

Dani tribe of new guinea history essay



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Irian Jaya or West Papua, as it is now called, is the “ western half of the island of New Guinea”(Papua, 2008, p. 1). The capital is Jayapura. The eastern half of the island is called Papua. The island of New Guinea came under Indonesian rule in 1969 where it remains today. There is a central mountain range that runs east to west across the island. The coastal lowlands are swampland. There is ample water from rivers and lakes throughout the province. The “ climate is a warm and humid” 66-82 degrees Fahrenheit all year (Western New Guinea, 2008, p. 1). There are tropical rainforest and many edible plants, birds, and small game for hunting. The island’s indigenous population consists of hundreds of tribes with as many languages (Papua, 2008, p. 1). The Balium Valley is centrally located in the midst of the central mountain range. This valley is where the Dani people live (Papua, 2008).

When Karl Heider first visited the Dani in 1961, their traditions had not changed significantly since the Stone Age. Men still wore nothing but a Koteka, a dried gourd used to cover the penis. Women wore skirts of “ braided cord” (Heider, 1997, p. 60) that were wrapped and knotted around them and large knotted nets suspended by a head strap. These nets were used to carry most anything such as foodstuff, piglets, and their babies. Pigs were the most valuable property of the Dani and the women tended to them along with their children. The men of the village slept together in one large hut while the women slept together with their children in separate quarters. Sweet potatoes were particularly important to Dani subsistence. Heider reported at least 70 names used in Dani vocabulary for the tuber (Heider, 1972). Sweet potatoes were cultivated in raised garden mounds or terraces

surrounded by ditches for drainage and irrigation. The gardens were primarily managed by the woman. The pigs are used to prepare the soil for planting by turning it over, much like pigs are used to look for truffles in France and Italy. Their waste provides fertilizer. Weeding and harvesting is done by the women in a casual unplanned way. In other words, the gardens are attended on no apparent time table without any regard as to whose plot is being tended. That is to say, when Dani woman are out and about performing their daily chores they will stop here and there to give whatever attention is needed to whichever plot needs it. Times spent on a plot are related to what needs to be done rather than on a set daily schedule. Harvesting is performed in a similar manner where women will harvest “sweet potatoes ... from any one garden area every day or two over a period of several weeks” (Heider, 1972, p. 222). When that garden is exhausted, they will move on to another plot. This seems almost like a form of planned foraging. Women are important to the Dani society for the work they can do in the gardens, for childrearing, and for the alliances that can be made with a marriage however they have no power to make decisions. Men trade pigs, sweet potatoes, shells, jao stones to the woman’s family for his bride. Men practice polygyny whenever they can afford to. This can take fifteen years or more before a Dani man is established enough to take a second wife (). In Dani society, men and women sleep in separate quarters and abstain from sex for several years after the birth of each child. The children sleep in the woman’s lodging. The Dani leadership is based on achieved status where there may be one or more ‘big men’ in a family group. The status is based on their ability to convince others to do something and their past achievements as a warrior. In 2001 Woman can still be seen wearing grass

skirts and one or more string bags that are hung from their foreheads (Sims, 2001).

Today old men still favor the Koteka or penis gourd and prefer wearing this over the short pants that the Indonesian government would prefer them to wear. The younger Dani men continue to wear the Koteka only for ceremonial events and consider Dani traditions backward. Women are more likely to be found in dirty ragged cloth skirts than their traditional grass skirts.

This practice has since been outlawed by the Indonesian government

Under an agreement with the Indonesian government, Freeport-McMoran Copper and Gold Inc. was given a 30 year exclusive mining license in the region. This was the beginning of a close relationship between Freeport and the Indonesian military. To clear the way for the mine, the Amunge tribes and Kamoro tribes were forcibly removed from their ancestral lands. When the tribal leaders consented to Freeport coming in they did not realize that Freeport was going to destroy their beautiful “ Earth Mother” (). Because Freeport mining is the “ largest corporate taxpayer” they are allowed to operate with impunity. The Grasburg mine is the largest open pit gold mine in the world (Benedetti). With billions of dollars at stake, Freeport can overcome nearly any opposition to their mining practices. This has allowed Freeport to get away with polluting the rivers and causing extensive damage to the native rainforest. The pollution is so bad that the Komoro has been forbidden to eat their usual diet of sago palm and rain barrels have been distributed to catch rainwater for drinking (). Most of the fish have died from

high levels of copper in the rivers. Freeport has repeatedly been accused of using their security force and the Indonesian military to suppress opposition by indigenous people by using violence when necessary. Violent outbreaks have resulted in torture and in some cases the death of tribal members at the hands of the security forces (Soodhalter, 2000).

