

Chapter 11

Being 'indigenous' in the Indonesian province of Papua

Lina was selling individual pieces of cutlery on a piece of hessian sacking in the East Awin market when we first met. As I passed by her in my search for chillis, she tugged at my billum. Woven from natural fibres and dyed with local pigments, the billum was one I had bought in Wamena, West Papua. From her seated position Lina pulled the billum to her body, and burying her face in it, inhaled deeply: 'O', she cried, 'I can smell the soil of my place in this billum.' I explained to Lina that I had bought it in the market in Wamena, and invited her to view the photographs of my trip. The photographs of the Baliem Valley landscape, of cultivated plots bordered with streams and neat sapling fences and Dani women selling vegetables in the marketplace, invoked great excitement in Lina, and her women friends Griet, Josina and Elsje. They seemed unfussed by the photographs that documented the domination of the Wamena market by migrants. Bugis and Madurese owned most of the small eating stalls or *warung*, as well as the kiosks, and larger shops around the marketplace. I learned from Lina and her friends that they were selling their meagre possessions in the East Awin market because they were on the brink of return to Wamena.

Lina and her friends carried out their preparations for repatriation clandestinely. They were aware that others viewed their repatriation to be premature, and usually travelled to the camp of their leader, an evangelical lay preacher from the north coast, under the cover of dawn or dusk. Other refugees knew indirectly of Dani people's planned repatriation through activities like the sale of cutlery and other small household items in the marketplace, and the sale of houses for demolition. The actual date of repatriation was a matter of secrecy. Some spoke about the need to burn their houses in their wake, fearing that their personal traces could be used as the substance of sorcery or magic against them.

In July 1998, I attended a religious service in the Wamena Baptist Church at East Awin to farewell repatriating Dani. In many ways it was like any other service: hibiscus and bouganvillea had been placed in vases at the door, and people sang hymns in pidgin with gusto in spite of the mangy dogs that fought each other in the back stalls of the church. Unlike other congregations at East Awin that used texts in Indonesian, the Wamena congregation used Bibles and songbooks in pidgin. Most Dani adults had learned to read and write at East Awin, but in pidgin. They could speak basic Indonesian, but were not literate in it. On the morning of the farewell, the service began with the testimonials of

male congregation members who recounted their involvement with the OPM since 1969. Some speakers concluded that military strategy had not produced results, and that they had gained nothing. Josina's husband spoke dramatically of the Israelites who had lived in the desert for 40 years—the period of one generation—circling continuously when the path home was short. He then asked the congregation: 'Will you also circle aimlessly when the path home is short, will your fate be the same?' For months the farewell event had been mentioned as an opportunity to shake the hands of fellow Dani who had chosen not to repatriate. Men shook hands, and sought forgiveness from one another for past words and actions arising from their different political allegiances. Privately, returnees said they felt the contempt of those staying, and it was said that the dogs of repatriating Dani left behind at East Awin would be renamed 'returned' or 'surrendered', as a matter of ridicule. In the absence of their owners, these dogs reminded people that repatriation amounted to surrender, or yielding to the Indonesian state.

At the time of the farewell in 1998, about 200 Dani people lived in two camps at East Awin, named Wamena I and Wamena II. Residence in either camp was determined by political allegiance, specifically, whether one supported the military strategy of the OPM or not. The two camps merged for social events such as church services, prayer groups, literacy classes and funerals. Most Dani at East Awin shared with Katarina (Chapter 3) the journey of flight from the Baliem to Mamberamo to the border. At East Awin, Dani composed songs in Indonesian and Dani languages that invoked the name Wamena and the Baliem Valley landscape. The songs intensify states of loss and sorrow felt by Dani as a result of living outside their homeland. These feeling states are central to the evocative nature of the songs. The six songs below appear like verses of a single song, but are actually discrete songs. Categorized as 'songs of sadness', they are sung to invoke weeping during the period before the burial of a deceased person and 40 days after burial. The songs comprise a single line lyric or verse repeated almost meditatively, with the harmony changing slightly after several sets of repetition:

First song:

Pity, Wamena is already faraway
Children, don't cry.

Second song:

Father, Mother, look over there
The clouds keep rolling in.

Third song:

O! Friends we feel hungry, our place is faraway
Friends can you give us food?

Fourth song:

How is Wamena: is it far or close?

The mountain and the cape are hidden.

