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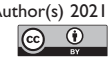
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Gatekeepers to Decolonisation: Recentring the UN Peacekeepers on the Frontline of West Papua's Re-colonisation, 1962–3

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Abstract

This article examines the policies employed by United Nations (UN) peacekeeping leadership and mid-level staff to silence West Papuan anti-Indonesian activists and dismiss the population's political opinions as immaterial to their territory's sovereign future. The UN brokered the New York Agreement, legitimising Indonesia's claims to the region following a decade of international discussions and military skirmishes between Indonesia and the Netherlands over the territory of West Papua. The Agreement vested the UN with sovereign control of West Papua for seven months to facilitate the transition in authority from Dutch colonial rule. Drawing on a multi-archival study of the mission, this article offers depth and balance to previous high-policy-focused scholarship on the dispute, rendering mid-level peacekeepers visible and bringing their role in shaping peacekeeping practices to light. It illuminates how the mission staff dismissed the views of West Papuan representatives in 1962–3 and contributed to the project of disenfranchisement carried out by the Indonesian government. In doing so, the mission leadership decisively participated in the re-colonisation of the population and disregarded rights violations on the ground.

Keywords

decolonisation, human rights, peacekeeping, sovereignty, United Nations, West Papua

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As the military strategies of the United Nations (UN) peacekeeping mission in Congo increasingly attracted negative attention in the global media, the UN leadership struggled to restore the organisation's reputation as a guardian of international peace and security.[1] It was in this context of institutional anxiety, debt and escalating geopolitical pressure that the General Assembly authorised a novel form of peacekeeping intervention that sought to transfer the Dutch-colonised territory of West Papua to Indonesian authority: the United Nations Temporary Executive Authority (UNTEA).[2] The UN leadership constructed the UNTEA mandate upon the logic of Dutch census and administrative information, uncritically conceiving the host population as wholly underdeveloped and politically illiterate.[3] However, once the UNTEA officials arrived on the ground, the peacekeeping staff met multiple Papuan activist groups, regional councils and political parties demanding self-determination. Driven by organisational pressure and racial prejudices, the UNTEA leadership reacted to Papuan demands by suppressing anti-Indonesian protests in the pursuit of a smooth transition to Indonesian authority. Focusing on mid-level peacekeeping officials' gatekeeping logic, practices and consequences helps to reveal the individual roles played by mid-level international civil servants in reshaping structures of state sovereignty during decolonisation. The mission leadership characterised the population in internal reports as not yet ready for self-determination, driven by racialised assessments of the Papuan population as well as imperialistic motivations to prevent potential geopolitical threats in the Pacific region. By preserving imperial conceptions of the absence of political life in the territory, the UNTEA staff adopted the same gatekeeping rhetoric and paternalistic role as the previous Dutch colonial administration, facilitating the take-over of an authoritarian government that continues to retain power today.[4]

The organisation's first plenary international territorial administration provided an opportunity for the leadership to reassert the institution's expertise in conflict resolution and intervene in a rapidly escalating crisis.[5] The concept of an international 'trusteeship' or 'protectorate' over the region of West Papua had been floating unsuccessfully between the involved parties for some time. Indonesian diplomats based in the Netherlands' Embassy first suggested this kind of international arrangement in 1959.[6] The Dutch and Indonesians initially

1 T.J. Hamilton, 'U. N. under pressure: financial crisis and criticism of policy beset world organization', *The New York Times* (11 February 1962).

2 UN Document, General Assembly, A/RES/1752(XVII), 'Agreement between the Republic of Indonesia and the Kingdom of the Netherlands concerning West New Guinea (West Irian)', 1127th plenary meeting, 21 September 1962.

3 UN Archives (Henceforth, UNARMS), S-0075-0001-07, 'New Guinea', 1962.

4 V. Kuitenbrouwer, 'Beyond the 'Trauma of Decolonisation': Dutch cultural diplomacy during the West New Guinea question (1950–62)', *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 44, 2 (2016), 313.

5 R. Wilde, *International Territorial Administration: How Trusteeship and the Civilising Mission Never Went Away* (Oxford 2008), 60.

6 US Department of State: Office of the Historian, 'Despatch From the Embassy in the Netherlands to the Department of State', *Foreign Relations of the United States 1958–1960, Indonesia, Volume XVII, Document 223,* 3 September 1959.

demonstrated no intention of compromising on their aims for the future of West Papua as they were emerging from a decade of increasingly tense relations following the latter's own successful independence campaign. Indonesia had relied upon its history of shared Dutch imperial administration to drive their claims to 'reunite' West Papua with the rest of the archipelago having attained independence from the Netherlands in 1949.[7] However, following a decade of international discussions and military skirmishes between Indonesia and the Netherlands in the Pacific Ocean, the conflict began to ignite anti-Soviet fears within the UN leadership and US government. Dutch historian Vincent Kuitenbrouwer described this volatile context as, 'on the brink of war, and skirmishes claimed the lives of dozens of soldiers on both sides'.[8] UN leadership's concerns about Indonesia's materiel reliance on the Soviet Union intensified in January 1962 during Operation Trikora where the two nations allied in a military operation to annex West Papua.[9] The American President, John F Kennedy, privately discussed his fears with Thant about the territory's on-going instability as it held a significant geographic position in the Pacific Ocean and, more broadly, Asia.[10] These perceived risks to international security drove Thant to orchestrate a settlement that would allow the UN to preserve an amicable diplomatic relationship with Djakarta without representation of or consultation with the West Papuan population.[11] The UN's mandate for protecting international peace and security and reification of the Westphalian state system thus became an obstacle in the provision of rights-led peacekeeping operations.

The UNTEA mission demonstrated the disconnect between principles projected by the UN headquarters and the practices in the field as the re-colonisation of the West Papuan population violated the General Assembly's recent Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples.[12] The result of these negotiations, known as the 'New York Agreement', formally recognised Indonesia's claims to West Papua and requested a peacekeeping mission to control the transfer of sovereignty. A successful vote in the General Assembly vested the UN with administrative authority over West Papua and its five hundred thousand inhabitants for seven months to guarantee law and order and facilitate the transition.[13] The geopolitical fears and organisational desire to demonstrate its

7 R.E. Elson, 'Marginality, morality, and the nationalist impulse: Papua, the Netherlands and Indonesia: a review article', *Bijdragen en Mededelingen betreffende de Geschiedenis der Nederlanden* (2006), 4/5.
8 Kuitenbrouwer, 'Beyond the 'Trauma of Decolonisation'', 310.
9 E.T. Pauker, 'Indonesia: "The year of the triumph"', *Current History,* 43, 255 (1962), 274.
10 US Department of State: Office of the Historian, 'Telegram from the Embassy in Indonesia to the Department of State', *Foreign Relations of the United States 1961–1963, Southeast Asia, Volume XXIII, Document 218*, 27 December 1961.
11 T. Banivanua-Mar, *Decolonisation and the Pacific: Indigenous Globalisation and the Ends of Empire* (Cambridge 2016), 147/8.
12 UN Doc, A/RES/1514(XV), 'Declaration on the granting of independence to colonial countries and peoples', 14 December 1960.
13 UNARMS, S-0700-0005-14, 'Report on education in West Irian', 25 March 1963, p. 3.

operational capabilities manifested in the UN leadership choosing to prioritise the diffuse the geopolitical threat of a powerful nation, Indonesia.

This was a period of organisational crisis for the UN staff. UN General Assembly delegates feared that the organisation was under threat and there was an urgent need to re-establish member states' confidence in the UN's operational capabilities following the death of secretary-general Dag Hammarskjöld in September 1961.[14] This institutional pressure was compounded further following a series of military manoeuvres during the Congo mission (ONUC) and a significant financial crisis, marring the perceived capability and credibility of the organisation's decision-making in the field.[15] While the first armed peacekeeping mission, the United Nations Emergency Force (UNEF), had been relatively successful in establishing stability in Egypt following the Suez crisis,[16] the 'storm of criticism' during the Congo mission shook the reputational and financial standing of the organisation within the international community.[17] Thus, the UN's role in the negotiation process between the Dutch and Indonesians was a much-needed and hard-won victory in the eyes of U Thant.[18] UNTEA was the organisation's first international territorial administration since its forebear organisation, the League of Nations, occupied the Saar in 1920, thus, functionally expanding the organisation further.[19] Thant also ensured that the mission was financed equally by Indonesia and the Netherlands, providing the UN some much-needed fiscal respite from the combined operations of UNEF and ONUC.[20] This 'victory' encouraged an organisational impulse to protect the delicate diplomatic arrangement from crumbling due to complications on the ground.[21] The success of the Thant in resolving the two countries' claims to the territory – and avoiding the outbreak of war – was a precarious but rejuvenating moment for the organisation.

