CHAPTER II

DISPOSSESSION OF PAPUAN CULTURE

(*RUBY-EYED COUCAL*)

Bruce Pascoe’s *Ruby-eyed Coucal* (1996) is an apt example of Neo-colonialism. Neo-colonialism is a policy whereby a major power uses economic and political means to perpetuate or extend its influence over underdeveloped countries. These weaker countries are under direct military and political control, where the capitalist countries start their firms and businesses to plunder the resources of these nations. Dr. Kwame Nkrumah, the first President of independent Ghana, says that Neocolonialism is the last stage of imperialism. *Ruby-eyed Coucal* is a Postcolonial novel, and also a work of resistance. Portrayal of a nation in crisis and resistance to colonial rule are dominant themes of the work. It represents the subalter. The oppression and victimization of the natives and their powerlessness; resistance and fight for liberation, and mostly observed, the violation of human rights, are to be found in the novel.

Melanesians belong to the land of Papua. Germany, Britain and Netherlands are responsible for the division of Papua land into East and West Papua, though people of both the regions belong to the same ethnic group. The island was bifurcated with a straight line. Both the nations were ruled by different colonial powers and later, West Papua by Indonesia with the ‘Act of Free Choice’. Unfortunately the largest peace promoting organization of the world, UNO approved the illegal invasion. Certainly, the international companies from the developed nations have a
key role to play in its occupation. All these companies are owned by the politicians and ministers in power.

Karl Marx quotes, “History does nothing; it does not possess immense riches, it does not fight battles. It is men, real, living, who do all this, who possess things and fight battles...” Selfish men with egocentric attitude, who believe in plundering the weak, are the cause for imbalances in the society. Marxist ideology champions the oppressed in their long and bitter struggle against the decadent bourgeois order. The bourgeoisie practice naked, shameless, direct, brutal exploitation on the proletariat. Class conflict, victimization, exploitation, discrimination and inequality are common aspects of a society, where capital is the prime concern for its people. And West Papua is no exception to this tendency.

*Ruby-eyed Coucal* deals with the dispossession of native Papuan culture in the hands of Indonesian army; and the complacency of Australia in supporting the occupation. Papua Island lies to the east of Indonesia and north of Australia. It’s estimated that people have been living in West Papua for more than 50,000 years. The island which is known for its rich minerals, flora and fauna, is divided into two nations- West Papua and Papua New Guinea. It’s a land of great ancient culture:

West Papua has been inhabited for at least 30,000 years. The indigenous peoples have retained many of their early forms of living. They are scattered throughout the whole territory in small clans and are kept apart by terrain, language, and customs. No indigenous language has more than 150,000 speakers, and some languages are spoken by only a few thousand people. The
people live mainly by subsistence farming, consuming edible roots and pigs. (Rumley, Dennis, et al., 2006, 113)

John McLeod in Beginning Post Colonialism (2000) observes on dominant themes of post-colonial literature. Post colonial literatures represent the meeting of two cultures, in particular, the way in which an indigenous order has been usurped by alien and intrusive values. It’s evident in the Indonesian occupation of West Papua. Since 19th century to 1960s the Dutch colonized it. West Papua has been occupied by Indonesia as soon as it got independence from the Dutch in the year 1962. They don’t even belong to a single ethnic group as Papuans are Melanesians and Indonesians are Malays. The only common factor is that both the nations were the colonies of the Dutch. With military force Indonesia has been exploiting the rich minerals and resources of the land. Surely, the occupation is only for material gains. In the process of colonization the natives have been deprived of their valuable culture and the decrees of human rights have been mocked at by the Indonesian government and its army, ample number of times.

Papuan land had tribal societies before the advent of Europeans. They had a trading system and used to maintain small scale industries that design wooden artifacts. The colonization of the land by the Dutch and the arrival of people from other parts of Europe disturbed the routine affairs of the land. Especially, at the time of World War II the Japanese invaded Australia via Papua. And Australia with the help of American troops fought against the Japanese. And the place they chose to fight was Papua. It’s not a question of who won the war, but the destruction of a land which has nothing to do with the issue. Aletta Biersack remarks:
Through trade, marriage, and travel, they (natives) have moved among one another, imported to and exported from one another, defined themselves in opposition to one another, created hybrid cultural forms. In the history of the area, syncretism is not just an artifact of colonialism; syncretism is the ordinary state of affairs. Through administrative patrols, missionization, and capitalist incursions, colonialism brought the West to the doorsteps of these peoples, creating yet another context for intercultural activities: travel, exchange, language learning, ritual sharing, borrowing and lending, and warfare. (Biersack, Aletta. 5-6)

Sandra Marker in her paper titled, “Effects of Colonization”, remarks that the source of the conflict of West Papua lies in the Western colonial policies, like, treatment of indigenous populations, the privileging of some groups over others, the uneven distribution of wealth, local governmental infrastructures, and the formation of non-democratic or non-participatory governmental systems. It takes time for any nation for its transition from a colonized territory to an independent state. Moreover, it’s highly difficult to get a consensus in a nation like Papua because of the geographical diversity as it is spread into many islands. Even before Pauans planned a governmental structure, Indonesia unexpectedly occupied West Papua and claimed for its possession. And the ‘Act of Free Choice’ granted to the Pauans by the United Nations, made West Papua a part of Indonesia in the year 1969, and West Papua was named Irian Jaya. 1025 Papuan men were asked to choose between sovereignty and Indonesian citizenship. And they voted for the latter. There are allegations that the
Papuan representatives were hand-picked by Indonesian Government. By doing so, it has denied the fundamental right to freewill of the native Papuans.

*Act of Free Choice* was a vote in Western New Guinea in 1969 that asked whether the population favored remaining with Indonesia or becoming independent. The selected representatives of the population unanimously chose union with Indonesia and the result was accepted by the United Nations, although the validity of the vote has been challenged in retrospect. (*Act of Free Choice*, Wikipedia)

Since then, the West Papuans have been subjected to the brutality of Indonesian military for almost five decades, during which more than 100,000 Papuans got killed. Their houses were burnt down, gardens were destroyed and the cattle were shot to death. Many Papuan leaders were hunted and people disappeared from the country, fled into the wild forests. They’ve been dispossessed and displaced of their land. It has become a place of modern genocide as the Colonizers committed mass murders to keep their hold on the occupied country. There’ve been many instances where the Indonesians violated human rights:

The abuse and neglect of the Indigenous people by the Indonesian Government and Military has been ___ and continues to be in severe violation of their basic human right. The severe and constant violation of all basic human rights has left the native people with a painful history of bloodshed, demoralization, displacement and heartache. (*Human Rights. Web*)

Increased sexual violence is a result of Colonization. It’s a historical fact that the colonizer’s eye catches the beauty of the native women. Papuan women have
suffered dreadful violence in the hands of Indonesian army. The military and police have violated human rights, which include rape, torture, slaughter, illegal detention, assault, slavery, sexual exploitation, displacement and abduction. Large numbers of Indonesian troops who are deputed to quell Papuan resistance have committed sexual crimes on them. It’s pathetic that women are raped inside their houses, in the presence of their family members at the gun point, by the army in the name of hunt for rebels. The brutalities on women are used as a weapon to terrorize and demoralize the rebels. If at all any crime comes to the public notice, the Indonesian soldiers are sentenced to less than one year imprisonment. Agus Alua, Chair of the MRP (Majelis Rakyat Papua/ Papuan People’s Council) remarks:

Everywhere, we are being raped and subjected to sexual molestation, in prisons, out in the fields, whenever seeking refuge, whenever the army and the police conduct operations in the name of security, and even in our own homes.

We are victims of violence. (West Papua Report Jan 2011 Highlights)

The sexual abuse on Papuan women resulted in high rate of HIV/AIDS in the region. And lack of proper health services adds fuel to the fire. Tom Benedetti in his essay, “Papua’s Women and Children under Fire”, says that AIDS was first detected in the region in 1992. Brothels established and run by Indonesian military are principal causes for the spread of the deadly disease. They also relocate HIV infected women from other parts of Indonesia to Papua. In turn, they put the blame on the natives’ risky sexual behavior. The innocent women are being killed because of the vulnerable diseases. The Indonesian government hasn’t taken any initiatives to bring awareness among the people on the deadly diseases.
Papuans formed OPM (Organisasi Papua Merdeka - Free Papua Organization), a militant organization to fight against Indonesians in 1965. It’s been trying through various means for the liberation of Papua and to overthrow the Indonesian government from ruling the land. They could not digest the slow disappearance of their cultures, customs and mining of the land in the name of modernity. They get little support from the neighboring countries. Australia indirectly supports Indonesia for its selfish reasons as they share an oil basin and gets a share from mining. So also, Papua New Guinea, which is under the Australian imperial rule. And the support of USA and Britain to Indonesia suppresses the plan of any support from the other nations of the world.

