

The Blind Kings of Papua

A Psycho-Cosmocide Manifesto for the Tokoh and the Resistance Leader



The Sentence

1 Papua is Thebes, and Thebes is dying. She is dying slowly, beautifully, in full view of her kings, and they call her dying a season of progress.

2 And the king who stands before the dying city, swearing on his life to find the cause of her suffering, is himself the cause he cannot see. He is searching for the knife with the knife still in his hand.

3 This manifesto is written for the kings of Papua: the Tokoh, who sits on the throne the empire built for him, and the resistance leader, who sits on the throne his suffering people built for him out of their hope and their dead. Both are crowned, loved, and feared. And both are blind.

4 It is not written to hate them. It is written to hold up the oldest mirror in the world before their faces, because a king who will not look into that mirror will lead his whole city into extinction.

The Plague on Thebes

5 When Oedipus Rex begins, Thebes is already dying. The crops are blighted in the fields. The herds sicken in the pastures. The women labour and deliver the dead. Smoke from the funeral pyres and incense from the temples hang together over the city like one long prayer that no god answers, and the people crowd the palace steps, begging their king to save them.

6 Look at Papua and see the same city. Her forests are sold by the hectare. Her rivers run grey with tailings. Her villages empty as the soldiers come, and her people live as refugees in the bush or as strangers in someone else's town. The young drown in alcohol and despair. The children of exile grow up fatherless and motherless. Billions are poured in, and her people grow poorer. Settlers multiply, and Papuans grow fewer. The ancestors fall silent, and the tongues go with them, one grandmother at a time, until a Papuan child opens her mouth and the empire's language falls out.

7 This is the plague. It does not arrive with a single scream. It arrives as a slow forgetting, so gradual that each generation of Papuans mistakes the ruins they inherit for the natural shape of the world. And like the Thebans, Papuans crowd the steps of their leaders, the governors, regents, pastors, presidents, commanders, and diplomats, and cry: save us.

The Riddle and the Throne

8 Oedipus did not seize his throne by force. He earned it. A monster, the Sphinx, was strangling Thebes, devouring all who could not answer her riddle. Oedipus answered it. The monster died, the city was freed, and the grateful Thebans gave him their crown, their widowed queen, and their love. They did not know that in crowning their saviour they were crowning their plague.

9 He was the cleverest man in Greece. He was famous and adored. He believed, with good reason, that there was no riddle he could not solve and no crisis he could not master. That belief was his genius. It was also the blindfold he tied with his own hands.

10 Papua's leaders also earned their crowns. The Tokoh solved the empire's riddle: he learned its language, passed its examinations, mastered its offices, and climbed its ladders until his people said of him, with wonder, 'dia sudah jadi manusia': he has become human. Hear what lies buried inside that praise: before the empire crowned him, he was not human. The resistance leader solved a harder riddle: he faced the colonial guns, endured prison, survived exile, and gave his life to the cause until his people saw in him Papua herself.

11 Both are clever, brave, and sincere. And here is the terror at the heart of tragedy: the very gift that won the throne is the gift that will destroy the city. The mind that solved the riddle is the mind that cannot solve itself. This is the essence of the tragic hero, the tragic king.

The Vow of the King

12 Oedipus stands before his people and makes a great vow. The oracle has declared that the plague will not lift until the murderer of the old king Laius is found and driven out. So Oedipus curses the unknown killer. He swears to hunt him down as though avenging his own father. He forbids every citizen to shelter him, to speak to him, to let him near the altars.

13 It is magnificent, it is righteous, and it is the speech of a great king. And every word of the curse is a stone thrown straight up into the sky, and every stone will fall on his own head.

14 For Oedipus is the murderer. He is the pollution. The city is dying because of him, and he is the only man in Thebes who cannot see it. The hunter and the hunted wear the same face, and the face is his.

15 Papua's kings make the same vow. They stand on platforms, at inaugurations, at rallies, in pulpits, at summits abroad, and swear to find and drive out the cause of Papua's suffering. The cause, they say, is Jakarta, the military, the settlers, the companies, the rival faction, the traitor, the infiltrator.

16 Some of this is true. The empire is real, the guns are real, and the graves are real. But there is one place the king never looks, because everything he has been taught directs his eyes away from it: his own throne. Psycho-Cosmocide does its finest work not where the king is watching, but in the one place he has been trained never to look.