Thus, the West Papuan conflict emerged at the height of post-colonial anxieties, hierarchies and debates, and became entangled in broader organisational alliances and fantasies for the new international order during decolonisation.[22] The practical

14 UNARMS, S-0876-0001-06-00001, 'Internal report from Engers to Thant', 17 August 1962, p. 8; Hamilton, 'U.N. under pressure', *The New York Times* (11 February 1962).

15 A. O'Malley, *The Diplomacy of Decolonisation: America, Britain and the United Nations During the Congo Crisis 1960–64* (Manchester 2018), 120.

16 British National Archives (Henceforth, BNA), FO 371/129792/UN.1117/108, 'Telegram from New York to Foreign Office: text of Minister of State for Foreign Affairs' speech in today's plenary debate', 22 November 1957.

17 Hamilton, 'U.N. under pressure', *The New York Times* (11 February 1962).

18 U. Thant, '3. From transcript of press conference, Geneva, 3 May 1963', in A. Cordier and M. Harrelson (eds) *Public Papers of the Secretaries-General of the United Nations: Volume VI, U Thant, 1961–1964* (New York 1976), 337.

19 Ralph Wilde establishes that 'Despite the exceptionalist suggestions made by some commentators, international organisations have been involved in the conduct of territorial administration since the start of the League of Nations . . . The first plenary international territorial administration [project was] the Saar in 1920 (in the League era)' in Wilde, *International Territorial Administration*, 60.

20 T.J. Hamilton, 'U. N. under pressure', *The New York Times* (11 February 1962).

21 U. Thant, *View from the UN* (London 1978), 48.

22 The author recognises the important contributions of scholars such as Todd Shepard, A.G. Hopkins, and Stuart Ward (2016) in criticising vague uses of the term 'decolonisation' and revealing

implications of multiple self-determination campaigns during decolonisation were the development of hierarchies within the post-independence international order between older and newer, smaller and larger and well-resourced and less well-resourced nations.[23] As more colonial nations achieved independence, many sought to expand their borders and make sovereignty claims on neighbouring or proximate regions. Protectorates which had previously been within vast national borders – such as the Dutch East Indies – became heated points of dispute between colonial and post-colonial states, as well as ideological opportunities for Cold War superpowers.[24] Although there was vocal anti-colonial rhetoric emerging from the General Assembly and UN Committees during the early 1960s,[25] some of the most dominant anti-colonial governments – such as Indonesia – simultaneously repressed independence campaigns in West Papua and East Timor and sought to re-colonise these territories for political gain.[26] As Brad Simpson has argued, 'Many of the countries that deployed self-determination claims with the greatest fervour after 1945, such as India, Indonesia and Algeria, denied them even more fiercely when made by restive ethnic and regional minorities within their borders'.[27] The UN staff's prioritisation of international security over domestic politics created new modes of systematic disenfranchisement which were euphemised in the language of international diplomacy. Rather than being peripheral or passive in the recalibration of sovereignty during decolonisation, the UN leadership and peacekeeping staff provided a crucial legitimising role for powerful states' neo-colonial aspirations.

In recent years there has been a surge in scholarship on the historical subjecthood of international organisations, their staff and (in)formal networks.[28] Historians have begun to investigate the influence of non-state actors and

the trend of homogenising agents calling for decolonisation. Although these terms ('decolonisation' and 'recolonisation') were not in circulation during the period examined in this article, many scholars in this field have used these terms to refer to the particular processes of political and constitutional transfer in West Papuan history. It is this conversation that this article seeks to intervene in and, as such, has used these terms to further nuance understanding of how the UN mid-level staff were complicit in this process of 'recolonisation': For example: D. Webster, 'Narratives of colonization, decolonization and recolonization in Papua', *Archive History*. Available at: http://activehistory.ca/papers/history-paper-3/; T. Banivanua-Mar, '"A thousand miles of cannibal lands": imagining away genocide in the re-colonization of West Papua', *Journal of Genocide Research,* 10, 4: pp. 583–602 (2008); J. Pouwer, 'The colonisation, decolonisation and recolonisation of West New Guinea', *The Journal of Pacific History,* 34, 2: pp. 157–179 (1999).

23 A. Getachew, *Worldmaking after Empire: The Rise and Fall of Self-Determination* (Princeton 2018); M. Spanu, 'The hierarchical society: the politics of self-determination and the constitution of new states after 1919', *European Journal of International Relations,* 26, 2 (2020), 372–96.

24 L. Walker, 'Decolonization in the 1960s: on legitimate and illegitimate nationalist claims-making', *Past & Present,* 242, 1 (2019), 227–64.

25 S.L.B. Jensen, *The Making of International Human Rights: The 1960s, Decolonization, and the Reconstruction of Global Values* (Cambridge 2016); J.L. Pearson, 'Defending Empire at the United Nations: the politics of international colonial oversight in the Era of Decolonisation', *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History,* 45, 3 (2017), 525–49.

26 M. Fibiger, 'A diplomatic counter-revolution: Indonesian diplomacy and the invasion of East Timor', *Modern Asian Studies* (2021), 55, 1: pp. 587–628.

27 B. Simpson, 'The United States and the Curious History of Self-Determination', Diplomatic History, Vol. 36:4 (2012), 676.

28 E. Manela, 'International society as a historical subject', *Diplomatic History,* 44, 2 (2020), 184–209.

international organisations during decolonisation, as territorial borders and legal claims to sovereignty reshaped the geography of the Global South.[29] During the decolonisation period, mid-level UN staff, specifically international peacekeeping staff deployed to the field, navigated the increasingly fluid rules of sovereignty during decolonisation for institutional benefit. The West Papua territorial dispute demonstrates that the UN's international relations paradigm was fundamentally challenged by decolonisation processes and the increasing 'territorialisation of political identity' during the early 1960s.[30] The structure of the UN in the post-war context entrenched an unequal international order whereby only nation-state status could provide access to the forums of global decision-making. For minority or indigenous groups within post-colonial territories, the evolving nation-state international order required them to immediately develop a popular nationalist movement or be recolonised. This re-constructed regional allegiances, instrumentalised pre-colonial heritage for post-colonial claims, and presented only the protection of nationalisation to those who refused re-colonisation or annexation.

Many works on the Indonesian takeover of West Papua have successfully contextualised the UNTEA mission in regional Cold War politics and state instrumentalisation of the territory for 'anti-colonial' diplomatic credentials. This scholarship focuses on the Dutch-Indonesian dispute and negotiations,[31] or, on the unrepresentative plebiscite of 1969 as primary sites of Papuan betrayal.[32] Throughout the 1950s, Indonesia and the Netherlands internationalised their position, both paradoxically pursuing anti-colonial credentials, on West Papuan sovereignty. Neither achieved universal success in the public forum of the General Assembly or privately through diplomatic interactions with other state representatives during this period.[33] The Dutch government argued that, if it retained

29 D. Webster, 'Development advisors in a time of cold war and decolonization: the United Nations Technical Assistance Administration, 1950–59', *Journal of Global History,* 6, 2 (2011), 249–72; E. Muschik, 'Managing the world'; E. Muschik, '"A pretty kettle of fish": United Nations assistance in the mass dismissal of labor in the Iranian oil industry, 1959–1960', *Labor History,* 60, 1 (2019), 8–23; D. Bhouraskar, *United Nations Development Aid: A Study in History and Politics* (New Delhi 2007); D. Maul, *Human Rights, Development and Decolonization: The International Labour Organization, 1940–70* (New York 2012); G.F. Sinclair, 'Forging modern states with imperfect tools: United Nations technical assistance for public administration in decolonized states', *Humanity,* 11, 1 (2020), 54–83.

30 J. MacArthur, 'Decolonizing sovereignty: states of exception along the Kenya-Somali Frontier', *The American Historical Review,* 124, 1 (2019), 109; D. B. Carter and H. E. Goemans, 'The making of the territorial order: new borders and the emergence of interstate conflict', *International Organization,* 65, 2 (2011), 275–309.

