belongs to the deep prehistory of soft civil war, providing the denominational and administrative geography that would later be exploited by psychological and organisational fragmentation.

V.3 War, Occupation, and Competing Futures, 1942–1949

The Japanese occupation devastated parts of New Guinea and disrupted Dutch institutions. Following Indonesia's declaration of independence in 1945, Papuan political responses were not uniform. Some Papuans identified with Indonesian anti-colonial nationalism, while others feared that replacing Dutch authority with Indonesian authority would simply install a new form of domination. Still others favoured continued Dutch administration while Papuans were educated and prepared for eventual self-rule. Figures such as Silas Papare became associated with the pro-Indonesian integrationist movement, while organisations favouring local self-government or outright independence emerged alongside them. The central, unresolved issue of this period was whether Papua was an integral part of the Indonesian anti-colonial revolution or a distinct Melanesian territory with the right to self-determination. This issue was never resolved through a process that was accepted by all parties, and the two competing answers recur in successive phases of the conflict examined below. This period does not yet constitute a civil war in any of the paper's three senses, since no organised faction has yet fought, governed or campaigned against another for control of a Papuan political project. However, the unresolved question of whether Papua's destiny lay within or apart from Indonesia is the seed from which the medium-war contests over constitutional legitimacy and the soft-war contests over sincere but incompatible loyalty, which are traced throughout the rest of this section, eventually grow.

¹⁸ J. M. van der Kroef, "Nationalism and Politics in West New Guinea," *Pacific Affairs* 34, no. 1 (1961), on missionary and denominational partition of Papuan territories.

V.4 Political Parties, Educated Elites and the 1961 National Moment (1950–1961)

During the 1950s, Dutch development and decolonisation policy accelerated. The Unity Movement of New Guinea (Gerakan Persatuan Nieuw Guinea), founded in 1950 by politically conservative educated Papuans, was the precursor to the later Papuan political party. Contemporary scholarship by J. M. van der Kroef documented the emergence of organised Papuan political life well before the start of Indonesian administration.¹⁹ Three broad tendencies emerged during this decade: an Indonesian-oriented tendency, which was strongest in regions with long-standing links to Maluku, Islam, trade and Indonesian political activity; a gradualist tendency supported by the Dutch; and a Papuan nationalist tendency which held that Papuans were a distinct Melanesian people with the right to self-determination. As with the regional pattern already noted, Fakfak and Serui again demonstrate that these tendencies were not absolute in terms of geography or religion.²⁰

Elections were held for a New Guinea Council, in which Papuan candidates won twenty-two of the twenty-eight seats available. Council leaders and a National Committee developed a national flag, anthem, name, emblem, manifesto and political programme for self-government, known as the Morning Star. On 19 October 1961, the First Papuan Peoples' Congress adopted the Independence Manifesto and the Morning Star flag. These national symbols were inaugurated in a public ceremony on 1 December 1961, a date which Papuan nationalists have commemorated ever since as marking the beginning of their nation's history.²¹ Scholarship in Indonesian examining Papuan political elites of this period similarly challenges any portrayal of Papuans as passive bystanders in these debates. It argues that the elites actively participated in shaping the territory's contested political status in the years before the New York Agreement.²² While the moment was unifying, it did not mean that every Papuan supported the same future. Indonesian-oriented Papuans remained politically active throughout, and some communities, particularly in the interior, knew little of the emerging national project. The 1961 moment illustrates a pattern that this paper returns to throughout: the genuine achievement of national unification arrived at through internal debate rather than external imposition that nonetheless left real internal divisions unresolved beneath its symbolic surface. Neither a hard nor a medium-intensity civil war is visible here yet, since no organised faction had taken up arms or captured institutions against another. What the 1961 moment anticipates is the soft-war pattern that recurs throughout this history: sincerely felt unity at the symbolic level coexisting with an underlying plurality of loyalties. This template of a nation being proclaimed before it is fully agreed upon recurs in nearly every later episode examined in this history.

¹⁹ J. M. van der Kroef, "Nationalism and Politics in West New Guinea," 1961.

²⁰ Van der Kroef observes that Indonesian-oriented, gradualist, and nationalist tendencies were unevenly distributed across regions and missionary spheres. J. M. van der Kroef, "Nationalism and Politics in West New Guinea," *Pacific Affairs* 34, no. 1 (1961).

²¹ Pieter J. Drooglever, *An Act of Free Choice: Decolonisation and the Right to Self-Determination in West Papua* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2009), chaps. 3–4.

²² Bernarda Meteray, "Dinamika Perjuangan Status Politik Papua: Peran Elite Politik Papua Periode 1949–1961," *Jurnal Penelitian Politik* 21, no. 1 (2024): 105–19, <https://doi.org/10.14203/jpp.v21i1.1679>.

V.5 Transfer, Repression and the Act of Free Choice, 1962–1969

Under pressure from Indonesia and the United States, as well as Cold War calculations, the Netherlands and Indonesia signed the New York Agreement in 1962. This transferred administration first to a United Nations Temporary Executive Authority, and then directly to Indonesia in 1963, on the condition that an ‘act of self-determination’ be held before the end of 1969. However, Papuan representatives were not principal parties to these negotiations.²³ Once Indonesian administration began in earnest, open Papuan nationalist organisation became extremely dangerous. The New Guinea Council was dissolved, Papuan political organisations were banned, and the Morning Star flag and national anthem were prohibited.²⁴ Political leaders were monitored, arrested, exiled or absorbed into Indonesian institutions, while others went underground. This effectively converted a developing public nationalist movement into clandestine, geographically isolated and increasingly militarised resistance networks. Resistance accordingly arose in multiple locations rather than from a single founding conference. The name Organisasi Papua Merdeka (OPM, or Free Papua Movement) gradually became associated with these dispersed networks. The 1965 Arfak uprising is often considered one of the founding moments of organised armed struggle. However, resistance also developed independently around Manokwari, Biak, Jayapura, the border region and the highlands. This meant that no single founding command ever held universal authority over what would become known as the OPM.

The act of self-determination promised in 1962 — the Act of Free Choice, derisively known among Papuans as the ‘Act of No Choice’ — took place between July and August 1969. Instead of universal suffrage, the Indonesian military selected 1,025 Papuan representatives from a population of around eight hundred thousand. These representatives were required to vote publicly and under military supervision by a show of hands.²⁵ Pieter Drooglever’s study, based on previously classified United Nations documents, and the work of Marcus Colchester and other researchers using the same UN archive, document the severe limitations of the process. A confidential internal UN assessment concluded that the majority of Papuans favoured independence. This was in stark contrast to the unanimous result of the vote, but it was not made public at the time.²⁶ Despite the documented coercion, the UN General Assembly took note of the outcome in Resolution 2504 without rendering a judgement on its legitimacy. Indonesian sovereignty over the territory has been recognised internationally ever since. By

²³ Australian Department of Veterans’ Affairs, “Australian Peacekeepers in West New Guinea with UNTEA 1962,” *DVA Anzac Portal*, accessed 10 July 2026, <https://anzacportal.dva.gov.au/wars-and-missions/peacekeeping/summaries/west-new-guinea-1962>.

²⁴ Dutch Australian Cultural Centre, “From Self-Rule to Suppression: The Fate of West Papuan Independence and Australia’s Ambivalent Role, 1962–63,” October 6, 2025, <https://dutchaustralianculturalcentre.com.au/archive/dutch-australian-history/military-political-history/from-self-rule-to-suppression-the-fate-of-west-papuan-independence-and-australias-ambivalent-role-1962-63/>.

²⁵ John Saltford, *The United Nations and the Indonesian Takeover of West Papua, 1962–1969: Anatomy of a Betrayal* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003), 148–72.

²⁶ Pieter J. Drooglever, *An Act of Free Choice: Decolonisation and the Right to Self-Determination in West Papua* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2009), 610–35; Melinda Janki, “West Papua and the Right to Self-Determination under International Law,” *West Indian Law Journal* 34, no. 1 (May 2010): 1; Thomas D. Musgrave, “An Analysis of the 1969 Act of Free Choice in West Papua,” in *Sovereignty, Statehood and State Responsibility*, ed. Christine Chinkin and Freya Baetens (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 209–28.

contrast, Indonesia officially maintains that the Act of Free Choice completed a legitimate decolonisation process, and that West Papua's integration is legally settled and not open to revision. This disagreement over the historical record is itself part of the ongoing medium-war dimension of the conflict, as later sections argue. This period also marks the onset of a civil war in the traditional sense, as the prohibition of Papuan political organisations forced resistance to go underground and take up arms. From 1969 onwards, hard and medium civil war operated together instead of in historical sequence — a pairing that the soft-war episodes examined in the rest of this section will eventually join.

V.6 Attempted Centralisation, the 1971 Declaration and the Rumkorem–Prai Split (1970s–1980s)

On 1 July 1971, OPM commanders Seth Jafet Rumkorem and Jacob Prai proclaimed the Republic of West Papua at Markas Victoria, near Port Numbay (Jayapura), and adopted a constitution. Rumkorem assumed executive and military leadership as General, while Prai occupied the senior political position of Chair of the West Papuan Provisional Parliament's Senate. Nicolaas Jouwe was reportedly involved in planning the declaration alongside the two commanders.²⁷ For a period, Markas Victoria represented an attempt to combine a provisional government, a national constitution, diplomatic leadership, armed command and territorial resistance within a single organisational centre. This act of self-declared statehood has been commemorated by Papuan nationalists ever since as the founding date of the movement, even though no other government recognised the state and there was no unified command over the guerrilla forces claiming to act in its name. Another, better-documented declaration followed later in the same decade. On 14 December 1988, the scholar and nationalist Thomas Wainggai proclaimed the Republic of West Melanesia at Mandala Stadium in Jayapura. He raised a fourteen-star flag, which was distinct from the Morning Star. Wainggai was convicted of subversion and sentenced to twenty years' imprisonment. He died as a political prisoner in Jakarta's Cipinang penitentiary in March 1996. His funeral procession triggered rioting in Jayapura. Wainggai's proclamation indicates that multiple, competing declarations preceded, accompanied and followed the movement's better-documented split in 1976. Each proclamation added another claimant to national leadership, rather than resolving the underlying question of who possessed the authority to speak for the Papuan nation.²⁸ However, Markas Victoria's practical reach was limited throughout by geography, Indonesian military pressure, communication difficulties and competing regional authorities.

Around 1976, the partnership between Rumkorem and Prai collapsed. Prai formed a separate command, PEMKA (associated with 'Pemulihan Keadilan', or 'Restoration/Defence of

²⁷ Universitas Airlangga, "Peralihan Model Pergerakan Separatisme Organisasi Papua Merdeka"; National Government of the Republic of West Papua (NGRWP), "50 Years Independence Proclamation 1 July 1971," *National Government of the Republic of West Papua*, accessed July 10, 2026, <https://www.ngrwp.nl/>.

²⁸ Camellia Webb-Gannon, *Morning Star Rising: The Politics of Decolonization in West Papua* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2021), on the 1988 proclamation of the Republic of West Melanesia; "Papua's Fallen Leaders," *Arena*, accessed 10 July 2026, <https://arena.org.au/papuas-fallen-leaders-2/>.

