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# MAINSTREAM(S) AND MARGINS

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## Refugees and Representation: Politics, Critical Discourse, and Ethnography Along the New Guinea Border

**Stuart Kirsch**

One problem all refugees face, regardless of the circumstances of their migration and resettlement, is the numerous limitations on their ability to speak for themselves. Among these constraints are the trauma of past experience, the enormity of their daily struggle for survival, the fear of reprisals against family members left behind, the prejudices and resentment of host communities, and the difficulties in communicating across barriers of language and culture. The refugee experience is reduced to a vast silence that is easily ignored. Refugees are treated like nameless figures jumping the turnstiles of national borders, and they are unable to raise their voices to challenge this characterization.

This is not to suggest that there is no discourse about refugees, rather that refugees themselves are afforded few opportunities to contribute to it. Their point of view is frequently neglected or ignored. In this chapter, I describe some of the consequences of this general failure to take refugee perspectives into account in discussions about their fate. Most discourse about refugees falls into three general categories, which I call the "political," the "critical," and the "pragmatic."

In political discourse, refugees are primarily of concern in regard to the problems that they pose for relations between nation-states. Refugees typically cross international borders, raising questions about the integrity

of the nation-states involved and potentially jeopardizing their relations. Political discourse seeks to minimize complications resulting from refugee action, including perceived threats to national security. Relatively little attention is given to efforts to understand the origins or cause of the refugee movement. Politicians, political scientists, and some journalists commonly engage in this kind of discourse. Political discourse is distinguished by its emphasis on the political ramifications of refugee action, rather than with the fate of the refugees themselves.

Refugees become the subject of critical discourse largely because their actions highlight political processes that the advocates of this discourse wish to critique. Whether from a Marxist perspective, from an indigenous rights platform, or in opposition to oppression and hegemony in all their guises, critical discourse focuses on refugees to advance a particular theoretical agenda or political cause. Scholars from a variety of disciplines, including geography, anthropology, and sociology, contribute to critical discourse on refugees. Journalists and other media specialists in television and film also frequently participate in critical discourse as defined here. Although such discourse is intended to increase awareness of the problems faced by refugees, broader political and theoretical issues remain the primary focus of critical discourse about refugees.

The third form of discourse about refugees is characterized by its pragmatic orientation. The work of refugee service personnel and relief organizations generally falls into this category. Their interests are largely applied, and range from concrete problems such as the provision of medical care to planning for complex processes like integration into the host society. A common feature of such discourse is its urgency, which may preclude effective refugee participation in the planning process (Baker, 1992), even though such participation is generally regarded as essential to success in all development projects (Cernea, 1985). A variety of external considerations, such as time constraints on spending, media attention, and regional political pressures affect the delivery of aid to refugees in ways that may have little to do with their needs or long-term goals (Cuny, 1983). Although some of the criticisms levied against political and critical discourse apply here as well, in this chapter I do not consider pragmatic discourse at length.

This chapter is therefore primarily concerned with political and critical discourse about refugees. More generally, the topic that I address is the politics of representation. I argue that political and critical discourse often marginalize and dehumanize the refugees in the process of enhancing their own rhetorical power. Rather than focusing on refugee experience and addressing refugee concerns, advocates of these forms of discourse seek to advance their own political and theoretical agendas. Their work may even have detrimental consequences for the refugees about whom they write.

As an alternative to these forms of discourse, I argue that greater attention should be given to person-centered ethnographic accounts of refugee experience. Despite the current crisis of representation in anthropology (Marcus and Fischer, 1986; Clifford and Marcus, 1986), ethnography compares favorably with competing critical and political discourse with regard to the ability to describe and analyze the circumstances faced by refugee populations. In my conclusions, I discuss the value of ethnography as a form of political representation.