31 C.L.M. Penders, *The West New Guinea Debacle: Dutch Decolonisation and Indonesia 1945–1962* (Honolulu 1971; D. Webster, 'Self-determination abandoned: the road to the New York: agreement on West New Guinea (Papua), 1960–62', *Indonesia*, 95 (2013); D. Easter, 'Active Soviet military support for Indonesia during the 1962 West New Guinea crisis', *Cold War History*, 15, 2 (2015); J. Pouwer, 'The colonisation, decolonisation and recolonisation of West New Guinea', *The Journal of Pacific History,* 34, 2 (1999); Kuitenbrouwer, 'Beyond the "Trauma of Decolonisation"'.

32 P. Drooglever, *An Act of Free Choice: Decolonisation and the Right to Self-Determination in West Papua* (London 2009); J. Saltford, 'United Nations involvement with the act of self-determination in West Irian (Indonesian West New Guinea) 1968 to 1969', *Indonesia,* 69 (2000).

33 C. Brown, 'Indonesia's West Irian case in the UN General Assembly, 1954', *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies,* 7, 2 (1976), 261.

colonial power over the territory, it would ensure that the population would be given access to self-determination when they were ready for a plebiscite, thus adopting a gatekeeping role built upon paternalistic logic.[34] Whereas, the Indonesian government maintained that their own experience of colonisation and founding role in the Bandung Conference in 1955 abdicated their government of any neo-colonial aspirations.[35] The Bandung Conference had been a crucial site for the Indonesian government to claim its territorial rights to West Papua and control the narrative of their re-colonisation of the region to Afro-Asian allied nations.[36] A foundational event for the emergence of the Afro-Asian movement, Bandung formalised transnational solidarity between post-colonial nations across the global south and marked the formal emergence of Third Worldism within international diplomacy. Although Indonesia struggled to recruit unilateral Afro-Asian support for their West Papua plan,[37] the ties of Afro-Asian solidarity still provided the majority votes for the construction of UNTEA within the General Assembly.[38] Thus, the West Papua vote demonstrated that nations aligning with the anti-colonial movement, in practice, supported anti-*European* colonialism rather than explicitly opposing all imperialism or authoritarianism.

Political histories on the Papuan independence movement have provided detailed investigations into the violation of Papuan rights and the campaigns of racism against the Papuan population.[39] Tracey Banivanua-Mar and Emma Kluge focused on these indigenous campaigns and situated activists' rhetoric within international anti-colonial and Pan-African movements within the global south.[40] Indonesian and western politicians, such as John F Kennedy, perpetuated a bestial image of a tribes populated by 'stone-age', evolutionarily stunted and cannibalistic peoples, in order to dismiss the Papuans' demands for independence.[41] Kluge, in particular, has emphasised how the West Papuan activists' used race rhetoric and imperial categorisations of themselves to assert their racial difference from Indonesia, as a means of achieving independence.[42] Similarly, David Webster

34 For more on the impact of Bandung on the Afro-Asian movement and international diplomacy, see: A. Phillips, 'Beyond Bandung: the 1955 Asian-African Conference and its legacies for international order', *Australian Journal of International Affairs,* 70, 4 (2016); C. Ewing, 'The Colombo Powers: crafting diplomacy in the Third World and launching Afro-Asia at Bandung', *Cold War History,* 19, 1 (2019), 1–19.

35 Kuitenbrouwer, 'Beyond the "Trauma of Decolonisation"', 310/11.

36 Q. Swan, 'Blinded by Bandung?: Illumining West Papua, Senegal, and the Black Pacific', *Radical History Review,* Vol. 2018: 131.

37 For more on the Brazzaville vote, see Kluge, p. 10; Kuitenbrouwer, 'Beyond the 'Trauma of Decolonisation'', 319/20.

38 The resolution affirming the New York Agreement was adopted by 89 votes to none, with 14 abstentions: UN Doc, A/PV.1127, 'General Assembly 17th Session', 21 September 1962, 52/3.

39 A. Muhammed, 'The historical origins of secessionist movement in West Papua', *Journal of Asia Pacific Studies,* 3, 1 (2013), 1–13; P. Savage and R. Martin, 'The OPM in West Papua New Guinea: the continuing struggle against Indonesian colonialism', *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, 7, 3 (1977), 338–46.

40 Banivanua-Mar, *Decolonisation and the Pacific*; E. Kluge, 'West Papua and the international history of decolonization, 1961–69', *International History Review,* 42, 6 (2019), 1155–72.

41 Banivanua-Mar, 'A thousand miles of cannibal lands', 584; Swan, 'Blinded by Bandung', 60.

42 Kluge, 'West Papua', 9.

has demonstrated that Dutch arguments of racial difference between the 'dark-skinned' West Papuans and the 'Asian' Indonesians were foundational in the protracted battle over the territory.[43] During the 1950s, the Indonesian government publicly challenged this and argued that there were multiple different ethnic groups on the island, rather than one 'West Papuan race', as this argument undermined their claim to the territory and pursuit of authority across the archipelago.[44] However, following the New York Agreement, the Indonesian government pursued an active policy of genocide and military aggression against the Papuan population, much of it driven by racial exceptionalism and a desire for authoritarian control.[45]

Articulating the racialised prejudices at the heart of the UN peacekeeping culture requires a critical approach to the racist underpinnings of international relations and, more specifically, the UN leadership's strategy for protecting international peace and security during the Cold War.[46] Scholarship on racism within international relations has been traditionally limited by the assumption that the 'elite Western subject' was the 'implicit cosmopolitan subject' and central 'agent in the task of global justice',[47] but critical research has begun to examine the racial power dynamics, inequalities and hierarchies perpetuated through liberal international institutions, organisations and networks.[48] Scholars such as Robert Vitalis, Errol Henderson, Inés Valdez and Victor Ray have highlighted how international organisations, like the UN, behaved as racial structures despite projecting themselves – and being projected through traditional scholarship – as technocratic, race-neutral bureaucracies.[49] Ray, in particular, has emphasised that it is not the 'individual prejudice and racial animus' that is now being drawn to attention by this critical work, but the result of racialised logic combined with 'organisational processes' such as gatekeeping, exclusion, or knowledge production.[50] It is not the existence of international staff's racism that deserves our attention. Instead, we should focus on the organisational mechanisms and interests which not only

43 D. Webster, '"Already Sovereign as a People": a foundational moment in West Papuan nationalism', *Pacific Affairs,* 74, 4 (2001), 512–3.
44 Webster, '"Already Sovereign as a People"', 512.
45 J. Elmslie and C. Webb-Gannon, 'A slow-motion genocide: Indonesian rule in West Papua', *Griffith Journal of Law and Human Dignity*, 1, 2 (2013), 156.
46 For more on the racial underpinnings of the international relations system, specifically the democratic peace theses, see: E.A. Henderson, 'Navigating the muddy waters of the mainstream: tracing the mystification of racism in international relations', in W.C. Rich (ed.) *African American Perspectives on Political Science* (Philadelphia, PA 2007).
47 I. Valdez, 'Association, reciprocity, and emancipation: a transnational account of the politics of global justice', in D. Bell (ed.) *Empire, race and global justice* (Cambridge 2019), 121–122.
48 B.G. Jones, 'Race in the ontology of international order', *Political Studies*, 56, 4 (2008), 907–27; W. E. Connolly, 'The liberal image of the nation', in D. Ivison, et al. (eds) *Political Theory and the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (Cambridge 2000).
49 R. Vitalis, *White World Order, Black Power Politics* (Ithaca, NY 2015); E.A. Henderson, 'Hidden in plain sight: racism in international relations theory', *Cambridge Review of International Affairs,* 26, 1 (2016), 71–92; Valdez, 'Association, reciprocity, and emancipation'; V. Ray, 'A theory of racialized organizations', *American Sociological Review,* 84, 1 (2019), 26–53.
50 Ray, 'A theory of racialised organisations', 27.

conceal but *support* the translation of staff's racist logic into operational decision-making, geopolitical structures and inequal rules of engagement within the international order. This article builds upon this literature and demonstrates the presence of racism within the UN peacekeeping missions, tracing how international personnel reallocated patterns of authority and suppressed local activists in order to maintain stability on the ground and preserve nation-state hierarchies within the international order.

This article first examines the logic of UNTEA staff underpinning their gatekeeping strategy and preventing the Papuan population from amplifying their cause. Through a close examination of the communication and reports written by UNTEA personnel during the first phase of the mission, it reveals the role that racialised conceptions of the Papuans played in informing peacekeeping decision-making and practices. It pays particular attention to how the UNTEA staff interacted with the host population and communicated Papuan activities to those within the rest of the mission bureaucracy. The next section focuses on highlighting gatekeeping practices by mission staff and concentrates on UNTEA leadership's violation of Papuan civil rights as a tactic to safeguard stability in the territory. Finally, the article examines the consequences of the mission's gatekeeping logic and practices by illustrating the ongoing violence and oppression against Papuan anti-Indonesian activists.