Justice'), while Rumkorem retained the current Victoria Headquarters.²⁹ This split appears to have arisen from several interacting factors, including personal distrust, disagreements over authority, competing diplomatic and military strategies, rivalry over external contacts and differing regional support. Jason MacLeod's research describes this split as one of the movement's most damaging episodes of factional rivalry. He concludes that non-violent organising in this period was severely hampered by rivalry and factionalism, and that the Rumkorem–Prai rift was the most severe instance of this.³⁰ Robin Osborne's history, circulated in Indonesian translation through ELSAM as Kibaran Sampari, records that Indonesian military offensives in 1976 further weakened the OPM just as the internal division was unfolding.³¹ This weakened the prospect of a centralised armed command, created rival claims to the 1971 constitutional legacy, encouraged individual commanders to either align with a particular leadership or remain autonomous, complicated diplomacy abroad and established an organisational model that would be reproduced by later factions. It also eased Indonesian infiltration and deepened generalised suspicion of any Papuan figure negotiating separately with foreign governments. In effect, it established a miniature version of what would later be termed 'soft civil war', more than four decades before the term existed. The split also had a hard-war dimension since it fractured the armed command fighting Indonesia and a medium-war dimension since it produced two rival claims to constitutional legitimacy that had to be managed informally rather than through any accepted procedure. However, its most enduring legacy is the soft-war template of parallel, sincerely held legitimacy, which would be repeated almost exactly by later splits, as will be examined below.

However, the rupture was not permanent or absolute. On 11 July 1985 — some sources state that the ceremony took place in 1987 — Rumkorem and Prai met in Port Vila, Vanuatu, at the invitation of Vanuatu's political leaders. They signed the Port Vila Declaration, agreeing to reconcile the political and military wings of the movement and work towards a unified command. The declaration eased the rivalry between the two factions without dissolving it. Prai and Rumkorem continued to lead organisationally distinct networks, cooperating intermittently in international forums over the following decades. This episode foreshadowed a recurring pattern. Papuan reconciliation efforts have repeatedly succeeded in reducing acrimony between rival factions without ever fully merging their separate constitutional claims, commands or historical narratives into a single, widely accepted structure. This partial reconciliation pattern is also exhibited by the 2014 Saralana Declaration and the unresolved 2023 ULMWP split, which are examined below.³²

²⁹ Robin Osborne, *Indonesia's Secret War*, Indonesian ed., *Kibaran Sampari: Gerakan Pembebasan OPM dan Perang Rahasia di Papua Barat* (Jakarta: ELSAM), on the Rumkorem–Prai split.

³⁰ Jason MacLeod, "Nonviolent Struggle in West Papua: 'We Have a Hope,'" in *Encyclopedia of Life Support Systems* (Oxford: EOLSS Publishers, 2009); Jason MacLeod, "The Struggle for Self-Determination in West Papua (1969–Present)," *International Center on Nonviolent Conflict*, March 2011, <https://www.nonviolent-conflict.org/struggle-self-determination-west-papua-1969-present/>.

³¹ Robin Osborne, *Kibaran Sampari: Gerakan Pembebasan OPM dan Perang Rahasia di Papua Barat* (Jakarta: ELSAM, 2001); Carmel Budiardjo and Liem Soei Liong, *West Papua: The Obliteration of a People* (Surrey: TAPOL, 1988), 41–63.

³² Malcolm Gault-Williams, "Organisasi Papua Merdeka: The Free Papua Movement Lives," *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars* 19, no. 4 (1987): 32–43, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14672715.1987.10409792>.

V.7 Exile, Autonomous Commands, and the Limits of Unified Command, 1980s–1996

Indonesian military operations throughout the 1980s forced thousands of Papuans to flee to Papua New Guinea. Border camps thus became political, humanitarian, and military spaces simultaneously. This movement dispersed across jungle commands in West Papua, refugee communities in Papua New Guinea, political offices within Pacific, European and African diplomatic networks, urban clandestine organisations and church and human rights institutions. Exile was integral to international diplomacy but raised enduring questions about whether a leader living abroad could effectively command those experiencing the conflict at home. By the 1990s, researchers and journalists were describing several relatively independent armed commands rather than one operational hierarchy. Estimates ranged from seven to ten or more, and command authority depended variably on local military capacity, control of weapons, kinship and customary authority, battlefield prestige, access to cross-border networks, and relationships with civilian communities.³³ A conflict-mapping study concluded that competition between armed factions could encourage commanders to conduct more spectacular operations to strengthen their standing — a tendency especially pronounced in the highlands, where leadership is often based on achievement rather than bureaucratic appointment.³⁴ The 1996 kidnapping of a scientific expedition at Mapenduma, conducted by forces associated with Commander Kelly Kwalik, exposed the same underlying problem in its most internationally visible form. This was the ability of local commanders to undertake actions of major international significance without transparent national decision-making processes, and the fact that the movement's political and military spokespeople could present openly conflicting positions on the same event. This is soft civil war in close to textbook form: no single command directed the movement, yet no command regarded itself as acting illegitimately by acting alone; each instead regarded its own operational autonomy as fidelity to the resistance, not as a fracture within it. This soft-war fragmentation unfolded alongside a continuing hard civil war against the Indonesian state, rather than replacing it. This confirms that the three forms of civil war identified here coexist, rather than displacing one another.

V.8 Reformasi, the Papuan Congress, the Presidium and The Murder Of Theys Eluay (1998–2001)

The fall of President Suharto in 1998 opened up a brief political window of opportunity. In July 1998, the territory's three largest churches — the GKI, the Roman Catholic Church and the GKII — formed the Forum for Reconciliation (Foreri). In February 1999, a delegation known as the Team of 100 met with President B. J. Habibie in Jakarta and publicly demanded

³³ Susan Connelly, "Imagining West Papua: The Most Underreported Region in the World," *Arena Quarterly*, no. 12 (December 2022), <https://arena.org.au/imagining-west-papua/>; Mariam Sophie Paula Bonson, *The Shifting Power Dynamics Between Indonesia and West Papua in Global Discourse: Narratives in the 50s versus Now* (master's thesis, Malmö University, 2023); O. Ondawame, "One People, One Soul": *West Papuan Nationalism and the Organisasi Papua Merdeka (OPM)/Free Papua Movement* (PhD diss., Australian National University, 2000).

³⁴ Susan Connelly, "Imagining West Papua: The Most Underreported Region in the World," *Arena Quarterly*, no. 12 (December 2022); Mariam Sophie Paula Bonson, *The Shifting Power Dynamics Between Indonesia and West Papua in Global Discourse: Narratives in the 50s versus Now* (master's thesis, Malmö University, 2023).

independence rather than mere autonomy.³⁵ At the Second Papuan Congress in 2000, the legitimacy of the 1969 Act of Free Choice was rejected, West Papua was reaffirmed as an independent nation, and authority was vested in the newly formed Papuan Presidium Council, especially associated with Theys Eluay and Tom Beanal. However, this new civilian centre of gravity did not resolve the movement's existing fractures. Some OPM figures welcomed the mass civilian mobilisation that the Presidium represented. Others distrusted it because its ranks included people who had worked within Indonesian institutions and because its funding sources were controversial. They also disliked the fact that it appeared to establish a new leadership layer above older armed and diplomatic structures. In November 2001, Theys Eluay was murdered by members of Indonesia's Kopassus special forces — an act that was formally acknowledged by an Indonesian military tribunal which convicted several of the perpetrators. However, critics have long argued that the prosecution only reached low-ranking personnel.³⁶ His death removed the most widely recognised civilian leader that the movement had produced since 1961, and weakened the prospect of a broad political centre capable of uniting rival factions for a generation. This is an example of the recurring pattern whereby selective, targeted violence removes the very leaders whose legitimacy could have unified the movement. Eluay's murder can be classified as an act of hard war directed with precision at a soft war vulnerability: a single killing, rather than a sustained campaign, was sufficient to remove the one figure capable of uniting the various factions. This shows how hard and soft civil wars can reinforce each other through a single, targeted act instead of operating as separate stages of conflict.

V.9 Special Autonomy, Pemekaran and Elite Fragmentation, 2001–2013

Indonesia's 2001 Special Autonomy Law (Otonomi Khusus, or Otsus) created new Papuan institutions and transferred substantial revenue funds from natural resources to the territory. Meanwhile, sovereignty, security and foreign affairs remained under central control. Papuan opinion was divided between those who accepted Special Autonomy as a genuine opportunity, those who treated it as a transitional compromise pending fuller self-determination, those who rejected it outright in favour of independence, and a growing class of elites who entered provincial and regency politics through the institutions it created. Jaap Timmer's research found that subsequent pemekaran (territorial division) decrees 'amplified cleavages within the Papuan elite', dividing those who favoured special autonomy as a means of developing Papua as a whole from those who sought personal advantage through the creation of new administrative units.³⁷ The International Crisis Group similarly warned that this territorial

³⁵ C. J. P. Dale, "“Becoming Stronger”: Christianity, Indigenous Politics of Self-Determination, and Endogenous Transformation in West Papua," *Oceania* 94, no. 3 (2024): 160–83, <https://doi.org/10.1002/occe.5416>.

³⁶ Human Rights Watch reports that Colonel Tri Hartomo, the most senior of the seven Kopassus soldiers convicted in the killing of Theys Eluay, was later promoted rather than subjected to further sanction. Human Rights Watch, "Indonesia: US Resumes Military Assistance to Abusive Force," July 22, 2010, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2010/07/22/indonesia-us-resumes-military-assistance-abusive-force>.

³⁷ Jaap Timmer, "Erring Decentralisation and Elite Politics in Papua," in *Renegotiating Boundaries: Local Politics in Post-Suharto Indonesia*, ed. Henk Schulte Nordholt and Gerry van Klinken (Leiden: KITLV Press, 2007), 459–82.

division 'created widespread anger within important sectors of the Papuan elite' and was likely to produce tension, if not physical conflict, between pro- and anti-division factions.³⁸

Indonesian-language scholarship provides a more detailed picture: For example, Lili Romli's study of the arguments for and against Papua's territorial division found that the responses of the elite to central government policy were key to the resulting conflict. Similarly, I Ngurah Suryawan's essay, 'Stop Kam Baku Tipu' ('stop deceiving one another'), argues that Papuan elites often mobilise public support for pemekaran ('division') in the name of progress and welfare, even though this process removes political sovereignty from local communities and funnels it into projects controlled by the elite.³⁹ Research from Indonesia's National Research and Innovation Agency (BRIN) confirms that the introduction of Special Autonomy and subsequent proposals for territorial division created divisions among Papuan elites, and ongoing research into the creation of the Papua Tengah (Central Papua) province in 2022 finds that the formation of new provinces still generates conflict among local elites, the central government, and customary communities.⁴⁰ The creation of every new province or regency under this programme potentially produces a governor or regent, a provincial parliament, government departments, construction contracts, civil service positions, electoral constituencies and new military and police structures. This has the effect of displacing the question of independence with competition over government positions, ownership of the new provincial capital and qualification as orang asli Papua (authentic Papuan) within a particular jurisdiction, regardless of the stated justification.

This administrative multiplication also operates, as the wider Psycho-Cosmocide corpus argues, at a register beneath the institutional: it redraws the ground on which cosmological jurisdiction is itself understood to rest. The Lani of Wamena, Tolikara, Mamberamo Tengah and Intan Jaya, for example, are now officially distributed across separate provincial administrations created by the 2022 pemekaran laws, despite belonging to a single Lani cosmological and kinship community that predates every one of these boundaries.⁴¹ The elite competition over new capitals and offices documented above is therefore not only a struggle over resources; at a deeper level it is the state-issued grid of Jakarta's coordinates displacing the organic cosmological jurisdiction through which such communities have historically understood themselves.

This is the medium-war dimension of the conflict at its most institutionally elaborate. No single act of pemekaran resembles armed conflict; however, the cumulative effect, decree by

³⁸ International Crisis Group, *Dividing Papua: How Not to Do It*, Asia Briefing No. 24 (Jakarta/Brussels: International Crisis Group, April 9, 2003); *The Great Divide: West Papuan Demographics Revisited* (2017).

