

'If I Stay Here There is Nothing Yet If I Return I do not Know Whether I will be Safe': West Papuan Refugee Responses to Papua New Guinea Asylum Policy 1998–2003

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This article examines the responses of West Papuan refugees from Indonesian Irian Jaya to an asylum policy developed by the PNG government and UNHCR and implemented from 1997. The policy required refugees to decide whether to integrate locally as 'permissive residents' in Papua New Guinea, or accept assisted repatriation to Irian Jaya. Refugee decision-making was informed by a politics of exile. Repatriation before political independence was deemed by most refugees to be premature, i.e., before a 'result' had been achieved. Those who chose repatriation interpreted independence in terms of a framework of development rather than statehood. Most refugees opted for 'permissive residency' which allowed them greater agency in relation to the timing of their return to the homeland. The article elaborates uses made of 'permissive residency', and illuminates some of the risks of the 'permissive residency' arrangement.

The phrase 'If I stay here there is nothing yet if I return I do not know whether I will be safe' encapsulates the dilemma of decision-making for many refugees who are unable to find solace in a decision to return to the homeland or remain in the host country. It was spoken by a West Papuan refugee with reference to the implementation of an asylum policy formulated by the government of Papua New Guinea (PNG) in consultation with UNHCR. The policy required West Papuan refugees at the East Awin settlements in PNG to decide whether to accept assisted repatriation to Irian Jaya, or integrate locally in PNG as 'permissive residents'. Use of the term 'permissive residency' dates back to the 1960s when the Australian administration of Papua and New Guinea issued temporary entry or 'permissive residency' permits on humanitarian grounds to West Papuans crossing the border. These permits required the holders to refrain from political activity relating to West Irian, and were revocable at the discretion of the Administrator (Blaskett 1989: 69, 71). Implementation of the new asylum policy took place (fortuitously) during the author's doctoral fieldwork in anthropology at East Awin in 1998–1999 (Glazebrook 2001a).

The island of New Guinea is shared by the country of Papua New Guinea to the east, and to the west the Indonesian province of Papua, previously known as Netherlands New Guinea (up to 1962), West Irian (1962–1973), and Irian Jaya (1973–2001). In this article refugees from Irian Jaya are referred to as ‘West Papuan’ as this is their preferred term which distinguishes them as a nation, rather than a provincial Indonesian ethnicity. ‘Irian Jaya’ is used in recognition of the region’s ongoing administration as a province of the Indonesian Republic since 1962. In 2001, the name Irian Jaya was changed to Papua and ratified through the Special Autonomy Bill for Papua (Basic Law number 21 of 2001) by the Indonesian Parliament in Jakarta.

There are currently approximately 2,460 West Papuan refugees living at East Awin in Western Province, PNG (see Figure 1). It is estimated that 11,000 West Papuans live outside East Awin, including 5,000 Muyu in the border region of Western Province, 3,000 in Port Moresby and Lae, and 500 elsewhere in PNG (Siffointe 2003). Since 1998, about 1,000 refugees at East Awin have applied for repatriation, with 632 voluntarily repatriated to Irian Jaya under the auspices of UNHCR in 2000. Of the remaining population at East Awin, about 90 per cent hold ‘permissive residency’ permits, either valid or expired (Siffointe 2003).

This article elaborates the imperative of timing in West Papuan refugees’ decision-making: timing in relation to events occurring at East Awin and in Irian Jaya and Jakarta, and timing in relation to the object of political exile. Interpretations of ‘permissive residency’ and repatriation are explored in the intentions of two discrete groups at East Awin. Some refugees perceived ‘permissive residency’ as a programme to eventually compel repatriation due to hardship created by the loss of UNHCR guardianship. Others viewed ‘permissive residency’ as enabling exile to be sustained until the object of *merdeka* or political independence had been achieved. ‘Permissive residency’ also enabled temporary or indefinite relocation to other regions of Papua New Guinea, as well as movement between the homeland and host country. Repatriation before *merdeka* was considered premature, and entertained only by those who interpreted independence more broadly in terms of a framework of economic and social development.

Background to West Papuan Asylum Seekers in Papua New Guinea

A chronology of events in Irian Jaya since 1961 provides a backdrop against which flight by West Papuans into PNG has occurred (see Mote and Rutherford 2001). On 1 December 1961, the Dutch administration oversaw the election of a New Guinea Council, and installation of ordinances such as a territorial flag and national anthem of Netherlands New Guinea. On 19 December Indonesian President Sukarno responded by declaring a campaign of total mobilization to wrest Netherlands New Guinea from the Dutch. Dutch control of Netherlands New Guinea was subsequently ceded to Indonesia through the New York Agreement on 15 August 1962, which provided for a UN transitional authority present until 1 May 1963. Between 14 July and 2 August 1969, West Papuans voted in

