

Chapter 9

Permissive residents

It was not the fact that six of her seven children had just been diagnosed with tuberculosis that Gisela had not slept the night before our visit. It was because of the torrential rain. Her roof comprised scraps of iron and bark, and thick plastic that had been ripped and torn by the winds. In a storm the plastic funnelled the water into the house. She had no money to purchase sago thatch, and no energy to harvest the leaves of the forest coconut palm. On stormy nights, resourceful Gisela would send her children, aged between five and sixteen, to the dry houses of neighbours. It was not just Gisela who weathered these storms. Everyone talked about their roofs at East Awin. Without decent roofing material, people spent rainy nights moving objects away from puddles and rescuing foodstuff and clothing from persistent drips. Torrential rain and fierce winds brought dampness and people complained of aching bones, but the inevitable hot morning sun baked the clay loam all over again.

Like most people at East Awin, Gisela yearned to return to her own village near Sota in Irian Jaya. (It was Gisela's husband who accompanied Conrad back to Irian Jaya in his reconnaissance journey mentioned previously.) But it was the matter of bride-price that made return unsafe for Gisela and her children. On the day after the storm, I invited the UNHCR field officer to accompany me to her house. An economist from Japan, he was busy gathering data for a UNHCR inventory and consulting with refugee leaders. He made several trips to East Awin from the UNHCR Regional Office in Canberra during the time of my research, and was seen wandering in and out of machinery sheds, clipboard in hand, and curious observers in tow. He had no Indonesian or pidgin facility himself, so Hiro talked mainly to refugees who spoke English. As it was only teachers and their students who spoke English at East Awin, the refugee houses that Hiro frequented were teachers' houses. There he might have found cloth curtains covering windows and suspended over doorways, a hand-embroidered tablecloth, a chair to sit on, a kerosene lantern lit at dusk and a battery-powered radio at news time. He would have been offered drinking water in a glass, a cup of sweet black tea and fried banana or some other sweet morsel on a plate.

Gisela's house consisted of two rooms separated by a door. A kitchen had once been attached to the back of the house but had become separated from the main building. Its posts swung beneath the floor and its plastic roofing flapped in the wind. With the kitchen fallen off, Gisela had relocated the cooking hearth to the centre of the main room. She had built it onto a small sheet of corrugated iron, delineated by four sturdy poles of banana palm resembling green bamboo.

On the day of our visit Gisela was absent. She had gone fishing for small fish—the size of a large sardine and filled with bones—in the shallow streams that flowed on the margins of the East Awin settlement. I was told by a neighbour that Gisela never caught much but she adored fishing. Her boys were not idle either and spent their days slingshotting birds and lizards for food. None of her children had attended school at East Awin beyond the second grade. At different times, Gisela had temporarily adopted her older children out to other families in neighbouring camps. On the morning of our visit, the younger children were sitting around the hearth, which was smoking because of damp wood. They were boiling cassava in the household's only cooking pot, a large aluminium saucepan with a hairline crack that emitted steam. There was no crockery, no cutlery. At East Awin, Gisela was reliant on the generosity of her neighbours, of whom three earned wages. The family survived on cassava and small fish, and contributions such as salt and occasionally rice, as well as soap and old clothes.

It was Gisela's neighbour who told me a version of Gisela's life story. Gisela's own place was replete with deer and pig meat, sago and coconut. She had never experienced hunger before arriving to East Awin. A raid was carried out by the Indonesian military on her border village in 1992, on the pretext that villagers were suspected of harbouring OPM fugitives. Much of the population fled to the east across the international border into PNG. They camped near Weam in Moorehead Province for several months before being officially relocated to East Awin. Gisela and her husband and five children were relocated with another one hundred families. At East Awin, Gisela gave birth to two more children. Three years after their arrival at East Awin, Gisela's husband travelled with Conrad, by foot and canoe, back to their border village to see what had taken place. From East Awin, Gisela heard the news that, following custom, her husband had married his older brother's widow. Some time later, a neighbour at East Awin heard of Gisela's husband's death on the local radio's 'deceased listing', broadcast nightly from the capital Jayapura.

