

A Papuan Tragedy Is More Tragic Than Tragedy

A Manifesto of Chromatic Tragedy



The Sentence

1 *A Papuan tragedy is more tragic than tragedy.*

2 *This is not a boast of suffering. It is not a claim that Papuan pain outweighs any other pain on earth. There is no scale on which human grief can be weighed against human grief.*

3 *It is a claim about structure. Every tragedy destroys a world. The Papuan tragedy destroys a world, and then destroys the eyes that could have watched that world die. It kills twice: once in the flesh, and once in the mind that might have mourned.*

4 *This manifesto names that condition: Chromatic Tragedy. Suffering dressed in every colour of the rainbow. Destruction that arrives looking like hope, and leaves looking like gratitude.*

The Theatre of Athens

5 *In ancient Athens, at the festival of Dionysus, the citizens gathered on a hillside to watch tragedy. On the stage below, kings murdered their fathers, mothers killed their children, cities burned, and gods laughed.*

6 *The audience wept. Then the play ended. The actors removed their masks. The citizens walked home through the evening streets, carrying what they had seen, and slept in houses the play had not touched.*

7 *That boundary was a mercy. The stage was not the world. The actor was not the king. The performance had an ending. The mask could be taken off. Because tragedy had edges, suffering could be seen, named, mourned, and remembered by those who survived it.*

8 *Tragedy has always held a strange dignity. Not the dignity of suffering, for there is none in suffering, but the dignity of recognition: the moment when the sufferer can still say, "This is the tragedy in which I stand."*

Oedipus, Antigone, Hamlet

9 *Oedipus killed his father and married his mother without knowing. When the truth arrived, he tore out his eyes. But the truth did arrive. He knew, at last, what had been done, and by whose hand.*

10 *Antigone knew from the beginning. She buried her brother against the king's decree, and she named the law she obeyed: a law older than kings. Her suffering had a grammar.*

11 *Hamlet questioned everything: death, betrayal, conscience, action, the meaning of being itself. His suffering nearly drowned in language, but it was never without language.*

12 *Oedipus discovers his tragedy. Antigone names hers. Hamlet interrogates his. Each of them, however broken, still stands somewhere outside the catastrophe: close enough to be destroyed, far enough to see.*

13 *Now imagine a tragedy that has taken even that place away. Imagine a tragedy that has stolen the ground beneath the witness, and then the witness.*

A Tragedy Beyond Tragedy

14 *What happens when the catastrophe does not stop at the body, the land, and the city, but enters the very language needed to name it?*

15 *What happens when the memory needed to measure the loss has been rewritten, the categories needed to judge it have been replaced, and the people who might have mourned it have been taught to celebrate it instead?*

16 *Then tragedy no longer happens to a people. It happens through them, from within them, and in their name. It speaks with their mouths. It prays with their hands. It dreams their children's dreams.*

17 *This is the condition of West Papua. Not only a people suffering inside a colonial order, but a whole world being reorganised, through school, church, office, road, language, and ballot, until Papua's destruction looks like her salvation and her funeral sounds like her wedding.*

The Colours

18 *Tragedy does not always arrive wearing the face of tragedy. In Papua, it arrives as good news.*

19 *The school arrives as enlightenment. The road arrives as development. The church arrives as salvation. The office arrives as service. The election arrives as freedom. The flag arrives as belonging. Each comes wrapped in bright colour, carrying something genuinely desired, and each is welcomed at the door by the very people it has come to unmake.*

20 *That is why the tragedy is chromatic. Its colours do not conceal because they are false. They conceal because each one carries something real: literacy, medicine, community, opportunity, hope. And behind each real good, a deeper loss walks in unseen, wearing the same smile.*

21 *The most devastating prison is the one whose walls are painted in the colours of freedom. The most terrifying heaven for the colonised Black child is the one painted white and filled with white figures, a heaven in which the child cannot find a single face like her own. The most twisted monument to progress is a Cosmobian world reduced to bones and then decorated in the colours of development.*