The New York Agreement attempted to disengage the UN staff from Papuan self-determination during the organisation's administration of the territory by delaying the question until after Indonesia assumed authority.[51] However, the bureaucrats of the mission, especially the Administrator Abdoh, utilised the Divisional Commissioners' interactions with the population to survey and remain updated on the political lives within the territory. Thant chose Dr Djalal Abdoh, an Iranian politician with close ties to the Afro-Asian movement,[52] to represent the organisation in West Papua.[53] He was appointed to the mission until the agreed date of transition to Indonesian sovereignty on 1 May 1963.[54] Meeting Thant in 1955 at the Bandung Conference as Head of the Iranian delegation gave Abdoh the opportunity to amplify himself as a vocal delegate within the Afro-Asian bloc.[55] Abdoh originally established himself within international diplomatic networks in spring 1945 as the Iranian Representative at the UN during the San Francisco Conference. By 1952, he was enmeshed in General Assembly debates about

51 United Nations, 'New York Agreement', Article X. Available at: https://peacemaker.un.org/sites/peacemaker.un.org/files/ID%20NL_620815_AgreementConcerningWestNewGuinea.pdf (accessed on 6 December 2018).

52 R. Burke, '"The compelling dialogue of freedom": human rights at the Bandung conference', *Human Rights Quarterly,* 28, 4 (2006), 956.

53 UNARMS, S-0876-0001-07-00001, 'Press release: acting secretary-general appoints administrator of West New Guinea (West Irian)', 22 October 1962.

54 UNARMS, S-0876-0001-07-00001, 'Press release WNG/55: United Nations administrator arrives in West New Guinea', 14 November 1962.

55 R. Burke, *Decolonisation and the Evolution of International Human Rights* (Philadelphia, PA 2011), 45.

sovereignty and natural resources, arguing that nation-states should be able to protect their oil from multinational corporations and retain the wealth. Marrying anti-colonial politics to extraction economics, Abdoh spent the 1950s defending the importance of 'permanent sovereignty' and the nation-state system of the UN as integral to fighting global inequality.[56] Thus, his diplomatic speeches suggest that Abdoh perceived the protection of nation-state sovereignty within the UN as central to the anti-colonial fight against extractive imperialism.

Subsequent field-based positions, such as Plebiscite Commissioner for the UN-organised referendum in Cameroon, helped Abdoh build a reputation as an expert in 'reconciling opposing factions' in complicated colonial disputes.[57] His experience within the UN systems in addition to his shared politics of the 'spirit of Bandung' made him a reliable colleague who Thant could trust to protect the institution's reputation in West Papua.[58] Deployment to West Papua provided Abdoh with a novel mandate to direct the administration as he saw fit for the future wellbeing of the territory and region with few accountability measures other than limited communications with UN headquarters. Rather than disengaging from the question of Papuan self-determination, Abdoh promoted the international staff's racialised assessments and generalising statements, thus legitimising the continued dismissal of Papuan rights to the international community.

The communications between the divisional commissioners and the mission headquarters reveal a widespread racist policy towards the Papuans, formalised as accurate assessment of the host community. The role of the six UN divisional commissioners was a dual role of knowledge production and reproduction between the UNTEA mission base and the Papuan communities. They performed primarily as eyes on the ground for the mission leadership, tasked with recording regional activities and distributing relevant information to West Papuan groups.[59] However, many of the mission directors and divisional commissioners were 'persons who have served in colonial territories for a considerable part of their career'.[60] Their past experiences as colonial administrators and governors distorted their analysis of the Papuan population and influenced the accuracy of their accounts. For example, Gordon S. Carter, divisional commissioner for the Central Highlands, informed in his November situational update that he was struggling to, 'guide the faltering steps of stone-age man along the dimly lit paths of progress and enlightenment . . . the obligation is of course a moral one towards some 200–300,000 extremely primitive peoples . . . many of whom are still

56 C.R.W. Dietrich, *Oil Revolution: Anticolonial Elites, Sovereign Rights, and the Economic Culture of Decolonization* (Cambridge 2017), 28–41.
57 UNARMS, S-0876-0001-07-00001, 'Dr Djalal Abdoh newspaper cuttings', 4.
58 L. Eslava, M. Fakhri and V. Nesiah, 'The spirit of Bandung', in L. Eslava, M. Fakhri and V. Nesiah (eds) *Bandung, Global History, and International Law: Critical Pasts and Pending Futures* (Cambridge 2017), 3–32.
59 The six regions with Divisional Commissioners were Hollandia/Kotabaru, Central Highlands, Fak Fak, Maokwari, Merauke and Biak (sometimes referred to as Biak-Numfoor: UNARMS, S-0682-0003-11, 'UNTEA Background and Datelist', 1 March 1963, 3.
60 Ibid., p. 40.

in the stone-age state of primitive savagery and tribal warfare'.[61] This imperialistic rhetoric was frequently woven into district commissioner's analysis of the population in the pretence that their judgement of the society was apolitical and from a place of technocratic expertise. Abdoh briefly communicated his concerns about his colleagues' colonial experience and racial prejudices to Thant, having received their 'observations and ideas' in their weekly updates.[62] Nevertheless, Abdoh continued to include and, indeed, foreground divisional commissioners' racialised commentary in his reports, ensuring that their interpretations of the Papuan population were presented uncritically and as fact. Although Abdoh did not compose these regional updates himself, it was his decision to include these dismissive paternalistic and racialised comments in his reports to the secretary-general and present them as accurate generalisations of the Papuan population. Thus, the UNTEA bureaucrats legitimised the Dutch characterisation of the Papuans as a 'primitive' population, not yet ready for self-determination and disconnected as a nation.

On 1 December 1962, Abdoh instructed his divisional commissioners in a confidential memorandum to make 'discreet enquiries' with the Papuans in their region on their general mood towards self-determination,[63] intending to gauge the reception to a speedier Indonesian take-over.[64] He used their responses, as well as previous communication, including weekly updates, police reports and telegrams, to produce an extensive report for the UN headquarters. Once sent at the end of the mission's first phase on 31 December, this report provided the secretary-general and the Secretariat inner circle, such as Chef de Cabinet Chakravarthi V Narasimhan, vital insight into the political situation on the ground and the receptibility of the population to the Indonesian takeover. The UN officials were geographically and politically disconnected from the West Papuan territorial authority, forcing them to rely on the UNTEA leadership's assessment and judgement in driving their diplomatic approach to the transfer. The UNTEA bureaucrats' opinions of the mission mandate and political life on the island informed the organisation's strategy towards Indonesian diplomats and, more broadly, shaped international delegates' understanding of the host population and territory.[65] Therefore, the mid-level peacekeeping bureaucrats provided a unique service in international knowledge production as the 'frontline' experts to the region.

In structuring his long report to Thant throughout the first phase of the mission, from October to December 1962, Abdoh introduced the three main strata of the Papuan population and, in turn, dismissed their political positions as unrepresentative and evidence of underdevelopment: elite, urban and rural communities. He

61 Bodleian Library, Special Collections United Nations Career Records Project, D. Burnell Vickers, 'Central Highlands, Situation Report, 7th November 1962', Sections 53–60, pp. 1–2, 8.
62 Ibid., p. 40.
63 UNARMS, S-0876-0001-07-00001, 'Abdoh report to Thant', 13 December 1962, 29.
64 UNARMS, S-0703-0003-01, 'Private and confidential memo from Biak Divisional Commissioner Rawlings to Somerville, Director of Internal Affairs', 12 December 1962.
65 UNARMS, S-0876-0001-07-00001, 'Abdoh report to Thant', 13 December 1962, p. 30.

labelled any Papuan political engagement as illegitimate due to its unreliability or unrepresentative nature in order to justify the mission's decision not to publicise the treatment of activists on the island and push for the plebiscite under UN jurisdiction. However, as contemporary works by Dutch scholars van der Kroef and van der Veur observed in the early 1960s, Papuan activist movements had developed across the territory throughout the 1950s and the formation of several regional political parties demonstrated the vibrancy of youthful and rural Papuan nationalist engagement.[66]