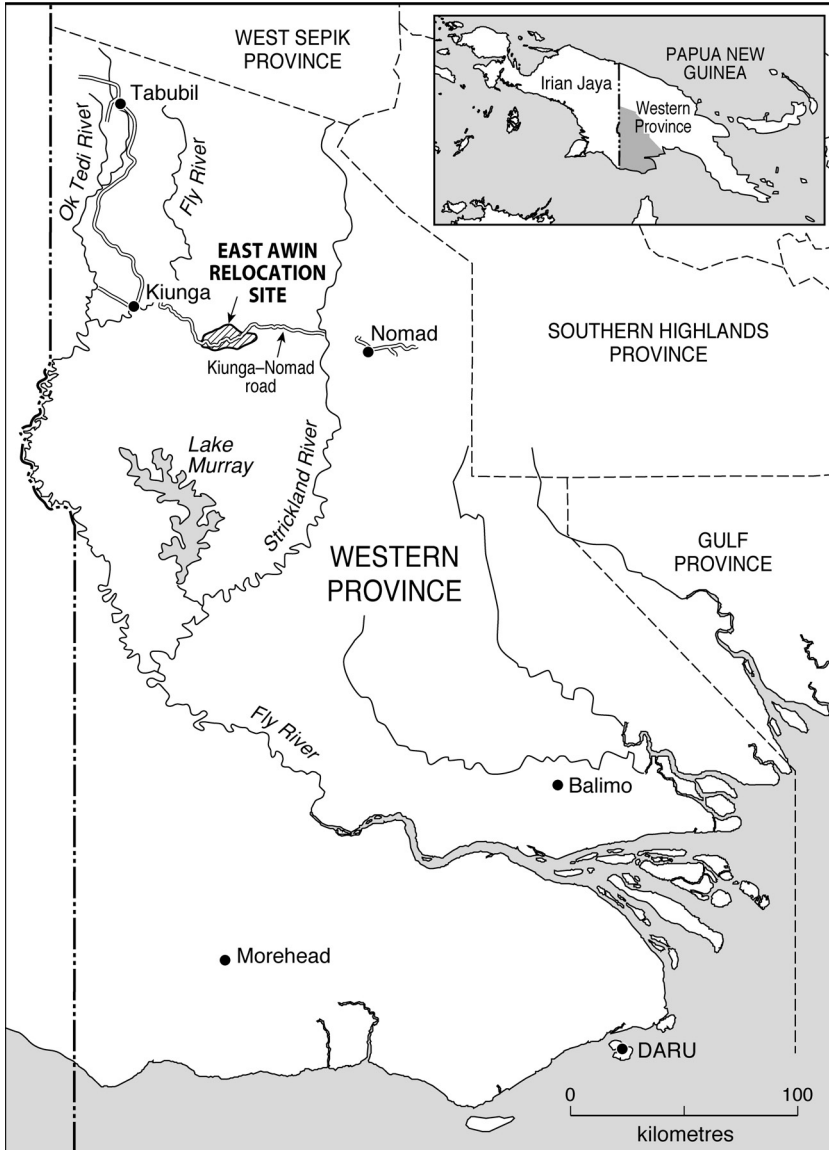


Figure 1
Location of East Awin

eight assemblies (1,022 delegates appointed by the Indonesian administration) in the Act of Free Choice or PEPERA, and West Irian was declared Indonesia's seventeenth province. Between 1962 and 1969, the Australian Administration recorded around 3,925 West Papuan crossings into PNG. Of these, 1,695 were made in 1969 (see Blaskett 1989: 256–309).

After 1969, the Indonesian Government embarked on a programme of transmigration, to relocate mainly Javanese rural populations to other sparsely populated provinces such as Irian Jaya. In 1984, the Indonesian government's transmigration programme projected an increase over a five year period to approximately 138,000 mainly Javanese families, or 700,000 persons, to be relocated to Irian Jaya. Only 3 per cent of the projected target was actually settled (Manning and Rumbiak 1989: 46). Beginning in 1971, the Indonesian government implemented a 'humanitarian' project called Operation *Koteka* in the interior regions of Irian Jaya. The operation took its name from action to end the wearing of the *koteka* penis sheath. Foreign critics perceived the programme to be one of political and cultural indoctrination. Programmes such as these, as well as military campaigns, provoked armed and non-armed resistance usually represented as activity by the Free Papua Movement (OPM). The comparatively large movement of 11,000 West Papuans into PNG which commenced in February 1984 was the result of a general uprising by West Papuans 'in part the consequence of a new solidarity within the [resistance] movement' (May 1986: 113). This uprising resulted in military activity extending from the capital, Jayapura, on the north coast, sweeping inland to the south and east to the border (Hewison and Smith 1986: 204). OPM activity on the border was countered by 3,000 additional Indonesian troops using counter-insurgency planes, helicopters and fighter jets (Osborne 1985: 100). Based on interviews with West Papuan refugees, the International Commission of Jurists (ICJ) summarized factors impelling flight to be cultural, political and economic:

Some spoke of human rights issues—freedom of association, discrimination against Melanesians in education and public service, denigration of Melanesian culture and attempts to weaken it, the effects of Indonesia's transmigration policies, the subordination of proper legal processes to political controls. Some spoke of economic issues—Indonesians dominate business and economic life, Melanesians are less able to afford the bribes that were said to be necessary for advancement and public service (ICJ 1986: 49).

