

Chapter 6

The West Papua Imagined Community: A Bondless Plural Society

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Abstract This study discusses the architecture of the society of West Papua (region) in Indonesia and explores how modernisation, democracy, and conflict shape its identity formation. The study challenges previous studies on West Papua that portray the society as homogeneous and tribal. It proposes that contemporary West Papua's society is also characterised by multiethnicity. Further, this study suggests that a new phenomenon of a divided society is factual in West Papua, and the situation is sustained by political and economic competition among different groups. The map of the contemporary society of West Papua in this study can be used as a departure for further studies on West Papua.

6.1 Introduction

The region of West Papua in Indonesia consists of the following two provinces: Papua Province and West Papua Province. West Papua region (hereafter, West Papua) has suffered demographic explosion and unequal economic growth due to a flood of migrants. As a result of this migration, West Papua's society is heterogeneous with different ethnic groups mingling and blending without any real distinction among the communities. The diversity is mostly shown in the feeling of being different from others and down to loyalty to its imagined community based on ethnicity. Socially, communities are assimilated. Politically, the gap is apparent and growing wider. However, segregation in the society based on ethnicity does not

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