Abdoh criticised elite Papuans and focused on the group's dominant characteristics as selfish and easily bought: 'Irrespective of their real feelings, they try to be on the right side of the Indonesians and thereby secure their future. No wonder that they should be prone to follow whatever lead comes from Indonesia and thereby remain in the forefront of public life.[67] Thus, Abdoh generalised all elite Papuans as a group that should be totally disregarded in the UNTEA decision-making process, noting that their opinions were likely to be unquestioningly pro-Indonesian and meaningless. This disregard of the Papuan leadership and elite strata was also reproduced by other international actors. The British Foreign Office commented that, 'The various leaders of opinion ... had now virtually all gone over to the Indonesians with whom their bread would in future be buttered'.[68] However, scholarship on West Papuan nationalism has demonstrated the diversity of elite Papuan political feeling during UNTEA, contrary to Abdoh's report, revealing how Papuan opinions were not homogenous or static.[69] By asserting that all Papuan elite leaders were pro-Indonesian, he erased the dynamic, complex political debates emerging from Papuan consultative spaces and communities as activists navigated their nation's future during UNTEA.[70]

Abdoh's conviction that all Papuan leaders were 'mostly motivated by their own narrow self-interest rather than a genuine interest in a public cause' demonstrated a disregard for the diversity of opinion within the Papuan elite class and contempt for the population he was employed to protect.[71] Abdoh also ignored UNTEA's complicity in creating an environment increasingly dominated by Indonesian soldiers, politicians, and administrators, many of whom were absorbed within the mission itself.[72] To be sure, some Papuan elites, including World War Two military 'heroes' Marthen Indey, Lukas Rumkorem and Silas Papare, accepted the *fait*

66 J.M. van der Kroef, 'Nationalism and politics in West New Guinea', *Pacific Affairs,* 34, 1 (1961), 45; P.W. van der Veur, 'Political awakening in West New Guinea', *Pacific Affairs,* 36, 1 (1963), 59–60.
67 UNA, S-0876-0001-07-00001, 'Abdoh report to Thant', 13 December 1962, 29.
68 BNA, FO 371/169952, DJ 1019/4, 'Letter from Vines to A.S. Fair in the Commonwealth Relations Office', 14 January 1963.
69 The vibrancy of Papuan nationalism has been explored by: J. Elmslie, *Irian Jaya under the Gun: Indonesian Economic Development Versus West Papuan Nationalism* (Honolulu, HI 2002).
70 For further insight into Papuan nationalism and activism, see: O. Ondawame, '"One people, one soul": West Papuan nationalism and the Organisasi Papua Merdeka (OPM)/Free Papua Movement', unpublished PhD thesis, Australian National University (2000); Webster, '"Already Sovereign as a People"'.
71 UNA, S-0876-0001-07-00001, 'Abdoh report to Thant', 13 December 1962, p. 30.
72 UNA, S-0701-0003-04, 'Report from Divisional Commissioner, Biak, to Director of Internal Affairs, Hollandia, 26 March 1963', p. 1.

accompli of incoming Indonesian rule and supported the Indonesian unity project.[73] Sections of Papuan elites used this transitional period to build goodwill with Indonesian politicians in order to maintain power through the changeover.[74] As the divisional commissioner of Merauke wrote in an update to Abdoh, 'Already pressure from paratroopers on local residents has made some Papuans feel it would be good for the future health to favour Indonesia now'.[75] However, several Papuan leaders and important figures, such as Nicolaas Jouwe, Marcus Kaisiepo and Filiman Jufuway,[76] adopted vocal anti-Indonesian positions and were integral to attempts at promoting the population's right to self-determination to the international community.[77] Therefore, Abdoh's prejudice against Papuan self-determination manifested in his generalisation of the population's elite class despite evidence that this group held multiple political positions, including demanding self-determination.

Next, Abdoh dismissed the political activities and activism of urban Papuan communities, arguing that they were numerically insignificant. He suggested that their activism had been engineered by groups outside the territory, as he believed it unfeasible for Papuans to demonstrate such political imagination.[78] Writing to Thant, Abdoh emphasised how unrepresentative the urban activists were within the vast territory, especially protests in Hollandia. Anti-Indonesia demonstrations in the capital city took place before and during the UNTEA mission, disrupting Abdoh's characterisation of a population predominantly in favour of annexation. He argued that 'The normal media through which public opinion expresses itself are non-existent. Communications are incredibly poor; large areas are still inaccessible and lie outside the administrative control. The combined effect of all this is to make it a well-nigh impossible task'.[79] Abdoh noted that the absence of a territory-wide communications network made the construction of a unified nationalist movement impossible and took the pockets of anti-Indonesian groups across the country as evidence of an isolated population of which it is impossible to gauge the opinion, rather than an indication of a widespread movement limited by poor infrastructure. Thus, Abdoh, chose to disregard the efforts of groups such as the Biak-Numfoor Regional Council and their interactions with their divisional commissioner.[80] Abdoh continued to view the political agency of the Papuan population negatively against his discretionary standard of formal enfranchisement.

73 van der Veur, 'Political awakening in West New Guinea', p. 59.
74 Saltford, *The United Nations and the Indonesian Takeover of West Papua, 1962–1969,* 31–32.
75 UNA, S-0876-0001-07-00001, 'Abdoh report to Thant', 13 December 1962, 38.
76 During the 1950s, Jouwe was a member of the pro-Indonesian movement, the Indonesian Independence Committee (KIM) but had reconsidered his political position by the time of UNTEA, as had many other Papuan elites: B. Singh, *Papua: Geopolitics and the Quest for Nationhood* (Abingdon 2017), 74–7.
77 CICR, B AG 200 158-002 200 (96), 'Letter from New Guinea Council and Hollandia to President of ICRC in Geneva', 27 January 1963.
78 UNA, S-0876-0001-07-00001, 'Abdoh report to Thant', 13 December 1962, p. 30.
79 Ibid.
80 Ibid., pp. 39–40.

Finally, Abdoh argued that the majority of the rural Papuan population could not provide a public opinion 'even in a rudimentary form'.[81] He characterised the rural class as, 'politically inarticulate and [...] nothing to do with social life or political changes taking place in this territory'; their lifestyle supposedly justifying their exclusion from the political future of their territory.[82] He explained that the rural population's political opinion was, supposedly, so 'inarticulate' that the mission leadership was abdicated from any suggestion of holding a plebiscite during UNTEA.[83] Allegedly, most of the population was intellectually incapable of understanding alternative scenarios for the future direction of the territory, nor able to find a basis for choosing between, and, therefore, it was legitimate that diplomats in New York had made the decision for them, without meaningful consultation. By infantilising the population, despite his knowledge of widespread political agency across the territory, Abdoh reconfirmed the Dutch's paternalistic governance and legitimised the removal of self-determination from the population. He relinquished the mission staff from acting in accordance with the organisation's responsibilities to colonial peoples, normatively rooted in the principles of the UN Charter and the 1960 General Assembly resolution, thus, demonstrating the disconnect between the rhetoric of the UN headquarters and the practices in the field in decolonising contexts.[84]

This stratified manner of dismissing each socio-economic group of Papuan society was a central source of frustration for the anti-Indonesian Papuan communities. These communities felt that the elite group's pro-Indonesian opinions were publicised in the international media as the only political view in the entire population.[85] David Sommerville, Director of Internal Affairs for UNTEA, reported to Abdoh in December 1962 that, 'There is also a considerable amount of dissatisfaction with self-styled leaders who proceed to Indonesia as sign of assent to declarations on behalf of constituents whom they have never consulted'.[86] The privilege, therefore, of the affluent Papuan elite was that their resignation to the Indonesian takeover, to seek goodwill with the incoming Indonesian politicians, served to legitimise the imminent transition and project that the entire population consented to the Indonesian take-over. Without the support of the UNTEA staff, the Papuan activists had no methods of recourse and were, thus, unable to challenge the characterisation of the entire population in support – or uninterested – in the transfer to Indonesian administration. Any engagement with the petitions or claims made by the Papuan population, and their efforts to

81 Ibid., p. 30.
82 Ibid., p. 30.
83 Ibid., p. 30.
84 UN Document, General Assembly, A/RES/1514 (XV), 'Declaration on the granting of independence to colonial countries and peoples', 14 December 1960.
85 UNARMS, S-0876-0001-07-00001, 'Sommerville note to Abdoh cited in Abdoh report to Thant', 13 December 1962, p. 36.
86 Ibid., p. 36.

internationalise their situation, were dismissed as anomalies to the general political apathy of the population and, thus, acceptable for the UN staff to ignore.[87]