### REFUGEES ALONG THE NEW GUINEA BORDER

This chapter is based on two years of research among the Yonggom, a group of about 15,000–20,000 people living in the interior lowlands of southern New Guinea, on both sides of the border between Irian Jaya, Indonesia, and Papua New Guinea (see Kirsch, 1991; Schoorl, 1993).<sup>1,2</sup> The area occupied by the Yonggom is bounded to the north by foothills leading to the island's central cordillera, and to the east and west by the Fly and Digul rivers. The Yonggom exploit a variety of resources in their rain forest environment. Their staple food is sago, a starch harvested from the pith of the *Metroxylon* palm. They also practice slash and burn horticulture, raise pigs, and supplement their diet with hunting and gathering. The Yonggom are involved in the regional cash economy as well. In addition to wage labor, particularly in the service sector, they sell forest and garden products in local markets and produce small quantities of rubber for export.

Despite the so-called "bamboo curtain" that surrounds the militarized Indonesian province of Irian Jaya, there are numerous reports of political and military terror regularly inflicted on its inhabitants (e.g., Suter, 1982; Osbourne, 1985; Whittaker, 1990). Even though transmigration programs moving thousands of peasant farmers and their families to Irian Jaya from Indonesia's inner islands have slowed in recent years (Arndt, 1986), large areas of land have already been alienated from local ownership and use. Mines and timber companies operate in the province with little regard for either traditional land rights or ecological impact. Melanesians living in Irian Jaya face pervasive racism as well as political and economic inequality.

In 1984, more than 10,000 people from Irian Jaya fled eastward into Papua New Guinea (PNG) as refugees, settling in camps along the border. The exodus followed an aborted attempt to raise the flag of independence in Jayapura, the capital city of Irian Jaya, and subsequent military reprisals by the Indonesian government, the details of which are not well known (Smith and Hewison, 1986). Both the protest in Jayapura and the refugee movement were coordinated by members of the "Organisasi

Papua Merdeka" (OPM) or "Free Papua" political movement, which has pursued sovereignty in Irian Jaya for more than twenty years.

Nearly half of the 10,000 refugees who left Irian Jaya for Papua New Guinea are Yonggom.<sup>3</sup> What do they say about their experiences in Irian Jaya and their reasons for coming to Papua New Guinea? To answer this question, it is important to note that the Yonggom refugees themselves do not speak in terms of racism, cultural imperialism, and ethnocide, the favored vocabulary of many outside commentators. And unlike the educated leaders of the OPM, one of whom wrote to me that "God the creator will[ed] that each nation be free from colonialism" (anonymous, p.c.), the Yonggom refugees themselves do not speak about the domination of Third World nations over Fourth World tribal peoples.

Instead the refugees refer to the Indonesian refusal to establish reciprocal relations with them. This is particularly significant given that for the Yonggom, the denial of reciprocity is regarded as an affront to their humanity (Kirsch, 1991). This idea is illustrated in their myths in which *unrequited reciprocity* results in persons becoming animals. One example from this genre of myths is the story of the children who turned into flying foxes after their father's sister, who had adopted them when their parents died, decided that she would no longer take care of them:

Once there was a woman who was called upon to raise her brother's orphaned children. The woman had to work hard to make enough sago flour to feed them all. She grew weary of the labor involved and one morning, in a fit of anger, called out to her nephews and nieces, telling them to look after themselves, for she would no longer feed them. Then she stalked off into the rain forest.

The children were shocked; they did not know what to do. Finally, the eldest picked up some pieces of wood and some branches with leaves and made himself a pair of wings. He ran around the yard, jumping and flapping his arms up and down. He leaped high into the air and flew into a tree beside the house. He called down to his brothers and sisters and told them to make their own wings and fly up to join him.

That afternoon when the aunt returned, she felt contrite. She was puzzled at the fact that the house was silent and she called out to the children, telling them to come eat the food she brought from her gardens.

When she heard noises in the trees overhead, she turned to look up: her nieces and nephews had become flying foxes. They called down to her: "Oh, aunt, you did not feed us, so now we are going away," and off they flew, every last one of them.