The support that Indonesia gets from USA and Britain can be termed as neocolonial practice. Dr. Kwame Nkrumah, Jean-Paul Sartre and Noam Chomsky, critics of neocolonialism, argue that “existing or past global economic arrangements created by former colonial powers were used to maintain control of their former colonies and dependencies after the colonial independence movements of the post World War II period.” (Cano, Librado F. 26) The process of decolonization started because of freedom movements in various colonized countries across Asia and Africa. In no time, they have been subjected to a new form of colonialism, waged by developed countries.

In ancient days, approximately in the seventh century, there were trading links among the ancient Papuans, Aboriginal Australians and Indonesians. They used to exchange spices, herbs, and the feathers of an elusive bird. They participated in the rituals of others and had respect for each other. The Western thought, of money
making and plundering the weak has brought in a ruthless change in the relations of the natives. There was competition among the European countries in occupying the weaker nations. People in the olden days lived amicably but the modern era is known for its cut throat political ideologies. There’s a clash between enduring ancient cultures and modern politics.

Jim Fox, a protagonist of the novel, has been fighting with the Free Papua Organization (OPM) in the highlands of Irian Jaya. He is a half-caste Aborigine, ran away from Australia as he’s accused of killing his adopted father. When Australia yielded to the Indonesians he came to help the OPM resistance fighters on the border. He joined OPM and been fighting for the cause of Papuans. Armos Tutilani, the leader of the OPM, Jim Fox, Marcus and many Papuans, like fugitives, move in the jungle, hide themselves, carry guns and fight against Indonesian soldiers and transmigree settlers who’ve come to occupy the land and destroy their culture. They use the border between West Papua and Papua New Guinea as their hideout. In the beginning Jim Fox preferred the program of passive cultural resistance. But the Indonesian army has killed millions of natives. Armos and Marcus are impatient for success and have adopted militant style. The significant immigrant Java population does not support the OPM. These transmigree farmers, who were ex-army people, are brought to border villages of West Papua by Indonesian soldiers only to suppress Papuan resistance. It has become a war now.

They are on a hopeless fight to free their homeland, have lost many of their companions in the fight. They can escape to their neighboring countries like, Australia or Papua New Guinea. But they are not allowed to enter as both the
nations support Indonesia. Moreover, these rebels don’t like to leave their land. They have to safeguard their ancient old culture from enemy threat.

Fighting back is the natural way of responding to the destruction and exploitation without any concern to the human life and their environment … natural reaction to the intolerable killings, disappearances, torture, oppression, and intimidation carried out by the Indonesian government… important for the very survival of tribal people. (*Logical Reasons for Fighting, Web*)

Colonialism certainly encouraged ethnic rivalry for ages. Imperialist countries favor one ethnic group over others by providing them resources, which resulted in rivalry among the groups. Fortunately, colonization in West Papua has united all the tribes. Bruce Pascoe says that the natives are affectionate, good natured and amicable. They always greet others with a gentle smile, which they’ve done to Indonesians in the beginning. But “these people still had trouble understanding that a person who smiled could also mean harm.” (6) The tribes like the Mek, the Yali and the Ok never had good relations among themselves as there was competition for control over traditional lands. But they could immediately unite against Indonesians.

All the tribes living across West Papua share a single opinion towards the destruction caused by Western companies and governments with support from Indonesia. “They would fight for their gardens, their forests and their rivers even if it meant walking beside people they’d distrusted for centuries.” (4) According to OPM rebels, Indonesian administration of Papua is a military occupation. There has been
much gunfire between the members of the OPM and Indonesian soldiers. Raising slogan, ‘Merdeka’ (Freedom) is punishable for 25 years. Literally, they are on a run in their own land.

Jim Fox believes in peace and harmony, always thought of two distinct worlds. First one is the chaotic world, in which the future of the children is in doldrums because of internal and external wars. And the other, where children play with their parents, attend school, plan their careers, which can be called a romantic and secure childhood. Peace, love and happiness are always possible. But when your people are killed, your huts are burnt and lands are occupied; when your women are raped and your children are napalmed, you can’t think of peace and happiness but revenge.

During their runaway, the OPM rebels come across Kurul, leader of the tribe, Mek. He takes them to a thatched hut, where he shows them a grey stone, his people’s sacred source and says, “We did not flee and we did not fight. Our resistance was to stay here and keep our ceremonies, bury our dead, initiate our children and protect our sacred stones.” (6) He gives them a heavy Japanese pistol, which is a symbol of his tribe’s triumph over a Japanese battalion during II World war. Passing it to the OPM is a sign of absolute dedication to the cause of freedom of their land. Fox is taller than all the villagers by more than half a metre and twice their weight. But any one of them has twice his strength. They are strong both mentally and physically. They have the moral fiber to fight against the fifth largest army in the world, not with modern weapons but with bows, arrows and a few antique guns.
Not all the Papuans joined OPM. Many of them live in the highlands. But the support has been there for the rebels, for which, they lost their family members and friends. They are dedicated to the cause of freedom. Kurul’s tribe informs the rebels of a secret village to hide themselves for some days, provides them enough food to stay long and sends a native to guide them to reach the deserted village. After a long journey they reach the secret village, Baroong Baroong, abandoned many years ago. It is located in the middle of a dense forest. There’s no path, no way. They have to climb and clear the trees to reach the place. The people of the village have fled away many years ago as they could not resist the Indonesian soldiers. The rebels take shelter in the huts. During night, they capture Munark, a native of the village. His family and fellow villagers fled to Papua New Guinea when the Indonesians attacked the village. He’s been staying there among the bushes, waiting for his friends. They come back only when Indonesians leave their land.

The village intrigues Fox and the rebels. It’s a fine example of a great civilization. For thousands of years many of the villages are unexplored. Other tribes do not dare to enter, if the land is owned by a particular tribe. Another reason is that they live in clan system; each clan is isolated from others. Papuan land is mountainous and there’s a lot of difficulty in accessibility and transportation. That’s why; the places are hidden for ages. Fox walks around and tries to study the houses of the village:

The entrance of the village was an elaborately thatched pavilion with a woven conical spire shading a stile made from polished auracaria planks. Thick sliding panels of cedar barred the entrance and these were intricately carved.
with numerous figures of men, women, children, pigs and dogs. Either side of these panels stood two totems carved in the image of a strange bird. The claws were made with pearl inlay and the eyes were chunks of carnelian garnet set into the sockets from behind. Standing at the gazebo, you looked down on an ancient avenue of auracaries to where houses were arranged around the spring… The poles supporting the roof either side of the door of each house were carved in identical fashion to those at the village entrance: the strange bird inlaid with pearl shell and garnet. Flitches of cedar formed the outside walls and each panel was carved with spirit figures, animals, maize, sugar cane and banana palms, a friege of village life and its regeneration. A story no more sadly told than when abandoned… Around each house and bordering the pool were carefully sculpted gardens of coleus, orchids, lantana and impatiens. A haven, a heaven. (15-16)

When Fox’s taking rest Munark wakes him up and shows him a bird. “A bird the size of a small pheasant was shuffling through the low growth of ferns and bamboo. It had a long glossy tail of deep emerald green, a back mottled with the same green and shimmering bronze. On the wing there was a slash of brightest blue and its eye was – yes, the eye was deep ruby.” (17) Munark with a bamboo knife kills the bird, tugs something and tosses it to Fox. He is really surprised when he finds small nuggets of gold, two rough garnets and a perfectly clear crystal of sapphire. The bird is called Baroong Baroong, (Ruby-eyed Coucal) and the village is named after it. The images of the bird that he saw at the entrance of the village are of
the same bird. As the bird and the stones are sacred, Fox locates the village stone and preserves the precious stones in the package.