As a result of the military activity in and around Jayapura, approximately 1,000 West Papuans crossed the border into PNG near Vanimo on the north coast between February and June 1984. This 'northerner' group included villagers from the northern border region, but also included formally educated, politically active and previously urban people from north coast towns (Jayapura, Sorong, Manokwari) and islands (Biak-Numfoor, Serui). Independently of this movement, an estimated 9,435 Muyu people crossed the border into PNG between Kiunga and Tabubil in the Western Province between April 1984 and September 1985. Muyu people were predominantly traditional landholders living along the international border in the central region of the island. Anthropologist Stuart Kirsch has described Muyu reasons for flight in terms of 'unrequited reciprocity' (1996: 226). Muyu refugees did not speak in terms of racism, cultural imperialism, or ethnocide to describe Indonesian treatment.

Rather, Indonesian refusal to treat them as equals or to establish reciprocal relations with them represented a serious grievance that compelled their flight. Villagers claimed that the OPM had encouraged people to leave their villages with promises of a better future, but the OPM were also perpetrators of violence against villagers. At East Awin, a Muyu lamentation sung at funerals described the fighting between the Indonesian military and the OPM that had driven innocent villagers to flee and had caused subsequent suffering and premature death in PNG.

West Papuans who crossed the border into PNG between February 1984 and October 1985 were recognized by UNHCR as *prima facie* refugees based on their mass influx.¹ The Government of PNG acceded to the 1951 Convention and 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees on 17 July 1986² and subsequently determined that West Papuans would be relocated from seventeen informal camps on the international border to a single inland location, as recommended by UNHCR. The government identified the site at East Awin, a division of the Kiunga District in Western Province, approximately 120 km east of the Indonesian–PNG border. The site was established with the financial assistance of the international community including UNHCR. Between 1987 and 1989 about 3,500 West Papuans were relocated from border camps to East Awin.

The East Awin site was chosen for its location within a proposed integrated development plan that included timber logging, palm oil, and rubber harvesting (Preston 1992). The site is located in Western Province, which is the poorest province in PNG based on income per capita from the sale of agricultural produce, and timber and mineral royalties (Allen *et al.* 2001: 546). An estimated 4,500 West Papuan Muyu people in border camps in the Western Province refused to relocate to East Awin in spite of the services and rations offered by UNHCR. Their refusal to relocate has been explained in terms of proximity to their own *dusun* (traditional landholding comprising cultivated orchards, gardens and hunting ground), their desire to remain close to sago stands on the border, and their unwillingness to agree to the condition which proscribed political activity. The East Awin site was initially allocated 720 square kilometres. However, since 1987 West Papuan refugees have lived in seventeen settlements strung out along a road measuring 30 kilometres long and 1 kilometre wide, totalling approximately 6,000 hectares or 30 square kilometres. Population density at East Awin has been measured as twice that of neighbouring areas (Allen *et al.* 1993).

The East Awin site has no naturally occurring sago; the available gardening space is diminishing due to cultivation practices and population pressure; there is no reliable water source, and game within the site is extinct. Additionally, the Awin and Pa landholders—who have not been fully compensated by the government—have restricted refugees from pig farming, hunting and fishing. Three quarters of the refugees at East Awin were dependent on subsistence food production in Irian Jaya and most consumed sago as a staple food. Immediately prior to fieldwork undertaken for this research, the 1997 island-wide drought further increased refugees' vulnerability. The issue of food security at East Awin

formed part of the backdrop against which refugees responded to the offer of repatriation or ‘permissive residency’ in 1998–1999 (Glazebrook 2001b).

The Offer of ‘Permissive Residency’ or Repatriation

Under the PNG Migration Act 1978, ‘permissive residency’ status can be accorded to refugees for renewable periods of three years conditional on no political activity and no residence in the border area (ICJ–RCOA 2003: paragraph 308). From 1984 until the mid 1990s, an international campaign advocated that the government should offer ‘permissive residency’ to West Papuan refugees in order to remove the threat of forced return to Irian Jaya in contravention of the 1951 Convention which it signed in 1986. The Australian section of the International Commission of Jurists also recommended that ‘permissive residency’ status be offered following their visit to the border camps in PNG in September 1984. ‘Permissive residency’ would mitigate the impact of the government’s reservations to Article 26 of the 1951 Convention, i.e., Freedom of Movement within the Territory of Papua New Guinea.³ It was not until 1997, however, that the Government finalized application procedures for ‘permissive residency’ to be offered to West Papuan refugees.

The 1998 offer of ‘permissive residency’ encouraged refugees to make a decision as soon as possible:

Assistance from the Government, NGOs and UNHCR has been provided to you for many years. However, such assistance cannot continue indefinitely. Before, the only option was voluntary repatriation. You now also have the choice of Permissive Residency. The time has come for you to make a decision . . . It is in your best interest to apply for one of the above alternatives as soon as possible (DFAT PNG n.d.).