In Yonggom myth, when exchange relations are abrogated and people are denied reciprocity, they cease being human and take on animal form. In this case, the children were refused food by the adult responsible for them, and they became flying foxes as a result. Unrequited reciprocity is thus regarded as a threat to one's humanity.

Hence Yonggom assertions about the Indonesian refusal to treat them as equals or to establish reciprocal relations with them represent serious grievances to the Yonggom. This is also the language in which the refugees usually spoke to me about their departure from Irian Jaya and their determination to stay in Papua New Guinea until they achieve their goal of political sovereignty. From their perspective, to do otherwise would be to accept the Indonesian evaluation of them as less than human.

The Yonggom refugees also make reference to unrequited reciprocity in their attempts to imagine political solutions to their problems. Elsewhere (Kirsch, n.d.) I have described how the Yonggom seek to extend their myths into the present to make history. In one example of this process, the refugees have elaborated on a series of myths involving a man named Kamberap. In the first of these myths, which are central to Yonggom male cult ritual, Kamberap manages to symbolically overcome the problems caused by unrequited reciprocity. In subsequent episodes of the myth, he mediates Yonggom interaction with colonial authorities. In a new episode of the myth told by the refugees, Kamberap has a son living abroad who will one day return to help them in their quest for independence from Indonesia. The advent of the son is expected to lead to political change. In one version of the myth, Kamberap's son is identified as Jesus Christ, and his return likened to the second coming of Jesus Christ. The myth seeks to universalize concern for the refugees by linking their fate to broader notions of human salvation. The refugees express their political aspirations by elaborating on a body of myths that, through the actions of Kamberap, hold the key to overcoming the problem of unrequited reciprocity.

A significant dimension of the Yonggom experience as refugees is their emotional response to social disruption. Great sadness and pathos is associated with being alone, a condition they call *iwari*. During a speech concerning a dispute between villagers and refugees about competition over scarce food resources, an elderly refugee man stood and addressed those assembled:

I am an old man. I came here by myself and I have no family with me. I am alone (*iwari*). Just look at my body; I am no longer strong. I am short of breath, so I don't leave my house. I just sit inside all day long. I have no sons or daughters, no brothers or sisters. In the morning I wake up and make a fire . . . and wait to see whether anyone will bring me food. I will stay here and die; they will bury me here.

His speech was intended to remind those listening, particularly angry villagers, of the great hardships that the refugees face by living in Papua New Guinea.

The separation of the refugees from their land also presents them with

emotional and psychological difficulties. Among the Yonggom, in the course of a lifetime, one's activities inscribe personal history onto the landscape. For example, the Yonggom maintain individual networks of trails, camping places, and catchments for drinking water. They plant trees and clear areas for gardens. They fell trees to make canoes and build houses. Gradually the landscape is transformed so that it comes to reflect, or is inscribed with, a person's biography (see Battaglia, 1992). The rain forest thus acquires the force of memory.

This inscribed history extends beyond an individual's lifetime. For example, a person mourning a friend or relative may refuse to leave the village for several weeks or even months to avoid confronting memories of the deceased that echo throughout the landscape. Thus, for the refugees, being away from their land involves more than a simple physical separation; it also entails the displacement of memory.

### PERSON-CENTERED ETHNOGRAPHY

The anecdotes just discussed represent fragments of a person-centered ethnographic account of Yonggom refugee experience. Person-centered ethnography has undergone something of a renaissance in anthropology over the last decade (Rosaldo, 1984, p. 138). Langness and Frank (1981, p. 1) describe person-centered ethnography as the attempt to "convey directly the reality that people . . . experience." In presenting this material, my intention is to describe refugee experience from the Yonggom point of view.