Fifth song:

The children they question their father and mother

Is our village distant or close by?

Sixth song:

When will we return to see our homeland?

It is so long since we left our village

The second song refers to the sighting of high, rolling white clouds to the west of East Awin. This familiar cloud formation recalls their highland place, and villages and relatives left behind. The third song was composed in Indonesian by Dani children whose parents fled the Baliem Valley in 1977, and recalls their starvation at various times during the journey of flight. The fourth song refers to Dani children born outside the Baliem, who only know the location of Wamena and its glory through the stories of their parents.

In 1977, Griet, Elsje and Josina walked together with several hundred other Dani from the Baliem Valley northwards over the mountains, descending into the swampy lowlands of Mamberamo. In 1983, they set out again to walk eastwards from Mamberamo to PNG. Elsje's husband Justus explained to me that many Dani people had perished in the course of these two journeys. In the event of repatriation, those Dani who survived were responsible for explaining the deaths of those who had not. Or at least, those who survived had to return with some sort of advantage that could justify the deprivations of the deceased. Justus's ascetism practised at East Awin remembered the death of his parents and siblings in the Baliem Valley in 1977. Since fleeing, Justus had not worn shoes and had not shaved as a sign of grief. He claimed that upon his return, his brother would take pity and buy him a pair of shoes. Then in a public ceremony, his brother would place Justus's feet in those shoes and cut his beard. It was not only Justus who embodied his grief. Other men who fled, leaving behind wives and children, had not re-married. Nor had wives, and children had delayed marriage in honour of absent fathers.

Justus's resolve was steeled by the memory of kin whose lives had been sacrificed. To return to the homeland before any outcome had been achieved diminished the sacrifice of those who had died. To endure exile was to repay their sacrifice, to uphold their honour. In order to return, it was necessary to do so with *hasil*, meaning 'success' or 'result' in Indonesian. Losses sustained had to be compensated. Defending his decision to repatriate, Justus explained that it was founded on his membership of a group called the West Papuan Indigenous People's Association, known by the acronym WPIA. It was the

articulation of 'indigeneity', and the use of indigeneity as a political identity, that Justus conceived as an object or result. Previously, Justus and other WPIA members had little if any conception of themselves as belonging to a global category of indigenous or 'fourth world' peoples whose land had been appropriated by colonial governments. Drawing on a discourse of indigeneity, WPIA members claimed that international recognition of themselves as indigenous would privilege them in relation to 'newcomers' i.e., migrants. They defined indigenous as a 'native' or 'original' person able to trace their descent in a particular place, and in categorical opposition to people who had recently arrived from somewhere else.

In an interview published in the Jayapura-based tabloid *Jubi* (short for *jujur bicara* or literally 'speaking frankly' or 'straight talk' in Indonesian), a WPIA member elaborated indigeneity:

We fled leaving behind our places of origin because here [Irian Jaya] people did not value our rights as indigenous citizens. Now we have returned and want to carry on the struggle for our rights which are directly protected by the UN ... And now we have returned to the land of our origin ... We have returned not out of hunger or thirst or difficulties of survival. But, now indeed is already the time for us to return. Why? We think for what [purpose] should we exist outside and demand our rights from outside? What we demand here is the fairness and honesty of the government in seeing to the interests of Papuan people. Not just as a demand for independence, but how Papuans are developed and assisted. This was our thinking and reason for our return ...¹

WPIA evolved from the 1993 UN Year of Indigenous People. A transnational alliance of indigenous people facilitated by a secretariat in Geneva, its slogan 'peace, human rights, democracy' struck a chord with West Papuan refugees who rejected military means. An evangelical pastor at East Awin called Jeronimus, himself a refugee, received mail from the UN Secretariat, and subsequently established WPIA. Jeronimus positioned himself as leader, and promoted indigenous identity as a means to claim privileges in relation to migrants, especially in the matter of land rights. The following extract is taken from another interview in *Jubi* with a WPIA returnee in the month of his return:

We are not transmigrants or translocals. We are refugees. We are not people who have fled in order to look for a place. But we have returned to our homeland. So, we are people who have left behind the place of our homeland and returned again to our home village ... It is we who have a place, have a homeland. We are not transmigrants. We are indigenous inhabitants. So, where is the government attention towards

us? What we request is that the government sees to the interests of indigenous Papuan inhabitants.²