³⁹ Lili Romli, "Pro-Kontra Pemekaran Papua: Sebuah Pelajaran bagi Pemerintah Pusat," *Jurnal Penelitian Politik* 3, no. 1 (2006): 25–41; I Ngurah Suryawan, "Stop Kam Baku Tipu: Pemekaran Daerah, Isu Strategis Pengelolaan Konflik, dan Transformasi Sosial di Papua Barat," *Masyarakat Indonesia* 40, no. 2 (2014): 229–43; National Research and Innovation Agency (BRIN), unpublished studies on Special Autonomy, pemekaran, and elite division.

⁴⁰ Emir Chairullah, *Indonesia's Failure in Papua: The Role of Elites in Designing, Implementing and Undermining Special Autonomy* (Oxford: Routledge, 2022); Made Supriatma, "The Second Amendment to Papua's Special Autonomy Law and the Recentralization of Power to Jakarta," *ISEAS Perspective*, no. 123 (2021); Republic of Indonesia, *Undang-Undang Nomor 15 Tahun 2022 tentang Pembentukan Provinsi Papua Tengah* (Jakarta: Government of the Republic of Indonesia, June 30, 2022).

⁴¹ Yamin Kogoya, "Building a Settler World inside the Papuan World: Colonial Consciousness and the Struggle for Reality in West Papua," *Psycho-Cosmocide Studies*, Kurumbi Wone Working Paper Series, No. 13 (2026).

decree, has been to redirect Papuan political energy away from the question of self-determination and into competition for the offices provided by a compliant state apparatus. Unlike the armed episodes examined elsewhere in this history, pemekaran produced no civil war; its significance lies in the institutionalised, non-violent contest for office and resources. This contest, in turn, reinforces the soft-war pattern that this paper identifies throughout: the mobilisation of Papuan identity by Papuan elites against other Papuans.

The same period produced one further rival constitutional claim. At the Third Papuan People's Congress, held in Abepura from 17 to 19 October 2011, more than four thousand participants declared the establishment of a Federal Republic of West Papua. Forkorus Yaboisembut, the chair of the Papuan Customary Council, was named president, and Edison Waromi, a lawyer, was named prime minister. Indonesian security forces broke up the congress as it concluded, opening fire and arresting around three hundred participants; one man was found dead nearby. Yaboisembut, Waromi and three co-organisers — subsequently known as the 'Jayapura Five' — were charged with treason and each served approximately three years in prison. This event encapsulated three recurring dynamics within a single week: the assertion of a new constitutional claim alongside the 1971 and 1988 declarations that had already been examined; the targeting of the leadership best positioned to unify rival factions by state repression, as had previously occurred with Theys Eluay in 2001; and the addition of another name to the list of individuals who have, at one time or another, been declared president of a Papuan state. There is currently no accepted procedure to adjudicate between their competing claims.⁴²

Alongside these constitutional and armed claims, a parallel civil society current pursued reconciliation through dialogue instead of statehood. In February 2010, Papuan Catholic priest Neles Tebay and Indonesian Institute of Sciences (LIPI) researcher Muridan Widjojo established the Jaringan Damai Papua (Papua Peace Network, JDP). The JDP held public consultations across the territory, drawing on the 'Papua Road Map' analysis of the roots of the conflict in marginalisation, historical disputes and state violence, which was developed by LIPI. On 7 July 2011 — during the period in which the Third Congress was taking place, with some of the same participants present, including Edison Waromi — the network helped to produce the Papuan Peace Declaration, under the banner 'Papua, Land of Peace'. This declaration sought to establish a dialogue between Jakarta and Papuan civil society, customary leaders, and church leaders, as an alternative to a unilateral declaration of independence or continued armed struggle. Tebay pursued this dialogue-based approach until his death in 2019, meeting successive Indonesian presidents and consistently arguing that any lasting peace agreement must include exiled and armed Papuan groups as well as domestic civil society. The JDP's project belongs to a recurring counter-current in this history. Alongside every new proclamation, split or rival command examined in this section, Papuan civil society has produced repeated, well-organised efforts to substitute dialogue for fragmentation. These

⁴² Asian Human Rights Commission, "Indonesia: One Person Killed, Hundreds Arrested and Five Persons Charged with Rebellion at Third Papuan People's Congress," AHRC-UAC-213-2011, October 19, 2011, <http://www.humanrights.asia/news/urgent-appeals/AHRC-UAC-213-2011/>.

efforts have altered the nature of the conflict, but have not yet resolved the underlying absence of a single, universally accepted Papuan political authority.⁴³

V.10 Competing Organisations and the Formation of the ULMWP in 2014

During the 2000s and early 2010s, several organisations attempted to overcome the fragmentation of the OPM while simultaneously establishing new institutional claims: the West Papua National Coalition for Liberation (WPNCL), the Federal Republic of West Papua (NRFPB), the National Parliament of West Papua (PNWP) and the National Committee for West Papua (KNPB). These organisations operated alongside the various armed structures of the OPM, TPN and TPNPB, as well as a range of regional customary and church organisations. The WPNCL developed diplomatic networks across Vanuatu and the wider Pacific, while the KNPB emerged as a mass mobilisation organisation, particularly among younger Papuans. It emphasised a referendum and non-violent popular resistance, explicitly rejecting negotiated 'dialogue' with Jakarta in favour of a direct demand for self-determination. This represented a generational transformation from forest-based guerrilla leadership towards urban mobilisation, demonstrations and popular participation.⁴⁴ Both organisations claimed to solve the problem of fragmentation in their own way, each possessing their own constitution, leadership structure, historical narrative, diplomatic contacts and concept of sovereignty. This meant that every new unification project risked becoming another claimant among several in practice. Even the movement's most successful unification project thus far reproduces the deeper soft-war pattern traced throughout this section: each new organisation was created in good faith to end fragmentation, yet each one added another institution to the field it was intended to consolidate.

In December 2014, representatives of three major groupings — the Federal Republic of West Papua, the West Papua National Coalition for Liberation and the National Parliament of West Papua — met in Vanuatu and formed the United Liberation Movement for West Papua (ULMWP). The ULMWP's immediate objective was to present a single, united Papuan application to the Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG).⁴⁵ The ULMWP achieved observer status in the MSG in 2015 — a genuine diplomatic achievement. The Lowy Institute has noted that, whereas the broader OPM movement was criticised for being too fractured, the ULMWP presents a more united front by absorbing the main pro-independence currents into a single platform.⁴⁶ It created a common international platform, a single MSG application and a bridge

⁴³ Richard Chauvel, "Papua: Dialogue as the Road to Peace," *Indonesia at Melbourne*, University of Melbourne, accessed July 10, 2026, <https://indonesiaatmelbourne.unimelb.edu.au/papua-dialogue-as-the-road-to-peace/>; "West Papuan Peace Advocate Who Urged Dialogue Dies," *RNZ*, April 15, 2019, <https://www.rnz.co.nz/international/pacific-news/387094/west-papuan-peace-advocate-who-urged-dialogue-dies>; International Crisis Group, *Indonesia: Hope and Hard Reality in Papua*, Asia Briefing No. 126 (Jakarta/Brussels: International Crisis Group, August 22, 2011).

⁴⁴ Hipolitus Ringgi Wangge, "Securitization of a Political Conflict in Southeast Asia: Disengaging the Indigenous Audience in West Papua," *Asian Security* 19, no. 3 (2023): 207–27, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14799855.2023.2225419>; Institute for Policy Analysis of Conflict, *The Current Status of the Papuan Pro-Independence Movement*, IPAC Report No. 21 (Jakarta: Institute for Policy Analysis of Conflict, August 24, 2015).

⁴⁵ United Liberation Movement for West Papua (ULMWP), "Background," accessed July 10, 2026, <https://www.ulmwp.org/background>.

⁴⁶ Johnny Blades, *West Papua: The Issue That Won't Go Away for Melanesia* (Sydney: Lowy Institute for International Policy, May 2020), <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/publications/west-papua-issue-won-t-go-away-melanesia>.

between the major civilian political organisations. However, it did not create universally accepted sovereignty over all armed commands, a single constitution accepted by every faction, or agreement over whether the body should be understood as a coalition, a coordinating umbrella or a government. The formation of the ULMWP belongs primarily to the 'soft war' register described throughout this section: no organisation fought another by force; yet the addition of a further diplomatic platform reproduced rather than resolved the underlying pattern of parallel legitimacy. Whether the ULMWP will prove to be different from its predecessors or simply the latest chapter in the same soft-war pattern is a question that the following two subsections demonstrate is being tested in real time.

V.11 Armed Unification Controversy and the 2020 Provisional Government

On 1 July 2019, the ULMWP announced that three military formations had unified as a 'West Papua Army' under its political leadership. TPNPB representatives rejected the announcement almost immediately, with *The Guardian* reporting that the long-running armed group had denounced it as 'lies and fabrications'.⁴⁷ This episode revealed that the presence of individual commanders or representatives at a diplomatic meeting does not necessarily signify the consent of all the commands they are assumed to represent. It also raised four questions that recur throughout this history: can a political umbrella appoint or absorb decentralised military commands? Who has the authority to sign agreements on behalf of those commands? Is symbolic unification equivalent to operational integration? Does international political recognition translate into command authority on the ground?

On 1 December 2020, the ULMWP announced a provisional constitution and a government-in-waiting, naming the UK-based exile Benny Wenda as interim president and international representative of the state-in-waiting.⁴⁸ Opponents argued that a leader residing in Britain could not unilaterally become president; that the armed movement had not authorised the declaration; and that consultation with commands and communities inside the territory had been insufficient. TPNPB spokesperson Sebby Sambom publicly explained the organisation's rejection of the declaration on precisely these grounds.⁴⁹ The disagreement was not merely about Benny Wenda as an individual, but concerned the deeper, unresolved question of whether the ULMWP had the authority to establish a state and government — a question that had previously divided Rumkorem and Prai in 1976, as well as Markas Victoria's competing claimants. The 2019–2020 dispute is a soft civil war because no institutional process yet existed that was capable of adjudicating rival claims to command authority. The disagreement was managed through continued parallel assertion instead of any accepted procedure. In effect, it is the Rumkorem–Prai pattern recurring under diplomatic rather than military terms.

⁴⁷ Helen Davidson, "West Papuan Independence Group Says It Is 'Ready to Take over Country,'" *The Guardian*, 3 July 2019.

⁴⁸ ABC News/ABC Pacific, "West Papuan Separatists Declare Provisional Government, Tell Indonesia to Leave the Region," 2020.

⁴⁹ "OPM Explains Background to Dispute with Benny Wenda and ULMWP," IndoLeft.org, December 2020, republished by Europe Solidaire Sans Frontières, <https://www.europe-solidaire.org/spip.php?article55981>.

V.12 The 2023 ULMWP Split and Its Unresolved Aftermath

The most serious recent political schism arose in 2023. At a ULMWP summit held in Vanuatu in August and September of that year, Menase Tabuni was chosen to succeed Benny Wenda as president on the basis that the movement should be led from within West Papua rather than from exile. Markus Haluk was appointed secretary.⁵⁰ According to Indonesian-language Papuan reports, the Tabuni–Haluk faction claimed that the summit had restructured the organisation so that leadership would be shared between Papua and the international arena. They argued that the ULMWP should return to functioning as a coordinating umbrella, as originally agreed at its founding in 2014, instead of continuing to operate principally as a provisional government.