22 *Colour itself is not the enemy. Papuan worlds blaze with their own colours: feathers, clays, flowers, painted bodies, the endless greens of the forest. The tragedy is not colour. It is colour enlisted to make a funeral look like a festival, so that the mourners dance and never know whose body lies in the coffin.*

Celebration and Catastrophe

23 *In Chromatic Tragedy, celebration and catastrophe happen in the same place, at the same time, through the same institutions, and often from the same lips.*

24 *A road is opened with speeches while ancestral land is quietly reorganised around extraction. A graduation is celebrated while the language of the graduate's grandmother stops being passed on. A church is dedicated while the sacred mountain behind it falls silent. The ribbon is cut, and somewhere a thread to the ancestors is cut with it.*

25 *A civilisation measures what its institutions were built to count. A road can be measured in kilometres, a school in graduates, an election in turnout, a programme in money spent. But who measures a language that dies with its last speaker? Who counts the place names that vanished, the ancestral authority that withered, the sacred ground that became a quarry?*

26 *What cannot be counted is treated as if it never existed. And so the celebrations are recorded, and the catastrophe is not. The archive fills with ribbons and photographs, and the dead leave no receipt.*

27 *There may be a genuine school and a genuine loss; a genuine road and a genuine invasion; a genuine church and a genuine cosmic displacement. Recognition begins only when the first truth no longer blinds us to the second.*

The Four Collapsed Separations

28 *In Athens, four walls held tragedy in place. In Papua, all four have fallen.*

29 *The stage has become the land. There is no hillside from which to watch. The valleys, the coasts, the forests, the cities: all of Papua is the stage, and there is nowhere left to stand outside her.*

30 *The actor has become the person. No one steps out of the role at the end of the night. The teacher, the official, the convert, the soldier, the elected representative: each lives inside a part that was written elsewhere, and calls it a life.*

31 *Performance time has become generational time. The play has run for more than sixty years. The actors who began it are dead. Their children were born on stage. Their grandchildren have never seen the curtain, and do not know that curtains exist.*

32 *The mask has become the face. It is no longer worn over consciousness. It has grown into it and taken root in the bone. When Papuans look in the mirror, the eyes that look back have been shaped by the mask; they search the glass for a face that has already been replaced.*

The Child Born Mid-Performance

33 *A Papuan child is born into a drama already in progress. The language of advancement is already Indonesian. The white heaven is already imported. The map is already drawn. The history is already written. Even the lullaby has been translated.*

34 *The child does not see the play begin. They have no seat in the audience, no memory of the world before the stage was built. They inherit the script as if it were simply reality, and learn their lines before they learn their ancestors' names.*

35 *What one generation suffered as invasion, the next inherits as environment. What was once a foreign command becomes a familiar routine. What was once imposed becomes desired. And what is desired becomes the dream that parents pass to their children, out of love.*

36 *This is the cruelty of inheritance: the tragedy no longer needs to be imposed. It is bequeathed. It is handed down like an heirloom, wrapped in tenderness, and received with thanks.*

The Puppet That Moves Itself

37 *In the Javanese shadow theatre, the wayang, a puppet dances on the screen while the dalang, the master, moves it from behind. The audience sees the figure. The hand that moves it stays in the dark.*

38 *Colonial power began like this: the visible figure, the hidden hand. Territory seized, languages ranked, curricula imposed, borders drawn, soldiers waiting behind every institution.*

39 *But a puppet cannot learn its role. It cannot desire the script, anticipate the next movement, or teach the dance to its children. Human beings can. That is where the metaphor breaks, and where the true horror begins.*

40 *The script has travelled inward, into aspiration, judgement, and identity, and outward, through schools, churches, offices, and families. The hand of the dalang can withdraw, and the performance goes on. This is the Civilisational Psycho-Cosmocide Virus: a pattern that no longer needs its original carrier to keep reproducing. Papua, the host, now breeds it, feeds it, and defends it as her own.*