Some refugees understood that since ‘permissive residency’ was granted for three years at a time, anyone who chose this offer would be ineligible for assisted repatriation to Irian Jaya during that three year period. However, according to UNHCR, this perception was in contradiction with the UNHCR principle that voluntary repatriation is always the most desirable durable solution (Siffointe 2003). Without assisted repatriation (provision of airfare to a person’s place of origin in Irian Jaya), most refugees could not afford to return by plane, and the mountainous terrain could not be traversed otherwise. These restrictions created a decision-making dilemma: whether to register for assisted repatriation immediately, or register as permissive residents and inside of three years return home as self-funded individuals, or register as permissive residents and possibly join a repatriation programme after three years.

In 1997, the first batch of ‘permissive residency’ applications by West Papuan refugees was intercepted and seized by Papua New Guinea landowners at East Awin. According to Bishop Gerard Deschamps of the Daru-Kiunga Diocese, the landowners feared two consequences arising from the granting of ‘permissive

residency'. First, the condition of 'permissive residency' allowing resettlement elsewhere in PNG would possibly relieve the government of its obligation to compensate the landowners. Second, West Papuan 'permissive residency' applicants who lived outside East Awin were required to relocate to live at East Awin for six months. The landowners feared that any population increase would further deplete natural resources that had not yet been fully compensated for.⁴ In 1998, permissive residents were offered 50 kina (1 kina = approximately \$0.40) per adult and 25 kina per child 'to help improve your living situation at East Awin' (DFAT PNG n.d.). Some referred to the amount as their 'final payment' as refugees, completely insufficient to help improve their living situation: 'The money is not real money, what can it buy? It can be consumed in a day. Now, 1,000 kina per person—that might be sufficient to start a small business of some sort.'

The decision whether to repatriate or apply for 'permissive residency' was also affected by rumours that circulated at East Awin, partly due to lack of access to news or radio reports of the situation in Irian Jaya and political developments in Jakarta. People's awareness of rumours increased their anxiety about decision-making. Without regular news, some West Papuans living at East Awin 'knew' the current Indonesian state order through rumours of political violence, and through their experiences of the previous Suharto regime that had caused them to flee for their lives into PNG. During the period of fieldwork, 1998–1999, such events as President Suharto's downfall, Megawati Sukarnoputri's candidacy for the Indonesian Presidency, and the East Timor referendum were interpreted by some West Papuan refugees to be 'nationally' cathartic, that is, in terms of an imminent West Papuan nation state.

Several conditions were attached to the offer of 'permissive residency' status as follows: 1. To abide by the laws of Papua New Guinea; 2. Not to engage directly or indirectly in any political activity that might affect the good relationship between the Governments of PNG and Indonesia; 3. Not to reside in the border areas of West Sepik and Western Provinces except East Awin Camp; 4. Not to engage directly or indirectly in OPM activities including holding of military and civil positions in the organization; 5. Not to hold executive positions nor be financial members of any political parties in PNG; 6. Not to vote or stand in national, provincial and local government elections in PNG until attainment of citizenship; 7. To notify the appropriate authority of any change of address and place of residence in PNG; 8. 'Permissive residency' permits are subject to renewal annually. Permissive Residents would have the following rights: 1. Free movement within PNG except to and in border areas; 2. Engagement in business activities including leasing of government land and access to banking facilities; 3. Employment with similar conditions as nationals; 4. Enrolment in PNG schools and tertiary institutions; 5. Access to health services and facilities; 6. Access to PNG courts; 7. Freedom of worship; 8. Freedom of marriage; 9. Eligible for naturalization after eight years qualifying period as Permissive Residents; 10. Freedom to return to Indonesia again to take up permanent residency at own expense.

Refugees claimed the proscription of political activity denied their history and political situation. It was often explained to me that ‘the condition of silence is against my reason for being here which is to let the rest of the world know what is happening in West Papua.’ While permissive residents are eligible for PNG citizenship after eight years under Section 67 of the PNG Constitution, refugees tended to identify themselves as ‘a West Papuan person’ rather than in terms of the language of state citizenship. In other words, ‘permissive residency’ as a kind of provisional Papua New Guinean citizenship would not affect their West Papuaness. According to Indonesian law (Article 17 (k) of the Indonesian Basic Law No 62 of 1958), most West Papuans at East Awin have lost their Indonesian citizenship as their absence from Indonesia has exceeded five years (ICJ–RCOA 2003: paragraph 719). At East Awin, the children of West Papuan refugees comprise 52 per cent of the population (Siffointe 2003), and the report of the International Commission of Jurists (ICJ) mission to Western Province in January 2003, recommended that the government grant citizenship to children born in PNG who would otherwise be stateless (ICJ–RCOA 2003: recommendation 5). The ICJ report does not comment on whether West Papuan refugees themselves sought PNG citizenship for their children. West Papuan permissive residents also informed the ICJ mission that their three year permits had expired; no arrangement had been made either for renewal or processing certificates of identity as travel documents, and rejected permissive resident applicants had not been provided with any explanation (ICJ–RCOA 2003: paragraphs 308, 621).