Gisela's travesty was that her husband had never submitted bride-price to her family. Among Yei and Kanum, bride-price customarily meant the exchange of sisters and Gisela's husband had not submitted a sister or female relative to Gisela's family.¹ Ignoring exchange brings grievance and retribution. Gisela's husband's sudden and inexplicable death rendered Gisela's family vulnerable to accusation of sorcery. For according to the logic of retribution, Gisela's family was the most aggrieved party. Gisela and her children were barely surviving at East Awin, but the act of return posed different threats. If she returned to her husband's family they might seek to avenge their son's death which they believed was caused by Gisela's family. Returning to Gisela's own family would increase their vulnerability. Even at a distance of several hundred kilometres from her village, Gisela felt the threat of retribution of her husband's family. This was

evidenced by the recent diagnosis of six of her seven children with tuberculosis, and Gisela's own blinding headaches, sleeplessness and inexplicable bodily sensations. She felt like someone was following her and could sense their breath on the nape of her neck. The neighbour who told me Gisela's story did not understand why Gisela's husband had not submitted a sister from his side of the family in exchange. Ignoring the rules of exchange risks antagonistic feelings between both parties, and bad feelings inspire retribution through such means as sorcery. In contrast, exchange cements relations between families by equalising loss and gain.

The matter of bride-price profoundly shaped Gisela's decision whether to return to the homeland, or remain at East Awin. The decision of returning or staying cannot be reduced entirely to macro politics. For some people categorised as refugees, decision-making may be bound up in cultural matters. Gisela's story although anomalous, allows us to see displacement from the margins. Experiences like hers might be conceived as the 'trash of history'² for her circumstances do not fit the archetypal West Papuan refugee, whose flight into exile in order to struggle for freedom will be followed by eventual return. In historian Neumann's writing, inspired by Benjamin, he looks for a past that seems useless, in the sense that it cannot be used to delineate the present: 'These fissures, breaking up the continuity that is constructed between past and present ... enable us to glimpse the otherness of the past and the potential otherness of the future.'³ There is no political sense in Gisela's existence at East Awin. She and her children are only incidentally there. She fled east across the international border to save her and her children's lives, and to follow her husband who may or may not have harboured OPM. By relocating his family to East Awin, Gisela's husband was merely falling in step with the decision of the main group. Staying on at East Awin allows Gisela to (mostly) avoid the imbroglio of suspicion and accusation that would be her fate if she returned. Her vulnerability—her unpaid bride-price—was exposed by the events that had removed husband and wife from their respective families and from each other.

Gisela was not the only person at East Awin troubled by the changes to PNG refugee policy that offered the 'choice' of joining an assisted repatriation program to Irian Jaya, or registering for permissive residency and remaining in PNG. For Gisela, the so-called choices would effect similar ends. Returning would surely result in her death by sorcery and staying could see her children die from poverty-induced disease. During a meeting in a church at East Awin in 1997, a government official briefed the congregation on the subject of the new policy. Markus recounted the incident to me. During the course of the meeting, a congregation member expressed his dilemma to the official: 'If I stay here there is nothing, yet if I return, I don't know whether I will be safe.' The man, who was moved to rise from his seat, articulated eloquently the dilemma of

decision-making for people unable to find solace in a decision to return to the homeland, or remain in the host country. For in the homeland they have 'everything' yet they are unsafe, and in the host country they are safe yet they have 'nothing'. Like Gisela, the man saw both options carrying considerable risk.

Ironically, refugees and their advocates had lobbied for the status of 'permissive resident' since the mid-1980s. It was not until the offer was made, and the terms and conditions explained, that people understood the effects of the status change and began to question its benefit. To understand permissive residency it is necessary to trace a prior shift in status, from border crosser to refugee. Use of the term 'permissive residency' dates back to the 1960s. At this time, the Australian administration of PNG issued temporary entry or permissive residency permits on humanitarian grounds to West Papuans crossing the border. These permits required holders to refrain from political activity relating to Irian Jaya and could be revoked by the Administrator.⁴