41 *Papuans are not puppets. That is precisely the tragedy. Their faith, their love, their ambition, their sense of duty, all the most human things in them, can become the strings through which an inherited order moves itself. The strings are not tied to their wrists. They are woven through their hearts.*

42 *The Lani already knew this danger: 'Nit Ap Yi Ti Kugi Aret'. We human beings ourselves can become Kugi. The destroyer does not always come from outside. Sometimes the destroyer is trained, decorated, and promoted from within, and is buried with honours by the very people he destroyed.*

The Sincere Participants

43 *If the tragedy were run only by villains, it would be easy to see. Point at the enemy. Resist the enemy. Done.*

44 *But Chromatic Tragedy runs on sincerity. Sincerity is its fuel, its camouflage, and its alibi.*

45 *The teacher sincerely wants the children to succeed. The pastor sincerely comforts the grieving. The official sincerely delivers services. The politician sincerely believes that a seat in parliament can help their people. The parent sincerely sends a child away to school, towards a better life.*

46 *None of them is lying. And still, through their honest labour, a world they love is being replaced by another. They build the coffin with tears in their eyes, believing it is a cradle.*

47 *This is the unbearable truth: good intentions do not decide what a structure does. Love can carry the virus. Faith can carry it. Hope can carry it. And the more sincere the participant, the harder the tragedy is to see.*

The Broken Detector

48 *A forest can be recognised as destroyed only by someone who knows what a forest was. A language can be mourned only by someone who knows what it carried. A sacred place can be violated only in the eyes of someone for whom it is still sacred.*

49 *That capacity to compare is the detection mechanism of a people. It lives in language, ancestral memory, land, cosmology, ritual, oral history, and the old judgements about what must be kept and what must be resisted.*

50 *Chromatic Tragedy aims at the detector itself. It does not need Papuans to forget. It needs only memory and meaning to come apart. Papuans can remember that the road was built, that the mission arrived, that the mine opened, and still read every one of those events as progress.*

51 *The event survives. Its meaning dies. And so destruction becomes development, displacement becomes opportunity, cosmological loss becomes salvation, and political containment becomes participation. The alarm has not been switched off. It has been rewired to ring in celebration.*

The Eight Removals

52 *The removal of the Papuan world is carried out in eight dimensions at once.*

53 *Cosmological removal cuts the threads between land, ancestors, and sacred geography. Metaphysical removal repaints being itself, until blackness means darkness and holiness means white. Conceptual removal replaces Papuan ideas of land, authority, and justice with foreign ones.*

54 *Linguistic removal silences the tongues that carried those ideas. Historical removal rewrites the past. Eschatological removal colonises the future, so that even the Papuan heaven is imported. Epistemological removal hands authority over knowledge to strangers.*

55 *And mental, perceptual, and semiotic removal completes the work: the moment when all of this begins to feel normal. Here the knife disappears into the wound, and the wound learns to call itself skin.*

56 *Papua's ancestral world is weakened, and the tools her people need to recognise that weakening are removed at the same time. That is the deepest wound of all: a wound that removes the nerve that would have felt it.*

The Paradox of Papuan Extinction

57 *Here is the paradox that makes a Papuan tragedy more tragic than tragedy.*

58 *Individual advancement can rise while the collective world collapses. More graduates. More officials. More churches. More Papuans in parliament. More roads, more phones, more programmes. And at the same time, fewer speakers of the old languages, fewer sacred places still honoured, less land still held, thinner threads between the living and the dead.*

59 *Papuans can remain physically present, educated, Christian, represented, and employed, and still be going extinct as a world. The census counts them, and does not notice that they are vanishing.*

60 *For extinction is not only the death of bodies. It is the death of the relationships through which a people remain themselves: to land, to language, to ancestors, to memory, to the future. Papua can die as a world while her people go on living inside the ruins, and call the ruins home.*

The Cost of Seeing

61 *Recognition is still possible. It survives wherever memory survives, wherever a grandmother still speaks the old tongue, wherever land still speaks through ancestral relationship, wherever the promises of the imposed order break too often to be believed.*

