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Prologue

The last place

Talk drifted once more, our attention diverted by the sight of new inmates entering Bomana. Bewildered, these men ran, stumbled and hurried again, propelled forward by the weight of warders' shouts and insults. They ran bare-chested, sweating, with civilian shirts and shoes — earlier removed for inspection — clasped awkwardly in their arms. On their heads they seemed to carry too much hair. The men passed on, out of sight, to the reception office and we returned our attention to the interview. This time the convicts before me were a different, more puzzling expression; the face of his round and shaven head revealed both smile and frown. 'This, this is the last place', he muttered, 'the very last place in the country'. The convict paused and surveyed the compound yard around us, as if to confirm that he was indeed talking about the prison. 'Here', he continued, 'everything is left behind. There is no beer or tobacco, no women. You cannot see your forest, your rivers, mountains and rocks. You cannot see your children. In this kind of place you are abandoned'. These sad thoughts were followed by silence. Then he straightened, cleared his throat and returned the conversation to an earlier inquiry.

Police vans dump new male inmates at the gates of the main compound of the gaol (Bomana holds on average 700 men and thirty women, both convicts and those held on remand). These men are shuffled into lines and counted. Warders then escort them to an inspection hut next to the gate and instruct them to remove their clothes. Fingers struggle with awkward buttonholes; knees bend and sway as men step out of trousers. With garments littered on the concrete floor, they stand cross-armed or with hands shyly covering sexual organs. Some men try to retain their underpants, but warders shout and kick them until these too are pulled down (experienced prisoners call this stuffy,
breezeflack hut the 'naked beach', an ironic reference to the strips of coastal sand outside where boys leave their clothes before running, screaming and laughing, into the sea). Once undressed, these inmates are ordered to turn around and spread their hands against the wall. The row of naked men, with their buttocks raised, are ready for inspection. Warders walk down the line, checking hair and mouth for smuggled items such as tobacco, marijuana or rolls of money; sticks, used to fish around for contraband, are inserted up the anus. Nervously, inmates wait. They listen for the sound of footsteps or the slap of rubber hosing against guards' thighs. If something is discovered, the smuggler is dragged from the line, cursed and hit. Angry warders sometimes whip everyone, drawing screams from inmates as the strips of hose lash the back of their legs. The inspection is over quickly. Sore and bruised, men put on their trousers and gather up remaining clothes. Once outside, warders count them again and then send them off to be processed at reception (Figure 1).

are also given a bar of soap and razor, told to shave and cut their hair short (legal provision protects remand inmates from these restrictions). Convicts' dreadlocks, beards and moustaches must disappear, only to return, with their civilian clothes, when their term of sentence is completed.

For prisoners at Bomana, this ceremony of arrival is crucial. They distinguish their experience of incarceration on the basis of that moment of dramatic separation, in terms of those things that are taken away. Inmates complain that the gaol is a place without kin, spouse, partner or children. It is a place without money, alcohol, popular music and custom (kastom), without favourite foods or familiar landmarks. Although the gaol is only a fifteen-minute bus ride from Port Moresby, the national capital and largest urban centre in Papua New Guinea, prisoners claim to feel isolated, as if lost in a deep forest. The convict who told me that Bomana was the country's 'last place' (las ples), a popular expression among inmates, was drawing attention to that dilemma. To him, it appeared that life was taking place elsewhere. Prisoners share this sense of omission, of being cut off or exiled from those they know outside the gaol. They believe their prison lives are shaped by what is missing.