Members were well versed on the subject of indigeneity, and in the course of everyday conversation, spoke knowledgeably about International Labor Organisation (ILO) Conventions 107 and 169 relating to indigenous and tribal peoples. It seems unlikely that Jeronimus informed his constituency that the Indonesian government had refused to ratify the UN's Indigenous and Tribal People's Convention, and had legislated against the concept of indigeneity in Presidential Decree No. 26/1998: 'stopping the use of the term Indigenous and Non-Indigenous in all formulations, policy implementations, program planning and activity implementation and government policy'.³ The entry of the concept of SARA (an acronym in Indonesian referring to ethnicity, religion, race, class) into Indonesian discourse is not coincidental. The privileging of a particular category in relation to another is considered discriminatory, and any 'claim' based on one's membership in a certain category such as ethnic, religious or racial, can be discredited by invoking SARA. In short, to claim rights based on indigeneity is considered discriminatory against those who are not indigenous.

The UN Secretariat produced generic paraphernalia that was ascribed different meanings at the local level. Some WPIA members claimed that the logos of the UN and International Year of Indigenous People stencilled onto t-shirts and jerseys gave protective powers to wearers. Shielded by these marked pieces of clothing, it was said that WPIA members had travelled safely back and forth across the international border. WPIA posters showing the UN logo had allegedly been pasted across Irian Jaya, but were neither torn down nor defaced. International connections were claimed to bear witness and afford protection. Justus grounded the power of these logos in the rationale of international politics: Indonesia did not want to damage its relationship with the US-dominated UN and its institutions. Other WPIA members attributed a kind of supernatural agency to UN paraphernalia like logos—as though they were enspirited.

Jeronimus selected dates carefully to coincide with historical events in which West Papua figured. For example, he selected the original date of WPIA members' planned repatriation for 15 August 1998. This day commemorated US General Macarthur's Proclamation of Peace ending World War II, announced from Jayapura (then Hollandia) in 1945. According to Justus, West Papuan victimisation by the Japanese in support of the American allies during the Second World War had rendered the US morally indebted to West Papua. Justus admitted that Jeronimus and WPIA members were on their own in thinking that this event was significant. Other West Papuans derided the idea, claiming it to be 'trash': an event that led nowhere and offered no basis for a political claim in the present. Jeronimus sought out opportunities to raise the West Papuan flag alongside other national flags in an inter-national formation. He even planned

for the repatriation to be launched by a ceremony in which the flags of America, Japan, PNG, and West Papua would be flown in parallel. Like the UN logo, national flags were considered to have a sort of human agency, or witnessing capacity: 'Others don't want to return home with us. They say they are afraid to die. If the Indonesians want to kill us while we are standing on top of these flags, so be it.' It was said that Jeronimus had invited Indonesia's President Habibie, PNG Prime Minister Skate, and UN peacekeepers to attend the launch of their repatriation.

Jeronimus was hailed as a Moses figure by his WPIA constituency:

In the story of Exodus, through the prophet Moses, God performed ten miracles of plagues and still Pharaoh was hard hearted, refusing to let the Israelis out of Egypt. The Israelis were slaves. Suharto was like Pharaoh. Jeronimus is a prophet and deliverer like Moses. As we have seen from the history of Israel, Moses led them home. West Papuan people can similarly be saved. (Justus)

At Jeronimus's camp at East Awin, WPIA members built a monument dedicated to Psalm 23 'The Lord is my Shepherd' and the principle of tithe. Tithe was enshrined in the 'charters' of each of the three main political alliances at East Awin. The principle of tithe recognised that *merdeka* would only be achieved through God's intervention (i.e., Lord as Shepherd), and that following independence, a tithe of 10 per cent of state income would support the work of God in the new state.

WPIA members were also influenced by the ideas of a Dutch pastor named Leenhout. His sermon was translated into Indonesian by a West Papuan living in exile in the Netherlands and since 1986 had been distributed to West Papuans in PNG. A schoolteacher at East Awin explained Leenhout's revelation to me. In 1948, the pastor apparently received divine revelations relating to Romans 9 and 11, and Ephesians 2:11–22 in the New Testament. The revelation occurred at the time of two significant events, both involving Israel. First, at the formation of the World Council of Churches its membership included churches that did not recognise Jesus as Messiah. Second, Israel's constitution as a political state denied its non-secular nature as Promised Land. Leenhout preached that Israel was a window through which God viewed the world but while Israel remained a political state, peace would elude the world. God had intentionally hardened the heart of Jews so that Christ's teachings would be spread to other nations. The salvation of black colonised nations, including West Papua, was said to be wrapped up in the fate of Israel, and it was the responsibility of the peoples of these nations to evangelise Israel.