Other people moving west–east across the border were classified as 'traditional border crossers'. Their movement was considered temporary in character for the purposes of traditional activities listed as: 'social contacts and ceremonies including marriage, gardening, hunting, collecting and other land usage, fishing and other usage of waters, and customary border trade.'⁵ The Migration Ordinance of 1963 contained no clear provisions for dealing with non-traditional border crossers and assessment of their status was at the colonial Administrator's discretion.⁶ By determining asylum applications individually, the Australian, and later, PNG administrations, in effect masked the political nature of the movement.⁷ Generally speaking, the PNG government preferred to categorise West Papuans as border crossers rather than refugees. This avoided predetermining their status, and encouraged repatriation as the most appropriate response.⁸ It was not until the influx of 11,000 West Papuans between 1984–86 that the question of status became a sensitive topic for the national Cabinet and press. It was argued that those who had crossed en masse could not be categorised according to the technical term border crosser, as their movement was not temporary in character or for the purpose of traditional activities.

A discourse of 'Melanesian-ness' was invoked in the press and Cabinet, naturalising PNG solidarity with West Papuans. An English-language play titled 'My brother my enemy' by PNG writer John Kasaipwalova, written in 1978, explores fraternity when it pushes up against nation-state politics. The relations of diplomacy between nation-states, rather than the relations of kin or shared Melanesian-ness, shape political decisions. The play traces the response of the PNG Security Minister (Sokaru) to the arrest of his cousin Sari, an OPM leader. Sokaru, a Minister in the Cabinet, never pauses to reflect on his cousin's struggle in light of his own post-colonial state. The two were raised as brothers in a village

in the border province of Sandaun. Sari's identity was determined by two events: his father's decision to relocate from the border town of Vanimo to his wife's village in the highlands and the annexation of Netherlands New Guinea by Indonesia. Sari's legal status as a citizen of Indonesia renders his re-entry without a visa into PNG to be illegal. His political activity is also deemed criminal by both PNG and Indonesia. Sokaru's uncles invoke their kinship relation to Sari by bringing a pig, and foodstuff, to Sari in jail. It is via their uncles' actions that Sokaru's identity as Sari's cousin becomes known. Sokaru the politician undercuts the fraternal values of the 'Melanesian way': not only does he treat his cousin Sari as an enemy, he joins hands with his own cousin's enemy (Indonesia).

Photo 4. 'Who's [sic] put the border mark!' Oil painting by Herry Offide, 1999.



Photo: Diana Glazebrook.

Among PNG policy-makers in the 1980s, it was the economic refugee argument that came to dominate thinking on the matter of asylum.⁹ PNG did not challenge Indonesia's claim that border crossers were motivated by non-political or economic motives. Indonesia promoted a theory of underdevelopment that claimed cross-border movement to be the result of unequal development in the border region.¹⁰ Simply, West Papuans were pulled across the border by opportunities on the PNG side. While deliberations continued about the status of the West Papuans as border crossers or political refugees, there were threats of repatriation and incidents of deportation. Some people also returned of their own accord. Between 1984 and 1988, as many as 2150 West Papuans were reported as voluntarily returning to Irian Jaya. Among them was a group of about 140 who were 'repatriated' without UNHCR monitoring, and about 12 who were recorded as deported.¹¹

PNG's public support of Indonesia's sovereignty over Irian Jaya can be traced back to the pre-1975 period when PNG acted as understudy to Australia in the negotiation of a Border Agreement with Indonesia. PNG's continued economic relationship with Australia influenced the former's foreign policy. Analysts have said that PNG's perception of its own vulnerability in relation to Indonesia compelled the government to 'accept the Indonesian interpretation of the Border Agreement and to implement it accordingly, or at least, to appear to implement it.'¹²