Abdoh's racialised assumptions of unrepresentative political literacy and 'primitivism' within the Papuan population demonstrates how anti-colonial leaders were susceptible to their own discretionary standards of rights within international society. Conceptions of colonised populations were not developed within a vacuum. Anti-colonialism was a heterogenous movement, linking different actors from different backgrounds who suggested different solutions to different disputes.[88] 'Self-determination' was without normative definition and this affected how the term could be deployed and who by; if 'self-determination' was diversely understood, it could be co-opted by non-egalitarian or colonial actors for their own interests rather than seeking the amplification of vulnerable or silenced groups.[89] Anti-colonial activists in positions of power, like Abdoh, held significant authority to decide whether a population 'deserved' self-determination which affected the lens through which the population was viewed. Abdoh pursued an arbitrary and highly personal standard required for a population to be sufficiently 'deserving' of self-determination, thus, encouraging a pattern of unequal access to UN support and, necessarily, leading to rights violations. There existed a tension between Abdoh's anti-colonial credentials from his work as Iranian Representative at Bandung and his perception of the role of UNTEA administrator. in principle he championed the right to self-determination but, in practice, his racialised perception of which movements should be afforded that right led to his consent to the re-colonisation of the territory.[90]

Paradoxically, in attempting to disparage the 'politically inarticulate' population, too complex to comprehend as a unified nationalist movement, Abdoh acknowledged the politically vibrant environment in West Papua, particularly emanating from anti-Indonesian circles. Thus, this report revealed the UNTEA staff's early knowledge of widespread Papuan pro-independence activists and groups. However, rather than correcting the racialised characterisation of the population and rectify the foundational assumptions of the New York Agreement, the mission leadership chose to continue dismissing the Papuan activists despite their knowledge of pro-independence political activity in the territory. UNTEA staff, thus, obscured the political agency of the population and dehumanised the Papuans in their internal communications as a means of justifying the UN's instrumental role in negotiating the New York Agreement and the mission's inherent support of the Indonesian take-over. This section illustrated how peacekeeping missions provided fertile conditions paternalism to thrive within ranks of post-war humanitarian bureaucracy. This paternalistic power dynamic guided the

87 UNARMS, S-0876-0001-07-00001, 'Abdoh report to Thant', 13 December 1962, p. 30.
88 Getachew, *Worldmaking after Empire*.
89 O.C. Tassinnis and S. Nouwen, '"The Consciousness of Duty Done"? British attitudes towards self-determination and the case of the Sudan', *The British Yearbook of International Law* (2019), 1–56; Kuitenbrouwer, ''Beyond the 'Trauma of Decolonisation''.
90 Burke, *Decolonisation and the Evolution of International Human Rights,* 45.

decision-making of peacekeeping staff as they placed themselves developmentally superior to the population and thus legitimately 'knowing what was best' for the Papuans.

During the second phase of the mission, beginning on 31 December 1962, the fragile peace established during the first phase had begun to crumble as Papuan activists gleaned that the UNTEA mission staff would be unwilling to promote their right to self-determination before the Indonesian take-over.[91] These gatekeeping practices were driven by institutional concerns about their reputational capability to retain stability in their field operations and their own rationale of the political context; it would do the population more harm to fight the inevitable. The mission sought to pacify the activist sections of the Papuan population in order to conceal the UNTEA administration's unwillingness to challenge the Agreement and to avert protests within mission territory and the wider Pacific area. The divisional commissioner from Biak, a particularly politically active region, suggested the mission needed to, 'let [the Papuans] down gently if they are not to explode'.[92] He argued that international staff should prepare a swift exit from the island, perhaps even before the official end date, warning, 'That there will ultimately be quite serious resistance to the Indonesians is, I think, certain … it behoves the UNTEA to depart as soon as the Indonesians are thick enough on the ground …'.[93]

However, the mission staff's efforts to maintain stability were threatened by Indonesian propaganda and coercion efforts, spreading anxiety within the peacekeeping bureaucracy that the successful completion of the mission was at risk. For the mission to help repair the organisation's operational reputation, the mission leadership needed to maintain authority of West Papua and demonstrate administrative power despite ongoing obstructionism. From 1 January 1963, there began a significant influx of Indonesian soldiers into West Papua, many of whom were described by the Biak divisional commissioner as, 'younger people whose educational training appears to have been more political than practical'.[94] The Indonesian government's obstructionism was focused on shortening the length of the mission through the proxy of coercible or influenceable Papuans. Once deployed to the territory, new Indonesian troops sought to harness and assert their power as the incoming sovereign authority power. These troops cultivated pro-Indonesian groups of Papuans, many of whom were coerced or misinformed,[95] to send petitions demanding a shortening of the mission's duration.[96] The Biak

91 ICRC Archives, B AG 200 158-002 200 (96), 'Letter from New Guinea Council and Hollandia to President of ICRC in Geneva', 27 January 1963.
92 UNARMS, S-0876-0001-07-00001, 'Abdoh report to Thant', 13 December 1962, p. 39/40.
93 Ibid., p. 40.
94 UNARMS, S-0701-0003-04, 'Report from Divisional Commissioner, Biak, to Director of Internal Affairs, Hollandia, 26 March 1963', p. 1.
95 UNARMS, S-0075-0002-04, 'Re-assessment of the situation, Merauke, Annex C.5, 8 December 1962', p. 1.
96 UNARMS, S-0701-0003-04, 'Report from Divisional Commissioner, Biak, to Director of Internal Affairs, Hollandia, 26 March 1963', p. 1.

district commissioner reported that his local representatives had communicated to him that at least one instance of a Papuan pro-Indonesian petition had 'fallen into Indonesian hands'.[97] Abdoh also noted in a report to Thant that he had, 'reason to believe that this method [of coercion] is widely practiced in Hollandia and other divisions by self-styled leaders'.[98] Coerced petitions attempted to characterise the majority of the Papuan population as being in support of the Indonesian take-over and, although UNTEA leadership were suspicious of genuine Papuan feelings, they were concerned that the presence of obstructive Indonesian troops could disturb the fragile peace of the territory and neighbouring islands.

Even before the second phase of the mission had begun, rumours travelled to the UNTEA bureaucracy that any pro-independence rallies or self-determination protests would become violent due to appearances from pro-Indonesian groups.[99] Abdoh wrote in his progress report to Thant that, 'There is also the risk that the Indonesian who are already in this Territory, might encourage, or engineer, incidents involving Indonesian troops in order to achieve their objectives'.[100] Within a month of this report, on 17 January 1963, the UN Department of Information broadcast reports of a pro-Indonesian, 'spontaneous mass demonstration which had apparently been staged by some 2,000 West Irianese [Papuans] before the UNTEA office at Kotabaru [Hollandia]'.[101] Indonesian efforts to motivate support within West Papuan communities and propaganda tactics put people on the street, whether they were coerced or not, and the threat of violent clashes between Papuan political groups and Indonesian paratroopers became a source of serious concern for the UNTEA administration as they worried about the diplomatic implications of violent eruptions under their authority. Although Abdoh had made efforts to enquire about the possibility of shortening the length of the mission, in acquiescence to Indonesian demands, Thant did not want to capitulate; the organisation could not run the reputational risk of being antagonised to leave early, unable to do its job, with their tail between their legs.

Instead, the mission leadership used the threats of political clashes and violence to its advantage. Rather than attempting to challenge the root of the threat and investigate the accusations of the Indonesian government's coercion and misinformation campaign, the UNTEA officials securitised the question of West Papuans' self-determination and reasserted their role as the arbiter of law and order in the territory by policing and limiting civil rights. The district commissioner from Biak acknowledged the predicament of maintaining the terms of the New York Agreement following deployment and administration of the territory: 'The simple issue is whether largely fabricated evidence [of majority pro-Indonesian feeling] is to be discounted and a bona fide attempt made in time by the UN to ascertain Papuan feeling, with the assurance convincingly given in advance that if

97 Ibid., p. 1.
98 UNARMS, S-0876-0001-07-00001, 'Abdoh report to Thant', 13 December 1962, p. 37.
99 Ibid., p. 29.
100 Ibid., p. 29.
101 BNA, FO 371/169951, DJ1013/8, 'Restricted letter from Selby to Warner', 25 January 1963.

the vote goes in favour of Papuan separation from Indonesia it can and will be effectively supported'.[102] Publicly accepting that the population supported the Indonesian take-over benefitted the UN narrative; they could argue that the UN masterminded a popular political decision rather than championed an artificial one, rooted in racism.