Dr. Richard Pritchard is a missionary of the First Church of Universal Salvation. He lives at Seng with wife, Elwyn; daughter, Alice and son, Troy. The boy is interested in *National Geographics*. He’s collected a large number of pictures of birds of the Irian Jaya jungles. Nobody in his house knows that he has collected the feathers of over one hundred and eighty highland birds and secreted them in the roof cavity of an abandoned hut. Dr Pritchard warns Korpun, the head of the village, to collect and destroy all the stone axes and the shields of the people. He warns them that if they don’t do it, evil will creep into their village in all its forms. For the villagers, Richard is an outsider, a white man. It’s not the image of holiness of the white man that made Korpun and his villagers allow Dr. Pritchard in to the valley and their lives. But it’s the thought of the curse of Satan that made them accept the white man. Richard instead of destroying the collected weapons, plans to sell them to Michigan Cultural Crafts. The stone axes and shields represent the native culture and would safeguard them from outside dangers. Troy suspects his father’s unholy nature and secretly returns Korpun’s weapons. The natives kill the whole family except Troy. He is left into the jungle.

Indonesian army is not worried about the death of few missionaries. But they don’t want the Americans to come to Papua to find out the reason behind their killing. That’s why, the army’s killed few villagers, claiming them as the murderers of the missionaries and sent the pictures to American consulate. The American government and the First Church of Universal Salvation will be happy with the
Indonesian army. The true reason behind this is that their occupation of Papua and the genocide won’t be identified and won’t get any exposure.

The rebels come across the Indonesian army when they are planning to dynamite enemy’s bulldozers. By the time the army opens fire the rebels jump into the drowning river. Unfortunately, Marcus receives a shot on his chest, which causes him his life. Fox doesn’t find any hope in the resistance. He doesn’t understand the patriotic fervor of Armos and Marcus, even when they are killed one by one. Same time he can’t comprehend the determination of the rebels. He tries to convince Armos.

“You must go home to your village, Armos,” Fox said to his friend.

“Army will kill me, kill my family.”

“They will kill you here and you cannot save your family by being away. You can’t win this fight. The Indonesians will not rest until they have caught you. Take your people to one of the missions.” Fox tried to sound convincing but his voice was lame and faded on the last words. Armos spat and turned his shoulder slightly to ward off Fox’s presence. Fox saw his friend’s angled back with dismay, knowing the offence he had given.

“You go back. You go back to your people. Take your people to a mission.”

“Armos, they are surrounding you.”

“Friend, they surrounded us in 1966. You taught me that. And now I’ll teach you. My people will move into missions, they’ll carve silly sticks for you white people.” Armos flicked his fingers at Fox, “All right you have black
blood, but you say go to the missions; that’s a white man’s thought. You’re thinking white, and… I will never think like a white or like an Asian, I am Papua; I can talk of a thousand grandfathers… this is Papua, this is my people’s land and I will die here as a Papuan.” (30-31)

Indonesian army tortures the natives for the whereabouts of rebels. Natives of Seng are repeatedly being harassed and interrogated by the army and the villagers want to escape into Papua New Guinea to be safe from the army. They with their leader Korpun have sought the help of OPM rebels. They meet the rebels on a mountain ridge overlooking an Indonesian camp. Fox observes more than hundred soldiers and stores to stay for months and a vast quantity of weaponry in the camp. The rebels dynamite the mountain which destroys the whole camp. It’s a shocking loss for the enemy. The rebels move quickly towards the border and after a long strenuous journey they come to the Inghivahkee River where it crosses the border into Papua New Guinea.

Women in the novels of Bruce Pascoe, have been represented as a symbol of great determination as well as suffering. The grit and resolve of Maree and Doris Arinyeri, the chief women characters of the novel, are exemplary. At the same time, the abuse and exploitation of native women of Papua and Australia is quite alarming and questions the basic doctrines of human rights. They’ve been suffering humiliation for the last four and half decades in the hands of Indonesian army. The judiciary and its laws can’t serve the purpose. The people who create the law are the breakers of it. The cry for equal rights isn’t answered.
Maree Fox is an employee with the Australian public service. She resigns her job to find her father, Jim Fox, and comes to Irian Jaya. The city looks like a heaven from the plane, which in real, is a hell to walk and live in. The place used to be a scenic beauty but the Indonesians have transformed it into a misery. It’s full of Javanese transmigrees and camps of Indonesian soldiers. At Jayapura she finds “a massive bronze sculpture of an heroic Indonesian marine, arm extended in a vast sweep to call his troops into the fray, is planted on reclaimed land where there was once a beach and palms and canoes. The victory celebrates the subjugation of forty thousand Papuans by seventy million Indonesians.” (43)

She has never seen her father. Her mother informs her that he’s joined resistance movement when Indonesia occupied West Papua. He was arrested on the charges of killing his step father and was released on bail. He ran away. His chances of a possible life in Australia have lessened as he is a half-caste orphan and escaped when he is on bail.

There were rumors on several occasions that he is dead in the deserts of the Mallee, swamps of Kakadu and in the Timor massacres. Australian journalists trying to find colleagues, who’d gone missing, kept hearing of a white soldier fighting for the Timorese… it was presumed he’d been shot along with the five Australian journalists, but ten years later a journalist in Papua New Guinea heard a similar story of a white fighting for the OPM in Irian Jaya and had contacted Eileen McConnell (wife of Jim Fox) in order to confirm it. (54)
She considers her father as a man of absolute conviction and composure. Her mother told her of his commitment to various freedom struggles and his search for his own identity - Aboriginality. It’s obvious that he’s always felt Aboriginal. But Maree is not. She is white in colour, has no black friends, moreover no black thought. She is all the time confused by her sense of belongingness. Is she white or, black? This bewilderment led her to meet Pat Slattery. He was a representative of the workers, used to give inspiring speeches on the future of Australia. He visions something about the light on the hill, used to speak on the Australia’s Aboriginal heritage, the unity of all people against the oppression, the reality of the land and its people and their future as Australians - not expelled Europeans. Like all the listeners, Maree is drawn to him. He’s a graduate in law but has no job. People considered him as a redeemer of their troubles. Maree observed that he speaks like a communist but a capitalist by nature. He loved European sports cars and possessed two Porsches parked in his mother’s garage so that his colleagues and clients would never know. It was a great disappointment for her.

Maree grows up without the presence of a father. She’s inherited her mother’s poise and dignity. Fox ran away from Australia when Eileen was pregnant with Maree. She brought her up on her own. Maree is aware of her good looks. She’s a half caste but lucky that she looks a stunning European. She has been in a government job till she has left for Papua. Unlike the Aboriginal women she’s lead a life free of hatred and hostility. Life has taught her many lessons. Nobody would question her about her lost father in a white society. But she wants to find him and question him why he’s left her mother alone. She has the guts to visit Irian Jaya at
the time when tensions were very high in Papua. The Indonesian army has been patrolling the highlands to kill OPM supporters and their sympathizers.

In the beginning, her European thinking doesn’t support her father’s stance of fighting for Papuans. She considers his escape from Australia as an excuse to free himself from family bonding, hates him for leaving her mother. This is the reason why she’s harsh towards men, Lester, in particular. Another reason is her bitter experience in love with Pat Slattery, her ex-boy friend. Her relation with Lester isn’t true love. She needs him to find her father. Lester’s always wanted her companionship. She is the only woman he’s loved. They interact like strangers. She dominates him all the time. It’s the fear of losing her makes him accept her opinion all the time.

Her visit to Papua changes her thoughts totally. She wasn’t that aware of the crimes on natives in Australia. But she gets to know the violence on native Papuans, understands her father’s motive to support the Papuan cause. She worries about the welfare of women and children of the region who are affected by the continuous fights. In 2008 a study by the *Medical Journal of Australia* reported:

> Treatable diseases, particularly pneumonia and diarrhea, are common causes of mortality in children. Data from across West Papua suggest that malaria, upper respiratory tract infections and dysentery are the major causes of childhood morbidity. Maternal mortality is three times higher than for the remainder of Indonesia. (Kirksey, Eben, 227)

Papua has become highly polluted because of nonstop bombing, and continuous military operations, which makes the place a hell to live. They suffer from severe
health disorders. She understands that Indonesia has occupied Papua only for its
resources. Nobody thinks about the welfare of Papuans.