While the national Cabinet and press bickered about the status of West Papuans who had crossed en masse in 1984, the Australian Section of the International Commission of Jurists (ICJ) advised that: 'the approximately 11,000 border crossers ... were either refugees under the UN Convention and Protocol, or were clearly in a refugee-like situation within the mandate of the UNHCR'.¹³ Based on their mass influx, UNHCR recognised them as prima facie refugees. However, it was not until a famine caused the death of 51 West Papuans at Komokpin border camp between July and August 1984, that the PNG relented and accepted UNHCR intervention. It was estimated that over 2000 refugees were squatting in an area at Komokpin that ordinarily provided for only 150 people.¹⁴ The PNG Cabinet agreed to accede to the Geneva Convention and protocol relating to the status of refugees in January 1986, and the Convention entered into force in October.¹⁵ The PNG government and the UNHCR signed an agreement which provided UNHCR funds to resettle West Papuans in PNG until the end of 1986. The UNHCR was given responsibility for administering the border camps in consultation with the PNG Department of Provincial Affairs and in consultation with Indonesia.¹⁶

Under the 1978 PNG Migration Act, permissive residency status could be accorded to refugees for renewable periods of three years, conditional on no political activity and residence outside the border area.¹⁷ An international campaign lobbied the PNG government to offer permissive residency to West Papuan refugees. In spite of PNG's ratification of the UN Convention, which prohibited refoulement or forced return to Irian Jaya, lobbyists argued that permissive residency status would remove any risk of refoulement. Permissive residency would also mitigate the impact of the government's reservations to Article (26) of the 1951 Convention, by permitting freedom of movement within PNG. It was not until 1996 that the government announced the change in policy, and not until the following year that application procedures for permissive residency were finalised.

Several conditions were attached to the offer of permissive residency status: 1. To abide by the laws of PNG; 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 organisation; 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; and 8. 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. Eligibility for naturalisation after eight years qualifying period as permissive residents; and 10. Freedom to return to Indonesia again to take up permanent residency at own expense.

According to Indonesian law (Article 17(k) of the Indonesian Basic Law No 62 of 1958), West Papuans at East Awin have lost their Indonesian citizenship, as their absence from Indonesia has exceeded five years.¹⁸ Under Section 67 of the PNG Constitution, permissive residents are eligible for PNG citizenship after eight years. Refugees interpreted the meaning of citizenship differently. Some claimed that citizenship was only something written on paper, and a bureaucratic necessity that did not alter their sense of themselves as 'Muyu' or 'Dani', or West Papuans. Others felt that becoming PNG citizens would diminish their struggle to restore their West Papuan nationhood. It is probable that the children of West Papuan refugees who have been born and raised in PNG—some 52 per cent of the population at East Awin—may view the prospect of citizenship differently. In 2004, UNHCR issued birth certificates to all children under the age of twenty born in PNG. A birth certificate provides a legal identity which is not a document of citizenship, but is necessary for citizenship application.

The PNG Department of Foreign Affairs encouraged refugees to make a decision about permissive residency as soon as possible:

Assistance from the Government, NGOs [non-government organizations] 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.¹⁹

Some people understood that, since permissive residency was renewable at three-yearly intervals, anyone who took the offer would be ineligible to apply

for assisted repatriation to Irian Jaya during that three-year period. UNHCR claimed this to be incorrect, and counter to their fundamental principle that voluntary repatriation is always the most desirable durable solution.²⁰ Without assisted repatriation (provision of an airfare to a person's place of origin in Irian Jaya), most refugees could not afford to return by plane and the difficult terrain could not be traversed otherwise. People understood the following range of options. They could register for assisted repatriation immediately. They could register as permissive residents immediately, and if they changed their minds within three years they could return home as self-funded individuals. Or they could register as permissive residents and if they changed their minds they could join a repatriation programme after three years. Those choosing permissive residency were offered assistance totalling 50 kina per adult and 25 kina per child 'to help improve your living situation at East Awin'.²¹ Some referred to the amount as a final payment, completely insufficient for improving their living situation: 'The money is not real money, what can it buy? It can be consumed in a day. Now 1000 kina per person—that might be sufficient to start a small business of some sort.'

Many Muyu perceived their return to be imminent, and had done since their arrival in 1984. The moment of return cannot be reduced to arrangements of identification, registration and international diplomacy. People's decisions were determined by: whether they thought it was safe to return at that time; whether they or their group had achieved what they had set out to; and whether they thought that the new era of political reformation in Indonesia could guarantee their amnesty.

In the event of return, refugees also anticipated their reception by their relatives, neighbours and friends who had not fled. A Biak schoolteacher used a fishing analogy 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.