In response to this potential risk, the UNTEA leadership securitised Papuan pro-independence political meetings and demonstrations as a means of preventing all potential breaches to the peace or instability. The UNTEA leadership installed a policy of authoritarianism by bureaucracy. They complicated existing protocols and expanded documentary requirements for public assemblies and meetings, expanding the terms of an old colonial law stating that activists must seek permission from their regional official before lawfully organising public processions and meetings.[103] On 18 February, the UNTEA mission published a new decree instructing all activists that 'the request for such permission must be filed with the Divisional Commission or District Officer *at least 48 hours* before the scheduled time for such processions, public entertainment or celebration'.[104] Failure to do so would result in a fine and, potentially, up to two weeks imprisonment, demonstrating the mission staff's willingness to utilise the carceral system to protect the stability of the mission.[105] The divisional commissioner would then be given the final right of veto 'in the event that a proposed procession would be likely to cause a breach of the peace', further empowering the commissioners to interfere in the political life of West Papuans.[106]

This expanded decree also asserted that the UNTEA commissioners retained a discretionary right to refuse any application if they were under any concern of potential 'incidents' erupting, further imbuing the peacekeeping officials with arbitrary decision-making powers.[107] The decree stated that the 'overriding duty of Divisional Commissioners [is] the maintenance of law and order', thus encouraging the commissioners to prioritise an overly cautious approach to approving assembly requests, especially in the context of intensified Indonesian obstruction efforts across the territory.[108] UNTEA officials held control over the access, topics and very existence of public political meetings organised by Papuan residents. The divisional commissioners, now armed with 48 hours to take any necessary law and order measures in response to activists' requests, were also authorised by the existing permissions of the old Dutch law which permitted 'civil servants and

102 UNARMS, S-0075-0002-04, 'Memorandum from Divisional Commissioner, Biak, to Dr. Abdoh, 4 December 1962', p. 1/2.
103 UNARMS, S-0700-0003-05, 'Vereeniging en Vergaderingverorderning [Association and Meeting Order], Para II'.
104 UNARMS, S-0700-0003-05, 'Decree concerning public processions', 18 February 1963.
105 UNARMS, S-0700-0003-05, 'Draft explanatory note concerning public processions', 19 January 1963.
106 Ibid.
107 Ibid.
108 Ibid.

police officers' to attend 'all meetings'.[109] Additionally, this law outlined that 'said civil servants and police shall have the right to force and entry in cases where admission is refused to them, under the auspices of the district officer' and 'admission may be refused to other persons', sanctioning the UNTEA officials with immense gatekeeping authority over all political activity in the territory.[110] Thus, by mid-February the new and expanded West Papuan laws had established a precedent of authoritarianism, especially towards pro-independence activists, that would only be intensified once annexed by Indonesia.

During the second phase of the mission, a significant number of Indonesian personnel joined the UNTEA administration and police service, drastically altering the national proportion of the mission and expanding the official Indonesian presence in West Papua.[111] In an environment of acknowledged coercion, the mission law and order policy forced pro-independence activists to discuss their plans and demands in the presence of armed Indonesian police officers and officials – that is, if their request for assembly was approved. Therefore, the UNTEA leadership prioritised the stability of the region in every aspect of the mission's operations, encouraging the overt violation of Papuan civil liberties under UN authority. Behaving like a colonial state, the UNTEA staff used their own fears of instability, violence, or 'emergency' in order to expand their own security permissions and to maintain absolute control over the territory.[112]

The mission also served to stymy Papuan efforts to internationalise their claims within the international humanitarian sphere. Attracting the attention of other international humanitarian organisations in the few months left before the Indonesian take-over was the Papuan activists' best strategy to pressure the UNTEA mission to hold the plebiscite under UN jurisdiction. In January 1963, three Papuan leaders from the New Guinea Council, based in Hollandia – Jouwe, Kaisiepo, and Jufuway – appealed to the President of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in Geneva, Leopold Boissier.[113] They met and organised with fellow anti-Indonesian activists in The Hague as they drafted the statement, recognising the UNTEA period was an unprecedented legal opportunity for the territory to resist re-colonisation. The Councillors wrote the letter to report multiple incidents of Indonesian violence against nationalist Papuans during the period of UNTEA administration and gave details such as dates and injured parties.[114] They also stated that these incidents had been reported to them by

109 UNARMS, S-0700-0003-05, 'Vereeniging en Vergaderingverordening [Association and Meeting Order], Para II'.
110 Ibid.
111 UNARMS, S-0701-0003-04, 'Report from Divisional Commissioner, Biak, to Director of Internal Affairs, Hollandia, 26 March 1963', p. 1.
112 This concept has been examined by M. Neocleous, 'The problem with normality: taking exception to "Permanent Emergency"', *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political,* 31, 2 (2006), 191–213.
113 ICRC Archives, B AG 200 158-002 200 (96), 'Letter from New Guinea Council and Hollandia to President of ICRC in Geneva', 27 January 1963.
114 Ibid.

'various sides' so as to position themselves as impartial actors.[115] The Council leaders requested the ICRC to send an independent investigation and query the plans to transfer administration into Indonesian hands on humanitarian and human rights grounds, attaching a supportive statement by UNTEA physician R. Kummer to their letter.[116] Kummer signed this statement from Zeist, a town in the Netherlands, verifying the injuries cited in the letter and referring to his period as a medic in the Central Hospital in Hollandia while employed by UNTEA.[117] He confirmed that he treated two patients on 1 January 1963 who had been seriously injured, likely whipped and beaten, by Indonesian paratroopers the previous afternoon in Ifar, a town westwards from Hollandia.[118] His witness statement and position of legitimacy as a physician employed by the UN was utilised as evidence by the New Guinea Councilmembers of the violence and human rights abuses prevalent, and likely to intensify following Indonesian annexation, in West Papua.[119] The Councillors hoped they could escalate their claims by opening a line of communication directly between an anti-Indonesian activist group and an international humanitarian organisation.

However, the Papuan Councillors underestimated the informal allegiances within the elites of international society. A week after receiving the petition, Roger Gallopin, the Executive Director of the ICRC, sent a letter to the Director General of the UN in Geneva, Pier Spinelli to alert him to the accusations made by the activists.[120] Gallopin suggested that Abdoh as the Administrator appointed by Thant, 'would be better than anyone able to rule on the merits of the complaints we received. . .'.[121] He also argued that the UNTEA Administrator would be in the best position to take action to prevent violence, 'if they [the abuses] have actually taken place', indicating that the ICRC leadership found it hard to believe the accounts of such violence under UN authority.[122] Returning the power of oversight to the UN, the ICRC's assumption of a UN senior official's independence and their preference to not interfere with the UN's area of jurisdiction served to prevent the Papuan activists from accessing international humanitarian recourse. Following confidential communication between the UN Secretariat office in New York and the ICRC headquarters in Geneva, the Papuan Councillors received a short letter from an ICRC delegate – rather than Gallopin – stating that the organisation had been informed that any previous

115 Ibid.
116 Ibid., p. 4.
117 R. Kummer was a Dutch physician. It is unknown whether he was part of the international staff deployed to the mission or whether he was hired by the mission once the transfer from Dutch colonial administration began.
118 ICRC Archives, B AG 200 158-002 200 (96), 'Letter from New Guinea Council and Hollandia to President of ICRC in Geneva', 27 January 1963, p. 4.
119 Ibid., p. 1.
120 ICRC Archives, B AG 200 158-002 200 (96), 'Letter from R. Gallopin to P. Spinelli (Director Generale de l'Office europeen des Nations Unies)', 8 February 1963. Translation from French – author's own.
121 Ibid.
122 Ibid.

instances of violence between Indonesian officials and Papuan civilians were 'exceptional' and that efforts had been made by the UNTEA mission to avoid 'a repetition' of 'any disagreement or tension'.[123] Thus, fellow humanitarian organisations contributed to the delegitimisation of reported instances of serious violence by favouring a narrative of exaggerative Papuans over one of inattentive peacekeepers.