However, in November 2023, a rival congress held in Jayapura (formerly Port Numbay) reinstated Benny Wenda as president and elected Edison Waromi as prime minister. Wenda described this congress as representing the people living in the territory, stating that Papuans ‘no longer want their leaders chosen on foreign soil’.⁵¹ On 30 November 2023, the Tabuni–Haluk leadership formally suspended Wenda, Buchtar Tabuni and others for alleged failures of accountability concerning the provisional government. Buchtar Tabuni rejected the suspension, arguing that membership or leadership could not be removed by press statement and that only a properly authorised congress possessed that power.⁵² ABC Pacific’s reporting found that, after the Jayapura congress, some members of the ULMWP continued to recognise Menase Tabuni as leader rather than Benny Wenda.⁵³ Both sides justified their position through appeals to ‘inside Papua’ legitimacy: the Vanuatu summit had selected a leader based in Papua, while the Port Numbay congress claimed that Papuans in the territory had rejected decisions made overseas. Based on this evidence, the dispute cannot be reduced to a simple “diaspora versus homeland” conflict. Rather, it concerns which internal constituency, which constitutional process and which congress possesses ultimate authority. A close reading of the competing Indonesian- and English-language accounts reveals at least six distinct constitutional disputes running simultaneously: which forum is sovereign; whether one founding component may organise a congress in the name of the whole; who has the authority to suspend members; whether the 2023 restructuring superseded earlier agreements; whether the 2020 provisional government remains valid; and whether ultimate legitimacy arises from international agreement or mobilisation inside Papua itself. As of this writing, there has been no publicly documented reconciliation accepted by both sides. The 2023 split is soft civil war in its purest form: two factions of the same movement, each invoking the same source of legitimacy against the other. Neither faction can label the other as an external enemy because

⁵⁰ Jamestown Foundation, “Benny Wenda: Papuan Independence Leader Struggles for International Support,” October 12, 2025, <https://jamestown.org/brief/benny-wenda-papuan-independence-leader-struggles-for-international-support/>; “Benny Wenda Stands Down as Head of Papua Liberation Group,” *Pacific Islands News Association (PINA)*, September 6, 2023, <https://pina.com.fj/2023/09/06/benny-wenda-stands-down-as-head-of-papua-liberation-group/>.

⁵¹ AWP Adelaide, “Menase Tabuni Leads ULMWP, Ready to Fight for Independence from within West Papua,” 2023.

⁵² “ULMWP Suspends Key Members Benny Wenda and Buchtar Tabuni, Sparking Leadership Dispute,” *Jubi*, November 27, 2023, republished by *Asia Pacific Solidarity Network*, <https://www.asia-pacific-solidarity.net/index.php/news/2023-11-30/ulmwp-suspends-key-members-benny-wenda-and-buchtar-tabuni-sparking-leadership-dispute.html>.

⁵³ ABC News/ABC Pacific, “Benny Wenda Back as ULMWP President, but Faces Challenge to His Authority,” 2023.

both are, by definition, Papuan. Unlike the disputes of 1976 and 2019–2020, this split has involved no armed confrontation or formal Indonesian institution to adjudicate it. This is precisely what marks it as a ‘soft’ rather than ‘hard’ or ‘medium’ civil war: the conflict has had a total effect on legitimacy and organisation, yet it has been entirely bloodless and largely invisible outside the movement itself.

V.13 Armed Tensions and Disputed Civilian Killings, 2024–2026

The armed conflict intensified markedly after 2018, especially in Nduga, Intan Jaya, Yahukimo and Pegunungan Bintang. In 2024, the UN Human Rights Committee expressed concern over ‘numerous reports of extrajudicial killings and enforced disappearances of indigenous peoples’ in Papua, while commending the rare decision of the Indonesian Supreme Court to uphold the conviction of six security officers for the premeditated murder of four Papuans in Timika.⁵⁴ In September 2023, The Guardian Australia published the results of an investigation into events from April of that year. The investigation reported allegations that Indonesian military personnel had tortured and killed Wity Unue, a seventeen-year-old, along with others suspected of having links to the West Papua National Liberation Army. The investigation also documented further allegations of house burnings, shootings and torture in the Nduga region, where more than sixty thousand people were reportedly displaced by the fighting. While this incident predates the 2024–2026 period covered by this subsection, it is included here as the most clearly documented instance of a pattern of alleged violence by security forces against civilians that continued well into that period, as evidenced below.⁵⁵

In 2025, reports quoted TPNPB spokesperson Seby Sambom as saying that disciplinary action would be taken against fighters associated with regional commander Egianus Kogoya for carrying out operations without central authorisation. Some of these operations were characterised in Indonesian reports as resembling criminal or personal violence rather than a disciplined national struggle. This report should be treated with caution as it appeared in an Indonesian media environment in which claims about armed Papuan factions may be influenced by the security services. However, it is consistent with the broader, independently documented pattern of a command structure in which local commanders have substantial operational autonomy, and the central headquarters may recognise a command without controlling its individual operations.⁵⁶ By 2024–2025, TPNPB’s central command had recognised thirty-six regional defence commands (Kodap) across the territory. Each Kodap was required to have a minimum number of members before receiving recognition from headquarters. If this figure is accurate, it illustrates why it is not possible to have a stable count of the movement’s commanders or territorial structures at any given moment.⁵⁷ Between 5 and

⁵⁴ Reuters, “UN Rights Panel Concerned by Extrajudicial Killings in Indonesia’s Papua,” 28 March 2024.

⁵⁵ *The Guardian*, “‘The Kids Had All Been Tortured’: Indonesian Military Accused of Targeting Children in West Papua,” September 26, 2023.

⁵⁶ Noi English, “TPNPB-OPM Threatens to Attack Egianus Kogoya’s Faction,” 2025.

⁵⁷ Seby Sambom, TPNPB-OPM spokesperson, quoted in “Reasons Why TPNPB-OPM Declared War Against the Indonesian Military,” *Tempo*, April 9, 2025, <https://en.tempo.co/read/1994842/reasons-why-tpnpb-opm-declared-war-against-the-indonesian-military>; “36 Kodap TPNPB-OPM Rayakan Hut Papua Barat dengan Upacara Bendera,” *Suara Papua*, December 3, 2024, <https://suarapapua.com/2024/12/03/36-kodap-tpnpb-opm-rayakan-hut-papua-barat-dengan->

8 April 2025, at least eleven gold miners were killed in Yahukimo Regency. TPNPB-OPM, through Sambom, claimed that the victims were soldiers in disguise. However, Indonesian military and defence officials insisted that the victims were civilians and dismissed the claim as ‘dangerous propaganda’, warning that targeting civilians under such a pretext could constitute a crime against humanity.⁵⁸ The joint police-military task force, Peace Cartenz, reported that some of the dead had gunshot and arrow wounds, and that several miners were reported missing or possibly being held hostage. In February 2025, the ULMWP stated that it would not engage in dialogue with Indonesia ‘until self-determination is on the table’, presenting West Papua as a colonised nation rather than an Indonesian province. In 2026, Benny Wenda continued to denounce arrests by Indonesian authorities, calling on Pacific leaders to condemn what he described as an ongoing occupation. Meanwhile, the ULMWP’s Interim President’s Office marked the 55th anniversary of the 1971 declaration on 30 June 2026, while reporting that two Papuans had been killed during the commemoration period.⁵⁹ In the absence of a credible internal judicial mechanism accepted by all Papuan factions, accusations of civilian killings on both sides of the conflict continue to be adjudicated through competing propaganda rather than public evidence. This is a symptom, as the analysis below suggests, of the soft-war dimension of the conflict rather than merely an unfortunate gap in its reporting. Meanwhile, the killings themselves confirm that hard civil war, in the classical sense of organised armed violence between the Indonesian state and Papuan combatants, continues unabated alongside these soft-war dynamics, rather than having been superseded by them. By 2024–2026, therefore, all three forms that this paper distinguishes are operating simultaneously, a claim that the next two sections set out to demonstrate systematically.

V.14 Everyday Competition, Contested Customary Authority, and the Securitisation of Internal Conflict

By the 2010s and 2020s, soft civil war within settler-colonial West Papua had become increasingly complex. It was characterised by overlapping dilemmas, competing loyalties, political controversies and multiple, often contradictory interests. Indigenous Papuans live within a political and economic order in which access to employment, government offices, development programmes, natural resource royalties, education, healthcare, public services and economic opportunities is largely mediated through Indonesian state institutions.⁶⁰ Under these conditions, survival frequently becomes a matter of competition rather than collective solidarity.

upacara-bendera/; Sindy Ajara, Laura Sorica, and Elliott Bynum, “Papuan Independence and Political Disorder in Indonesia,” *ACLEd*, October 5, 2022, <https://acleddata.com/report/papuan-independence-and-political-disorder-indonesia>.

⁵⁸ Agence France-Presse, “Indonesia Says at Least 11 Miners Killed by Papua Rebels,” April 10, 2025, as reported in *The Australian*; Sebby Sambom, TPNPB-OPM spokesperson, statement of April 8, 2025.

⁵⁹ “Benny Wenda Demands End to Indonesia’s Genocidal Attacks in West Papuan Highlands,” *Sydney Criminal Lawyers*, February 26, 2026, <https://www.sydneycriminallawyers.com.au/blog/benny-wenda-demands-end-to-indonesias-genocidal-attacks-in-west-papuan-highlands/>; United Liberation Movement for West Papua (ULMWP), “55th Anniversary Statement,” June 30, 2026, <https://www.ulmwp.org>.

⁶⁰ Henk Schulte Nordholt and Gerry van Klinken, eds., *Renegotiating Boundaries: Local Politics in Post-Suharto Indonesia* (Leiden: KITLV Press, 2007); Emir Chairullah, *Indonesia’s Failure in Papua: The Role of Elites in Designing, Implementing and Undermining Special Autonomy* (Oxford: Routledge, 2022).

As Papuan societies have traditionally been organised around closely connected families, clans, and customary and linguistic communities, contemporary political competition is deeply intertwined with these pre-existing social relationships. Disputes that were once largely governed by customary law and tribal jurisdiction are now increasingly intertwined with electoral politics, government patronage, development projects, public-sector employment, resource royalties and competition for administrative office.⁶¹ Elections for governors, regents, district heads, mayors, village heads, members of parliament and, in some cases, leadership positions within churches and customary organisations frequently become extensions of existing family, clan, regional, denominational and customary networks. Political rivalry therefore extends well beyond formal institutions, reinforcing social fragmentation throughout everyday Papuan life.

The consequences are evident in the increasing number of conflicts within Papuan society. Rivalries are increasingly emerging over customary land, forests, rivers, mountains, lakes, mineral royalties, government contracts, development funds, administrative boundaries, organisational leadership and claims to political representation. Family, clan, tribal, religious, regional and organisational affiliations become intertwined with struggles over access to material resources, prestige, authority and influence. Rather than addressing a shared structural issue, Papuans find themselves competing with each other to determine who has the legitimate right to represent, govern, control, or benefit from specific territories, institutions, and communities.

From this perspective, this transformation is one of the defining characteristics of a soft civil war. Political and psychological energy is gradually being redirected away from collective questions of national self-determination and towards internal competition for positions, resources, recognition, legitimacy and institutional authority. Administrative restructuring, patronage networks, selective recognition of leaders and unequal access to state resources reinforce these dynamics, rewarding some actors while marginalising others.⁶² Consequently, many Papuans increasingly look to state institutions as the principal source of employment, political authority, development opportunities, prestige, economic security, and social advancement. Competition for access to these institutions progressively replaces the pursuit of a shared national project.