Implied in this narrative and similar ones is that repatriation prior to independence signalled the struggle’s end—as though there was no longer any purpose in holding out in exile because *merdeka* was not possible. The aphorism: ‘who knows if it will be sooner or later’ was used by refugees to describe the unknown time of waiting that would hopefully culminate in their return to the homeland. Faith in *merdeka* existed as long as West Papuans remained outside Irian Jaya in protest at Indonesian rule, and in support of political independence. The schoolteacher’s 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 *translokal*, like people from Weski camp at East Awini had been.

The schoolteacher warned that returnees would be considered courageous, but that the timing of their return (before *merdeka*) would become a ‘potential source of derision’ and would invoke ‘humiliating words’. Premature return would not see repatriates taken in without expectation or obligation. Premature return was also said to betray those who had died in the struggle since crossing to PNG in 1984, and betray the families of the deceased. It was said that if people suddenly appeared ‘from nowhere’ after 16 years’ absence, their relatives and neighbours may suspect the reason for their sudden return. Why had they chosen this moment rather than any other? Some refugees claimed that premature return would release violence. This assertion was based on a notion that West Papuan exile, which allowed access to the outside world, held the key to a relatively peaceable Irian Jaya. Markus’s projection of their reception in the event of return and its political effect is illustrative:

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.

Most northerners in support of their nationalist politic conviction 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. This perception was not entirely unfounded. Indonesianist scholars had argued that while the 1984 flight attracted international attention to West Papuan injustices, it also led to a shift in Jakartan representations of the situation in Irian Jaya: the press tried to explain West Papuan grievances, mistakes were acknowledged, government officials visited the province and some intellectuals wrote about the enduring nature of West Papuan nationalism.²²

In 1997, refugees began registering to become permissive residents. The first batch of applications by West Papuans was intercepted and seized by the landholders at East Awin. According to Bishop Gerard Deschamps of the Daru-Kiunga Diocese, the landholders feared two consequences. First, they feared that the condition of permissive residency allowing resettlement elsewhere in PNG could divest the government of its obligation to compensate them. Second, West Papuan permissive residency applicants who lived outside East Awin were required to relocate to East Awin for six months. The landowners feared that any population increase would further deplete natural resources that had not yet been fully compensated.

Over time, the refugee population also began to fear several consequences arising from their status as permissive residents. Foremost was that they would lose UNHCR's guardianship. As the UNHCR considered an offer of integration by a host government as a 'durable solution', guardianship would no longer be required, resulting in the withdrawal of refugee status to West Papuans. Some refugees pointed out that permissive residency had made their status ambiguous because it appeared to mark a shift towards provisional citizenship. West Papuans had been granted, in principle at least, similar rights and responsibilities to PNG nationals. In theory, the withdrawal of UNHCR guardianship would only occur when refugees obtained full citizenship. To this end protection monitoring activity had continued, with several annual visits by a UNHCR liaison officer. In practice, refugees could list those UNHCR-funded services previously provided at East Awin that had been removed over time. Decline in services and deterioration of infrastructure was apparent. Hospital patients were no longer provided with food and the hospital operated without diesel-powered electricity. Coffins were no longer transported from the camp of the deceased to the cemetery. Fares were introduced on transport from East Awin to the Fly river. Road maintenance halted, sago roofing material was no longer subsidised, correspondence English courses ceased and the secondary school was closed down.

There was a history of resistance to withdrawal of UNHCR services at East Awin. Not surprisingly, these non-violent activities of resistance centred around flags.

As far back as 1993, a demonstration was held in front of the administration building to protest the introduction of transport fares and the termination of other services. Protestors lowered the UN flag and in its place raised the West Papuan flag to full mast, parallel to the PNG flag. The UN flag was raised to full mast on another shorter flagpole, appearing from a distance to be at half-mast. Previously, only the UN and PNG flags had flown parallel at full mast. I was told that the UN flag ought not be flown at full mast if its presence was only half felt. Five leaders were arrested over the protest. In 1996 when the offer of permissive residency was announced, the UN flag was once again lowered and removed.