As the designation 'last place' highlights, prisoners' thoughts on imprisonment are often presented through a meditation on place (plies). Bomana is said to be unlike any other place they know; in fact it is the very opposite of what place means to them outside the jail. Anthropologists working in the region point out that people are usually concerned to demonstrate how they are made visible in the land (Schieffelin 1976; Feld 1996). Places take form and significance through the history of life activity that marks them – the gardens people make, the houses they build, the paths they use, the everyday acts of feeding and sharing (Weiner 1991; Kahn 1996; Leach 2003). Particular landmarks – a river, a group of stones or a mountain – reflect peoples' memories of those events and remind them of obligations.1 Sets of relations animate those places, just as places animate those relations. It is through their connection to the land that people articulate who they are; as Kahn (1996: 180) states, to be without a place is to be humiliated, to exist at the limits of conventional social life.

Although Bomana is acknowledged to be a 'place of law' (plies blong lo), established and governed by agents of the State, prisoners prefer to emphasise the negative dimensions of place in gaol. They fail to see themselves reflected in the prison landscape.

Figure 1 Arrival

New inmates, still panting from the run, must stand to attention and answer the questions put to them by the registration clerk. He demands to know details about their marital status, the name of their village and province, and the address of designated next of kin. This information is recorded in an intake document and then filed away. The duty warder instructs the men to forget their lives outside and instead concentrate on following the rules of prison. He orders them to remove their trousers and underpants, empty their pockets of property, and then hand the bundle over for storage. In return, men are issued with uniform waistcloths, red for convicts and blue for those on remand. The former
Bomana is a place where prisoners claim they have no memories to draw upon; no evidence of the past inscriptive activity of kin or other familiar persons. The gaol is known as Papua New Guinea's last place because it is hardly a place at all (the last place any of them want to be). Nevertheless, the peculiar attribute of placeness at Bomana is what defines prison life. Inmates state that all aspects of their imprisonment can be understood by asking what it means to live in the last place. During my time at Bomana, I was invited to explore the different dimensions of this relationship (one of the themes that structure the chapters of my book), the multiple ways in which people experience (sense) place in prison.

**Under constraint**

This prison ethnography is about the constraint of place (and the sets of relations place reflects); in particular, it is about the constraint of living in the last place. The book examines the series of negations that prisoners characterise as the principle of their penal lives. These restrictions are coerced and painful to bear; they appear as obvious artifice. Indeed, at Bomana prisoners regard their location as something they have to negotiate; they feel that they are being punished with place (both the place they are given and the place that is taken away). The situation they describe offers a challenge to anthropologists working in the region – as Papua New Guinea’s last place, Bomana is a site of radical perspectives – as well as a challenge to those working in the multidisciplinary domain of prison studies.

Although not articulated through the notion of place, those working in the field of prison studies have long been concerned to explore the consequences of the act of detention. The sociological tradition of description and analysis of prison experience really starts, or restarts (cf. Clemmer 1940), with Sykes’s now classic work, *The Society of Captives* (1958). Heralded by the author himself as a new kind of penal account, this book cast a shadow over all future renderings of the genre. It encouraged an immediate outpouring of sociological monographs on individual prisoners, both in the United States (Giallombardo 1966; Heffernan 1972; Carroll 1974) and Europe (Morris and Morris 1963; Mathiesen 1965; Cohen & Taylor 1981; Moczydlowski 1992), which organised their descriptions around, and in reaction to, the principles that Sykes laid down. It also influenced a growing interest in the study of the ‘total’ power exercised by these institutions (see Goffman 1961). Sykes outlined the problem, as he saw it, for those who would wish to study the experience of incarceration – how to explain the emergence of inmate society and culture? This question was premised on another insight that Sykes presented as original, namely, that prisons produced their own coherent form of society, one quite distinct from that found outside the prison (1958: xii). That unique type, he argued, was deserving of separate scholarship; prisons provided what Giallombardo would describe as ‘an ideal social laboratory in which to test sociological theories’ (1966: 2; and cf. Heffernan 1972: 2–3). Imprisonment was held to be special then because it appeared to allow sociologists to watch society making in progress.