Lester Grange, a youth of Australia supports West Papuan independence. He
is a cane merchant. Maree meets him and they become good friends. He was a
footballer but left the game because of a knee injury. He chose trading as his
profession. He buys handicrafts from the natives, who curve and weave traditional
stuff, living in the villages around Jayapura, for a lesser price and exports them.
Sometimes, he goes into the highlands for axes and other stuff. He does brisk
business and it is profitable for him. He thinks that economy of countries like these
depend on tourism and craft sales. As the birth rate is very high in these lands people
need to be provided with jobs. The fact is, in the name of trading, he secretly imports
weapons to the OPM rebels.

Maree considers him lavish Australian and spendthrift. But when he argues
with an American over the heroism of MacArthur, she starts liking him. MacArthur
was a well acclaimed American General of World War II, who led part of Pacific
campaign, as the Lieutenant General of US Army Forces in the Far East. He is
considered as a Great War hero all over the world, fought against Japanese. But the
thing that Lester hates about MacArthur is, every time he went on patrol, he would
send a row of Papuans in front of his army to see if there were any Japanese in the
area. Of course, they are called local guides, who know the interiors of the land. If
the Japanese attacked, Papuans got killed. To save his army MacArthur put the lives
of the natives in danger.
Maree enquires him of her father, wants to find and meet him. Lester is a regular visitor to the highlands and knows the biggies of native villages, knows her father as he transports weapons to the rebels with the help of Viti. He is doubtful of her relation with Jim Fox, is convinced by her proofs. Maree plans to meet the natives. He helps her by informing the Indonesians that she has come there to buy cane and handicrafts. On business she can meet the natives. There’s news of the death of missionaries and continuous gunfire in the highlands. It is risky and trouble for the lady if the Indonesian army comes to know that she is Fox’s daughter.

As arranged by Lester, Maree meets Kurul. He shows her the artifacts made by his villagers. He is light-hearted and friendly natured man. She asks him about her father.

“Kurul, I am looking for a white man called Jim Fox.” The smile swiftly left Kurul’s face and he looked away to the ridge of mountains with the gleaming limestone outcrops and the clouds snagging and fraying on the razored peaks of rock. He turned back to her cultivating a version of his usual smile.

“White man?”

“Yes.” Kurul frowned and turned grave and began shaking his head as if perplexed.

“No white man Fox I think. May be he…”

She interrupted the diversion. “He is my father. I have come all this way to look for him.”
The Yali man stared up into the eyes of this fair young woman. “Your father he?” Kurul still seemed uncertain whether to trust her. “Maybe a white man here sometime.” He continued to study her face. “Maybe a white man walk this way.”

“He’s my father Kurul. I will not tell the Indonesians. I know my father has been fighting for your people; I will be careful.” She took off her watch and showed Kurul her name Maree Fox McConnell printed on the back. (55)

Kurul immediately orders few of his villagers to deliver her goods at the village and takes her to the border to find her father. Papua is known for its geographical diversities. It’s not connected by road and the villages rarely come into contact with each other. It makes the colonizer’s job easier to crush any sort of resistance. It is highly impossible for the people to cross the land from one place to other. Traveling in the country is possible by air or on water, but to reach the interiors of Papua, one must go on foot. They cross many rivulets, scree slopes, and slippery log bridges, an exhausting walk for her.

After a long walk they come to a river. They hide themselves as they hear the sound of an Indonesian army helicopter, patrolling the jungle. Same time, the sound of the helicopter alerted the resistance fighters and the villagers of Seng. They run for shelter to hide themselves. But Troy mildly gazes at the copter. Munark sees him and immediately alerts Armos and Fox. Someone has to save the boy. Fox runs wildly towards the boy, grabs him and runs towards the west of the village. He knows that all the villagers and OPM rebels are hiding towards the east. But the gunfire from copter wounds him. In fact, one of his legs is apparently shattered.
Maree and Kurul reach the village after one hour journey; learn from the villagers that her father is severely wounded. They watch from a distance, injured Fox is being taken away on a stretcher. They follow them, but they can not catch up the pace. An opportunity of meeting her father is lost. But Maree is intrigued by the nature over there.

The jungle was a continuous outpouring of vitality, vivid and fresh. Not like the ranges in Australia where the great scourers, weather and time abraded youth’s exuberance and changed it to placid introspection. People had to remind it that they were still there. Had to paint their likeness and the nature of their needs deep in the groin of the land before it would stir… Maree saw the reckless abandonment of this new geography and the sudden ageing of its people, and it seemed there was some violent game being played between man, land and the elements. (62-63)

They find one of the rebels when they reach an abandoned garden. The presence of a white woman shocks him. “The Indonesians had used all sorts of tricks to kill and capture.” (59) He considers it as a ploy of the enemies. Kurul sends information to Armos that Maree wants to meet her father and they take rest for two days, waiting for reply from the OPM. Fox is taken deep into the forest where he can be hidden for more days to cure him from machine gun wounds. She hears the sound of two helicopters while getting ready to start again. She sees 12 soldiers descend from the helicopters into the forest, with American machine guns and wraparound sun glasses. The rebels will be hunted. Kurul finds the rebels on the opposite mountain. It’ll take days for them to reach the rebels. But the presence of
Indonesian soldiers in the mountains is problematic both for rebels and Maree. And Maree, with the fake identity of a handcraft buyer, has no work there. She’ll be doubted, if she is seen in these lowly populated areas. Moreover, she herself is fatigued and tired of too much walking in the slippery mountain ranges. Kurul suggests his idea of going back to his village:

“I go Warook now,” the old man said, the name of his village bringing that pleasant smile to his lips. “Many Indonesians in mountains, may be danger for we. My people,” he stared up at Maree, wrestling with the translation of concepts, “my people try not to fight much. Dig potato, look after pig. We try not to fight. But hard now. Much trouble, much fighting. We scared for our life, our song. Warook, we, we try not fight. Korpun, he, he fight, he fight for his village but look now, he run, run, run. Where village he now? Where woman, baby? Where songs? Stay,” he hit his chest with both open hands, “stay we, not fight.” (63-64)

She follows him. On their way back they rest at one of the new towns, which is created for the transmigrees from Java. All these people are farmers now, but were ex-soldiers whose unofficial duty is to guard the border and shoot at OPM rebels.

The motives of Indonesia are quite clear in sending Indonesian transmigrees to different parts of West Papua for settlement. Bruno Benedetti views:

Transmigration has turned the West Papuans into a minority in their own land. The largest-scale organized resettlement in history, Transmigration has resulted in Indonesian immigrants making up more than 40% of West Papua’s total population, over 80% in urban areas. Under the guise of
‘development’ the Transmigration program was designed to enforce unity within Indonesia by flooding occupied territories like West Papua with Javanese settlers, displacing the indigenous people by outnumbering them with settlers from other overpopulated Indonesian islands. (Benedetti, Bruno. Web)

As they move towards Kurul’s village, people of other villages greet him with warmth and affection. They know him and his strength as a great leader. Their greetings don’t brighten him, instead his heart is burdened more with dread.

“He’d seen the disbursement of most of the villages in the area between his own village and well inside the border of Papua New Guinea. He’d seen the gardens gone to weeds and the palisades toppling; he’d seen the insult of the border posts and he was filled with fear.” (65)

If they resist Indonesian soldiers, they will be killed. Moreover, they have to provide accommodation to the soldiers, who kill the rebels, in their villages. He has no hope that his people can endure fighting a real war and would survive the genocide. West Papuan pastor and anthropologist, Benny Giay observes:

The word *genocide* is usually defined by institutions and powerful states that perpetrators of violence. West Papuans have the right to define this word for ourselves. We have experienced a genocide during the last 40 years of Indonesian rule. (Banivanua-Mar, January 15th, 2010)

The OPM rebels try to send Troy away but to no success. He is crazy, may be because of the head wound, during gun fire or the death of his family. He has been a
burden for them. Because of him Fox got hurt and smashed his leg. They can’t take the boy with them. At last, they leave him at the door of a Christian hospital. And they in turn, leave the boy at a Catholic priest, Father Wenzil Van der Post, from Holland. He’s been living there for a long time, habituated native cultures. He’s realized the mistake of his mission as soon as he’s come to the place.