Some refugees perceived the reduced responsibility of UNHCR evidenced in the decline in services at East Awin as a ploy. It was seen as a ruse by Indonesia and PNG to break refugee resolve to remain in PNG where they were a financial burden, and a continuing embarrassment to Indonesia. The offer of permissive residency functioned as a tactic to compel refugees to eventually register for repatriation. Several times I heard the comment: '[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. 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.

People at East Awin identified the period 1987–96 as 'the era of the UN'. In contrast, the perception of UNHCR withdrawal beginning in 1997 was seen to augur a new era. Refugees used 'before the UN freed its hands' and 'after the UN freed its hands' as markers of time and prosperity. UNHCR withdrawal 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'.²³ Some refugees believed that UNHCR had 'handed over' administration of West Papuan refugees to PNG. Mindful of history, 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 effected a temporary UN administration over Netherlands New Guinea until May 1963. The UN General Assembly ratified the 'unanimous' outcome of the 1969 Act of Free Choice.²⁴ Both of these events were represented as precedents of UN betrayal and abandonment of West Papuan people.

Refugees tended to read PNG policy towards them over the years as being motivated by a desire to please Indonesia. This was grounded in the perception

that Indonesia had actively sought the PNG government's support in repatriating West Papuans since 1984. Ways in which the PNG government was supposed to have encouraged repatriation included: neglect leading to famine in the period 1984–86,²⁵ relocation to the unsuitable East Awin site in 1987 and threats and acts 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 6000 hectares at East Awin and has recruited West Papuan teachers and nurses onto the government payroll.

The 1997 permissive residency policy was used by refugees in ways that the Papua New Guinea 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'.²⁶ In this sense, the uses that they made of permissive residency were tactical. De Certeau's elaboration of tactic allows us to consider the uses or operations of permissive residency by refugees:

[a tactic] must play on and with a terrain imposed on it and organised by the law of a foreign power. It does not have the means to *keep to itself*, at a distance, in a position of withdrawal, foresight, and self-collection: it is a manoeuvre 'within the enemy's field of vision', ... and within enemy territory. It does not, therefore, have the options of planning a general strategy and viewing the adversary as a whole within a district, visible, and objectifiable space.²⁷

De Certeau invites us to look for the difference or similarity between something's production, and the 'secondary production hidden in the process of its utilization'.²⁸ In the context of permissive residency, I read this as the difference between the permissive residency framework and policy developed by the PNG government and UNHCR, and the refugees' utilisation of permissive residency on the ground. De Certeau says that focusing on processes of utilisation allows us to see the way that a society resists discipline by manipulating the mechanisms of discipline: 'conforming to them only in order to evade them'.²⁹ The 'operational schema' of tactic is described as intervening in a regulatory field, for example, the application procedure and conditions of permissive residency and repatriation, and introducing a way of turning these regulations to their advantage. By using permissive residency to enable temporary protected return, or relocation to a familiar ecological/cultural landscape, some refugees have utilised the residency law imposed upon them to maintain relations with their own people and place, and sustain their livelihood.

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, the future is particularly bleak from the perspective of food production.³⁰ Most

permissive residents cannot afford to relocate outside East Awin, although the terms of their residency permit this. 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 evident. In 2003, the expiry of permits resulted in confusion about the question of renewal and the lack of transparency about the procedure caused anxiety.³¹ People whose applications lay waiting to be processed had no legal status, nor did West Papuans who were unable to meet the relocation conditions of permissive residency (i.e., returning temporarily to East Awin). A proposed 2003 PNG Refugee Act 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 economic situation for West Papuans at East Awin may radically change in the medium term. The Malaysian timber company GL Niugini Pty Ltd has negotiated a 40-year logging concession with the Awin and Pari landholders of a 200,000 hectare site on the perimeter of the East Awin settlement, close to the Fly River. Planned to commence in mid-2005, the operation would employ as many as 1000 local people to harvest rainforest timber.³² The labour force would include West Papuans from nearby East Awin as well as local Papua New Guineans retrenched after the OK Tedi mine closure. The entry of cash wages and royalties into the local economy would have a radical impact on the sustainability of livelihoods at East Awin. For those West Papuans who aspire to leave East Awin, harvesting wages may provide the capital necessary for relocation allowed by permissive residency.