These transformations have also reshaped customary authority itself. Historically, customary societies across much of Papua possessed well-established cosmological, genealogical and legal principles that governed who could become a big man, an elder, a ritual authority, a clan leader, a custodian of customary land or a guardian of communal memory. Leadership was embedded within inherited customary institutions and recognised collectively through customary law, rather than through individual proclamation or political appointment. Today, however, these boundaries are increasingly being challenged. Politicians, activists, business

⁶¹ Made Supriatma, "The Second Amendment to Papua's Special Autonomy Law and the Recentralization of Power to Jakarta," *ISEAS Perspective*, no. 123 (2021); Henk Schulte Nordholt and Gerry van Klinken, eds., *Renegotiating Boundaries: Local Politics in Post-Suharto Indonesia* (Leiden: KITLV Press, 2007).

⁶² Bobby Anderson, "The Failure of Education in Papua's Highlands," *Inside Indonesia* 113 (July–September 2013); Emir Chairullah, *Indonesia's Failure in Papua: The Role of Elites in Designing, Implementing and Undermining Special Autonomy* (Oxford: Routledge, 2022).

elites, organisational leaders and public figures may all claim titles such as chief, tribal leader, customary authority, big man, landowner, cultural guardian or wisdom keeper. The proliferation of competing claims has generated considerable uncertainty, since many Papuans recognise that such titles were traditionally regulated by specific customary jurisdictions rather than political influence, media visibility or organisational endorsement.

The controversy surrounding Governor Lukas Enembe's designation as Kepala Suku Besar Papua ("Great Tribal Chief of Papua") is emblematic of this broader transformation.⁶³ In October 2022, a faction of the Dewan Adat Papua (Papuan Customary Council), led by Dominikus Sorabut, formally conferred the title upon Enembe at his residence in Koya Tengah. They presented him as a unifying customary leader for Papua, citing his record as governor rather than any genealogical inheritance.⁶⁴ This decision was met with strong opposition from numerous customary leaders, Ondoafis, youth organisations and community representatives. They argued that no single individual could legitimately claim to be the supreme customary leader of all Papuan peoples since each customary territory has its own distinct genealogies, leadership structures and jurisdictions. Ondoafi Yanto Eluay of Sentani, for example, condemned the conferral as damaging to customary order itself. A rival faction of the Dewan Adat Papua rejected the ceremony, claiming it was inconsistent with the Council's own statutes which recognise chieftaincy as hereditary rather than conferred.⁶⁵ Critics also claimed that the title had no recognised basis in Papuan customary law and reflected contemporary political interests, including Enembe's ongoing corruption trial before Indonesia's Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK), rather than established indigenous systems of governance.⁶⁶

The significance of the Lukas Enembe controversy therefore extends well beyond the individual himself. It reflects a deeper uncertainty over who possesses the authority to define legitimacy, represent the Papuan collective, interpret customary law, and speak on behalf of the nation. Similar disputes have arisen concerning claims to customary ownership of land, natural resources, political office and organisational leadership throughout Papua. These controversies reveal how contemporary political authority and customary authority have become increasingly intertwined within a fragmented institutional environment.

These recurring tensions also create opportunities for an expanded security response. Episodes of communal conflict, political rivalry or local violence are often portrayed by Indonesian authorities as matters of public order necessitating additional military or police deployment.⁶⁷ However, critics argue that this securitisation may further reinforce internal fragmentation by presenting Papuan society itself as the primary source of instability instead of addressing the

⁶³ "Pengangkatan Lukas Enembe Jadi Kepala Suku Besar Papua Tuai Penolakan," *Kompas.com*, 14 October 2022.

⁶⁴ "Lukas Enembe Dikukuhkan Jadi Kepala Suku Besar Papua, Ketua Dewan Adat: Kami Tidak Disogok," *VIVA*, 10 October 2022; "7 Wilayah Angkat Lukas Enembe Kepala Suku Besar Papua Disoal Tokoh Masyarakat," *Detik.com*, 12 October 2022.

⁶⁵ "Pengangkatan Lukas Enembe Jadi Kepala Suku Besar Papua Tuai Penolakan," *Kompas.com*, 14 October 2022 (statement of Ondoafi Yanto Eluay); "Dewan Adat Papua Tak Mengenal Pengukuhan Kepala Suku Besar Papua," *BeritaSatu*, 16 October 2022.

⁶⁶ "Pengacara Sebut Lukas Enembe Kepala Suku Besar Papua," *CNN Indonesia*, 11 October 2022, reporting the KPK corruption case running alongside the customary designation; "Penobatan Lukas Enembe Jadi Kepala Suku Papua Dinilai Bertentangan dengan Statuta DAP," *Republika*, 16 October 2022.

⁶⁷ Hipolitus Ringgi Wangge, "Securitization of a Political Conflict in Southeast Asia: Disengaging the Indigenous Audience in West Papua," *Asian Security* 19, no. 3 (2023): 207–27.

wider historical, political and structural conditions from which these conflicts emerge. Within this framework, this represents one of the central paradoxes of soft civil war: a fragmented society turns its political, psychological and organisational energies increasingly inward while the broader structures of domination that shape those rivalries remain comparatively insulated from collective challenge.

VI. Eight Forms of Fragmentation and the Recurring Conflict Lines

This section moves from documented history to the interpretive typology presented in this paper. According to the interpretation presented here, the historical reconstruction above provides a more precise typology than the term 'fragmentation' usually suggests. At least eight distinguishable forms of fragmentation can be identified within Papuan society and the movement it has produced. These are:

1. Social and territorial plurality, inherited from the precolonial order described in Section V.1.
2. Regional division: coastal versus highland; north versus south; urban versus rural.
3. Ideological division: incorporationist versus gradualist versus federalist versus independentist.
4. Organisational division: rival claimants to the legacy of 1961, 1971 and successive congresses
5. Armed-command fragmentation: a national title frequently coexisting with highly decentralised practical authority
6. Leadership and constitutional conflict: who may appoint commanders; where leadership must reside; which congress or declaration is legally supreme
7. State-generated administrative fragmentation: repeated subdivision of provinces, regencies, districts, electoral constituencies and military commands
8. Narrative fragmentation: the movement possessing no single, universally accepted account of its beginning; different organisations emphasising 1961; the first armed resistance of the 1960s; 1 July 1971; later OPM reorganisations; the 2000 Papuan Congress; the 2014 founding of the ULMWP; or the 2020 provisional government as the movement's true foundational moment.⁶⁸ These competing historical calendars are not merely commemorative; each one supports a different — and sometimes conflicting — claim to legitimacy.

At least eight recurring conflict lines can be traced through every phase of the above-reconstructed history:

- Armed struggle versus nonviolent resistance. Jason MacLeod's research identifies this division as a major obstacle to the effectiveness of nonviolent organising, specifically

⁶⁸ "West Papua's Shifting Signifiers: Across History of Colonialism and Nationalism in Indonesia," *Oxford Political Review*, 5 July 2024, <https://oxfordpoliticalreview.com/2024/07/05/west-papuas-shifting-signifiers-across-history-of-colonialism-and-nationalism-in-indonesia/>.

because of the factionalism and competition it generates, rather than because the two strategies are inherently incompatible.⁶⁹

- Central command versus territorial autonomy. A commander's legitimacy, grounded in the defence of ancestral land, kinship and demonstrated survival, competes with the legitimacy of a distant headquarters, grounded in constitution, congress and diplomatic recognition. Neither automatically controls the other.
- Highland versus coastal political power. This reflects the uneven arrival of Dutch schools and missions, as described in section V.2.
- Generational conflict. This is between older leadership, which grounds its legitimacy in the years 1961 and 1971, and younger activists. The latter are especially embodied by the KNPB and demand transparent elections and leadership based inside Papua. There is a tension between the diaspora and the homeland, with reciprocal accusations that diaspora leaders are detached or self-appointed, and that internal leaders are vulnerable to coercion or infiltration. There are also federal versus unitary visions of a future Papuan state, and a conflict between customary authority and modern political organisation. In this conflict, chiefs, church leaders, commanders and elected politicians each claim mandates of a fundamentally different kind.
- Finally, there is the pervasive difficulty of distinguishing coercion, pragmatic accommodation, ideological conviction and opportunistic collaboration among the many Papuans who have entered Indonesian institutions for reasons of survival, employment, family obligation or genuine belief in autonomy rather than betrayal.⁷⁰ R. E. McGibbon's influential analysis concludes that Jakarta 'effectively exploited personal, regional, and tribal divisions within Papuan society', actively encouraging competition among Papuan elites for offices and resources through administrative and political policy instead of passively observing pre-existing rivalries.

This difficulty is not incidental to the Papuan case; the paradigm's parasitological model offers one account of why it recurs so consistently. Colonially educated Papuan leaders — governors, educators, church figures, intellectuals — need not be understood as obeying an external command they recognise as such. Rather, particular assumptions about what counts as rational, responsible, modern or desirable become embedded within the very formation of leadership, so that reproducing the settler order comes to be experienced as personal responsibility, professional duty or moral progress rather than as collaboration.⁷¹ This account converges with a separate strand of the same research programme examining the ideological formations of pembangunan (development), kemajuan (progress) and sukses (success), which argues that

⁶⁹ Jason MacLeod, "Nonviolent Struggle in West Papua: 'We Have a Hope,'" in *Encyclopedia of Life Support Systems* (Oxford: EOLSS Publishers, 2009).

⁷⁰ Rodd McGibbon, *Pitfalls of Papua: Understanding the Conflict and Its Place in Australia-Indonesia Relations*, Lowy Institute Paper No. 13 (Double Bay, NSW: Lowy Institute for International Policy, 2006); Eva-Lotta Hedman, ed., *Dynamics of Conflict and Displacement in Papua, Indonesia*, RSC Working Paper Series No. 42 (Oxford: Refugee Studies Centre, University of Oxford, 2007).

⁷¹ Yamin Kogoya, "Colonial Parasites and Colonised Hosts: The Psycho-Cosmocide of Cosmobian Existence in West Papua," *Psycho-Cosmocide Studies*, Kurumbi Wone Series, No. 18 (2026).

entering Indonesian institutions or pursuing individual advancement within the colonial order is not usually experienced by Papuans as betrayal, precisely because these formations redefine dispossession as hope and assimilation as achievement.⁷² Read together, these accounts suggest that McGibbon's account of Jakarta 'exploiting' internal divisions and the everyday choices of individual Papuans working within the settler apparatus are two descriptions of the same underlying process, seen respectively from the position of the coloniser and the position of the colonised.⁷³

This typology also clarifies the distinction that Indonesian policy and academic writing frequently draw between 'konflik vertikal' (conflict between the Indonesian state and the independence movement, or between corporations and customary landowners) and 'konflik horizontal' (conflict among Papuan clans, migrants and indigenous Papuans, or between rival armed factions). This distinction is analytically useful, but it can be misleading if it is not examined more closely, since what appears to be a purely horizontal conflict often has vertical origins. For example, a new regency may be created by government policy, which then leads to rival Papuan elites competing over its capital. This can subsequently result in violence that is described in official and media accounts as purely tribal, while the structuring role of the state disappears from the final narrative.⁷⁴ The same caution should be exercised regarding the Indonesian media's frequent use of 'perang suku' ('tribal war') to describe violence between Papuan groups. This term can conceal electoral disputes, land acquisition, mining compensation, government contract competition, security force sponsorship and administrative border disputes, presenting them as timeless ethnic hostility. The intention is not to deny the existence of genuine customary conflict, but to distinguish it from modern political conflict that merely expresses itself through the vocabulary of clan and tribe.⁷⁵

The cumulative record is instructive in itself. Since 1961, at least seven individuals have publicly declared themselves president of a Papuan state or government-in-waiting, and at least five distinct constitutional or charter documents have been produced. The movement's armed wing alone claimed thirty-six separate territorial commands by 2025. No figure in this reckoning is uncontested — organisations dispute each other's numbers and legitimacy — but the scale of the phenomenon is the key finding: a movement that generates a rival president and constitutional instrument roughly once a decade is not experiencing the occasional leadership dispute, but is exhibiting the soft-war pattern that this paper has identified as its structural condition. Read against the typology developed above, the proliferation of presidents

⁷² Yamin Kogoya, "The Four Gospels of a Civilisational Death Cult in West Papua: Religiosity, Development, Progress, and Success," *Psycho-Cosmocide Studies*, Kurumbi Wone Working Paper Series, No. 21 (2026).