West Papua is the cleanest country with picturesque landscapes and is tranquil and serene. The place looks like an art of the greatest painter. He knows animals, as his father was a farmer. He nurses animals, delivers calves; sets the broken legs, files back broken teeth; grows sweet potatoes and coaxes peculiar cheese from the milk of his cows. He is popularly known as Potato Priest. The native Papuans and his parish in Holland evade him. Troy likes to pasture the cow and works the manure into the mission and milks the cow. Priest observes that the cream is richer now than before. He learns the habits of the place. He has lost basic emotions like fear and happiness with the death of his family. It’s no matter for him whether it is day or night. He would take the cow for grazing and sleeps wherever and whenever he feels like sleeping. If he is hungry, he would drink milk straight from the cow’s teats.

There are two views about the relationship between Christian Missionary activity and colonialism. Some of them oppose colonialism, which is the root cause of all misery in the colonized countries. Many of the missionaries work for the relocation, education and betterment of the natives. They also work with the European organizations to raise their voice against the drastic conditions prevalent in the colonized countries. Some of the Christian missionaries supported colonialism as
it would provide them an environment for missionary activity. Van der Post doesn’t find any interest in his Dutch missionary as it serves the purpose of his nation’s colonial policies.

Maree can’t understand why Australian and Papua New Guinean governments are silent towards the oppression of West Papuans. Lester informs her, the reality:

I deal with both the governments all the time, and I’m telling you neither of them will help your father’s freedom fighters. The PNG (Papua New Guinea) government can’t afford to incite the Indonesians; they’re outnumbered two hundred to one by their army and PNG is broke… They couldn’t send six boys with popguns to that border area. You saw that country. It’s impossible to patrol without a huge army and helicopters. New Guinea has neither. Tamigau’s mob has secretly agreed to deport any Papuan rebels it catches in its own territory. (74)

Maree collects the phone numbers of the Australian government offices in Irian Jaya and Port Moresby. She says:

“I want to let Australia know what my father is fighting for over here.”

“What is he fighting for?”

“Freedom… The freedom of a people whose land has been taken off them by United Nations decree.”

“Well, don’t get your father’s mates killed. The Indonesians don’t care less about Fox; it was that mob of OPM people they wanted. They’ll know every
phone call you make and every one will take them closer to finding where the OPM are. The Australians will be about as reliable as a tiger snake in a tent. Any OPM caught from now on will be deported.” (74-75)

Maree meets Viti Mugoru in Moresby. He is a member of the local band and sings freedom songs, knows where the OPM rebels are deported in Australia. He looks like a rock and reggae singer. He says that people disappear in the country. As per the new agreement between Indonesia and Australia, the OPM rebels are transported to Australia to keep the Indonesians happy. His people are burning for revenge. He is inclined to fight till the end. He says, “I’m a Biak, sister! Will I tell you what the Dutch, the Japs, the Indons and Skippies have done to my people? Think the worst and you’re on the way there, sis, but don’t think there’s no guns in Irian Jaya and don’t think we won’t fight.” (78)

Viti informs her that Lester imports guns to the OPM rebels. Maree thinks Lester’s making extra money by doing this. He has been doing handcrafts business for many years with these highlanders, who later formed OPM. One thing is clear, if he doesn’t provide them the guns they will fight with spears and arrows. It’s not the weapon, but their strong will and thought of loss of their motherland, which drive them to put a fight against the enemies. He thinks that guns will give them “time to live in their own land as Melanesians not second-class Asians.” (79) He risks his life, will be killed if the Indonesians track down the import of guns to rebels. They’ve already lost patience with the bombing of the mountain as they haven’t seen a strike like that so far. Now they are onto the OPM leaders and arrest some of them.
To the utter shock of Papuans, PNG will allow the Indonesian army to enter their territory to kill the OPM rebels inside their border.

Australia doesn’t want any rift with Indonesia, that’s why they keep the captured OPM rebels in their territory. Maree asks Lester, “how can they make them stay there?” Lester says, “Impoverishment, quarantine, resettlement, they’ll find a way. Moresby and Canberra don’t want a blue with Indonesia. They want the Papuans to give up and become Indons. They’ll be better off than Aborigines. At least the Indonesians recognize their prior ownership of West Papua. Australia still doesn’t extend that courtesy…” (81) She wants to see the island where these rebels are deported to and take photographs to reveal the true intention of Australia to its public. Australian people wouldn’t tolerate the imprisonment of Papuan rebels fighting for their land. Australian government won’t accept her idea and the media barons won’t consider it newsworthy. But she will be successful in supporting and helping her father and his comrades. Fox lost the possibility of fighting for his people, aboriginals. Hence, he fights for another oppressed race. If he were living in Australia, he would have surely fought for the cause of Aboriginals.

There’s no chance that Maree can meet her father. The Indonesian army and the Australian consular officials have been after her father. She felt restless and agitated. “The process was tiring her. The quest had brought her so close and yet now she was as distant from her father as she had been in Australia.” (92) Meantime she tries to collect some information about the OPM. Many people are OPM supporters, but they fear the Indonesians. They have reasons. “During the only independence demonstration in Jayapura, the first time the rebel flag had flown,
twenty of the most influential Papuan nationalists were jailed for twenty-five years.”

(92) Few of the natives know that a white man is fighting for OPM but they are reluctant to give the information. They doubt Maree as she’s white in complexion.

There had been too much treachery in the past and the agreement between Papua New Guinea and Jakarta allowing hot pursuit rights into western Papua New Guinea had appalled local Papuans and made them doubly suspicious of anyone who wasn’t Melanesian. Only a Melanesian could understand the pain to heart, mind and loin of losing one’s homeland so suddenly to people who treated you with such contempt. (92)

Mack Davis is a Consular Official of Australia. He has strong support from the Labor cabinet as his tactics did wonders for them. He can analytically convince anybody. He convenes a meeting to talk political diplomacy to be followed with their neighboring countries. He informs others present over there an official work, ordered by the government that the OPM rebels have to be shipped from PNG to Duifken Island. He doesn’t want the involvement of his government to be known. He plans to cover this political issue with religion. And the right person he found is the Dutch priest, Wenzil Van der Post. He will be sent on to the Island, to make it appear like he started a missionary for his parishioners.

The plan benefits everyone. It helps the Papua New Guinean and Australian governments in their relations with Indonesia, OPM rebels may not be killed and these consular officials will be the news. Desmond P. Arthurton, subordinate to Mack Davis, tries to convince the Potato Priest:
Father, this is an opportunity to provide succour to the people you’ve worked with most of your life. The Indonesians are closing down the missions and you yourself are one of those suspected by the Indonesians of helping the rebels… the Australian government is offering you the opportunity to continue your work with your parishioners. (83)

The Priest is not interested in the proposal. He knows that the threat is from Australians, not from Indonesians. Desmond walks around the mission and finds books in a bundle wrapped in the folds of a paper bark. They are four exercise books and an illustrated edition of *The Birds of Papua New Guinea*. He opened the exercise books and “found the greasy pages crammed with close writing describing a multitude of birds in enormous detail with tiny sketches of feet, the patterning of feathers and moderately good drawing of entire birds, usually in the manner of the book, each bird depicted with some foliage and quite often with fruit or flowers.” (84) The Priest doesn’t tell Desmond who has drawn those paintings. Desmond gets a doubt of the presence of another white man there with the Priest.

Mack Davis himself comes there for verification and to try to convince the Priest to accept the offer.

“Father, we could use a priest of your intellect on a new mission we’re opening on Duifken Island.”

“I have heard of this Captain… but no, I vill (will) not fly to ze (the) Little Dove vere (where) you vill imprison unvanted Papuans.”

“They are refugees, Father, no country will have them.”
“No, zey (they) are an embarrassment; zey vant ze land vich is zeres (theirs) – for zat you vill jail zem (them).”

“The Indonesians will shoot them as soon as look at them.”

“And ze governments of Papua New Guinea and Australia cannot resist?”

(89)

He shows Davis the boy. The books are an extensive research and observation by Troy, the excellent pictures of which are drawn by him.

During his return journey the pilot informs Mack Davis of the presence of an Australian, Jim Fox, in the jungles with the OPM rebels; that he has been severely wounded in the gun fire from the Indonesian helicopter. Davis reasons it out that there’s no other person or doctor in the highlands to nurse him, except the Priest. He’s intentionally shown Davis, the boy and Munark just to misguide him. He won’t think about the presence of another white man. It’s evident that the Priest is with the OPM rebels.