62 *But recognition has a price.*

63 *To see Chromatic Tragedy is to watch the meaning of your own life rearrange itself before your eyes. The education that gave you dignity may also have taught you to despise your grandmother's wisdom. The faith that comforted you may also have helped to silence the ancestors. The career that fed your children may also have administered the dispossession of your people.*

64 *This is what recognition costs: it rewrites your biography backwards. Every achievement turns its face to you and shows you its other side. Oedipus tore out his eyes when he saw. The Papuan who sees must keep their eyes open, and go on living inside the very world they now recognise.*

65 *Recognition opens a dangerous interval between worlds. The old world has lost its innocence. The new world has not yet been built. Some who stand in that interval turn to grief, some to bitterness, some to endless critique. Clarity without capacity can become another kind of paralysis, another cage, this time with a window.*

Recognition Is Not Yet Freedom

66 *To name the theatre is not to leave it. To see the script is not to stop performing it. To recognise the mask is not to recover the face that existed before it.*

67 *The walls of this theatre are not made of ideas alone. They are made of salaries, laws, diplomas, roads, documents, churches, offices, borders, markets, languages, and generations of dependency. Papuans can see clearly and still have no school, no economy, no archive, no institution of their own through which another world could live.*

68 *The mind can cross a threshold that the world has not yet crossed. That gap between consciousness and capacity is where the next tragedy waits, unless it is filled.*

Wonesis: Leaving the Theatre

69 *Chromatic Tragedy begins when the imposed world becomes indistinguishable from life itself. Wonesis begins the moment that indistinguishability breaks.*

70 *Wonesis is not a rescue. No saviour is coming: no foreign government, no perfect ideology, no heroic leader, no heaven descending. Solidarity matters, and help from outside can be precious. But no outsider can become a people's language, memory, land, kinship, or authority. Only Papuans can carry their own world.*

71 *Wonesis is not a replacement performance. It is not enough to swap the actors: Papuan faces in place of Indonesian ones, Black saints in place of white ones, local officials running the same machine. A Papuan cast can still perform a script that destroys Papua. The question is not who plays the role. It is what world the role reproduces.*

72 *Wonesis is the recovery of ground: a place to stand outside the theatre, even while living inside it. Not a pure past, for none remains, but a ground of judgement. It is the moment when the school can still teach but no longer defines all knowledge; the church can still pray but no longer owns the whole cosmos; the state can still govern but no longer authors reality.*

73 *And that ground begins with land. Land that feeds the body, carries the ancestors, holds the language, names the people, and waits for the unborn. To recover land is not only to win a title deed. It is to recover the authority to say what land is, before anyone decides what it is for.*

74 *This is not nihilism, and it is not despair. It is responsibility: for the language that must be spoken again, the memory that must be taught again, the land that must be held, the children who must be raised as Ap and not as Ap-ap. It is survival, not as mere breathing, but as the refusal to let Papua die while her people are still alive.*

The Curtain

75 *The tragedy of Athens ended when the actors left the stage. The Papuan tragedy has no curtain. It will end only when Papuans remember that the stage is a stage, that the script was written by others, and that the mask is not their face.*

76 The deepest tragedy is not that Papua's Cosmobian world is being destroyed. It is that the faculties through which her people might recognise that destruction are being destroyed with it. The crime and the witness are being buried in the same grave.

77 But a faculty that can be destroyed can also be restored. A language can be spoken again. A mountain can be named again. A child can be told again who her ancestors were.

78 Let the colours fall away. Let the festival be seen for the funeral it hides. Let the Papuan people step off the stage, onto their own land, and look upon their tragedy with their own eyes.

79 Then, for the first time in more than sixty years, the tragedy will have a witness. And a tragedy that has a witness is no longer the end of the story. It is the first line of another.

The views expressed in the words of this manifesto are personal, reflective, and diagnostic rather than declarations of settled truth — a reading of the human condition through the Psycho-Cosmocide lens, offered to provoke thought and questioning rather than to close it.

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