⁷³ Rodd McGibbon, *Pitfalls of Papua: Understanding the Conflict and Its Place in Australia-Indonesia Relations*, Lowy Institute Paper No. 13 (Double Bay, NSW: Lowy Institute for International Policy, 2006).

⁷⁴ Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) Indonesia, *Preventing and Resolving Conflicts in Papua*; Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) Indonesia, *Beyond Grievance: The Political Economy of the Papua Conflict*; Agus Tutupahar, Eriyantouw Wahid, and Gunawan Djajaputra, "Conflict Mitigation in Papua through a Criminal Policy Approach with the Aim of Social Welfare," *International Journal of Social Service and Research* 3, no. 4 (2023): 879–94, <https://doi.org/10.46799/ijssr.v3i4.325>.

⁷⁵ Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) Indonesia, *Preventing and Resolving Conflicts in Papua*; Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) Indonesia, *Beyond Grievance: The Political Economy of the Papua Conflict*; Rodd McGibbon, *Plural Society in Peril: Migration, Economic Change, and the Papua Conflict* (Washington, DC: East-West Center, 2004).

is a soft-war signature in itself: each claim is sincerely held, none of the claimants consider themselves to be illegitimate, and there is no accepted procedure for resolving disputes between them. The succession of constitutions and declarations belongs more to the medium-war register: each one is an attempt at institutionalised, non-violent, legal-constitutional legitimacy. Their very proliferation shows that the contest never resolves into a single, accepted order. The decentralised armed commands mark the point at which the hard-war and soft-war registers intersect: a movement with no unified command, where none of the local autonomies are experienced as internal betrayal.⁷⁶

VII. Applying the Three-Part Framework to West Papua

Before presenting the evidence, it is necessary to clarify what precisely is being analysed in the three sub-sections that follow. The hard, medium and soft civil wars examined here are not principally wars between West Papua and the Indonesian state in the sense of two comparably organised parties fighting for control of a shared territory. Rather, they are civil wars within Papuan society itself, involving rival factions and generations of the resistance, as well as those who remain outside the Indonesian settler-colonial system and those who compete, work and advance within it. These wars are fought at the direct expense of an already dying, fractured and colonised people. Indonesia's role in each of the three dimensions is less that of a conventional belligerent and more that of an external power whose presence, administration and strategy render the internal Papuan fragmentation reconstructed in Section V possible, profitable and, in critical respects, invisible even to the Papuans themselves.

The Hard-War Dimension

According to the interpretation advanced in this paper, hard civil war has occurred repeatedly in West Papua, though it is rarely recognised as such for reasons that are themselves indicative of the paradigm. Since the transfer of administration to Indonesia, Papuans have killed Papuans — across village, clan and tribal lines, and increasingly across factional and generational lines within the resistance itself — in numbers that meet the threshold for hard civil war. However, these killings have almost always been coordinated, provoked or permitted within lines of enmity that predate Indonesian rule, which Indonesian administration has been careful to preserve rather than dissolve. When Indonesia assumed control, most Papuans still held primary loyalty to their original cosmological, clan and tribal sovereignty rather than to a single

⁷⁶ Counts are synthesised from sources cited throughout sections V.6–V.13 above. On presidential claimants, see Rumkorem and Prai (n. 29 above), Waingai (n. 28 above), Eluay (n. 36 above), Waromi (n. 41 above), Yaboisebut (n. 41 above), Wenda (nn. 44, 46–49 above), and Tabuni (nn. 49–51 above). On constitutional and declaratory instruments (1961, 1971, 1988, 2011, 2014, and 2020), see nn. 22, 27–28, 41, 44, and 47 above; see also United Liberation Movement for West Papua (ULMWP), “Background,” accessed July 10, 2026, <https://www.ulmwp.org/background>. On the thirty-six Kodap territorial commands, see “36 Kodap TPNPB-OPM Rayakan Hut Papua Barat dengan Upacara Bendera,” *Suara Papua*, December 3, 2024 (n. 56 above). As with the historical reconstruction generally, organisations and commentators dispute these figures; the numbers presented here should therefore be understood as order-of-magnitude estimates rather than an authoritative tally.

emergent Papuan nation-state. This made it difficult from the outset to generate a unified collective power capable of contesting Indonesian rule, and old inter-tribal and inter-clan enmities supplied Indonesia with a ready instrument for managing Papuan resistance without having to fight it directly.

The same pattern emerges in Papuan oral testimony. During a conversation with my father in 2018, I asked why villages with far larger populations failed to repel relatively small Indonesian military incursions during the Central Highlands campaign of 1977–1978. Having lived through that period himself, he answered immediately: ‘We could have defeated them, but many of our own people had already sided with the Indonesian soldiers. They led them into our villages and helped them identify our people.’ He ended the conversation with a warning that has remained central to my understanding of the conflict: ‘The same problem still exists today. Unless Papuans find a way to overcome it, we will not win this war against Indonesia.’ This testimony alone does not establish the broader historical record. Rather, it provides a participant’s perspective on the internal fragmentation that this approach seeks to explain.⁷⁷

The result is a brutal war in which Papuans are killing Papuans along old fault lines that the evidence suggests the Indonesian administration had every incentive to leave in place rather than dissolve. This has occurred on a scale sufficient to weaken any collective national power before it could form, without ever producing the kind of decisive, self-organised confrontation that could resolve the underlying dispute over Papuan destiny once and for all.

The best-documented instances of this dimension involve direct Indonesian military violence against the Papuan population as a whole. Indonesian military operations following the transfer of administration killed and displaced Papuans on a scale that human rights investigators have compared to crimes against humanity. Indonesia’s own national human rights commission has concluded that certain episodes of state violence in Papua met this definition.⁷⁸ One of the most cited instances of lethal state violence against the Papuan civilian population is the 1998 Biak massacre, in which Indonesian security forces violently dispersed a peaceful flag-raising demonstration and allegedly killed and dumped bodies at sea. The evidence from 2024–2026 reconstructed in section V.13 — the killing of Wity Unue, the 2024 findings of the UN Human Rights Committee, and the disputed Yahukimo killings of April 2025, where Papuan and Indonesian accounts of who died and why remain irreconcilable — demonstrates that this dimension of the conflict has not receded over time. In fact, the absence of an internal judicial mechanism capable of establishing facts that are accepted by both Papuan factions has resulted in the very concept of civilian death becoming contested terrain, adjudicated through propaganda rather than evidence.

A further dimension of hard war arises from the demographic and extractive transformation of the territory. Indonesia’s transmigration programme has relocated large numbers of settlers

⁷⁷ Author’s interview with a participant in the 1977–1978 central highlands conflict, Papua, 2018. This oral history source is used to illuminate lived experiences and local perceptions of the conflict; as with all retrospective testimony, it reflects individual memory and positionality.

⁷⁸ Jason MacLeod, “The Struggle for Self-Determination in West Papua (1969–Present),” *International Center on Nonviolent Conflict*, March 2011, <https://www.nonviolent-conflict.org/struggle-self-determination-west-papua-1969-present/>; Carmel Budiardjo and Liem Soei Liong, *West Papua: The Obliteration of a People* (Surrey: TAPOL, 1988), 41–63.

from Java and other islands to Papua, altering the territory's ethnic composition in a way that many Papuans regard as a form of slow demographic replacement rather than mere development policy.⁷⁹ Meanwhile, the Grasberg mine, operated by Freeport and containing some of the world's largest gold and copper deposits, has been protected by a substantial and long-standing military and paramilitary presence. This has led to frequent violent clashes between security forces, local communities and armed Papuan groups seeking to disrupt operations. Both processes exhibit the totalising nature of hard civil war, even though pitched, reciprocal battles similar to those in Rwanda or the former Yugoslavia have rarely occurred. Consistent with the above framework, both processes have deepened internal Papuan competition for land, employment and status within the colonial economy, rather than consolidating a united Papuan front against them.

The Medium-War Dimension

From the perspective of the Psycho-Cosmocide framework, the medium-war dimension operates through law, institutional restructuring and selective repression rather than mass violence. In some respects, it is the most consequential layer of the conflict because it is most easily mistaken for peace — and in the case of West Papua, for ordinary underdevelopment rather than war. Papuans continue to kill and destroy one another — both within the resistance and between the resistance and Indonesianised Papuans who staff and serve the colonial administration — but, because this occurs within a carefully administered and militarily supervised fragmented society, the resulting harm rarely registers as civil war, either domestically or internationally. Instead, each new episode of destruction is explained away as a result of grievances, underdevelopment, insufficient funding, unemployment and slow progress. This interpretation is not only mistaken, but also part of the apparatus of medium war, since it allows chronic internal harm to be managed indefinitely as a policy problem instead of being confronted as the result of a deliberate, sustained strategy of institutional containment.

In retrospect, the Act of Free Choice is best understood as an act of medium-scale civil war, rather than a genuine act of self-determination. It substituted a controlled institutional and legal process — backed by the credible threat of force — for either negotiation or open war. This achieved Indonesian sovereignty at a fraction of the cost that total conquest would have required, as documented in section V.5.⁸⁰ Indonesia's Special Autonomy Law and, in particular, the pemekaran programme examined in Section V.9 exemplify this logic in its most contemporary — and most corrosive, for Papuan society — form: they promised greater local control over Papuan affairs and a share of resource revenue, but their practical effect — confirmed independently by Jaap Timmer, the International Crisis Group and Indonesian-language scholars, including Lili Romli and I. Ngurah Suryawan — has been to expand central

⁷⁹ Rodd McGibbon, *Plural Society in Peril: Migration, Economic Change, and the Papua Conflict* (Washington, DC: East-West Center, 2004); Jason MacLeod, "The Struggle for Self-Determination in West Papua (1969–Present)," *International Center on Nonviolent Conflict*, March 2011.

⁸⁰ Pieter J. Drooglever, *An Act of Free Choice: Decolonisation and the Right to Self-Determination in West Papua* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2009), 610–35.

government authority and convert Papuan regional and clan identity into competition over governorships, regencies and provincial capitals.⁸¹ The banning of the Morning Star flag, the prosecution of peaceful demonstrators for treason, and the periodic expulsion or exclusion of international human rights organisations, journalists, and diplomats constitute a sustained apparatus of legal and institutional containment — the hallmark of a medium-intensity civil war — that has endured for six decades without the level of violence that would be required for a hard war of conquest. The assassination of Theys Eluay, president of the Papuan Presidium Council, in 2001, which is examined in detail in section V.8, illustrates how targeted violence against key figures functions within this register of medium war: it is sufficient to intimidate a movement and remove its unifying civilian leadership without escalating into open war.

Indonesian legal scholarship provides another subtle example of the medium-war dimension. A 2024 thesis from the University of Islam in Jakarta considers whether the OPM or TPNPB should be classified as domestic criminals, terrorists, rebels, or combatants and insurgents under international humanitarian law.⁸² Such state classification does not merely describe the movement, but actively alters relationships within it. For example, an organisation labelled as terrorist becomes isolated from civilian organisations, while individual activists distance themselves from armed commands to avoid criminal prosecution. Thus, legal categorisation itself functions as an instrument of fragmentation — precisely the kind of institutional weapon that medium civil war deploys in place of open battle.