Arthur Ventnall is an Archivist in the parliament house of Canberra. He has done extensive research on the whereabouts of an elusive bird, Ruby-eyed Coucal. Number of archives stated the presence of the bird in Papua region from very early ages, even before the white settlement. S. Corovin Rourke calls it, “Erin’s Ruby-eyed Coucal. Ruby for its eye and Erin for a group of three wing feathers of a vivid emerald green.” (100) He gets six sightings of the bird and has investigated all of them. The Aborigines had drawings of the bird even before 1788. Rourke says,
The fabled bird is reported... to have contained in its crop, diamonds, small rubies, brilliants and feldspar gravel. It seems apparent that... it seeks out hard stones for its digestive purposes... At death, the bird’s crop is so full of small diamonds and rubies that it resembles the small chamois purses worn around the necks of fleeing kings. (101)

Coucal is of the size of a small pheasant. It has a long glossy tail of deep emerald green, a back mottled with the same green and shimmering bronze. On the wing there’s a slash of brightest blue and its eye is deep ruby. It searches the humus and collects minerals to ease its digestion. It has little stones in its crop, small nuggets of gold, rough garnets and clear crystal of sapphire. All these made it the most sought after bird. This mysterious bird can only be found in Papua. It’s sacred for the Aborigines as they believe that it brings rain and can see during night. The Aborigines used to exchange the feathers of Coucal as a ritual.

The bird really stalked Arthur. It led him refer all the available archives and books from libraries which made him learn every detail related to it. In addition, he also came to know essential information that there were trading links between the peoples of Australia, Papua, and Indonesia. “The three groups had used the feathers as some kind of commonality, like pearl shell, and, like pearl shell, the feathers were keenly sought for decoration.” (218) He reads from one of the archives:

It is obvious that the Indonesians were accepting these green feathers in exchange for bamboo poles so favoured by the natives in the construction of barramundi and crocodile traps... the Macassan fishermen bring a deckload of bamboo poles in order to express their goodwill and to acquire the green
feathers of the jungle bird brought down the trade routes from the ranges of Cape York. (105)

Father Father is an Aboriginal priest, a descendant of stolen generations. On behalf of Northern Land Council, he and Doris Arinyeri legally fight for indigenous ownership of Australia. They file a case in the Supreme Court against the suspension of Macassar-Arnhem Land Trade. Macassar is a popular and principal trading centre of eastern Indonesia. And Arnhem Land is in the Northern Australia, the native blacks have been living on it for thousands of years. There have been trading links between these two regions even before the advent of the Europeans to Australia. It was traced back to 1700. The trade started mainly due to Trepang fishing, continued up to 1939 and ended with the imposition of Northern Trade Act. Lester’s right in saying, “What they need to do is prove that they were here first and controlled the country. One of the ways of doing that is to prove that there was a trading relationship with another independent country.” (123)

Peta Stephenson in her book, The Outsiders Within: Telling Australia’s Indigenous-Asian Story (2007), says that over hundreds of years, Indigenous and Southeast Asian people have traded across Australia, inter-married and built hybrid communities. It proves the doctrine, terra nullius, which was imposed in 1788 by the white settlers, wrong. Means, even before the European settlement, native Australians have a great ancient culture. They cultivated the land, have a recognizable trading system, and their rock art is world famous. Father Father understands that, “Northern Trade Act, which was instigated to stop Indonesians visiting Australia before World War II, was in fact an unlawful restraint of trade.
That trade was also the last concrete deed of title to the land of Australia, the only thing which proved their pre-contact ownership of the continent.” (104)

There’s every chance that Father Father would win the case. But the Minister for Trade, Dalton Vincent Beswick uses his power to frustrate the Aborigines bureaucratically. He can establish advisory committees, review committees to delay the case. Jan Smorgon has been given the task of preparing a plan of action to disturb the case of indigenous ownership. And she collects the Macassar-Arnhem Land Trade file from the library where Arthur Ventnall is an archivist. When she returns the file, Arthur checks through it and finds essential information. The government plans to support the suspension of the Land Trade or the imposition of Northern Trade Act, by projecting it as a danger to the nation:

There remains a certain aloofness between the two peoples but so harmonious and established is the relationship that it must be seen as a territorial threat to our nation. The loyalty of the Aborigines to the national cause is most questionable… Our war effort could be strategically disadvantaged by the continued economic allegiance of these two peoples. (107)

He sends photocopies of all these letters and the ministerial report to Father Father. Arthur would always engross in his work and regularly send some information to Doris Arinyeri and Father Father that would aid them in the case on indigenous proprietorship. The Land Council is trying to achieve justice through the system of constitutional legislature. Belinda Brassil says:

Land rights are at the heart of Aboriginal claims for social and legal justice. Land is a vital part of Aboriginal culture and tradition. Without land, and the
sacred sites and spirits it contains, much of Aboriginal culture is lost. (Brassil, Belinda and Brassil, Dimity, 79)

Lester and Maree visit Duifken Island in Lester’s boat, Tea Gardens. It’s the place where the arrested OPM rebels are put in exile. Saul, an aboriginal from Thursday Island, is on the deck. It’s a very prosperous island, teems with abundant fruits and fishes. Maree’s plan is to take photographs of the island and send them to the press. Australia and Indonesia have an agreement to divide the oil reserves of Torres Strait Islands between themselves. The involvement of international oil companies makes it more troublesome for the natives. The Australian government will do anything to make Indonesians happy. The rebels can not be kept on the island for a longer time as they can swim across the ocean, a strength that aborigines acquire from their ancestors. Dexter Mannix is an aboriginal fisherman lives on the island, which he inherited from his forefathers, should probably be the owner of it, but has no papers. Government can deceive him in every aspect to send him away.

She tries to ply information to the Australian journalists and unionists about the fate of the Papuan resistance fighters. She plans to break the news of the involvement of Australia:

Australia was complacent in the oppression of the Papuans. A whole civilization is being oppressed with the help of Australian government because Australia doesn’t want to antagonize the fifth biggest army in the world (Indonesia), can’t afford to support Papua New Guinea any longer and won’t let anything stand between it and the Torres Strait oil basin… Australia
was still a racist land, a capitalist land, where the only logic was economic; not social, not cultural, not racial, but economic feasibility… (121)

Though the journalists oppose it openly by giving long speeches, there’s hardly any support, which frustrates her.

She meets Doris Arinyeri of the Land Council, reveals her plan and requests her help to prevent the captivity of Papuan rebels on the island. Land Council’s first priority is to prove *terra nullius*, immoral and false. They can’t spend time on Papuan problems as they themselves are busy with a lot of paper work and preparation of documents for the case. Maree informs her that Duifken Island is actually owned by a native black, Dexter Mannix. As the Land Council fights for indigenous ownership, the information will be of great help to the council.

During their journey Maree and Saul find imprisoned OPM rebels, Armos, Viti, etc. and guards on the island. They change the course of the boat. Maree meets the representatives of Papua New Guinea and Australia. They are immovable as far as the issue of OPM rebels is concerned. They clearly state that all the nations of the world, including UNO recognize Indonesia’s occupation of West Papua. She speaks to Mack Davis and strongly opposes their opinion, gets the reply that for the peace and harmony of South East Asia, these Papuans have to be sacrificed. She tries to bring together all the information which is in bits and pieces, in her mind. The Indonesians occupy the land of Papuans and the Australians blindly support them because of their selfish ends.

The conjunction between the people’s of Papua and Australia was the incarceration of Papuan rebels on the Australian island of Duifken. The
connection between the Indonesians and Australian Aborigines was the trade they’d shared for centuries before white people learnt to sail boats… The Aborigines owned Australia as proven by the ancient recognition of their sovereignty by Indonesia, the Papuan and Aboriginal cause was linked by their oppression by two nations who had concurred in this oppression as a result of twentieth century diplomatic observances of law. (127-128)

If the government doesn’t prolong the case, the Land Council can surely prove the trade between Macassar and Arnhem Land in the court and successfully remove terra nullius. Arthur Ventnall provides vital information for Land Council. There are many citations in the archives that clearly state the exchange of feathers of Ruby-eyed Coucal among Papuans, Aboriginal Australians and Indonesians. It’s a proof that Papuans traded with their neighbors. If the native Australians can fight against terra nullius, Papuans also can fight for indigenous ownership. He gives additional information to Maree, provides her large books and says, “these might be useful... The plumage of the bird you’re interested in was used ceremonially by the Aborigines of Northern Australia.” (135)

Arthur doesn’t know anybody from the Land Council. It happens so, that the bird’s caught his attention when he’s reading from the proceedings of the Royal Australian Ornithological Union. It intrigues him so much that he reads or refers all the archives that give information of the bird, from the Parliament Library. Same time he happens to see the file on the suspension of Land Trade, which’s given to him by the Trade Ministry. He finds something’s mentioned about the bird in the
file, understands the case and has been helping the Land Council by giving them crucial information.