The Imperative of Timing: Returning with ‘Result’

The timing of the permissive residency policy’s implementation beginning in 1997, and the conditional nature of the offer, produced uneasiness in refugees. The moment of return could not simply be reduced to arrangements of identification, registration and international diplomacy. Rather, return was determined by events occurring at East Awin and in Irian Jaya. People’s reactions to the offer of ‘permissive residency’ or repatriation revealed decisions determined by timing in relation to the judgements: whether they or their group had achieved what they had set out to; whether they thought it was safe to return, and whether the new era of political reformation in Indonesia could guarantee their amnesty in spite of the humiliation they had caused the Indonesian state by seeking asylum in a neighbouring state.

Holding out in exile avoided the shame of returning empty-handed. Deaths of West Papuans while fleeing and in the period of exile required justification to relatives of the deceased living in the homeland. In the minds of some refugees, the meaning of exile was sustained by an explicit connection between Christian faith inspiring trust in liberation, and refugees’ faith in their ultimate return to a place considered as their West Papuan homeland. West Papuan theologian and scholar Benny Giay proposed that the Bible allows a West Papuan congregation to imagine a world free of trickery, intimidation and trauma. The Bible is a window onto another world identified by some as a liberated West Papua

(2000: 61). At East Awin, evangelical pastors preached the possibility of *merdeka* being achieved through divine intervention. The Exodus analogy in the Bible also loaned honour and historicity to West Papuan exile, underwriting return as inevitable. The belief that return ought not to be undertaken until independence affected many refugees' responses to the policy of permissive residency.

Refugees anticipated their reception by other West Papuans in Irian Jaya in the event of return. In the quotation below, a fishing analogy was used by a school teacher originally from the island of Biak, to explain the expectations of family and friends left behind:

If I plan to go fishing my family and neighbours observe me preparing my nets and line. They expect me to return with catch and they expect me to share it with them. If I return empty-handed they will gossip: 'You are not capable of becoming a fisherman.' We have left behind our families, father, mother and siblings. They have great hope that we will be successful. So, if I return to West Papua before independence, before our goal is achieved, people will protest: 'When will Independence come?' and 'What have you brought home?' We pledged on oath that we would return with result. If we have not yet achieved it, then we must strive until it has been achieved. I will be branded a failure, an ignorant person. I will be rejected. Shame is not evident; I alone will feel it in my heart. But it will become the source of ridicule for many years to come. If there is an event that evokes anger, for example, if my child steals from my neighbour's garden, my neighbour will say: 'Your father left his garden behind for years, now you steal from mine.' It is later that humiliating words will emerge. If independence is achieved and then we return, our names will be honoured. I may claim: 'I did not go for myself alone but for society.' Whereas if we return without result, we will be considered courageous but it will become a potential source of derision.

Implicit in this and other similar narratives is that repatriation to Irian Jaya prior to *merdeka* would signal that there is no longer purpose in holding out in exile; there is no longer hope or faith in liberation and independence. The aphorism: 'who knows if it will be sooner or later' was used by refugees to describe the unknown time of waiting-in-exile that would hopefully culminate in return. Faith in *merdeka* existed so long as West Papuans remained outside Irian Jaya in protest at Indonesian rule and in support of political independence. The narrative elaborates some of the risks to the individual and the collective political struggle in the event of premature return. Educated people claimed that on return, their 'civil record' and that of their children would be negatively affected. Others claimed that they would be involuntarily relocated into transmigration settlements as had happened to other repatriates in 1993 (see Jayapura Diocese Office for Justice and Peace 1998). Forced resettlement in transmigrant sites upon repatriation was seen by West Papuan people as denying their rights as people indigenous to Irian Jaya possessing villages and traditional landholdings.

Applicants registered for repatriation clandestinely, aware that return prior to independence was considered by many other refugees to be premature. Premature return was represented as betraying the people who had died in the struggle since

flight in 1984, and the relatives of the deceased. Most ‘northerners’, in support of their nationalist political convictions, intended to avoid repatriation until independence. They spoke of East Awin as an enclave drawing international attention to the struggle for *merdeka*, that is, as a political tactic. Some refugees claimed that premature return would release violence. This assertion was based on a notion that West Papuan exile and access to the outside world held the key to a relatively peaceable Irian Jaya. The narrative below by a Muyu man at East Awin illustrates people’s projection of their reception in the event of return, and its political effect.

We left thinking our flight would produce freedom through world attention. To return now would mean great humiliation in the eyes of our family and in the eyes of the Indonesian government. Upon return, our family will view us as ‘guests’ and the state will view us as third class citizens. Indeed, our families live peacefully inside because we are outside. The Indonesian government has kept the peace in order to draw us home. If murders and tortures occur inside, the government knows refugees will not return. Upon our return, the retribution will begin.