What I want to highlight is the emphasis drawn on the links between the pains of imprisonment and the nature of inmate culture. If society existed in prison, it did so, according to Sykes, as a response to the constraints of that life. Faced with a series of attacks on their self-image, prisoners turned to society making as a coping mechanism (1958: 82); the idiosyncrasies of inmate culture emerged out of that adjustment or substitution. Sykes proceeded to outline what those painful constraints might be. He listed a number of ‘deprivations’ that he claims prisoners at the New Jersey Maximum Security Prison, where he conducted research, identified. These included a ‘deprivation of liberty’ (loss of freedom of movement and exile from family), a ‘deprivation of goods and services’ (loss of possessions and material benefits), a ‘deprivation of heterosexual relationships’ (loss of sexual access and the company of the opposite sex), a ‘deprivation of autonomy’ (loss of control over personal actions and choices) and a ‘deprivation of security’ (loss of protection from violent or aggressive behaviour) (1958: 65–77). It was these pains, according to Sykes, that needed to be offset and mitigated by the construction of society (as solidarity increased among inmates, so the distress caused by imprisonment diminished), an adaptation that he believed also gave back to prisoners a sense of self-worth.

Sykes’s theory about the constitution of prison society was soon heavily contested (an argument raged about whether prison society was unique or in fact continuous with society outside the
The influence of his work did mean, however, that those conducting research in prisons felt compelled to record the complaints of inmates and describe, if only briefly, the restrictions they felt. Sociological studies started to include chapters with headings such as ‘The experience of imprisonment’ (Morris and Morris 1963), where testimonies of constraint could be found. Uppermost among these were complaints about the lack of access to family and friends, and in particular the frustrations felt by inmates at their inability to influence the course of events outside the gaol. Prison studies and memoirs repeatedly highlighted the distress caused by worrying about this state of affairs: whether a spouse would be faithful, the family evicted and property pawned, a child sicken or a relative die. In this description, imprisonment began to be articulated as a form of punishment grounded in confinement, in the experience of what has been taken away.

However, despite the recorded testimonies of prisoners, such constraints never seemed to become the proper subject of inquiry. Gradually, the focus of prison studies shifted from the prisoners’ experience of detention (and its deprivations) to their experience of the institution’s system of disciplinary management. Punishment became increasingly perceived as an issue of ‘mortification’ (Goffman 1961) or normative subject control (Foucault 1977; Sim 1990), often seen less as a result of confinement and more as the outcome of internal routine and surveillance. In place of society making, sociologists discovered that gaol was a site of identity making, viewed as a contested process over which inmates and prison authorities continually struggled for control (Díaz-Cotto 1996; Bosworth 1999). In these accounts, prison culture is built around things made present (the people and regime of gaol), rather than those things that are absent (the people and way of life outside the gaol). Where discussed, the experience of being separated from people outside the gaol was usually understood as a straightforward negative, a loss whose significance begins and ends at the moment of withdrawal.

In this book, I aim to recuperate the ongoing centrality of enclosure and dispossession, to make these experiences current and the focus of my prison analysis. The experience of living in Papua New Guinea’s last place leads prisoners to privilege those things that are absent; life at Bomana appears premised on the constraint of forced separation. As Sykes pointed out, the deprivations of confinement remain at the heart of prison life (even if they are not mechanisms for society making). Inmates’ stories about gaol are always also stories about those simple sets of restrictions: no kin, no women (or men), no money and no familiar landmarks. The places and persons from whom they are separated provide them with the background to every action. At the same time those absent things are thrown into relief, allowing prisoners to assess their usual orienting presence (their benefits and costs). Conventional sets of relations, and the obligations that accompany them, become the subject of debate and reflection. Imprisonment makes prisoners aware not just of what they are missing, but of constraints that exist everywhere (and of their artifice); in their discussions, the deprivations of detention become different in degree, rather than kind, from those faced by people outside the gaol. One of the lessons of prison life is that the imposition of constraint (whether voluntary or coerced) has its own potential.