In fact, Leenhout's sermon made scant reference to West Papua. So we might deduce that the West Papuan translator, himself a pastor, as well as congregation

leaders and followers at East Awini, have interpreted Leenhout in light of their own theological and political standpoints. Leenhout rejects military retaliation and preaches repentance and surrender of the struggle into God's hands. Critics of Leenhout claim that preaching surrender plays into the hands of the Indonesian state. In a 1998 Christmas sermon posted to East Awini, the translated sermon mentioned the government of Israel's plea for members of the Jewish diaspora to return to Israel to help develop their nation. WPIA leaders interpreted this sermon analogously as a call for West Papuans to return to Irian Jaya to assist develop the nation-state, rather than return in its wake. The idea of connection between Irian Jaya and Israel may have been influenced by a publication titled *From Jerusalem to Irian Jaya* which had been advertised and reviewed in the Catholic weekly *Tifa Irian*, a newspaper that occasionally circulated at East Awini.⁴ While I knew of no copies of the book at East Awini and knew of no-one who had read the book, many people referred to its title.

While Jeronimus planned the repatriation of his group prior to the millennium, the event finally took place in 2000. As I had left East Awini in 1999, I have no evidence of the way Jeronimus related the timing of repatriation to the new millennium. Given his propensity for reading signs though, it is probable that he represented the new millennium as an historical juncture—a new era for West Papuans. Like many other Christians the world over, Jeronimus might have believed that entry into the third millennium would mark Christ's return, and the liberation of the world's colonised peoples. This premonition circulated among some congregations of the Daru-Kiunga Diocese which included East Awini and the border camps. The decision made by Indonesia's President Abdurrahman Wahid to spend 31 December 1999 in Jayapura, heightened speculation about West Papua's future in the new millennium. The state's intransigence on the question of *merdeka* can also be read into the time and place of Wahid's visit. In other words, Indonesia's future in the new millennium rests on Irian Jaya's continued incorporation in the Republic. The Bishop's pragmatic letter to the Daru-Kiunga Diocese counselled against heeding false prophets:

Actually what will happen in the Year 2000? The sun will rise in the morning as usual and will set on dusk as usual. Everything will continue as today. People's lives will not change. Good people will continue to be good. Evil people will continue their habits, which are evil. The bells will continue to summon people to church to hear God's utterance. The government and businesses will continue to work for development. Rural congregations will continue to work in their gardens. The society will continue to experience various difficulties and problems, like now. But several people will discover new problems, that is, those who want to listen to false prophets. There are those who will stop work in their gardens, others will abandon their jobs. They will use up their food and money. There are people who will withdraw all of their money from the

bank and waste it on food and drink for the final party. After that they will regret because they have spent all of their money. Other people will gather in the one place together and wait for judgement day. But judgement day will not come and they will have finished their food and anger will emerge among them. Many sorts of propaganda and crusades will end without fulfilling any promise or result whatsoever.

The Bishop's sober counsel offers insight into millenarian thinking. In the case of Irian Jaya, millenarianism emerges where development projects do not fulfil their promises, persistent corruption occurs in the bureaucracy, land is appropriated and re-settlement enforced, and West Papuans consider themselves to be treated as less than human.⁵ Collective sentiments of disappointment, distrust, and humiliation can bring to the surface individuals who claim to have received revelations about the resolution of economic and political discontent.

It was the entry into what was perceived as a new era that left people vulnerable to the rumour of *merdeka's* imminence—that West Papua would become a nation-state, and that those in exile had been summoned home. Kirsch describes millennialism as a globalising discourse, synchronising a people's fate. Millennialism attributes the power to bring about change 'to an abstract moment of time, which is by definition independent of place' and ignores prior location of power in the landscape and other beings inhabiting that place.⁶ Faith in *merdeka* becomes millennial when the moment of its occurrence is predicted, but faith in *merdeka* that will occur more abstractly at some time in the future is not millennial. Benny Giay has described West Papuan conceptions of Indonesian occupation as the latest in a sequence or episodes or stages, beginning with Papuans ruling their own land, followed by the arrival of Christian missionaries from the West and consecutive colonial occupations (Dutch, Japanese, Indonesian).⁷ According to this schema, the episode following Indonesian occupation will be *merdeka*. The final episode will be marked by the arrival of Christ. Giay's point is that the incorporation of West Papua into the Indonesian Republic is one episode that has been preceded by and will be succeeded by other episodes.