The Soft-War Dimension

This framework interprets the West Papuan case as being of the utmost theoretical and practical significance in terms of its soft-civil-war dimension because it reveals a conflict that neither the Indonesian nor the Papuan side of the conflict intends or fully perceives, and which operates almost entirely within the Papuan community itself. Read as a whole, the century-long reconstruction offered in Section V is substantially a chronicle of this dimension. This includes the Rumkorem–Prai split of 1976 and the organisational template it established, as well as the proliferation of organisations from the 2000s onwards. These include the WPNCL, the Federal Republic of West Papua, the National Parliament of West Papua, the KNPB and successive OPM and TPNPB commands. Each of these organisations claims in good faith to represent the singular Papuan nation, while collectively multiplying the number of institutions doing so.

⁸¹ Jaap Timmer, “Erring Decentralisation and Elite Politics in Papua,” in *Renegotiating Boundaries: Local Politics in Post-Suharto Indonesia*, ed. Henk Schulte Nordholt and Gerry van Klinken (Leiden: KITLV Press, 2007), 459–82; International Crisis Group, *Dividing Papua: How Not to Do It*, Asia Briefing No. 24 (Jakarta/Brussels: International Crisis Group, April 9, 2003); Lili Romli, “Pro-Kontra Pemekaran Papua: Sebuah Pelajaran bagi Pemerintah Pusat,” *Jurnal Penelitian Politik* 3, no. 1 (2006): 25–41; I Ngurah Suryawan, “Stop Kam Baku Tipu: Pemekaran Daerah, Isu Strategis Pengelolaan Konflik, dan Transformasi Sosial di Papua Barat,” *Masyarakat Indonesia* 40, no. 2 (2014): 229–43.

⁸² Muhammad Hazel Khansa, *Tinjauan Hukum Humaniter Internasional Atas Status Kedudukan Organisasi Papua Merdeka (OPM) di Indonesia* (undergraduate thesis, Fakultas Syariah dan Hukum, UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta, 1446 H/2025 M), UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta Institutional Repository, <https://repository.uinjkt.ac.id/dspace/handle/123456789/87386>.

Other events covered include the 2019 dispute over the announced unification of armed formations under ULMWP political leadership. In this dispute, TPNPB representatives publicly denounced their own movement's political wing. There were also the 2020 provisional-government declaration and the TPNPB's rejection of it. Most consequentially of all, there was the unresolved 2023 split between the Wenda and Tabuni–Haluk factions within the ULMWP. In this dispute, both sides invoked 'inside Papua' legitimacy against each other, but neither produced a mechanism capable of settling the dispute.

This pattern has not eased over time. In fact, the logic of this paradigm predicts and the record confirms that it has deepened. Throughout their history, Papuan resistance movements have invested enormous energy, time, lives and resources in unifying efforts, including sustained diplomatic campaigns with sympathetic Melanesian governments, such as those in Vanuatu and Papua New Guinea, and countless international NGOs. However, these efforts have repeatedly resulted in further fragmentation rather than consolidation, as rival delegations, envoys and claimants compete for the same limited diplomatic recognition and resources that unification was intended to secure. Scholarly analysis of the OPM has repeatedly concluded that the movement is seriously weakened by its factionalised organisation. Even decades after its founding, as many as nine or more semi-independent commands continue to operate without unified leadership, and regional and clan identities continue to shape factional politics within the resistance itself.⁸³ Meanwhile, Papuans who have been influenced by Indonesian culture and depend on employment and advancement within the Indonesian settler-colonial system for their livelihood face a parallel and equally corrosive struggle. They are routinely placed in direct competition with their own family, clan, tribal and religious networks for political party positions, government jobs and colonial patronage. This means that the system which marginalises Papuans also turns individual Papuans against their closest kin in the ordinary business of survival.

Within the armed wing, the public feud that began in 2023 between TPNPB-OPM spokesperson Sebby Sambom and regional commander Egianus Kogoya — centred on disagreements over the handling of a kidnapped foreign hostage, and involving mutual accusations of betrayal — has further divided the movement's public messaging and undermined its command legitimacy. Some Papuan community leaders have publicly rejected the organisation's armed elements, considering them harmful to ordinary Papuans rather than protective. Social media has intensified, rather than resolved, this dynamic. Facebook, YouTube, WhatsApp and similar platforms have enabled Papuans to circumvent Indonesian media, document violence and mobilise international solidarity. However, they have also allowed rival leaders to instantly issue contradictory statements, convert internal disagreement into public humiliation and disseminate unverifiable claims of treason or infiltration that a

⁸³ Susan Connelly, "Imagining West Papua: The Most Underreported Region in the World," *Arena Quarterly*, no. 12 (December 2022), <https://arena.org.au/imagining-west-papua/>; Bonson, Mariam Sophie Paula. *The Shifting Power Dynamics Between Indonesia and West Papua in Global Discourse: Narratives in the 50s versus Now*. Master's thesis, Malmö University, 2023. <https://www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:1816954/FULLTEXT02.pdf>; O. Ondawame, *One People, One Soul: West Papuan Nationalism and the Organisasi Papua Merdeka (OPM)/Free Papua Movement* (PhD diss., Australian National University, 2000).

platform's act of publication can never verify.⁸⁴ A Facebook post proves that a person or page published a claim, but does not prove that the claim is accurate, that the writer represents the organisation they claim to, or that the event occurred as described. The logic of this paradigm suggests that this evidentiary gap is not incidental to soft civil war, but constitutive of it. After all, a war fought without a declared battlefield naturally produces an undeclared and unverifiable record of its own casualties.

Are These Fragmentations Deliberately Produced? Structure, Agency and the CPCV

The reconstruction in Section V raises the question of intent unavoidably: was Papuan fragmentation deliberately engineered by Indonesian policy or is it simply the unintended residue of difficult colonial and postcolonial history? The most defensible answer, and the one this framework is designed to accommodate, is that both are true simultaneously, and its distinctive contribution lies in refusing to treat this as a contradiction. There is strong evidence that Indonesian policy has exploited and intensified Papuan divisions through documented mechanisms, including the removal of leaders by assassination, imprisonment and forced exile; the infiltration of intelligence that encourages purges and distrust, even where evidence is weak; the granting of patronage through government positions, contracts and autonomy funds; the division of territory through 'pemekaran'; the selective recognition of leaders, churches and political representatives who comply with the government; and the criminalisation of diverse, often rival, organisations under a single label, such as OPM (Organisasi Papua Merdeka, or Free Papua Organisation) or KKB (Kelompok Kriminal Bersenjata, or Armed Criminal Group). This simultaneously collapses all Papuan resistance into one enemy for security purposes, while preventing legitimate public organisation from developing in any other way.⁸⁵ However, it would be an overstatement to claim that Indonesian intelligence is responsible for every Papuan disagreement; internal agency remains a real factor, and Papuan leaders have made choices, created rival organisations, refused accountability to one another, and, based on the documented evidence of the schisms reconstructed in Section V, sometimes prioritised personal status over collective organisation.⁸⁶

This is precisely the structure that the CPCV is theorised to describe: a reorganisation of perception in which external power and internal agency are mutually reinforcing rather than mutually exclusive explanations. The Indonesian administration did not need to manufacture every rivalry between Papuan factions; it only needed to preserve, fund and periodically activate divisions — such as regional, denominational, generational and organisational — that were already being produced by Papuan society's own precolonial plurality and postcolonial

⁸⁴ IndoLeft.org and Facebook pages associated with movement organisations commemorating the 1 July 1971 declaration are cited for illustrative purposes only. Social-media evidence throughout this paper is treated as contextual material requiring corroboration through official documents, independent reporting, and organisational statements.

⁸⁵ Hipolitus Ringgi Wangge, "Securitization of a Political Conflict in Southeast Asia"; Institute for Policy Analysis of Conflict, *The Current Status of the Papuan Pro-Independence Movement*. See note 43 above.

⁸⁶ Institute for Policy Analysis of Conflict (IPAC), *Managing Conflict in Papua: Suggestions for a New President*, IPAC Report No. 91 (Jakarta: Institute for Policy Analysis of Conflict, February 6, 2024).

elite competition. Meanwhile, each Papuan faction continues to experience its rivalry with other factions as a principled defence of the authentic national project, rather than as participation in a structure that a serious external power would have every incentive to maintain. The Bahasa Indonesia record is instructive here in a further respect: Indonesian security writing may describe an armed Papuan command as a *Kelompok Kriminal* while Papuan sources describe the same entity as a *Komando Daerah Pertahanan* (Defence Area Command). Similarly, government writing may describe the establishment of a new province as *Pelayanan Publik* (Public Service), while Papuan critics describe the same act as political or military fragmentation. This demonstrates that the language used to describe an event is already part of the contest over its meaning and that no single vocabulary — Indonesian, English, Papuan or state — can be treated as a neutral description of what has actually occurred.⁸⁷

VIII. Philosophical and Psychological Implications

The West Papuan case, when examined in such detail, poses a genuine difficulty for any resistance strategy based on unity as its primary condition. This is because the paradigm's account of soft civil war suggests that appeals to unity can be absorbed into the very structure they are intended to dissolve. Any call for Papuan unity, whether issued by the ULMWP under Wenda, the rival congress under Tabuni and Haluk, a TPNPB command or a church-based network, is seen by the other factions as simply another claimant asking them to subordinate themselves to it. Such appeals are therefore as likely to entrench fragmentation as they are to dissolve it because each faction experiences the call as a loss of security, status and meaning, rather than as an obstacle to the collective. Therefore, the paradigm's deepest suggestion is not moral, but diagnostic: societies caught in soft civil war require a form of collective self-recognition before any political strategy of unification — a willingness to recognise the internal fragmentation as a battlefield in itself, without assigning blame to any single faction, when it belongs structurally to the historical process that produced the fragmentation in the first place. Fanon himself alluded to this necessity when he cautioned newly independent nations that the psychological work of decolonisation remained incomplete upon the departure of the coloniser, and that a second internal struggle against the fragmentation produced by the colonial encounter still lay ahead.⁸⁸

Finally, the paradigm invites us to reconsider what victory and defeat can mean when a conflict is recognised as having a soft-war dimension. Hard civil wars end in surrender, partition or exhaustion, while medium civil wars, if they end at all, result in either negotiated power-sharing or the gradual erosion of one faction's institutional advantage. Soft civil war, by contrast, has no analogous end point because it has no analogous adversary. If the paradigm is correct, its resolution can only take the form of a slow, generational reconstitution of trust among fragments that have learned to regard one another with the same suspicion that the original external power cultivated between them over decades — a process closer to psychological and

⁸⁷ Muhammad Chairul Ferdiant, *Upaya Diplomasi Publik Indonesia di Fora Internasional Terkait Isu Papua Merdeka* (undergraduate thesis, Universitas Sriwijaya, 2025).

⁸⁸ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (New York: Grove Press, 1963), 148–205.

spiritual repair than political negotiation, for which existing conflict resolution frameworks, built around identifiable adversaries and negotiable terms, are poorly equipped.

