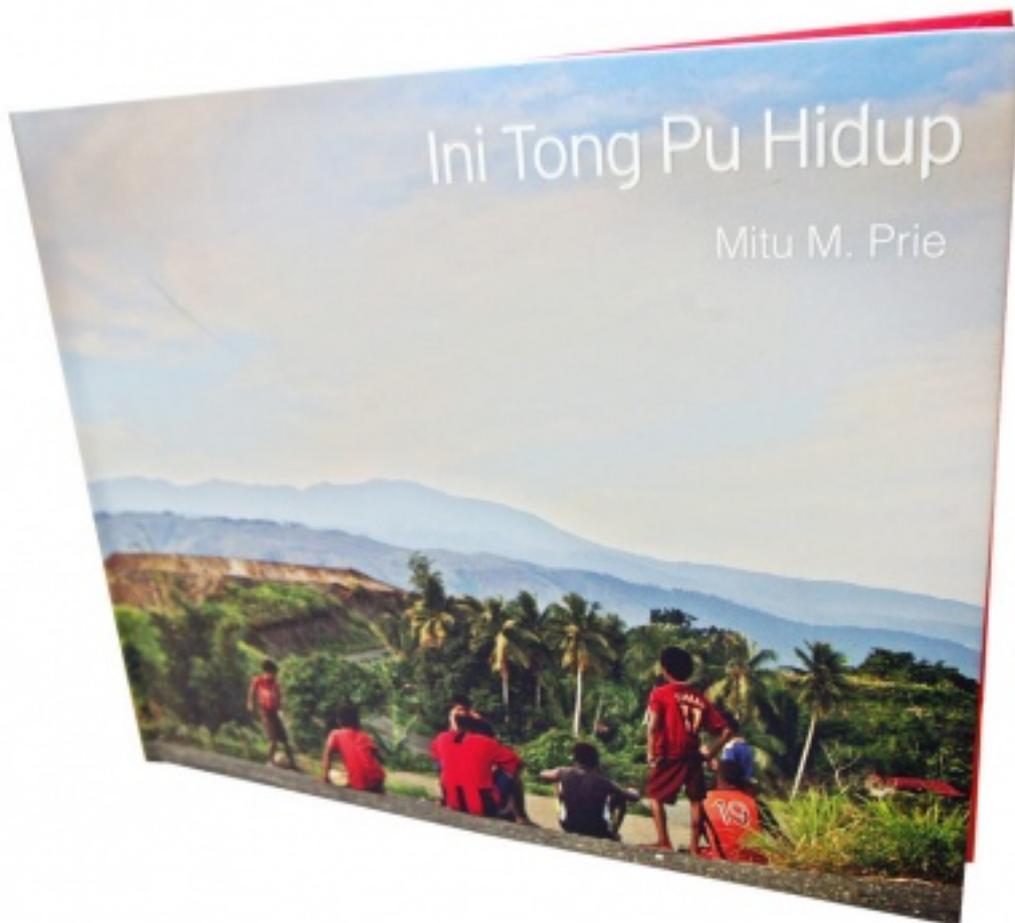


Prodita Sabarini, The Jakarta Post, Jakarta | Feature | Sun, September 09 2012, 4:18 PM

<http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2012/09/09/this-life-we-live-seeing-papua-through-friendly-eyes.html>



Papua province, Indonesia’s easternmost territory, is so far from the country’s capital — geographically, culturally and historically — that many people in Jakarta have little understanding of what life is truly like on the faraway island.

Development worker Mitu M Prie has had the opportunity to live and work in both Jakarta and Papua during the last 10 years.

Working on public health campaigns, she travels to the highlands of Papua, crosses the deep and often choppy waters of Lake Sentani, plunges her feet onto the beaches in Beiji and looks out to the Pacific from Jayapura.

There, she meets Papuan people, learns their languages and falls in love.

Mitu travels with her several cameras. There are professional SLRs and small point-and-shoot pocket cameras. Everywhere she goes, whether to the markets, the soccer fields, the airports and seaports, the hills and the beaches, she captures the faces of contemporary Papua. Her pictures are rich in human emotions, against a backdrop of majestic Melanesian nature.

Neles Tebay, a Papuan human rights activist and rector of the Fajar Timur school of philosophy writes in an introduction to Mitu’s book of collected photos from Papua, that “[S]he looks at Papua through the eyes of love”.

“Viewing Papuans without love is to treat them like an enemy,” he writes.

And that was what Mitu aimed to break through with the photographs that she took, which are collected in the book, *Ini Tong Pu Hidup* (This is the Life We Live).

“I want people to support, to love and to know, so that the gap of [knowledge] will be narrowed.

And the stories that come from there are not only from irresponsible parties," she said at the Cemara Gallery in Central Jakarta, where her photos were being exhibited in early August.

"Many of us here have an unkind tendency [toward Papuans] because we don't know them," she said.

Papua continues to be the most impoverished province in Indonesia, despite being home to the world's largest gold mine.

Years of conflict in the region from the military operation in the 1960s that officially placed Papua into the territory of Indonesia and decades of resource looting have left deep wounds.

Reports show that military operations hunting down so-called "separatists" have forced many Papuans to flee to the forests as their villages were razed to the ground.

"There is anger but, it's not only political grief; simple cultural ignorance is also one of the factors," Mitu said. She added that there was once a family planning campaign that utilized the same teaching materials aimed at Javanese culture, with Malay models on the posters, depicting life in urban Java. Unsurprisingly, the campaign failed and did not go down well with the locals, she said.

Her encounters with Papuans have often resulted in their becoming annoyed, as Muti hails from Java. "Sometimes, I'm like a representation from here [Java]. I'm ready to be scolded and I gladly take it," she said.

Her book includes forewords from academics. Apart from Tebay's essay, there is a detailed history of Papua by Agapitus E Durmatubun, a lecturer in the school of anthropology at Cendrawasih University in Jayapura.

Durmatubun provides an interesting read about Papua, from the geographical information of the

island — “The island of Papua is shaped like a giant bird, of which 47 percent consisting of the bird’s head, nape, neck, back, breast and belly is the territory of Papua” — to the history of Papua’s name, which means “curly” from the Malay word, pua-pua.

But the pictures speak for themselves.

Local Papuans take three-wheeled Javanese-style becak around Wamena in one of her pictures. In another, youths sporting rasta hairstyles smile into the camera. There are also little boys preparing for a soccer game in a field overlooking a great mountain range in the highlands.

Tak kenal maka tak sayang (if you don’t know it, you can’t love it); so goes an old proverb. Mitu has traveled to get to know Papuans and her love shows through the pictures that she takes.

Her book can be a tool for people to get to know the many faces of Papuan people and fall in love with them as Mitu did.

Ini Tong Pu Hidup

Mitu M. Prie

KPG (Kepustakaan Populer Gramedia), 2012

209 pages