The Crossroads

17 Long before he came to Thebes, at a place where three roads meet, the young Oedipus met an old man in a chariot. They quarrelled over who should give way. Pride met pride on the narrow road. Oedipus struck him down, killed nearly everyone with him, and walked on, never knowing that the old man bleeding in the dust was his own father.

18 Papua's leaders have met at that crossroads again and again, and the dust there has never dried.

19 In 1971, two commanders of the Free Papua Movement together proclaimed the Republic of West Papua. Within a few years they had split into rival commands. It was one of the movement's deepest wounds, and it became a template: every generation since has come to the crossroads, and no one has given way.

20 Armed against unarmed. Highland against coast. Elders against the young. Diaspora against homeland. Chief against commander, church against party. And in 2023, a single movement produced two rival leaderships, each invoking the same constitution against the other, like two sons tearing their father's will in half over his open grave.

21 Each leader walks on from the crossroads believing he has defended Papua's honour. He does not know that the one he struck down on the road was the father of the very nation he claims to lead. He goes home and mourns the dead the enemy has made, never recognising among them the ones his own pride has killed.

The Blind Prophet

22 Oedipus summons the blind prophet Tiresias to name the murderer. Tiresias refuses at first, because he knows the truth will be unbearable. When the king rages at him, the prophet finally speaks: you are the murderer you are looking for.

23 And Oedipus, the cleverest man in Greece, the solver of riddles, cannot hear it. He mocks the old man's blindness. He calls him a fraud and a traitor. He decides that Tiresias has been bribed, that his own brother-in-law Creon is plotting to steal his throne, that the truth is a conspiracy against him. The cleverer the mind, the more brilliant the walls it builds against what it cannot bear to know.

24 Tiresias answers him with the most terrible line in the play: you have your eyesight, and you cannot see the evil you are in.

25 Papua has her own Tiresias figures: the elder who warns, the writer who diagnoses, the young critic who names the mechanism while it is still at work. And again and again they are treated as Oedipus treated Tiresias. They are called

jealous, divisive, disloyal, paid by the enemy. The diagnostician is treated as the disease. The one who cries fire is arrested for arson.

26 This is the deepest inversion of all. When a colonised people come to fear their own truth-tellers more than the system that is killing them, the empire no longer needs to silence anyone. The king will do it for the empire, in the name of the nation, and his people will applaud the silence as loyalty. The cage has learned to lock itself.

The Stage of Rage

27 Watch Oedipus in the middle of the play. He shouts and threatens. He accuses Creon of treason and demands his death. The nearer the truth comes, the louder he grows, the faster he acts, the more certain he becomes. Certainty is the last fortress of a mind that is about to fall.

28 Watch Papua's kings on their new stage: the screen. Every night they gather there, presidents, commanders, diplomats, activists, and every night the accusations fly. The rival is exposed. The traitor is named. The grievance is published before the rally, before the lobbying trip, before sleep. The glow of the screen lights each face from below, like a mask in an ancient tragedy, and behind every mask the same wound bleeds.

29 No council judges these quarrels. No elders settle them. They end unresolved, and every king goes to bed vindicated, having handed his enemy the most valuable weapon of all: a map of exactly where the movement is cracked.

30 The empire watches, takes notes, and waits. It does not need to split the resistance. The kings are splitting it for free, with their own hands, in their own language, under their own flag.

The Bed of Power

31 The final horror of Oedipus is that he has married his own mother. Without knowing it, he has taken into his bed the queen whose body gave him life, and he has ruled from that bed as king. The children he fathered are also his brothers and sisters. The order of the world has folded in upon itself.

32 Hear the Papuan version of this horror, and do not look away. The land is the mother. Every Papuan is born of her: of her mountains, her rivers, her forests, her dead. And the throne of the Tokoh is built on top of her body.

33 The governor's budget comes from her forests, sold. The regent's office stands on her ground, surveyed and partitioned. The development he cuts the ribbon for is the mine in her belly, the plantation on her skin, the road through her heart. He lies in the bed of power, and the bed is made from the mother who bore him. Every signature is an embrace. Every embrace is a violation he has been taught to call service.

34 He does not know. That is the tragedy. He believes he is serving his people. He believes he has become human. He does not know whose body he is lying on, and when she groans beneath him, he hears applause.