In the period 1998–99, approximately 1000 people at East Awin registered for repatriation. In spite of people's hopes for the millennium and the offer of assisted repatriation in a millennial year, less than one-sixth of East Awin refugees (632) joined the repatriation operation that took place in September 2000. Very few registered for repatriation as individuals. Those registering were mainly members of WPIA who claimed that the offer of assisted repatriation allowed their passage home in order to assist in the development of their nation from the inside. During the period of decision-making, Jeronimus constantly postponed the timing of repatriation. Some WPIA members confided in me that so many delays had occurred that they doubted whether it would actually take place.

Lina registered for repatriation, along with Elsje, Josina and Griet. When I first met Lina in the market when she was selling her cutlery, I assumed she was pregnant. I learned instead that she suffered from a distended spleen due to persistent malaria and had chronic anaemia. Several times she had refused to travel to Kiunga for treatment for a bad bout of malaria because she felt too weak to make the journey. One morning, a neighbour returned from the morning market with the news that Lina had died. The neighbour was not surprised—she claimed to have seen Lina's spirit, which had already left her body, at the market two days prior. Elsje described to me how Lina's seven-year-old son had tended Lina's deathbed, cleaning her when she could not wash herself. Lina had left a message that she did not want a coffin, instead she wanted to be buried in her kitchen cupboard. Her body was laid in a state of wake for a day and a night, propped up on blankets in a half-lying position and festooned with a dozen or more coloured billum. It was the timing of her parting which was heart-breaking for Elsje, Josina and Griet: after 21 years they were finally returning to their place, without Lina. Their euphoric return would be affected by the fact that Lina would remain at East Awin. Lina's burial connected her friends to East Awin, and in the period after her death they viewed departure with ambivalence. The eulogy for Lina was a litany of departures and separations: separation from her husband after his flight in 1977, prolonged detention by Indonesian soldiers following this event, forsaking her young daughter to travel to Jayapura where she walked on foot to the border to be reunited with her husband, the death of her second-born child on her arrival to East Awin in 1987, and finally, leaving behind two young boys aged three and seven.

Lamentations sung at Lina's wake recalled her flight from the Baliem Valley and mourned her premature departure. For Dani, a lamentation known as *lendawe* is a eulogy that speaks of the past when the deceased lived, and imagines the future in the absence of the deceased. Usually *lendawe* connects the deceased to their place of origin: their village, mountain and river, as well as their close kin. In spite of its improvised character, *lendawe* must be sung with care to avoid offending the deceased's relatives. *Lendawe* increases in intensity at the time when night enters dawn on the day of burial. Sitting around the deceased, people think: this is the last day we will see their face, the last day we will meet—tomorrow we cannot meet again. A *lendawe* was sung for Lina by an elderly Mamberamo woman who had cared for Dani in the Mamberamo region in 1977, teaching them how to process sago and make canoes, before journeying together to PNG. This *lendawe* retraces the mourner's relationship with Dani people through the activities that they undertook in certain places on their journey, and regrets that they will not retrace the journey home together:

You arrived at our place
starving, suffering
we gave you food

showed you how to mattock sago to cook sago
to make a canoe
together we came to this place
O you have left us before we could return home
you have abandoned us in this foreign place which is not ours.

A year after Lina's death in September 2000, her friends (86 WPIA members) were repatriated to Wamena, leaving behind about 100 Dani at East Awin. Lina's friends might have assessed *merdeka* to be truly imminent, for Morning Star flags flew on almost every corner of Wamena town and outlying villages. At the time of their flight in 1977, raising the flag risked death by shooting, and enunciating the word 'Papua' was considered separatist. The appearance of reformation was to be short-lived though. On 6 October 2000, a military order was issued to lower Morning Star flags flying in the township of Wamena. Four were lowered and their flagpoles chopped down. At the fifth flag, soldiers were met with resistance and a physical clash and riot ensued. Soldiers killed independence supporters who killed migrants. Houses were incinerated, migrants fled for their lives, Dani were arbitrarily detained and subjected to torture, and a civilian curfew was imposed. For Lina's friends newly returned to Wamena after 23 years away, these events would have evoked the violence of 1977 from which they had initially fled as a terrifying allegory. The illusion of returning to a Dani homeland as it existed prior to aggressive military occupation in 1977 was shattered.