**Forgetting**

Imprisonment was, of course, a totally new idea to the native. At first it was a complete failure. The prisoners fretted, lost courage, pined, sickness, and died. (British New Guinea Annual Report 1897-1898: 47)

Examining early government reports for the colonial period, I was struck by the frequency of statements like the one above. In these reports officers complained of mysteriously high death rates in their prisons, of inmates who would arrive healthy and strong but within a few weeks would sicken and expire. The puzzle, for those gaolers, was that penal discipline offered a regime specifically crafted to produce quite the opposite effect—clean and well-managed bodies. What force, then, did they therefore ask themselves, could resist such a well-intentioned programme? The answer they invariably provided was homesickness or too much fretting about absent things.

When I later asked prisoners at Bomana to give their own comment on these deaths, they told me that ‘worry must have killed them’ (*wari mas kilim ol*). Explanations would continue thus: ‘such people did not understand the ways of the white men. When they were taken from their home and imprisoned they felt alone and scared. They thought about their parents, their brothers and sisters, garden food and all the good things left at home. So they worried and died’. Prisoners state that they still suffer from ‘worry’ (*wari*); for them this emotion embodies the pains...
imprisonment causes. Indeed, upon arrival in gaol a new inmate is said to feel nothing else. He or she may refuse prison food and spend the first days lying in a cell corner, crying and sleeping fitfully. Although worry no longer kills prisoners, I was told it continues to upset their composure.

In the security office at Bomana, an old black and white photograph is pinned to the notice board. Prominently exhibited, it shows a man dead, hung by the neck. The shaven figure wears only a waistcloth and appears bent double as if in prayer. His neck, caught by a leather strap, seems extended and directs the downward angle of his blank gaze. From the evidence of the photograph, this death scene, a presumed suicide, took place in a cubicle of the outside toilet block. It is a pathetic, miserable image. Indeed, that is the very reason for its display. Warders want prisoners to realise the consequences of too much worry (some prisoners referred to this photograph when answering my questions about the high death rate in colonial prisons). They fear that this sentiment, if unchecked, may lead to trouble; not just the harm inmates may inflict on themselves, but also the danger that worry may spark quarrels, fights and, most seriously (as far as staff are concerned), attempts to escape.

In an attempt to curb these anxieties, warders at the welfare office reserve several hours each morning for hearing prisoners’ concerns. Those who visit the office are known as the ‘worry people’ (wari lain). They come either on their own initiative or through the representation of guards and other inmates. During these interviews staff are unusually receptive, permitting each prisoner full time to express their worries. These trends to revolve around a sense of frustration at his or her inability to meet obligations to people outside the gaol. ‘Who’, it is typically asked, ‘will look after my parents? How will my wife survive in the city without me? How can I prevent my husband from running away with another woman? What will happen to my garden, my pigs and property? Who will pay my children’s school fees?’ Prisoners are also concerned about the worry their kin may suffer as a consequence of their detention; in particular, the commonly expressed fear that it may affect the health of elderly parents. If regret is expressed for the pain their actions have caused, it is directed towards these people rather than the victims of their offence. Prisoners fear the anger of kin outside the gaol; especially remand inmates, who often sit around and speculate about why their bail fee has not been paid (as a punishment, parents may wait weeks or months before paying the fee and getting them released). Sometimes inmates determine to keep their detention secret, in the hope that they will quickly be discharged. Those who do want to inform kin may be prevented by the swiftness of their arrest, so that they are never quite sure if anyone outside the gaol actually knows.