Through Them, Via Them, From Them, With Them, In Them

35 Now hear the secret that turns this tragedy into something worse than tragedy.

36 In Sophocles, the plot was written by the gods. No human hand designed Oedipus's fall. In Papua, the plot has an author. The empire did not need to become fate. It needed only to write the script, build the stage, and hand the leading role to Papuan kings, so that when the curtain falls, the audience will blame the actors and never ask who wrote the play.

37 Through them, the empire rules: through the Papuan governor, the Papuan regent, the Papuan police chief, the Papuan pastor who blesses the state.

38 Via them, the empire speaks: in Papuan voices, with Papuan faces, so that every decree sounds like the will of Papua's own people.

39 From them, the empire draws its legitimacy: every Papuan signature on every permit, every Papuan seat at every table, is held up to the world as proof that Papua consents to her own disappearance.

40 With them, the empire divides: it funds one leader against another, elevates one clan over another, feeds one faction and starves the next, and lets the kings do the fighting, and the burying.

41 In them, the empire lives: in their language, their ambitions, their idea of success, their very imagination of what freedom would look like. This is the final dwelling of Psycho-Cosmocide. The coloniser does not stand outside the king. The coloniser has moved into the king's mind, unpacked its furniture, hung its portraits on his walls, and now answers to his name. When the king says I, it is the empire that speaks.

42 Through them, via them, from them, with them, in them. The empire needs no Sphinx at the gate. It has Papuan kings on the throne, and they guard the gate better than any monster could, because no one thinks to fear them.

The Kings Who Cannot Recognise

43 And yet even Oedipus was granted one mercy, and it is a mercy Papua's kings may never receive.

44 At the end of the play, Oedipus learns the truth. The shepherd confesses. The pieces fall into place. In one blinding moment, the king sees what he has done. The Greeks called this anagnorisis: recognition. It is the most terrible moment in tragedy, and also the only door out of it. A man who has recognised his crime can mourn it, confess it, pay for it, and set the city free.

45 Papua's kings may be denied even this. For the empire has not only written the plot. It has supplied the eyes with which the kings would read it: the language in which they think, the history they were taught, the categories of success and progress through which they judge themselves. How does a man recognise his blindness when the only lamp he has been given was made by the one who blinded him? He raises the lamp to search for the truth, and its light falls everywhere except on the hand that holds it.

46 This is Chromatic Tragedy. The kings are not blinded by darkness. They are blinded by colour: by development, education, religion, office, and recognition, each one a real good, together so dazzling that the destruction behind them cannot be seen. Oedipus's truth was hidden, then revealed. Papua's truth is hidden behind so much light that the king may die without ever seeing it, buried with honours and eulogised as a builder, while Papua, whom he helped to bury, goes unmourned.

Wounded Time

47 Oedipus could recognise his crime because he had a past to recognise it against, a present in which to grieve it, and a future in which to atone for it.

48 The Papuan king has been robbed of all three. His past has been rewritten by others. His present is held under permanent suspicion. His future has been scheduled by a calendar he did not write. Past and future have collapsed into the present like a flash flood, and every moment arrives screaming that it is the last minute.

49 So the king acts in panic and calls it urgency. He seizes the throne because he cannot imagine a tomorrow in which someone else might hold it well. He chases a destiny that is not a place, because it was never rooted in anything his own people planted, built, or named. He runs and runs, and the ground beneath his feet is a treadmill the empire built.

50 A king without a timeline cannot recognise his error, because an error needs a timeline in order to be seen as one. Without yesterday, there is no mistake. Without tomorrow, there is no repentance. There is only the burning now, and in the burning now every king is innocent and every city is ash.

The Chorus Weeps

51 In Greek tragedy, the chorus is the people. They do not rule. They do not choose. They watch, plead, and warn, and in the end they bear the consequences of the king's blindness in their own bodies.

52 Papuans are the chorus. They have stood in the rain at the rallies. They have buried their children. They have sheltered the fighters and fed the delegations. They have voted, prayed, marched, and waited, decade after decade, for a king who would finally save them.

53 And they have watched the kings fall, one after another: absorbed by Jakarta, broken by rivals, exhausted in exile, buried in foreign soil, replaced by the next king, who climbs the same throne, makes the same vow, and walks with the same proud step towards the same crossroads.