The rebels escape from the Duifken Island with the help of Dexter and his wife, Fairweather Sailor, in Dexter’s small boat. It causes sleepless nights for the officials. They are answerable to the Indonesian government, tries to enquire the shipping around the Island. There were no ships. Nobody’s expected that a small boat could have taken those many rebels to Papua New Guinea. The boat isn’t registered and Dexter hasn’t got fishing license. As per the records he never existed and is hardly known to anybody. He does shipping on his own, doesn’t need any modern shipping tools. That small boat is enough for him to cross any straits. The silent and ignorant looking Dexter may have a motive to help the Papuan rebels escape from the Island as “one in two of all of his relatives had been shot, raped or stolen by white men in the last two hundred years.” (164) They face a severe storm during their passage. The boat goes upside down during which Dexter’s leg hits a reef and is severely wounded. All of them cling to the boat and wait for the storm to calm down. They are safer now as they are outside the search area. But the danger comes from the sea itself. The blood of Dexter attracts a shark and he becomes a prey to the fish. It’s more of a sacrifice. As soon as he notices the shark, swims himself away from others, towards the shark.

Maree and Saul take shelter at Point Keer Weer during the storm that took the life of Dexter. She has sex with him. Her relation with Saul isn’t attraction. May be the black blood in her pulled her towards Saul. She has been in a state of frustration all the time. She is dissatisfied with herself and with everybody; doesn’t like what’s
happening around her. Her chief endeavor has been to find her father, but the Indonesian helicopters snatch the chance away within sight of success. Then she tries to free the OPM rebels from the Duifken Island, which has been achieved, not with her help. Her attempts at liberating the rebels have failed. She did meet the officials but in vain. She feels, “the fact of their escape had reduced their chances of regaining their homeland and complicated constitutional change in Australia.” (169) The Land Council isn’t interested in the Papuan cause. It’s Maree who has drawn them in to the OPM issue. The escape of OPM rebels jeopardized even the case of ownership fought by the Land Council. Maree feels responsible for all these.

Indonesian government knows the escape of OPM rebels. Now the hunt has become more serious. The escaped rebels reach Digoel River near Asmat in Papua province of Indonesia. The Indonesian officials care less about the rebels. They are like any other black people. They can’t recognize from one to one. The Asmater blacks arrange food and shelter for them. The encouraging thing for the rebels is the support they get from all the blacks, belonging to different tribes, living in different parts of Papua and Australia. They have been enemies among themselves for ages. But one common enemy united them all. Every move and stay of the rebels has been covered up confidentially. No traces are left out. Bruce Pascoe says that the Asmaters have many reasons to support them. Many of their people have been killed by white men years ago when they killed and ate a white man. Another reason is that they have been exploited by an Australian timber company, which drains the harvest of Irian Jaya forest to Australia. They can’t cultivate their crops as they have to work
in the company. They work for half of the year just to pay off the credit for the debt of the village. Sometimes they are not even paid a penny.

From a different literary perspective the Marxist literary interpretation obviously finds its reflection in *Ruby-eyed Coucal*. According to Marxist criticism, literary works are reflections of social institutions from which they originate. The English literary critic and cultural theorist, Terry Eagleton observes:

Marxist criticism is not merely a ‘sociology of literature’, concerned with how novels get published and whether they mention the working class. Its aim is to explain the literary work more fully; and this means a sensitive attention to its forms, styles and meanings. But it also means grasping those forms, styles and meanings as the product of a particular history. (Eagleton, Terry, 3)

The discrepancies between the native Papuans and transmigree settlers; between natives and foreign companies can be found in the novel. Transmigrees are ex-service men brought to border villages to stop or kill West Papuans from entering PNG. They’ve occupied the agricultural lands and sent the natives away or made them to work in the same land as servants to earn food. It’s master-slave relationship between them.

OPM has established a strong village network which helps them to track and attack the enemy. The border villages of PNG support resistance. John Braithwaite observes:
OPM has access to arms and arms dealers across PNG border willing to sell to them at high prices by international standards. A more important capability of OPM is that it has access to an international safe haven in Papua New Guinea. Because OPM is popular with the people, villagers supply them while they hide in the mountains. (Braithwaite, John, et al., 68)

It’s been the sole aim of Indonesian army to weaken this network in highlands. Hence, they patrol these parts like never before. The villagers have fled away from their houses in fear. The rebels get the information that Indonesian officers are “elated by the capture of Armos and his fellows in the highlands and later Viti in Moresby. That elation had suddenly turned to manic ferocity when it was learned the rebels had escaped.” (177) They’re wiping out all the highland villages.

The rebels come to Van der Post’s village and take rest there. It seems nobody’s inhabited the place for some days. Their absence is the presence of Indonesian soldiers. They search for the Priest and Troy to get information of Jim Fox and found Troy, watching the dead body of Munark, hanging to a tree. The conditions are so different now, after their return to the highlands. All the villages are vacated and the villagers are scattered to different places. The Papuans “would even avoid the OPM, for wasn’t it the rebels who had drawn the Indonesians into the mountains to murder and rape their people? The OPM meant trouble.” (195) They leave the place immediately as soon as they find Indonesian soldiers. A troop of eight soldiers with a geologist survey the huts. The geologist finds the exercise books of Troy on Papuan birds and a wrapped pack that contains the precious stones.
of Coucal. Every detail’s clearly sketched in the book. The geologist’s truly surprised by the vivid detail of the Coucal bird. He compares the stones found in the pack with the drawings. With great difficulty he reads the descriptions of the bird as he’s poor at reading English and understands that the bird collects valuable stones for its digestion. Moreover, it’s sacred for the Papuans. The stones of all the killed Coucals can be found in the mountains. The information can make him wealthy and famous.

The rebels find Potato Priest but are worried as he behaves lunatic. He’s seen the brutality of the Indonesian soldiers when they wiped out a whole village. They entered a village to find rebels as one of their contingents has been killed by the rebels:

They lined up all the villagers and strafed them with submachine gunfire at close range that most of the bodies were almost severed at the waist. They fell even while their eyes registered what was happening around them: the scorn of the soldiers, Van der Post staring from his hut, and, worst of all, the voice of a child too short to be hit by most of the fire. Fatally wounded, he saw his mother’s eyes turn towards him as he threw himself on the heap of her body. “Nahme, nahme, nahme,” the child called, for the first time in its life frightened and injured, but not gaining the instant succour of her gentle voice and hands, the sustenance and comfort of her breast. “Nahme, nahme, nahme,” the child called throughout the night, suckling on her before succumbing to its wound, but not before driving Van der Post’s wits from him. (186)
He’s gone mad. He can’t understand why virtue has no place in human minds and why people are so brutal towards others. There’s no place for human virtues like innocence, love, affection, sympathy, kindness and compassion in the modern politics. Within few days the rebels find the Priest’s cow and the decomposed parts of Priest’s body tied to the animal, Potato Priest is killed.

Rebels have no hope that Fox would be alive with all those wounds of the gunfire. Fortunately he does well and recovers from the disaster. They are ecstatic to find Fox in one of the huts among the highlands. They embrace each other with warmth and affection. It’s painful for Armos to see his comrade, a great freedom fighter, limping to walk. It seems that with the accident the age’s overtaken him. He gives Fox an envelope. It contains a letter sent by Maree and a photograph to prove her identity. He has never seen her and heard of her. He knows that a lady is searching for him in the highlands. He’s always considered it as a trick by the Indonesians to capture the rebels. She’s disliked him till she got to know what he does in Papua; requests him to come back to Australia and informs him of the case of indigenous ownership fought in the Australian court by the Aborigines. She gives him the hope that Papuans can also fight for their land with the help of archives on exchange of Coucal feathers.