Such an undertaking necessarily relies predominantly on "experience-near" constructs, which reflect how someone "might himself naturally and effortlessly . . . define what he or his fellows see, feel, think, imagine, or so on, and which he would readily understand when similarly applied by others" (Geertz, 1984, p. 124). Such constructs stand in contrast to the more analytic "experience-distant" language more commonly employed in the social sciences. Yonggom *iwari* or loneliness is experience-near, while the assignment of refugee status, which is primarily a political and legal category, is experience-distant. Person-centered ethnography may also draw on intersubjective constructs that are neither experience-distant nor experience-near. These concepts are formulated by the ethnographer to translate particular cultural idioms, and as such, are not directly employed or necessarily recognizable by members of the culture. The concept of "unrequited reciprocity" is an example of an intersubjective construct used to represent cultural differences in experience.

Person-centered ethnographic inquiry into refugee experience should be able to address questions such as: How do the refugees describe their experiences? What are their primary concerns? How do they articulate their responses to political developments, and how do they challenge or

resist actions and events that they regard as unfavorable? Although this is not the forum for detailed discussion of the answers to these questions, I can suggest preliminary responses. The refugees interpret political relations in Irian Jaya in terms of the experience of unrequited reciprocity, and any resolution to the contemporary political struggle in Irian Jaya is dependent on reversing the underlying conditions of inequality. This is much more than a matter of instrumental desire for resources; rather, it reflects an existential position about equality and what it means to be human. Feelings of loneliness and separation from family, place, and history are central factors in Yonggom experience as refugees.

Given the limited participation of refugees in political, critical, and pragmatic discourse about their affairs, ethnographic accounts of refugee experience should be incorporated into these discussions. This is equally appropriate for discussion about practical matters, such as resettlement programs, and for more general debates about regional cooperation. In fact, the field of refugee studies is growing in significance within anthropology (see DeVoe, 1992; Hopkins and Donnelly, 1993). Although direct refugee participation is the ideal, political representation through person-centered ethnographic accounts is clearly preferable to the current pattern in which refugee perspectives are largely ignored. I now turn my attention to the representation of refugees in critical and political discourse.

### CRITICAL DISCOURSE

Critical discourse about refugees from Irian Jaya is characterized by its recourse to conspiracy theories and its advocacy of millenarian solutions, positions that are generally advanced without regard for refugee perspectives or for the impact that such discourse may have on the refugees themselves.

Let me begin with an example that illustrates these claims. In 1987, an article by David Hyndman in the *Cultural Survival Quarterly* was partially reprinted in a national newspaper in Papua New Guinea. The essay discussed the recent infestation of pigs in the highlands of Irian Jaya with the tapeworm *Taenia solium*, a parasite that can cause cysticercosis in humans, leading to convulsions and death. Hyndman, an anthropologist, argued that the tapeworms had been deliberately introduced into Irian Jaya as a form of biological warfare against indigenous Melanesian populations. He made these assertions despite the research of a parasitologist sponsored by the World Health Organization (Desowitz, 1987), who concluded that the parasites had been inadvertently introduced into Irian Jaya when a number of pigs were brought as gifts from Bali, where the parasite is endemic. Hyndman further suggested that the domesticated pigs raised by the refugees were hosts to the parasite, even though there

is no medical evidence to support this position (Fritzsche, 1988; George Nurse, p.c.). The original article, cleverly titled: "How the West (Papua) Was Won," made quite a splash. Had its speculative claims of Indonesian genocidal conspiracy through biological warfare been true, endangering the refugees as well as their neighbors in Papua New Guinea, the situation would certainly have provoked international intervention.

Given that Hyndman's argument has not been substantiated, however, what was its impact on the Yonggom refugees? Several weeks after the essay was reprinted locally, there was an outbreak of influenza in the refugee camps along the border in which a number of refugees lost their lives. The Yonggom usually attribute such deaths to sorcery, and may hold divination ceremonies they call *awon monbe* to identify the responsible party.