International perceptions of the UN's principles and therefore assumptions of the mission's inherent benevolence also prevented Papuans from seeking political asylum in neighbouring nations. Some of those who lost hope in UNTEA attempted to migrate across the border into Australian-mandated Papua New Guinea before the Indonesian takeover on 1 May 1963.[124] Scholarship on the Australian government response to asylum claims by Klaus Neumann and Savitri Taylor has shown the Australian government's policy of appeasement towards its 'powerful northern neighbour, Indonesia', situating this decision as part of a longer trend of xenophobic foreign policy in the country.[125] Australia's decision to reject Papuan asylum claims in 1963 was also underpinned by the government's assumption of the conditions under an UN authority. The Australian government argued that a legitimate basis for political asylum could not be made from civilians leaving a UN administrated territory. They argued that UNTEA officials should be the sole responsibility for managing these claims of asylum rather than any other national government, 'bearing in mind the humanitarian principles to which the United Nations subscribe'.[126] Thus, Papuan activists' efforts to communicate their experiences and concerns for the future were thwarted, directly and indirectly by UNTEA's administration of the territory. Under un-elected UN governance, the population had no recourse to popularise or protest their predicament to the international community, nor to seek legal protection abroad. For the international community, the mission was assumed to be the canary in the mine; if the UN staff became suspicious of the rights protections in the territory, they would sound the alarm and react accordingly.

As the second phase of the mission progressed, the dynamic in the territory shifted and the reality of the impending take-over began to have brutal consequences. The consequences of UNTEA's delegitimisation campaign became unavoidably evident in the physical repercussions on the Papuan population. The UNTEA staff dismissed the Papuans' political fears and reports of Indonesian paratroopers' aggression, rationalising that the future treatment of the population was out of their hands and beyond their control. The same racist logic underpinning the UNTEA

123 ICRC Archives, B AG 200 158-002 200 (96), 'Letter from ICRC Delgate to Mr. N. Jouwe', 11 March 1963.
124 UNARMS, S-0703-0001-02, 'Memorandum on some points of interest regarding West New Guinea – from Abdoh's visit to the Netherlands', p. 3.
125 K. Neumann and S. Taylor, 'Australia, Indonesia, and West Papuan refugees, 1962–2009', *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific,* 10, 1 (2010), 3.
126 UNARMS, S-0703-0001-02, 'Memorandum on some points of interest regarding West New Guinea - from Abdoh's visit to the Netherlands', p. 3.

bureaucracy's political delegitimisation of the population also encouraged the same leadership to characterise the population as troublemakers without motive and therefore likely to exaggerate or fabricate incidents of abuse.[127]

The close relationship between the UNTEA leadership and the West Papua police chief inspired a policy of diminishment or outright dismissal of Papuan reports of abuse. British national, Police Chief, J C. Robertson lead the policing wing of the UNTEA mission sent daily intelligence reports to the UNTEA headquarters to alert them of any security issues. During the second phase of the mission, the police recorded repeated instances of informal policing and violence against pro-Independence Papuans by Indonesians during this period.[128] For instance, on one occasion 53 pro-independence Papuans were unlawfully arrested and detained for several days by Indonesian troops for damaging the Indonesian flag.[129] The police discovered these detainees in their cells on 4 January and judged the arrest illegal, immediately releasing the civilians.[130] However, in internal communications, police chief Robertson blamed the victims for their own illegal arrest and attributed the incident to the detained Papuans' 'alcoholic intake'.[131] Robertson's assessment of this incident was part of a wider trend of dismissal and diminishment of the Papuan situation in order to normalise the mission staff's inaction.

In another instance, the mission leadership also revealed that it had been made aware of members of the Indonesian Army Intelligence agency tracking down and counteracting pro-independence Papuans across the territory during this period through updates from divisional commissioners. In one of Abdoh's progress reports to the UN headquarters, he mentioned that the Indonesian Army Intelligence had been actively scanning the island's communications for anti-Indonesian groups and petitions in order to put pressure on Papuan civilians in retaliation for their activism.[132] The police and UNTEA leadership preferred to individualise the situations rather than examine the compounding impact of all reported instances.[133] Thus, the UNTEA leaders disregarded the political and societal implications of these police reports and remained indifferent to the growth in Papuan unease and vulnerability following the influx of Indonesians to the territory.

After transferring authority to the Indonesian government on 31 May 1963, the UN leadership reflected on the UNTEA mission as a success and a peaceful resolution to a potentially disastrous territorial dispute.[134] The mission bureaucracy fulfilled the mission mandate and the terms of the New York Agreement.

127 UNARMS, S-0682-0003-01, 'Illegal arrests by Indonesian troops, 7.1.63'.
128 UNARMS, S-0682-0003-01, 'Daily intelligence: Police Headquarters, 17.1.63'; S-0682-0003-01, 'Daily intelligence: Police Headquarters, 19.1.63'.
129 UNARMS, S-0682-0003-01, 'Illegal arrests by Indonesian Troops, 7.1.63'.
130 Ibid.
131 Ibid.
132 UNARMS, S-0075-0004-02, 'Progress report from Abdoh, April 1963', p. 8/9.
133 UNARMS, S-0682-0003-01, 'Daily intelligence: police headquarters, 19.1.63'.
134 U. Thant, *View from the UN*, 48.

However, the UN officials were complicit in silencing the Papuan population despite their knowledge of the political activity and Indonesian interference in the territory. Ultimately, the UNTEA staff's organisational priorities and racial prejudices drove their legitimisation of the authoritarian take-over and the perpetuation of discriminatory conceptions of the Papuan population within the international community.

UNTEA staff's disengagement with Papuan independence was part of a broader pattern of unequal decision-making and gatekeeping authority wielded by UN mid-level peacekeepers during decolonisation in the 1950s and 1960s.[135] Decolonisation's 'moment of possibility' unequally affected different populations.[136] Some causes were internationally championed and others were sidelined as activists campaigned for recognition in an increasingly competitive field.[137] Global South independence and human rights activists witnessed this transformation to the international forum and sought to escalate their claims by engaging in the humanitarian sector through petitions and lobbying.[138] However, the UN officials' discretional power forged a pervasive hierarchy as the UN staff oversaw the inclusion – and exclusion – of activists' petitions, letters, and territorial representation within international forums. This gatekeeping power extended to the field-based UN officials deployed to West Papua in 1962–3.

The UN-brokered negotiations for the political future of the island were perceived, by the broader international community and the Papuan population, as a legitimisation of the New York Agreement; the rights of the Papuans would be protected if the principles of the UN Charter were followed. However, the terms of the Agreement conflicted with the demands of political groups within the territory who were excluded from the discussions between the Netherlands and Indonesian governments. Thant's decision-making was driven by geopolitical concerns about international security in the Pacific region as he sought to prevent the Dutch-Indonesian skirmishes from evolving into a Cold War conflict. Accepting the colonial administration's assessment of the Papuan population, those drafting the Agreement made provisions for the re-colonisation of the territory without any steps to ascertain *bona fide* insight into the political aspirations or demands of the Papuans.[139] The UN's reputational crisis and operational missteps in Congo prompted the secretary-general to conceive the UNTEA mission as an important

135 Similar dynamics existed in the League of Nations Mandate system and UN Trusteeship Council: S. Pedersen, *The Guardians: The League of Nations and the Crisis of Empire* (Oxford 2015); J. Heise and M. Ketzmerick, 'Points of division: the role of agency, security and shrinking spaces in the UN Trusteeship State Building of Togoland and Cameroon', paper delivered at ISA, 1–3 August 2019 in Accra, Ghana.

136 F. Cooper, 'Development, modernization, and the social sciences in the era of decolonization: the examples of British and French Africa', *Revue d'Histoire des Sciences Humaines*, 10, 1 (2004), 33.

137 Heise and Ketzmerick, 'Points of division'.

138 M. Terretta, *Petitioning for our Rights, Fighting for our Nation: The History of the Democratic Union of Cameroonian Women, 1949–1960* (Oxford 2013).

139 UNARMS, S-0075-0002-04, 'Memorandum from Divisional Commissioner, Biak, to Dr. Abdoh, 4 December 1962', p. 1/2.

opportunity to demonstrate the institution's field-based expertise. However, once on the ground, the UNTEA peacekeepers witnessed the political activity and vitality of the anti-Indonesian activists in each region of the territory. Prioritising racialised conceptions of the population, the UN staff asserted the political illiteracy of the population and securitised Papuan efforts to promote or publicise pro-independence activism.

The peacekeepers' awareness of the Indonesian government's abuses during UNTEA further complicates the organisation's projected image as a global protector of human rights during this period. Despite projecting themselves as part of a humanitarian organisation, the UNTEA personnel dismissed the attacks on Papuans and ignored the potential for these abuses to escalate following the take-over of authoritarian rule in the territory. The UN officials distanced themselves and rationalised away the human rights and civil liberties violations in order to ensure a smooth take-over and protect the desperately required diplomatic credentials of a 'successful' field operation. Thus, by gatekeeping Papuan self-determination, the UNTEA officials became complicit in re-colonising the territory and facilitated the perpetuation of racism and violence against West Papuans.

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