Guardianship and the Offer of ‘Permissive Residency’

West Papuan people expressed concern that the PNG government’s offer of ‘permissive residency’ had resulted in cessation of UNHCR financial assistance because they no longer had refugee status. They issued detailed verbal lists to me of UNHCR-funded services previously provided at East Awin that had been removed over time. Although protection monitoring activity continued with several visits each year by UNHCR liaison officers, refugees perceived that UNHCR guardianship had ceased. In theory, the withdrawal of UNHCR guardianship would only occur when refugees obtain full citizenship. However, the ‘permissive residency’ policy did make West Papuans’ refugee status ambiguous for it appeared to mark a shift towards a ‘durable solution’, with West Papuans granted similar rights and responsibilities to PNG nationals. The period 1987–1996 was identified by refugees as ‘the era of the UN’, and UNHCR withdrawal beginning in 1997 was seen as an augury of a new era. Refugees used ‘before the UN freed its hands’ and ‘after the UN freed its hands’ as markers of time, and radical change in their prosperity. Cessation of funding was understood by some refugees in terms of what Malkki has described elsewhere as a ‘conjuncture of perceived relations [of collusion] between past and present’ (1995: 106). Some refugees perceived the cessation as withdrawal, and a ruse by the Indonesian and PNG governments to break refugee resolve to endure exile until the event of *merdeka*. Others went as far as proposing that the offer of ‘permissive residency’ was a tactic to compel refugees to eventually register for repatriation, for example: ‘[“permissive residency”] allows survival that’s all, until there are those who cannot endure who will request to go home.’ In other words, left to their own devices in a hostile PNG economy without UNHCR assistance, West Papuans would be compelled to return to Irian Jaya out of their abject poverty and vulnerability. Some refugees concluded that the underlying motivation was to make life as miserable as possible, compelling their repatriation. The Catholic

Church of the Daru-Kiunga Diocese and NGOs such as the Austrian Service for Development Cooperation have sought to prevent such a result by providing development assistance, particularly health and education, to the West Papuan refugee population and local landholders.

Some refugees believed that UNHCR had ‘handed over’ administration of West Papuan refugees to PNG. They drew an analogy with the UN’s capitulation to Indonesia that effectively surrendered Netherlands New Guinea to Indonesia. The signing of the New York Agreement in August 1962 by the Netherlands and Indonesia which effected a temporary UN administration over Netherlands New Guinea until May 1963, followed by the United Nation General Assembly’s ratification of the 1969 referendum on self determination, were represented as precedents of UN betrayal and abandonment of West Papuan people. The tendency among refugees to read PNG policy towards them over the years to be motivated by a desire to please Indonesia was based on a perception that Indonesia had actively sought the PNG Government’s support in the repatriation of West Papuans since 1984. Ways in which the PNG Government was supposed to have encouraged repatriation included neglect leading to famine in the period 1984–1986 (Hewison and Smith 1986), relocation to the unsuitable East Awini site in 1987, and threats and events of deportation. Balancing these perceptions, it ought to be said that PNG is one of the few signatory states of the Refugee Convention in the Pacific region; has initiated the purchase of 6,000 hectares at East Awini; and has recruited West Papuan teachers and nurses onto the government payroll.

Events of Regional Return and Relocation

The 1997 ‘permissive residency’ policy was used by refugees in ways that the PNG and Indonesian governments might not have imagined. It could be posited that West Papuan refugees subverted the offers ‘by using them with respect to ends and references foreign to the system they had no choice to accept’ (de Certeau 1984: xiii). Actual plans and events of repatriation after 1998 reveal each particular event to possess its own historico-political complex. This is evident in the intentions of two discrete groups—Muyu and northerner—detailed below. The planned repatriation of Muyu people from Yogi settlement at East Awini was an act of reclamation of their region driven by their own development agenda in the absence of any local progress from the Indonesian Government’s development planning (*Repelita*). For northerners, ‘permissive residency’ enabled return to a coastal environment where they had enjoyed relative prosperity as refugees in the period 1987–1989.

‘Permissive Residency’ Allowing Relocation

A raid by the PNG riot squad was carried out at East Awini in December 1998, reportedly to investigate rumours of weapon manufacturing. This raid signalled to northerners their vulnerability as permissive residents without international legal protection. They had previously given much significance to the idea of East

Awin as a united refugee enclave. According to northerners, during the raid it was they who were targeted by police for violent interrogation and punishment. The raid caused a nadir of disillusion in northerners, altering their resolve to endure exile at East Awin. For northerners who intended to avoid repatriation until independence, 'permissive residency' enabled relocation to a prosperous environment which could sustain their exile. Unfortunately, only a handful of northerners could afford the cost of airfares to the north coast, a journey that could not be made on foot. Northerners believed that relocation costs for permissive residents would be subsidized by the PNG Government and UNHCR but this has not been the case.