In these divinations, several arrows are left overnight on the grave of the deceased, whose spirit is called on to identify the sorcerer. The following day, the members of the village or refugee camp stand in a broad circle with an adult pig in the middle. The arrows are shot at the pig, which runs away from the center of the circle, shrieking in its death throes and seeking to escape from the crowd. Like bullfighters braving a charge in the ring, everyone must stand their ground as the pig runs toward them. Only at the last second might the pig veer away and run in another direction. If the pig should collide with someone, marking him or her with blood, it implicates them, or a member of their clan, in the death. After the pig collapses, several knowledgeable men test a series of hypotheses about the identity of the sorcerer by seeing how the pig responds to the statements. If the pig blinks, kicks its legs, or otherwise reacts strongly to one of the statements, it is regarded as confirmation that the statement is true. Typically these assertions refer to tensions in social relations, particularly violations of exchange obligations, such as the failure to pay bridewealth.

At one such *awon monbe* divination in the refugee camp, held in response to the deaths from the influenza epidemic, I heard a surprising line of questioning. Standing alongside the group of men huddled around the pig, one man asked, "Did the Indonesians poison our pigs?" "Was that the cause of the deaths?" "If it's true," he said to the pig, "then blink an eye, kick your leg, or give us a sign." Thus Hyndman's unsupported claims about biological warfare were directly transformed into refugee fears about being poisoned by the Indonesian government.

In other examples of critical discourse about the refugees from Irian Jaya, the attempt to present the strongest possible case against Indonesia sometimes leads to false or exaggerated claims. Such assertions may have the unintended consequence of striking fear into the hearts of the very people that proponents of the argument claim to support. Sensationalist reports about helicopter gunships and armed river trucks patrolling the



Fly River (Nietschmann and Eley, 1987) or phantom OPM operations blockading the shipment of copper and gold from the Ok Tedi Mine along the Fly River (Matthews, 1992) do little to calm the refugees.

More than simply inciting terror, however, such discourse also encourages the refugees to seek a military solution to their predicament, a strategy that must be regarded as millenarian. Yonggom members of the OPM sometimes boast of magical techniques that enable them to transform themselves into crocodiles at river crossings to evade capture, or rites that permit them to withstand a volley of Indonesian gunfire without harm. Encouraged by outsiders, the OPM train in the rain forest along the border with their bows and arrows, machetes, and vintage weaponry.

Not only is the hope for a military solution to the problems in Irian Jaya unrealistic, but this perspective also discourages the refugees and the OPM from pursuing alternative political strategies. Political moderates among the refugees even risk denunciation as traitors. Thus the conspiracy theories and millenarian solutions of critical discourse are promoted at the expense of any possible rapprochement between the refugees and the Indonesian government. Proponents of critical discourse often overlook refugee interpretations of events and ignore the impact of their discourse on the refugees themselves.

### POLITICAL DISCOURSE

When politicians discuss the problems in Irian Jaya or the refugee situation in Papua New Guinea, they typically focus on their implications for international relations. The governments of the region have been reluctant to criticize Indonesia for its treatment of the indigenous population of Irian Jaya, or to question the neocolonial status of the province. For example, several years prior to the current refugee crisis, an Australian politician rejected the claim that Australia should provide the people of Irian Jaya with assistance in their struggle for independence from Indonesia, arguing that:

Australians today are still in the lead in raising false hopes and fears in Papua New Guinea on the subject of west New Guinea [Irian Jaya]. It must therefore be emphasized that to this day, no state will officially condone a process for severing some part of another state. Such a principle would lead to the breakup of such large entities as the USSR. (Whitlam, 1980)

In retrospect, this was not the best choice of analogy. The problem, as exemplified by the post-Cold War realignment in Europe, is that questions about the legitimacy of borders and states can spread to destabilize an entire region. Hence politicians in the Pacific have failed to challenge Indonesia's presence in Irian Jaya.