WPIA members had planned their repatriation to Irian Jaya during 1998–2000, a period promoted later as one of reformation or *reformasi* by the Wahid national government. To explain the intervening events that led to the riot, I have drawn extensively from Mote and Rutherford's meticulous chronology and analysis of events surrounding the Wamena incident.⁸ The approach of President Wahid, and the previous President Habibie, was to promote dialogue with a West Papuan leadership through forums like the Team of One Hundred meeting, and the Second Papuan National Congress. Wahid's approach was also felt at the street level. He gave permission for the Morning Star flag to fly (albeit 30 centimetres below the Indonesian one), and he accepted the change of name from Irian Jaya to Papua. People raised the flag throughout the district of Jayawijaya, including Wamena. This district is a military operation zone, and hub of OPM activity, and its peoples have sustained the vast majority of human rights violations that have occurred in the province. An official tour to Wamena by Wahid's Deputy President Megawati Sukarnoputri in May 2000 was characterised by self-righteous and volatile crowds: 'at the airport ... the vice president found herself facing a sea of Papuans waving the Morning Star flag, yelling at her to go home unless she had come to grant them independence.'⁹

Sukarnoputri and other members of an anti-Wahid coalition joined forces against Wahid, and forced him to act against West Papuan separatism. Additional Indonesian troops were sent to Irian Jaya, and the chief of police (reportedly at the demand of Sukarnoputri) ordered local police commanders across the province to remove all Morning Star flags. While the operation of the order was postponed at the request of the Papuan Presidium Council, in Wamena the authorities forcibly cut down and removed the Morning Star flag throughout the township and arrested and imprisoned 80 people. According to Mote and Rutherford, security forces fired shots over the crowd, and then fled into a migrant neighbourhood as a tactic to bring independence supporters face to face with migrants, thereby provoking a melee. The violence perpetrated against migrants was provoked in part by the violent treatment of independence supporters by the police immediately prior to the riot. Five days after the incident, Sukarnoputri's Security Minister Bambang Yudoyono (who won the Indonesian Presidency from Sukarnoputri in September 2004) set in train a process to develop a set of policies that would crush the independence movement. These included the banning of the Morning Star flag and an inquiry into the Papuan Presidium Council.

The melee aftermath resonates with the idea of sequences of actions that reverberate outward and upward through other 'cascades' of events.¹⁰ The melee was invigorated by a collective history of Dani suffering in the Baliem. It caused local issues involving Dani people and police in Jayapura to be energised, imploding into various forms of violence.¹¹ These include the attack on a police post resulting in the death of two policemen and a security guard, a raid on several Dani student hostels and housing settlements resulting in the death of four Dani in police custody, the shooting to death of 10 people during a flag-raising ceremony in Jayapura and the flight of some 460, mainly Dani, asylum seekers into PNG.¹²

Following the flight of asylum seekers, PNG closed its border with Indonesia and increased patrols.¹³ PNG Prime Minister Mekere Morauta reiterated his government's support of Indonesian sovereignty over Irian Jaya, and added that PNG would accept refugees from Irian Jaya only if the UN requested it to do so.¹⁴ In the PNG press, the same arguments about border-crossers and political refugees were reiterated, and in the Cabinet, ministers resisted attempts to recognise the group as refugees and questioned how many OPM fighters lived among them.

The West Papuans camped initially at the Wutung border post, but were relocated to the previous site of the Blackwater refugee settlement near Vanimo by the Sandaun provincial government after protests by Wutung villagers. UNHCR did not consider them to have a prima facie claim to refugee status and encouraged the PNG government to determine their status individually.¹⁵ The

PNG government granted them temporary protection on a humanitarian basis.¹⁶ Later, in consultation with UNHCR, the government conducted refugee status determinations. It was reported that UNHCR recommended approximately 75 per cent be accorded refugee status.¹⁷ The PNG Department of Foreign Affairs subsequently reassessed the claims, and granted refugee status to only 6 out of the 96 families. Initially the government sought the return of the 90 families to Indonesia on a voluntary basis, but later permitted them to remain indefinitely in the transmitter camp at Vanimo.