The contribution warders can make to the management of worries is limited; ultimately, it is up to prisoners to keep these feelings in check. This is achieved by learning to forget or ‘lose thoughts’ (las tingting). Prisoners tell each other to stop thinking and talking about events outside the gaol. They try to lose memories, to disregard kin and other persons they miss. Indeed, inmates claim that they no longer die from worry precisely because they have learned how to forget. When a prisoner appears alone and depressed, others will approach and offer their company; the dejected man or woman, bombarded with jokes and stories, is comforted and encouraged to lose his or her thoughts. The worries that cause pain are thus disremembered. At Bomana forgetting is presented as a deliberate act, one that requires the constant vigilance and hard work of inmates. Almost any activity – card games, penal labour, reading, song writing, sports, church worship and so on – can be motivated by this ambition. Male prisoners say that the very best way to forget is smoking; either tobacco or marijuana, both of which are contraband and must be smuggled into gaol. When an inmate’s worries grow out of control, he can inhale on a cigarette until his head starts to spin and his thoughts settle. Prisoners are impressed by the capacity of these drugs to ‘kill their memory’ (kilim dispela memori sens belong yu), and thus provide solace from prison despair.

While the constraint of living in the last place may be coerced, it is also in some respects voluntarily imposed. For inmates must try and forget those persons and places left outside the gaol, to put them out of mind. This denial of what is missing is an active, ongoing struggle. Inmates must learn to place a limit on their thoughts, to stop themselves dwelling on a range of conventional subjects. They must themselves enact a disappearance. Gialombardo (1966: 133), writing about the Federal Reformatory for Women in Alderson, West Virginia, speaks of the prison as an ‘as if’ world, one that is premised on continual efforts of disremembering. At Bomana these efforts
are directed at denying the failure of obligation. Prisoners attempt to live together as if nothing is wrong, as if the separation from loved ones hasn't happened, even as if kin never existed. Through their acts of forgetting they try to constitute Bomana as the only place in Papua New Guinea. Inmates do not believe they 'make' prison society, but they do believe their work allows certain sets of relations to be acknowledged. The form that prison life takes is presented as the outcome both of detention and of the constraint that prisoners impose on themselves.

Anthropologists working in Papua New Guinea and the broader region of Melanesia have no history of direct investment in prison studies. However, the idea that experiences of loss may be at the centre of gaol life would come as no surprise to them. Melanesian societies are judged to be unusually concerned with the relationship between what is made visible and what is kept hidden; people are said to be always aware of what needs to be forgotten in order for something else to appear. Events such as ritual exchange, mortuary and initiation ceremonies have been presented as deliberate attempts to reconstitute sets of relations by formal acts of separation (cf. Clay 1977; Wagner 1977; Feld 1982; Mosko 1985; Küchler 1987 and 1988; Strathern 1988; Battaglia 1990; Weiner 1991, 1993 and 1995; Mimica 1992; Gillison 1993). Indeed, Battaglia suggests that there exists what she calls a 'practical nostalgia' (1995: 77), concern for what absent things evince as well as disallow. She believes that in these societies loss carries 'active' or 'positive' potentialities (1990: 196): it directs people to the present (and future) states of social relations.

Her description draws self-consciously upon the scholarly tradition of deconstructive practice (1990: 7). That critique of positivism - the idea that every assertion or positive presence is always an act of deferment - seems to correspond in certain ways with the principles of indigenous performance. However, Strathern (1992a: 73-74) cautions against the use of that analogy. She points out that deconstructive practice, which targets totalising constructions, is based upon an assumption that social worlds are built or made. Strathern suggests that rather than uncovering the traces of lost positions, Melanesians might better be imagined as seeking to hide or disguise what is present and near. It is this attributed social behaviour that may help to inform an understanding of what incarceration means to prisoners at Bomana.

Indeed, the anthropological contribution to my genealogy of constraint comes from the work of Strathern (1988, 1992a, 1992b, 1995a). Her writing strategies seek to illustrate the power of indigenous practice by making it the basis of her methodology. In The Gender of the Gift (1988), she is concerned to write a text whose significance and rigour derives from what it omits. Orienting dichotomies of social analysis such as Individual and Society, Nature and Culture, Domestic and Public, are missing; in fact they are deliberately hidden. The Gender of the Gift is a book about that disappearance, one that speaks of its own constraint. It invites the reader through demonstration, as well as explication, to consider the contours of these absent dichotomies. On the basis of this omission Strathern puts forward an experimental socialism, one that privileges another analytic limit: the Relation (see 1995a). Much of her subsequent work is a gymnastic display of the constraint she has imposed upon herself, not only what it allows but also what it prevents.