Northerners' intention to relocate to the north coast as permissive residents was informed by their previous experience as refugees at the Pasi beach settlement near Vanimo in the period 1987–1989. From East Awin, this period was recounted in utopic terms. Northerners categorized those Ninggra people who granted them usufructuary rights in Ninggra land as 'brothers and sisters'. For northerner West Papuans, the familiar coastal environment allowed prosperity. They practised commercial fishing, even purchasing outboard motors. Northerners recounted to me that in 1989, PNG police had forcibly removed them from their camp at Pasi Beach to East Awin. Their church and dwellings were torched by police, and they were forced onto an aeroplane at Vanimo under the guard of police with dogs. They explained their forced relocation to the isolated, undeveloped East Awin site, as another strategy to compel their voluntary repatriation to Irian Jaya.

'Permissive residency' also enabled temporary return to the homeland, and maintenance of kin relations. Particularly for northerner women whose husbands had rejected repatriation outright, 'permissive residency' identification articles were seen as 'passports' allowing return to Irian Jaya to visit relatives and family.⁵ The articles identified them as provisional Papua New Guinea citizens; as inter-national subjects. Displayed in Irian Jaya, Papua New Guinea 'permissive residency' status was considered by refugees to be protective, whereas in PNG it meant their discrimination as 'non-nationals'.

Northerners' desire to return to the north coast reveals the complexity of displacement and attachment to place. The inland, isolated East Awin site was considered to be a place of deprivation, whereas the coastal site near Vanimo was remembered in antithetical, almost utopian terms. This familiar coastal environment was the most recent memory and experience of a prosperous home, and the sole memory for most school-aged children. How northerners will locate themselves discursively in relation to the two worlds of homeland and exile once they have returned to the coast, will offer insight into the way that attachment to place can mediate the experience of displacement.

Repatriation and Regional Development

East Awin was not an unfamiliar landscape for Muyu whose *dusun* were located only several days' walking distance away. However, Muyu experience contests

the assumption by some policy-makers that refugee movement within a region requires less cultural adjustment—where, for example, their land is on the other side of a colonial-imposed boundary, but they are living with fellow speakers of their language and kinsmen (Harrell-Bond and Voutira 1992). It was the relative proximity of their *dusun*, their dependence on agricultural livelihood, and the total absence of their staple food, sago, that determined Muyu experience of displacement at East Awin.

Muyu people refer to themselves as ‘sago people’, yet at East Awin they had resisted planting the sago seedlings offered by the administration. Planting a sago tree would serve to ‘locate’ them at East Awin and they did not want to imagine themselves still living out of their place, at the time of harvest ten years on. Resistance to planting sago was an act of defiance, resisting cultivating East Awin as a longer-term place of residence. Muyu people also claimed that Awin and Pa landowners prohibited planting sago outside the camp boundary, and discouraged planting sago inside the boundary. This response is congruous with a Muyu worldview that special permission is required to plant sago on another person’s land because sago trees perpetually produce suckers that colonize the area of the initial planting, producing an enduring and ambiguous relationship between the planter and the other person’s land (Schoorl 1997: 123).

During the period of my fieldwork at East Awin, a Muyu leader called Saul planned to repatriate his entire village at East Awin back to his former village, Kombut, in Irian Jaya. Saul explained the reason for Muyu flight in 1984 and prolonged exile in Papua New Guinea, in terms of disenfranchisement produced by the Indonesian state’s failed promise of ‘development’. Saul formulated a development plan and sought co-operation for its implementation from neighbouring regional governments in PNG and Irian Jaya. The plan consisted of four components: a map titled ‘highway development’ that plotted road construction linking villages to towns; a diagram showing the configuration of a new village; an inventory of services necessary to re-settle the village; and a human resources inventory of the skills that villagers had acquired since living in PNG. According to the logic of returning with ‘result’ mentioned earlier in the article, Saul’s result was the map, diagram and inventories of his development plan, and the two regional governments’ commitment to its implementation. In September 2003, I received an email from Saul via the Catholic Church in Kiunga:

Child, my plan has happened, from Mindiptanah to Kombut. Now the governments of PNG and Indonesia have united to clear the road from Kiunga to Dome [PNG] and on to Kombut [Irian Jaya]. Father will return home to Kombut in the year 2004, around February. The reason being: the road is already cleared from Mindiptanah to Kombut.

Muyu people’s anxiety about returning or staying suggests a dialectical tension between the virtues of the homeland in spite of neglect and violence, and the possibilities of the host country in spite of landlessness (de Santis 2001). A simultaneous tension of fear and safety in relation to the homeland and the

host country was explicit in Muyu responses to the 1997 permissive residency policy. Saul's plan partially addressed the bases of fear—identified as isolation and underdevelopment—in returning to the Muyu region. Focusing on infrastructure such as transport, market outlets for agricultural produce, schooling, health services, and housing, Saul has attempted to defuse this tension by increasing the 'safeness' of the homeland region in relation to the host country.