In March 2004, the 'Vanimo group' was recognised by the PNG government as refugees, and plans were made to relocate them to East Awin. Like those refugees at Vanimo in 1987, the group raised their voice in protest at relocation to East Awin. Letters were published on the internet news site 'The diary of online Papuan mouthpiece'. Invoking East Awin as a dystopic place, one writer wrote that the group: 'do not want to move, as they know already that Kiunga [i.e., East Awin] is the hell for them. Whoever sent there have never come back alive.' The site was an 'open prison for anyone from this Papua Soil.'¹⁸ Under 15A of the Migration Act, the refugee group was required to relocate to East Awin where they could apply for permissive residency after six months of residence. The relocation exercise was held up by negotiations with Awin landholders and by the Vanimo group themselves who resisted relocation. Reflecting their security concerns as a minority, the landholders agreed to the resettlement of the Vanimo group after negotiating a law and order deal with the government: deployment of two policemen and one patrol officer at East Awin.¹⁹ There had been no police presence at East Awin since the December incident in 1998.

On 1 October 2004, the Vanimo group comprising 360 people was airlifted to Kiunga by officials of the PNG government and UNHCR. The Vanimo group's Filadelfia Church was burned during the operation. Fearing the fate of their church, the refugee congregation had previously surrendered custody of it into the hands of the Catholic Bishop of Vanimo in a public ceremony. A UNHCR official advised PNG government officials that the church be respected as the custody of the Vanimo Diocese, and that the houses in the refugee settlement be dismantled rather than incinerated. Government officials reported that after the houses had been bulldozed, neighbouring villagers had burned the dismantled houses and airborne ash had ignited the thatched roof of the Philadelphia Church. Doubtless, other fallout would result when this news circulated among the Vanimo group and the wider refugee population at East Awin. The PNG government's refusal to recognise the Vanimo group as refugees until four years after their arrival is similar to the government's refusal to recognise West Papuans as refugees during the period 1984–87, and the burning of the Philadelphia Church in suspicious circumstances despite the public transfer of its custody to the

Vanimo Diocese is similar to the earlier burning of the Immanuel Church at Vanimo in 1989.

The arrival at East Awin of the Vanimo group may have served to confirm the perception that the state of *merdeka* is the only state that will guarantee freedom in the event of return. It is feasible that refugees at East Awin will retell the instance of Dani repatriation in allegorical terms, that is, the present is interpreted in terms of the lessons learned from similar events that have occurred in the past.²⁰ The repatriation carries the same lessons as 1977: highland peoples' resistance to the Indonesian state will be met by punitive retaliation and increased militarisation of the Baliem Valley. The entry of 360 new refugees, just two months after the exit of 630 others, underlines the volatility of the political situation in the Indonesian Province of Papua. Against a backdrop of refugee exit and refugee entry, repatriation might come to be seen by refugees as a circular experience.

Prospective repatriates may have been deterred by first-hand news of the treatment of West Papuans circulated by the arrivals from Vanimo in 2004.²¹ Continued political repression in the Indonesian province of Papua vivifies a West Papuan collective 'memory of suffering' or *memoria passionis* in the present. To return to the province into this milieu of fear that is constantly reproduced²² is to dispense with the object of exile: to live outside a state of terror, and for some, to struggle for the elimination of terror in a state of *merdeka*. With *merdeka* no longer perceived to be imminent, repatriation is out of the question—but return is not. Projecting in terms of the cosmology of refugee subjects, I would propose that over time permissive residency itself may come to be experienced as a sort of 'godsend'. By offering mobility to West Papuan refugees, everyday connections to the homeland can be sustained from a viable and safe place across the border in PNG.

ENDNOTES

¹ Keagop, 'Upaya terakhir kembali ke tanah air', *Jubi* 11, 1319 September 2000, pp. 3–4.

² Keagop, 'Suara pengungsi, suara kegelisahan', *Jubi* 11, 1319 September 2000, pp. 5–6.

³ Chris Duncan, 'From development to empowerment: changing Indonesian government policies towards peripheral minorities', unpublished manuscript, n. d.

⁴ R. A. Tucker, *From Jerusalem to Irian Jaya: a biographical history of Christian missions*, Academic Books, Michigan, 1983.

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