Provided the matters of administrative procedures and development assistance can be addressed, the *uses made* of permissive residency suggest benefit. By benefit I mean the production of household wellbeing 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. For Gisela and her children, however, the offer of permissive residency offered little comfort. She could not afford to leave East Awin, and neither could she subsist there.³³

ENDNOTES

¹ cf., Mark Busse, 'Sister exchange among the Wamek of the Middle Fly', PhD thesis, University of California, San Diego, 1987; Mary C. Ayres, 'This side, that side: locality and exogamous group definition in Morehead area, Southwestern Papua', PhD thesis, University of Chicago, 1983.

² Klaus Neumann, 'Finding an appropriate beginning for a history of the Tolai colonial past or, starting from trash', *Canberra Anthropology*, 15, 1, 1992, pp. 1–19.

³ Neumann, 1992, p. 9.

⁴ Blaskett, pp. 69; 71.

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⁵ Article 4 of the 'Basic Agreement between the Government of Papua New Guinea and Government of the Republic of Indonesia on Border Arrangements', Port Moresby, 29 October 1984, cited in E. Wolfers, *Beyond the border, Indonesia and Papua New Guinea*, University of Papua New Guinea Press and The Institute of Pacific Studies, University of the South Pacific, Waigani, PNG, and Suva, Fiji, 1988, p. 164.

⁶ Blaskett, p. 69.

⁷ Blaskett, p. 231.

⁸ Blaskett, p. 247.

⁹ Blaskett, p. 246.

¹⁰ Blaskett, pp. 23–5.

¹¹ Blaskett, pp. 256–309.

¹² Blaskett, pp. 253–4.

¹³ International Commission of Jurists, *Status of border crossers*, p. 8.

¹⁴ Ron May, 'East of the border: Irian Jaya and the border in Papua New Guinea's domestic and foreign politics', in R. J. May (ed.), *Between two nations: the Indonesian-Papua New Guinea border and West Papua nationalism*, Robert Brown and Associates, Bathurst, 1986, p. 145.

¹⁵ 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 [Naturalisation], of the Convention and does not accept the obligations stipulated in these articles'. (According to the 2003 Joint Report of the International Commission of Jurists and the Refugee Council of Australia ('Seeking refuge: the status of West Papuans in Papua New Guinea', paragraph 305) these reservations reflected the 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.)

¹⁶ Blaskett, pp. 248–9.

¹⁷ International Commission of Jurists and the Refugee Council of Australia, 'Seeking refuge: the status of West Papuans in Papua New Guinea'.

¹⁸ International Commission of Jurists and the Refugee Council of Australia, paragraph 719.

¹⁹ Papua New Guinea Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 'Joint UNHCR/PNG Announcement', n.d.

²⁰ Johann Siffointe, UNHCR Liaison Officer, Port Moresby, pers. comm., November 2004.

²¹ Papua New Guinea Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

²² I. Bell., H. Feith and R. Hatley, 'The West Papuan challenge to Indonesian authority in Irian Jaya: old problems, new possibilities', *Asian Survey*, 26, 5, 1986, pp. 539–56.

²³ Malkki, p. 106.

²⁴ John Saltford, 'United Nations involvement with the act of self determination in West Irian (Indonesian West New Guinea) 1968 to 1969', *Indonesia*, 69, 2000, pp. 71–86.

²⁵ Kevin Hewison and Alan Smith, '1984: Refugees, "holiday camps" and "deaths"', in R. J. May (ed.), pp. 200–17.

²⁶ Michel de Certeau, *The practice of everyday life*, University of California, Berkeley, California, 1984, p. xiii.

²⁷ De Certeau, p. 37.

²⁸ Original emphasis. De Certeau, p. xiii.

²⁹ De Certeau, p. xiv.

³⁰ Robert Askin, 'What is the future for these East Awin children', unpublished report, 2000.

³¹ International Commission of Jurists and the Refugee Council of Australia, paragraph 621.

³² Johann Siffointe, UNHCR Liaison Office Port Moresby, pers. comm., November 2004.

³³ Gisela returned to her border village in 2001.