Conclusion

Positing refugees' tactical use of asylum policy implies a certain degree of refugee agency. In doing so I do not want to negate the sense of profound dilemma in decision-making for many refugees. For those people remaining at East Awin, their future is particularly bleak from a perspective of food production (Askin 2000). For the majority of West Papuans at East Awin, the weakness of a temporary 'permissive residency' arrangement which is subject to three yearly renewal is already evident: the expiry of permits has resulted in confusion about the question of renewal, and the absence of information about this procedure has caused anxiety (ICJ–RCOA 2003: paragraph 621). Government officials have however disclosed that the Advisory Committee responsible for processing permits had not been constituted (ICJ–RCOA 2003: paragraph 405), and a proposed legislative framework has been released for a PNG Refugee Act 2003 which deals with the composition and terms of reference of a National Committee on Refugees.

Most West Papuan refugees at East Awin have lost their Indonesian citizenship according to Indonesian law. Those who chose integration as permissive residents in PNG now hold expired permits. Most permissive residents cannot afford to relocate outside of East Awin, although the terms of their residency permit this. People whose applications lie waiting to be processed have no legal status.⁶ Neither do West Papuans living outside East Awin who are unable to meet the relocation conditions of 'permissive residency', i.e. returning temporarily to East Awin. Nor do the children of West Papuan refugees born in PNG. Perhaps not since the period 1984–1987, prior to the classification of asylum seekers as refugees, have there been so many West Papuans with no formally recognized status in PNG. A proposed Refugee Act 2003 offers the promise that processing 'permissive residency' permits can be resolved at a bureaucratic and administrative level. But permissive residents' vulnerability in a hostile PNG economy is also related to domestic political will and economic capacity. The ICJ–RCOA 2003 report urges the international community to provide development assistance to West Papuan people in PNG to be distributed by church agencies (paragraphs 744–745). The report gives voice to refugee concerns that a void has been left by the cessation of UNHCR assistance, and refugees perceive this cessation as the withdrawal of guardianship.

Provided these matters of administrative procedures and development assistance can be addressed, I would propose that the *uses made* of 'permissive residency' suggest benefit. By 'benefit' I refer to the production of household

well-being allowed by freedom of movement to other regions of the host country, and the facilitation and maintenance of kin relations allowed by travel between the host country and homeland. These uses of 'permissive residency' allow West Papuan refugees who do not choose repatriation in the short term, to move and dwell more comfortably between the homeland and host country.

Epilogue

In 2003, UNHCR resumed the funding of limited activities in East Awin with a budget of around \$110,000. A similar budget is proposed for 2004. In November 2003, UNHCR PNG liaison officers made a field trip to East Awin and recommended to the screening committee of the Border Affairs section in the PNG Department of Provincial and Local Government Affairs, the renewal of 400 'permissive residency' permits, and the issuance of 700 new permits. New 'permissive residency' permits would be issued to all adults and not just to heads of families as had occurred in the past. This change will benefit spouses whose status is not clear in circumstances where the head of the family has died, or has several wives, or has returned to West Papua, or has relocated elsewhere in PNG without the family (Siffointe 2003).

1. Up to the time of writing, PNG had no domestic system for adjudicating asylum claims and had therefore allowed UNHCR to do this work.
2. When signing these instruments, the Government stipulated that 'in accordance with article 42, paragraph 1 of the Convention makes a reservation with respect to the provision contained in articles 17 (1) [wage-earning employment], 21 [Housing], 22 (1) [Public Education], 26 [Freedom of Movement], 31 [Refugees unlawfully in the country of refuge], 32 [Expulsion] and 34 [Naturalization], of the Convention and does not accept the obligations stipulated in these articles' (<http://untreaty.un.org>). According to ICJ-RCOA (2003: paragraph 305) these reservations reflected Government's concern about the porous nature of the border allowing illegal entry of West Papuans, and concern that the PNG state did not have the economic capacity to grant refugees the same social assistance as PNG citizens.
3. I am grateful to Jim Thompson for drawing my attention to this point.
4. In reality, the requirement for West Papuans living in urban areas in PNG to relocate to East Awin in order to apply for 'permissive residency' has meant that most people have been unable to fulfil these requirements and their status remains ambiguous (ICJ-RCOA 2003: paragraph 715).
5. 'Permissive residency' is different from the official border pass system for those who cross the border for traditional reasons such as exchange and hunting, and whose land boundaries may straddle the international border. People living in the border region on either side may apply for a red card from the Indonesian consulate on the PNG side, or an entry visa from the PNG embassy on the Indonesian side. People living outside the border region who wish to cross the border must hold a national passport. Officially at least, holders of 'permissive residency' permits must apply separately for a certificate of identity and upon receipt of this, must apply for a visa at the embassy/consulate in order to return to Jayapura to visit relatives.
6. More than 300 West Papuans living in a camp at Vanimo since 2001 were assessed jointly by UNHCR and the Government of PNG. UNHCR considered

that approximately 75 per cent should be accorded refugee status. The PNG Department of Foreign Affairs subsequently established a Task Force to re-interview and reassess the claims, granting refugee status to six out of the 96 families. The government sought the return of the other 90 families to Indonesia on a voluntary basis, but on 17 March 2003 decided to allow them to remain indefinitely in the camp at Vanimo (ICJ–RCOA 2003: paragraphs 310, 311, 319, 320).

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