Foreign companies own logging rights to the forest. The Indonesian government is has a plan to clear the native rainforest and plant Oil Palm plantation to produce bio-fuels for export (Collins, 2008).

This past March the Indonesian government published a “ plan to develop a food estate in Papua” (IRIN, 2010, p. 1). There is fierce opposition to the plan because it is thought that there will be damage to the environment and to the small native farmers who can barely make a living selling their crops without the competition of a large plantation. The food produced would not be affordable for indigenous people and they would no longer have access to the land to grow their own. This would result in starvation.

In 1949 Indonesia gained independence from the Netherlands and attempted to claim West Papua as part of it's nation. In 1952 the Netherlands began to prepare Dutch New Guinea for independence as it's own nation. A council was formed that would implement independence by 1971. Indonesia had made repeated claims to the province and by 1962 they had began to fight to gain control of Dutch New Guinea by launching invasions to the island. The US feared that Indonesia would become communist and convinced the Netherlands to give up their plan to make Dutch New Guinea an independence nation and surrender the island to Indonesia. By August 1962,

the Netherlands surrendered West New Guinea to Indonesia. The agreement made during the turnover was that the UN would conduct an “ Act of Free Choice” vote. The US Ambassador advised the State Department that the native Papuans were not literate enough to vote and that an election “ rigged” by the Indonesian government would be proffered (Simpson, 2004, p. 7). For a month before the vote, the Indonesian government detained a large group of Papuan tribal leaders. They threatened the head men at gunpoint to vote to keep Indonesian rule. The international witnesses that were supposed to witness the fairness of the vote left before most of the votes were cast allowing the Indonesians to fix the results in their favor. This allowed the Indonesians to annex West Papua in August 1969. To weaken the indigenous people, the new government imported 1. 2 million Javanese and Sumatran immigrants. This created conflict with indigenous West Papuan people who fear their culture is being wiped out and has made them “ a minority in their own land” (Benedetti, 2005, p. 1). The Indonesian Minister of Transmigration when speaking of his government’s goal put it this way: “ the different ethnic groups will ...disappear because of integration, and there will be one kind of man” (Benedetti, 2005, p. 2). Indonesian migrants are encouraged to cut trees and plant rice which is their staple food. Removing rainforest trees has caused the soil to erode making it impossible for the Dani and other tribes to continue to grow their subsistence crops (Benedetti, 2005). The Indonesian soldiers quash any uprising and have killed an estimated 1/6th of the population (Reed, 2004).

The Indonesians have not bothered to understand the Dani culture and environment. The Dani are used to controlling their own affairs and do easily

recognize external rule (O'Brian, 1964, p. 282). During the early 70's Under "Operation Penis Gourd" the Indonesian government tried to discourage the Koteka and encourage them to wear shorts and shirts to make them look "more modern". They might have been more successful with the Indonesian sarung or Lungi. Western clothing is required in all government buildings and schools.

When Christian missionaries came to the Baliem vally they saw the Dani as being deceitful and untrustworthy heathens whose souls were not capable of being saved. . When they tried to convert them the Dani attempted to apply the Bible stories to legends of their own culture. To break the connection to their native beliefs, the missionaries did their best to convince the Dani that the jao stones are evil. These polished stones were used as currency to purchase brides. Dani men liked to view the stones and handle them much like worry beads in other cultures. Over time the missionaries convinced the Dani that their beliefs were inferior.

In the 1950's the missionaries tried to force local men to wear shorts.

In a New York Times article, the " chairman of the anthropology department at the University of Cenderawasih" (Sims, 2001, p. 1) is quoted as saying, " the Dani are being taught that these customs are sinful or that they are uncivilized and an embarrassment" (Sims, 2001, p. 1). " Many oral traditions, including village histories, songs and dances that have been passed down for generations could be lost" (Sims, 2001, p. 1).

This once proud band of warriors has not become a tourist attraction for foreigners that want to see a few Stone Age savages in their natural habitat. Tours are run into the

After the birth of their children couples abstained from sexual relations for approximately five years. The Dani practiced polygyny with most men having more than one wife. The Dani were still occasional warriors which led to a society where there could often be more women than men. When family members died, Dani woman would have a part of one of their fingers cut off in memory of the deceased.