Strathern weaves her experiment by drawing upon and taking apart the anthropological canon from Melanesia. Her text operates as a parasite upon that material, using it first to describe the dichotomies and then reworking it, imposing her own constraint, in order to make the canon demonstrate what it actually obscures. Thus her Melanesians fail to recognise the conventional categories of anthropological representation. Instead of socialisation, they consider rituals such as male initiation as acts of decomposition (1988: 3). Instead of disorder, they consider fighting as another form of exchange. Instead of contract, they consider marriage as converting sameness into difference. Instead of society making, they consider action as working upon relations that are already given. Her experimental subjects enact the consequences of the anthropologist's avoidance of certain analytic limits. They are themselves demonstrations of constraint, both because of what they recognise (the Relation) and what they hide (Individual and Society, Nature and Culture, Domestic and Public).

Strathern's writing strategy is sympathetic to any account of constraint as mode of living (including the constraint of living in the last place that prisoners at Bomana suffer). Yet at the same time her experimental socialism presents my prison ethnography with certain problems. While her subjects are engagingly subversive for anthropology, their analytic power is precisely what
creates difficulties. As embodiments of a limit imposed by the anthropologist, they deserve more respect than simple emulation. In this book I will focus on the constraints that prisoners identify (coerced or voluntarily imposed) in order to demonstrate the ways in which their practice simultaneously reproduces and displaces the sociality she describes.

Sneeze

‘Achoo! Achoo!, Who’, Don asked, ‘calls out my name?’ The convict, from Tari in the Southern Highlands, reacted to his bout of sneezing by tensing his body and throwing back his arm until it reached his ear. He then proceeded to extend his arm with sudden violent thrusts back and forth; each downward extension begins a revolution, turning the body in a clockwise movement. When his elbow bone cracked (bau paiap) Don stopped, thus freezing the position of the extending limb, which now pointed in one direction (Figure 2). This arm, Don held, marked the bearing or location of those persons outside the gaol whose thoughts had caused his nasal expulsion. However hard inmates try to forget the fact of their confinement events like sneezing are said to return that separation to mind. In this way missing persons and places declare their presence (absence) and so risk unravelling the ‘as if’ world prisoners establish by their acts of forgetting.

When someone outside Bomana worries about a prisoner, that person is said to literally ‘send thoughts’ (salim tingting) to him or her. This transmission may cause the inmate to sneeze, but also to develop skin itches, headaches, pulsating veins or ringing ears.9 Gabriel, a remand inmate from the Goilala region of Central province, took his involuntary gulps or hiccups as evidence that kin were talking about him. At such moments he stopped and called out their names, waiting until the spasms ended and the identity of the concerned persons were thus revealed. Troubling events are also said to leave their mark on the bodies of prisoners. Numb limbs or reflex kicks of the leg during sleep are taken to indicate a death or injury outside the gaol. When cold air currents descend on Bomana, causing men and women to shudder and their arm hairs to stand on end, some inmates grow anxious. They believe that the change in weather denotes misfortune, and in response they throw worried questions into the wind: ‘Is someone injured at home? Has fighting returned? My father, is he dead?’ If the gusting currents cease to blow, then the prisoner knows that he has asked the right question.