The initial response of the governments in the region to the refugee crisis of 1984 was to downplay the seriousness of the situation. The Papua New Guinea government dismissed the refugees as "traditional border crossers" under the provisions of a border agreement between Indonesia and Papua New Guinea (Kirsch, 1989; Dorney, 1990). It was only after missionaries visited the refugee camps and discovered a number of newly dug graves and scores of children suffering from malnutrition that international organizations such as Save the Children and later the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) were invited into the country to provide food and medical care (Smith and Hewison, 1986).

In the wake of this international attention, Papua New Guinea established regulations limiting the mobility of the refugees. The aim of these rules was to contain the refugees along the border until they grew tired of the difficult living conditions and consented to return to home. After a series of military skirmishes in which the Indonesian army pursued members of the OPM across the border into Papua New Guinea territory, a new strategy was developed.

A retired politician, one of the last representatives of Australia's colonial administration, devised a plan in which all of the refugees would be transported away from the border to a largely uninhabited area to the east. According to a UNHCR official, this proposal had a covert agenda:

One of the main reasons for the establishment of the refugee settlement was to promote the economic development of the area. As part of a rubber development scheme, refugees were seen as potentially able to generate the additional production needed in this sparsely-populated region to justify the construction of a rubber processing facility. (Baker, 1992, p. 26)

The refugees would serve as indentured laborers in a large rubber plantation, the profits from which would accrue in part to the author of the plan, who controlled much of the provincial rubber trade (see Hastings, 1986, p. 226). When the refugees learned the details of the plan, however, many rejected it completely: "We came here for independence," one of them told me, "Not to work for white men." Other refugees refused to move because they wanted to stay near the border, which allowed them to maintain close contact with relatives who belonged to the OPM or had remained behind in Irian Jaya. Thus the majority of the Yonggom refugees stayed in the original camps along the border.

In general, Papua New Guinea politicians have shown themselves to be more interested in improving political and economic ties with Indonesia than in helping the refugees. They have made little effort to encourage reform in Irian Jaya, and with few exceptions, have not challenged Indonesia's presence in New Guinea. Relocation of the refugees to permanent settlement camps was prompted by Indonesian bor-

der-crossings and economic interests rather than humanitarian issues. Most political scientists writing about the refugees view the situation primarily as a crisis concerning the integrity of international borders (see the essays in May, 1986; Wolfers, 1988). Thus in political discourse, refugees are treated like the proverbial canary in mine shaft, of significance primarily as an indicator of regional stability.

### CONCLUSIONS: ETHNOGRAPHY AND THE POLITICS OF REPRESENTATION

Over the last decade, ethnography has been the subject of considerable historical and literary deconstruction, resulting in what has been referred to as a "crisis of representation" (Clifford and Marcus, 1986; Marcus and Fischer, 1986). Recently anthropologists have begun to express concern about the self-paralysis that such criticism threatens to impart. Scheper-Hughes (1992, p. 28) has suggested a "compromise that calls for the practice of 'good enough' ethnography," whereas Watson (in Wolf, 1992, p. 2) has emphasized the importance of "getting the news out."

Another, more compelling reason not to abandon ethnography comes from close examination of alternative modes of representation. In some cases, ethnography may provide a valuable complementary perspective. Anthropologists may also use ethnographic accounts where no alternatives exist: to convey the stories of others across cultural boundaries where they would not otherwise be heard (Behar, 1993), or to show Western readers how they are implicated in the lives of people living elsewhere in the world system (Gewertz and Errington, 1991). Perhaps the most significant use of ethnography, however, is in challenging accounts that ignore or misrepresent the voices and experiences of others to support their own claims.

Advocates of critical and political discourse about the New Guinea border effectively marginalize and dehumanize the refugees in the attempt to gain greater rhetorical power in advancing their respective agendas. In critical discourse, conspiracy theories and millenarian solutions are emphasized rather than dialogue and reform. In political discourse, refugees are of significance because they indicate possible threats to regional security. Neither approach takes refugee viewpoints into account or considers the impact of their discourse on the refugees. In contrast, the goal of person-centered ethnographic accounts of refugee experience is to ensure that refugee perspectives are represented in regional debates.