He writes back to Maree and sends the letter with Fairweather, a cousin to Doris. It’s been few months that Maree receives the letter. She now stays with Doris and is in seventh month of pregnancy. Doris and Fairweather convince her for the journey to meet her father and she can have a look at the bird also. It’s grueling journey for all the women, Maree, in particular. They stop on a bank of a stream to
take the much needed rest. There they find the bird drinking from the stream. “It moved carefully in the mottling shadows and scratched furtively in the quartz gravels, pecking occasionally at what it found there… It was shy but in no hurry to finish its examination and selection of the feldspars and quartz crystals in the stream’s washed rubble.” (207-208)

Maree meets her father and they feel like strangers. For her, he has been a disappointment. She hates him for leaving her mother alone; but feels proud of him for fighting for the dispossessed. Her request of his coming back to Australia is dangerous for him and also for OPM rebels. The feeling of having a daughter “made him feel old and yet it made the yearning for his homeland sharper and more insistent. Here at last was his flesh and blood, the undeniable proof of his link to Australia, his part in the continuance of the place and the people, his people.” (212) Yes, he belongs to Australia. He is not one among the natives though he fights for them. He is white in complexion, born and brought up in Australia. He doesn’t wear the traditional penis gourds like Papuans. He is held outside their hearts. He is an outsider, a stranger for the natives. They could integrate him in the fight for resistance but not in their society and culture. He has felt Papua as his country, never thought of returning to Australia, till he meets his daughter. He never thought of his family, has been a fugitive throughout his life. He promises her that one day he’ll come back to Australia.

Arthur’s transferred from his job to Ports and Harbours at Goulburn. “It might mean they’d discovered the source of the Land Council’s information, or just guessed it, or maybe they realized that a man who didn’t take holidays and loved his
job was up to something. And if that something entailed a person guarding two hundred years of secrets then perhaps he was dangerous.” (224)

He doesn’t like his job at Goulburn and joined as a librarian at Mitchell Library in Sydney. Arthur hasn’t seen the bird but he can recognize it immediately. He’s been getting dreams of the bird. He gets plenty of time to “further refine the bibliography of all references to the relationship of the coucal and the people of Australia and Melanesia, as well as the documentation of the evidence of trade between Australian and Asia-Pacific peoples and the recognition of sovereignty.” (229)

He again starts sending relevant information, all the bibliographic material and copies of the most crucial documents to the Land Council. Ester Raoul, the Director of the Library, always finds him absorbed in work. She’s quite satisfied with his work as he’s doing it not for himself but for a dispossessed race. He supports the aboriginal rights:

The thing that had drawn him into the fight for Aboriginal rights was not the palpable justness of their cause but because they (Aborigines) had sought knowledge and been denied access to it…. that denial was like physical pain to him. (230)

Maree gives birth to a baby boy, named him Reuben, after the bird. Lester’s very supportive to her. He truly loves her and will be a father to the boy. Doris has no hope that Land Council can win the case of indigenous ownership though she gets crucial information from Arthur. She doesn’t understand quite clearly how a bird can bring their land back. Fairweather Sailor says that the bird is sacred for the
natives as they believe that it brings rain and see in night. People use its feathers as a token of cultural exchange. It eats precious stones to ease its digestion or belly ache. And white people kill it for these stones. Doris suspects that the information can not convince the court, which follows white rules and run especially by white people.

Karl Marx’s economic formula, ‘the right to plunder the interior’, can aptly be applied to the occupation of West Papua. The Indonesian government deceives a treacherous plan of action to occupy Papua, politically. If the bird, Coucal collects precious stones and sapphires from the humus, the whole land itself is full of valuable stones, as suggested by the Indonesian geologist. They plan to mine the land after occupying it. They can’t do it without the help of Australia and Papua New Guinea. That’s why they’ve invited representative of Commonwealth of Australia, Mack Davis and the ambassador of Papua New Guinea. The Prime Minister of Papua New Guinea and his senior ministers also attend the meeting to discuss the new joint patrol posts along the border. There’s more to this. A gold mining venture is going to be started in West Papua, very near to Van der Post’s mission. They are doing it without inviting any leaders from West Papua. All others except Indonesians sensed that an irresistible negotiation is underway:

An area of relatively unpopulated land had been demarcated as a new Neutral Defence Region which Indonesian, Australian and Papua New Guinean troops would patrol to clear all rebel activity… In return Papua New Guinea would receive the aid of this same force to quell dissent on Bougainville, military and agricultural aid money would pour into Papua New Guinea and a royalty of 2.8 percent of all income from mining within the demarcated
region for the next fifteen years. Australia would receive a large share of the sea floor in the Arafura and a consortium of its mining companies would gain a 48.6 percent share of all new mining activity in the area. And Indonesia… would acquire the territory after fifteen years by the strategem that gained them western Papua and Timor – international compliance. (188)

And nothing for the Papuans, who’ll lose their mother land and ancient rich culture. The foreign mining corporations will exploit Papua’s natural resources and in turn Indonesian Government will receive billions of money in the form of taxes.

According to Partha Chatterjee, the script of anti-colonial liberation was written by Euro-American intellectuals to further neocolonial schemes. She further suggests that the prevailing model of independent postcolonial states is copied from colonial states. West Papuans aren’t knowledgeable of the preciousness of their land. Same time, we can not neglect the support of the developed nations to Indonesian Government.

The USA and its allies were aware of the massive gold, oil, gas and copper resources in West Papua… The USA’s, Britain’s and Australia’s major corporations such as Freeport, Rio Tinto, British Petroleum, BHP Billiton, etc. make billions out of West Papua with a seeming exclusivity agreement with Jakarta. Tax revenues from Irian Jaya (West Papua) account for more than one sixth of the total tax revenues received by the Indonesian Government. (Austin, Mark. Web)

Bruce Pascoe says that Papua used to be a paradise for agriculture. It was considered as one of the world’s most eternally productive places:
Prior to permanent settlement by foreigners in the 1870s, more than 170 plant species were used by Papua New Guineans for food. As well, hundreds of other species provided materials for shade, firewood, medicine, tools, weapons, house and fence construction, decoration, rope, string, food wrappings, bark cloth, dress, personal adornment, canoe, and raft construction, and ritual and magic purposes. (Bourke R. Michael, and Harwood Tracey, 15)

The advent of Europeans and Indonesians has put an end to everything. The fields are not tilled now and crops not harvested. Where are the people to plow the land? All of them have died or fled away. The traditional crops like sweet potato, taro, ferns and gourds have disappeared from the land. All those rituals, traditions are a history now. The thought blurred the eyes of Armos with tears. Natives still have the same respect for Armos and his fellow rebels but they fear Indonesians. “There would be no reticence in offering him these things but if the Indonesians found that he had stayed there none of these villagers would be safe… he could not bring himself to risk their lives… Here he was in his own land, prevented from being with his own people and deserted by his fellow revolutionaries…” (216)

Maree is shocked to know the support of Australia to Indonesia in colonizing West Papua. She tries her best to reveal the matter to the Australian media so that the common Australians understand the cruel intentions of their government. In the process, she has met many government officials of Australia to stop the imprisonment of Papuan rebels on Duifken Island. But the officials, Mack Davis, in
particular, are observing her pretty physique than giving importance to the future of a nation. A women she is, they haven’t paid any attention to her ideas.

She meets Doris Arinyeri to request her to fight for Papuan land rights and very soon they become close associates. There’s extreme change in Maree’s life because of her friendship with Doris. Doris has been fighting tirelessly for Land Rights for Australian Aboriginals and Treaty of Reconciliation for decades. Though, there’s no hope of getting the Rights, she continues her endeavor. She is an apt example for her commitment and dedication to the movement. Land Rights Council works with minimum support and little cooperation.

The West Papuans are denied the right to education. The nation has registered least literacy rate under Indonesia. At least, they were getting best education from the missionaries under the Dutch rule. They couldn’t represent their issue at the global stage as only few people could read and speak in English. Indonesia least bothers about funding for education in the region. That little support for education affects their competency when they compete with highly educated foreigners. Destruction of the environment of Papua has resulted in the abuse of cultural, economic and social rights. It aggravated extreme poverty among native Papuans particularly through denial of access to education.

Cultural ethnocide has been continuing and becoming severe day by day. When somebody tries to destroy the culture of a nation or of people, they are destroying the cultural practices, languages, traditional customs and habits of the people. Therefore, the native culture is being systematically destroyed for the possession of precious resources of the land. The Postcolonial principles - Social
and cultural erosion; misuse of power and exploitation, can be traced in the occupation of West Papua. Wealth is important for the Capitalist countries and how can one expect them to be respectful towards native cultures.

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