One candidate for what this generational reconstitution of trust might concretely involve is developed elsewhere in this research programme under the name Wonesis: not a political programme or an institution, but an orientation performing six interlocking functions — detection of the coloniser's categories operating as though they were simply reality; distinction between the unavoidable conditions of existence and the historically constructed hierarchies imposed upon them; reorientation of energy and attention towards land, kinship and living memory; preservation of what must not be lost; transmission of that inheritance between generations; and return, in whatever form remains available to a given community.⁸⁹ Applied to the soft civil war examined here, Wonesis would suggest that the reconstitution of trust cannot begin with a demand that any one faction subordinate itself to another, since that demand is precisely what each fragment already experiences as a threat. It would instead begin with a shared, cross-factional recognition that fragmentation itself — rather than any rival faction — is the condition to be diagnosed and addressed. Whether such recognition is achievable at the scale of an entire national movement, rather than at the scale of clan, family or individual return for which Wonesis has primarily been developed, remains an open question that this paper does not resolve.

IX. Limitations of the Psycho-Cosmocide Paradigm

Nothing argued here claims that every divided society is experiencing soft civil war, nor that all fragmentation within a colonised or postcolonial society originates from external actors. The West Papuan example acknowledges both internal and external factors, and readers who disagree with the balance drawn in a given instance are encouraged to focus their disagreement on the underlying historical evidence rather than the framework itself. This analytical model and the hard/medium/soft typology built on it are offered as interpretive frameworks through which certain long-term patterns of collective fragmentation may be analysed. They are not intended to be comprehensive causal theories capable of explaining every division within every society, nor are they intended to claim that soft civil war is present, or present to the same degree, wherever internal conflict occurs. As section II notes, the three ideal types in the typology are Weberian constructs rather than empirical categories with clear boundaries in the historical record. Actual cases, including the comparative examples in sections III and IV, often blend or transition between these types, and the paper attempts to acknowledge this blending rather than forcing cases into a single category where the evidence is inconclusive. Finally, the West Papuan reconstruction draws on a wide, though not exhaustive, body of English- and Indonesian-language sources and documentary and journalistic material of uneven institutional provenance. Where sources disagree, or where an author's institutional position may colour an account, this is noted. However, a fuller reconstruction, particularly one incorporating additional Papuan-language and oral historical sources, would likely refine and, in places,

⁸⁹ Yamin Kogoya, "Wonesis: Framework, Belonging, and the Antidote to Psycho-Cosmocide," *Psycho-Cosmocide Studies*, Kurumbi Wone Working Paper Series, No. 16 (2026).

revise the account offered here. Future comparative research applying the same three-part framework to other long-fragmented conflicts would appropriately test how far its explanatory power extends beyond the case examined in this paper.

X. Conclusion

This conclusion addresses four questions: what the paper has revealed, its contribution to the study of civil war, how the framework could be tested or challenged by other scholars, and the areas that remain open. Regarding the first question, it is argued that civil war is best understood as a spectrum running from the visible and total violence of hard civil war, through the institutionalised and selectively violent struggle of medium civil war, to the largely invisible psychological and civilisational fragmentation of soft civil war, rather than as a single, easily identifiable category of armed conflict. Evidence from historical events in Rwanda, Nigeria, Yugoslavia and the United States illustrates the first type, while evidence from Lebanon, Sri Lanka and Zimbabwe illustrates the second. The century-long reconstruction of Papuan fragmentation presented in Section V, together with the eight-part typology and recurring conflict lines developed in Section VI, illustrates the third type at a level of historical detail against which the paradigm has not previously been tested.

West Papua is analytically significant because it displays all three forms simultaneously. Crucially, each form operates less as a war between Papuans and Indonesia, and more as a war within Papuan society. This war is engineered, sustained or exploited by an external colonial administration, which need not fight directly so long as Papuans continue to fragment themselves. There is a hard-war dimension in the form of Indonesian military violence and demographic transformation. More recently, from 2024 to 2026, there were disputed and unresolved civilian killings. However, there is also a less visible dimension of hard war: generations of Papuan-on-Papuan violence organised along old tribal and clan lines. This violence has been preserved, not dissolved, by the Indonesian administration since well before 1963. A medium-war dimension is present in the form of a durable apparatus of legal, institutional and selective coercive containment, from the 1969 Act of Free Choice to the 2021 Special Autonomy revision and the pemekaran programme that it accelerated. The ordinary harms of this apparatus are absorbed into the vocabulary of grievance and underdevelopment, rather than being recognised as war. A soft-war dimension also exists in the chronic, century-long fragmentation of Papuan society and its resistance movement, from pre-colonial territorial plurality and the 1976 Rumkorem–Prai schism to the ongoing ULMWP split, involving organisational splits, factional feuds, denominational and tribal rivalry, competing self-declared leaders, public social media warfare and elite defection. This constitutes soft civil war in its purest documented form.

This framework posits that this third, softest form of conflict is among the most dangerous not because it is more violent, but because it is the least likely to be recognised, resisted or healed. A hard war eventually produces monuments, tribunals and textbooks, while a medium war produces treaties and power-sharing formulas that at least acknowledge the parties involved. However, a soft war produces neither of these things because its combatants do not recognise

themselves as such — each fragment of the Papuan movement sincerely believes itself to be its people's hero, warrior and guardian. Yet it is precisely this sincerity, multiplied many times over, that extinguishes the collective capacity for self-determination. A structurally similar paradox has been documented in the specifically religious register of Papuan life: the same population that gathers each Easter to proclaim the triumph of life over death simultaneously experiences the conversion of its forests into extraction zones and the erosion of its languages, without the two facts registering as contradiction — evidence that the sincerity this paper has traced through Papuan political history is not confined to political life alone.⁹⁰ The West Papuan movement has not failed to unite due to a lack of national identity among Papuans: a powerful national consciousness has survived over a century of colonial partition, six decades of Indonesian military rule, demographic transformation, political imprisonment, exile and organisational destruction. The deeper problem, as evidenced here, is that national consciousness and national government are not the same thing. Papua does not yet possess a universally accepted mechanism for converting a widely shared sense of homeland, symbol and dispossession into representative authority, constitutional succession, financial accountability, civilian protection and legitimate international representation. For West Papua, and for any people attempting to recover a coherent political destiny after prolonged external domination, the implication of this paradigm is clarifying but unsettling: the gravest danger is not only the external power that fractured the collective in the first place, but also the self-sustaining fragmentation that continues generation after generation in the wake of that power — fought by people who sincerely believe that they alone are defending the nation, while the nation itself is quietly and methodically being erased.

If this paper's argument holds true, its implications extend well beyond the Papuan case. According to this interpretation, West Papua is not an exception to ordinary political conflict, but rather an unusually well-documented example of a pattern that the analysis suggests may recur elsewhere: modern societies can fragment psychologically long before, or instead of, fragmenting militarily. The destruction of a people does not necessarily begin with weapons; it can also begin with the slow and largely undeclared reorganization of memory, legitimacy, identity and imagination, which this paper refers to as 'soft civil war'. If this typology can be applied beyond the case examined here, the struggle over collective memory, legitimacy and imagination arguably deserves to be considered alongside territory and armed force as a subject of political theory in its own right. Future comparative studies could therefore consider whether the same three-part framework could be applied to other long-term conflicts, such as those in Myanmar, Sudan, Kashmir, Palestine and Northern Ireland, where visible violence may be just one layer of a deeper, less visible conflict. Recognising this process is therefore not only specific to West Papua, but also a broader philosophical and political challenge facing any society attempting to preserve a coherent collective future under conditions of internal and external pressure.

So, what does this framework contribute to the wider study of civil war? Its main contribution is definitional: by extending the concept of civil war along a spectrum ranging from hard to

⁹⁰ Yamin Kogoya, "Easter Religious Performances in the Time of Papuan Extinction: The Gospel of Psycho-Cosmocide in West Papua," *Psycho-Cosmocide Studies*, Kurumbi Wone Working Paper Series, No. 10 (2026).

medium to soft, the paradigm provides a vocabulary for phenomena that existing datasets, which are built around battle deaths and regime change, are unable to capture. The study of civil wars has long recognised that armed conflict has institutional and psychological precursors. The contribution offered here is the stronger claim that these precursors can constitute a form of civil war in their own right, rather than merely explaining one. When applied to other colonised or postcolonial societies, the framework will be most effective where a people's political history combines deep internal plurality, externally imposed borders or governance structures, and a resistance movement fragmented by exile, geography or generational change. Plausible further tests might include the multiple governments that have periodically claimed authority in Somalia, the recurring splits within Kurdish or Sahrawi self-determination movements, or the layered loyalties of indigenous nations negotiating both internal governance and settler-state recognition elsewhere in the world. The theory can be tested and challenged in at least three ways: by showing that cases displaying the hard, medium or soft pattern are better explained by existing frameworks, such as ethnic-conflict theory or resource-competition models; by demonstrating that, once operationalised, soft civil war fails to reveal anything that ordinary institutional analysis does not; or by identifying colonised or postcolonial societies with comparably fragmented histories that do not display the psychological or organisational patterns predicted by the paradigm. Any of these outcomes would count as genuine evidence against the framework and not merely as an inconvenient case. The paper regards this openness to falsification as a strength of the approach rather than a weakness.

What remains open? The most significant unresolved question is larger than West Papua itself: how does admitting that a people can be defeated without anyone they would recognise as an enemy firing a shot at them change how we understand civil war? Conventional theory marks the end of a society's coherence as the moment when its army is defeated or its government falls. This analysis locates the end of a society's coherence earlier and more quietly: the moment a people loses the capacity to recognise its own fragmentation as a war. If this is correct, then the oldest question in the study of civil conflict — who is fighting whom, and for what — must be supplemented with another question: can a people still tell the difference between defending itself and dismantling itself? A theory of civil war that cannot answer this question with regard to the quieter wars of the twenty-first century will have little to say about how most collective destruction actually happens now.

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About the Author

Yamin Kogoya is a Papuan philosopher, writer, and independent researcher from the Central Highlands of New Guinea (West Papua), currently based in Australia.

His work investigates one of the most enduring questions of human existence: how worlds are created, transformed, and destroyed. He is the originator of the Psycho-Cosmocide paradigm, an interdisciplinary philosophical framework that examines the destruction of human worlds not only through physical violence, occupation, or ecological devastation, but through the systematic reorganisation of perception, memory, meaning, and reality itself. Within this framework, he argues that words, images, symbols, signs, colours, institutions, and technologies do not merely represent the world—they participate in creating, reorganising, and erasing the conditions through which human beings inhabit it.

Kogoya introduced the concepts of the Cosmobian World and the Synthobian World to distinguish two fundamentally different modes of human existence. The Cosmobian World refers to forms of life constituted through reciprocal relationships with land, ancestry, kinship, memory, ecology, language, and the cosmos. The Synthobian World refers to synthetic, engineered systems of existence organised through abstraction, institutions, technology, production, and civilisational processes. The relationship between these two worlds forms the central philosophical architecture of his research.

Drawing upon Indigenous cosmologies together with philosophy, anthropology, history, religion, mythology, and civilisation studies, Kogoya develops original conceptual frameworks for interpreting the contemporary human condition. His work re-examines humanity's foundational myths, epics, tragedies, religions, and philosophical traditions as enduring civilisational architectures through which societies organise reality, negotiate meaning, confront mortality, remember the past, imagine the future, and participate in their own survival or extinction. Although grounded in the historical experience of West Papua, his research addresses broader philosophical questions concerning civilisation, consciousness, memory, belonging, power, and the future of human worlds.

He holds a Master of Applied Anthropology and Participatory Development from the Australian National University. His academic background also includes Religious Studies, Indigenous Studies, and Asia-Pacific Studies, and he undertook advanced study in epistemology at the University of Oxford. His research and commentary have appeared in *SBS News*, *RNZ Pacific*, *Asia Pacific Report*, *The Fiji Times*, and *The Jakarta Post*.

Kogoya is the founder of the NATAKA Research Institute, an independent research institute dedicated to the philosophical and historical study of human worlds and the conditions under which societies survive, transform, or become extinct.

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