Anthropologists have become increasingly aware of the political dimensions of their work (Myers, 1986), but the contribution that ethnography can make to political representation is less widely appreciated. As Gewertz and Errington (1991, p. 209) suggest, "it is because ethnography is inherently political that it continues to have potential value." Indeed,

it is in contrast to other modes of representation that the political power of ethnographic accounts is fully realized.

### EPILOGUE

Recent events in the region and their effect on the refugees from Irian Jaya have reinforced the conclusions of this chapter. On the island of Bougainville, in the North Solomons province of Papua New Guinea, more than two decades of unanswered protests against the Panguna copper mine culminated in an armed insurrection against the mine and the national government. The complaints of Bougainvillean residents centered around a number of related issues, including the devastating environmental impact of the mine, their loss of productive land, the disruption of local patterns of residence and exchange, and their dissatisfaction with the distribution of revenue from the mine. More than five years of military engagement, failed diplomacy, and a prolonged stand-off with the state, which has blockaded the island since 1990, have strengthened the opinion or belief held by many Bougainvilleans that the conflict can only be resolved by secession from Papua New Guinea.

In response, the Papua New Guinea government has actively challenged the legitimacy of calls for Bougainvillean secession:

There is no historical basis for Bougainville as an independent nation. Bougainville, like any other Province, is a colonial creation for convenience of administration. There is no such tribe as Bougainville. (Bernard Narokobi, PNG Minister of Justice, quoted in Spriggs, 1992, p. 269)

Representing Papua New Guinea in a statement to the United Nations Working Group on Indigenous Populations, Charles Lepani has justified Papua New Guinea's use of force against the secessionist movement, arguing that: "Any sovereign state has absolute power to defend its sovereign territory and integrity against internal or external threats" (1992, p. 363). What are the implications of these policies and actions for the refugees from Irian Jaya?

Politically it is difficult to defend the principle of sovereign integrity with regard to one's own state while simultaneously refusing to grant a neighboring state the same rights. Indeed, an observer from Bougainville has described the similarities between Indonesian control of Irian Jaya and Papua New Guinean rule over Bougainville:

The Papua New Guinea government in trying to hang onto the status quo as a necessary prescription for peace is now living in a fantasy, similar to that indulged in by the government of Indonesia. Together they have become modern-day im-

perialists within the Pacific, claiming territories that clearly do not belong to them geographically, socially or politically. (Havini, 1992, p. 168)

Papua New Guinea also desires the support of Indonesia and other ASEAN member countries in their struggles over Bougainville. The result is that the problems in Irian Jaya have been put on the back burner. Not even renewed clashes along the border with Indonesian troops are likely to change this fact. There is little chance that Papua New Guinea will ever formally endorse the political aspirations of the refugees.

Even the search for a productive middle ground in which Papua New Guinea might work to persuade Indonesia to reform its policies in Irian Jaya, as Wesley-Smith (1987) has suggested, has become increasingly unlikely. Political decisions that directly affect the refugees continue to be formulated with little regard to their needs or concerns. International attention to the problems in Irian Jaya, like media coverage of similar conflicts in East Timor, might be of some benefit. Ultimately, these problems will not be solved until refugee experience is brought to the forefront of political debates that affect them.

## NOTES

1. The use of the designation "Irian Jaya" rather than "West Papua" or "West New Guinea" reflects international conventions and is not intended as a political statement.
2. Research support from the National Science Foundation, Fulbright-Hays, Sigma Xi (The Scientific Research Society), The Explorer's Club, and the English-Speaking Union of Philadelphia is gratefully acknowledged. I am further indebted to the Yonggom refugees who trusted me with their stories. I assume full responsibility for any errors of fact or interpretation in this chapter.
3. In Irian Jaya, the Yonggom are known as the "Muyu" or "Muju" (see Schoorl, 1993).

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