54 *The chorus of Oedipus Rex ends with a warning: count no one happy until they have passed beyond life free of pain. Papua's chorus has learned something harsher: count no king a saviour until Papua is alive.*

Two Kings, One Blindness

55 *Do not think that one of these kings is wicked and the other pure. The Tokoh is captured by incorporation. The resistance leader is captured by fragmentation. One is swallowed by the system he serves; the other is torn apart by the struggle against it. They look like opposites. They are two halves of one wound, and they share one blindness.*

56 *Both believe that Papua's survival depends on their own throne. Both search everywhere for the cause of the plague except in the structure of their own power. Both have been given, by the empire, a stage on which their pride can play out in public while Papua dies quietly behind the scenery.*

57 *And neither is a villain in the simple sense. Most are sincere. Most love their people. That is precisely what makes this a tragedy and not a crime story. But hear this clearly: constraint is not innocence. A king who was blinded is still responsible for where he leads his people. Blindness explains the fall. It does not excuse the refusal to listen to Tiresias.*

The Self-Blinding

58 *When Oedipus finally sees the truth, Jocasta, his mother and his wife, has already hanged herself. He tears the golden brooches from her robe and drives them into his own eyes, again and again. He who would not see is now as blind in body as he was in mind. And he begs to be cast out of Thebes, so that the city may live.*

59 *This is the hardest lesson of the play, and the most hopeful. The plague does not lift when the king wins. It lifts when the king steps down from the throne of his own certainty and accepts that the city matters more than the crown.*

60 *Papua does not ask her leaders to blind themselves. She asks something harder: that they open their eyes. That they look at their own thrones. That they ask what their power is built on, whose land lies beneath it, whose script they are reciting, and which crossroads they have soaked with the blood of their pride.*

Beyond the Saviour King

61 *The final truth of this manifesto is this: Papua will not be saved by a better king.*

62 *Every time Papuans pour all their hope into one leader, a perfect president, a perfect commander, a perfect prophet, a perfect patron abroad, they repeat the plague. The structure survives while the heroes are celebrated, compromised, rejected, and replaced. Papua waits for the next Oedipus, and the next Oedipus climbs the same blind throne. The saviour is the plague's favourite disguise.*

63 *Papua must stop waiting for the king who solves every riddle. She must build what no single king can carry: councils that can judge a quarrel before it reaches the screen, elders whose word binds the commanders, institutions that outlive their founders, schools in the ancestral tongues, land that is held in common and cannot be sold by any single signature. This is Wonesis: not a greater hero, but a world strong enough to survive without one.*

The Inversions

64 *Where the king vows to find the enemy outside, let him first search inside his own throne.*

65 *Where the king mocks the blind prophet, let him bow his head and listen, though every word cuts.*

66 *Where kings meet at the crossroads, let one of them give way, and let that be counted the greater courage.*

67 *Where the king fights his rivals on the screen at night, let him settle his quarrel before the elders by day.*

68 *Where the king lies in the bed of power, let him ask whose body it was made from, and let him rise.*

69 *Where the empire rules through him, via him, from him, with him, and in him, let him refuse to be the instrument, even if it costs him the crown.*

70 *Where Papuans wait for a saviour king, let them become a people who no longer need one.*

The Question

71 For sixty years Papua has asked: who will lead us to freedom?

72 That question has produced king after king, grave after grave, and the plague has not lifted.

73 The deeper question is this:

What kind of people must Papua become, so that the blindness of her kings can no longer destroy her?

74 A people whose survival depends on the sight of one king will always be at the mercy of that king's blindness. A people who see for themselves cannot be led into the dark.

Open Your Eyes

75 To every Tokoh: you solved the empire's riddle. Now solve your own. Look at what your throne stands on. Ask whose script you are reciting. Ask whose voice speaks when you say I. You were told you had become human. Become Papuan again.

76 To every resistance leader: you faced the guns, the prisons, and the long exile. Now face something harder: the rival you will not forgive, the elder you will not hear, the crossroads where you will not give way. The enemy is counting on your pride. Do not let your courage become the empire's most loyal servant.

77 To the people of Papua: do not only crowd the palace steps. Do not only weep on the stage. Become Tiresias. Speak the truth to every king, and protect those who speak it.

78 In his old age, as another play tells it, the blind and wandering Oedipus came at last to a grove near Athens and died there in peace. The gods declared that his grave would protect the city that sheltered him. The king who had brought a plague upon one city became, in the end, a blessing upon another, because he had finally seen.

79 Let every Papuan king choose that ending while there is still a Papua left to bless.

80 Let the kings open their eyes. Let the chorus find its voice. And let Thebes, who is Papua, rise from her funeral fires and live.

The views, words, and ideas expressed in 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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