I remain behind the fence here. Mi stap long banis hia
I look at the blue hill here. Mi lukim blue maunten hia
I think of the cold place, Mi tingting long kol ples
And that is all. Na em tasol
I worry here. Mi wari hia.
(Clare Poia)

I live in Bomana. Mi stap long Bomana
When I turn and see Biseke hill, Taim mi taimin na mi lukim maunten Biseke
I am sorry and cry. Mi sori na karai.
(Timothy Kola)

Inmates may also see reflections of absent places in the prison landscape. Around Bomana, the ground undulates gently between flat expanses; most of the year it is brown and torn. Only one hill scars the horizon. Prisoners, adopting the local language name, call this earth form Biseke. From the small female wing it is seen to rise most dramatically, towering above the dusty plateau as if intent on eating the sky. Biseke is a lowland hill, but to those from the Highlands region it seems familiar. For them, the mountainous proportions recall their own
home scenery, that ‘cold place’, and with it those persons they have left behind. Double exposure: Biseke is strange, yet so familiar that it makes them cry. Clara – a convict from the Western Highlands – waited to hear if she would be transferred back home. She told me that she found the delay upsetting and the sight of Biseke amplified her distress. Timothy – a remand inmate from the province of Simbu – expected to receive a long sentence. The blue hill reminded him of what he would be missing and his song evoked that sadness.

But the most common form of thought transmission is held to be dreams. Prisoners believe that faraway events are often revealed to them during sleeping hours. Peter – another inmate from the Goilala region – claimed to learn of a death outside the gaol in this way. He told me his dream.

He sits by the side of a city road, holding the corpse of a man. A car approaches and Peter hails the driver. When the vehicle’s tinted window slides down, he sees that the driver is a white man. Peter asks him to take them to the hospital. He complains that the buses refused to stop. The white man agrees to help and leaves the two of them outside the morgue. When Peter sees the dead body lying out on the metal slab, he cries.

The morning after this dreaming, Peter received news that a gang mate had been shot and killed by police in Port Moresby. Other dreams may inform prisoners about the injury of kin, a quarrel or fighting between clans at home. The problem, however, is that the cause of dreams is not always clear. Many times, prisoners are left to speculate about the nature of the event described. Thus, Kubu, a convict from Balimo on the coast of Western province, remained puzzled by his dream experience.

He turns to find a stranger facing him. This man stands with a straight back and to Kubu seems sad. The stranger hesitates and then speaks. ‘Your sister’, he says, ‘is dead. She lies in the snow. Go and fetch her!’ Shaken, Kubu sets off. Soon he finds his sister, her dead body cushioned by a blanket of snow. The landscape is everywhere brilliantly white. Kubu lifts the body and carries it home. His kin start to weep over the corpse.

Although the dream seemed ominous, he had received no news from home to support it. Before Bomana, Kubu was imprisoned at Daru, the administrative centre of his province, and his sister used to visit him regularly, but since his transfer he had heard nothing from her. The dream itself appeared very strange – a missing sister from a hot, coastal village, where winter scenes could only be viewed in photographs, found dead in the snow! Kubu hoped that

his sister's thoughts of him had sparked the dream, but he knew it might signify something worse. He tried to push that prospect aside, but everyday he expected to receive bad news.

Dreams, then, have the capacity to exacerbate prisoners’ worries. If one dreaming experience is verified, others immediately take on new significance. For instance, a convict who dreams of her younger sister having sex with an unknown man, and subsequently hears that her sibling is pregnant, will begin to treat other dreams more seriously. If she next dreams that her husband is being unfaithful, the convict will become unsettled and anxious. The worries caused by sending thoughts work in both directions. When prisoners dwell too long on people outside the gaol, they too can be affected; a male inmate who worries about his parents may cause them to dream about him. Prisoners are therefore concerned that their own worries do not upset kin and friends (female inmates instruct those among them that are mothers not to think too much about their children outside Bomana, for fear that their thoughts will damage the children’s minds and make them ill). The imperative to forget extends beyond the welfare of inmates.

Prisoners also remain ambivalent about receiving letters and visits. While they look forward to both events, and get angry if they do not eventuate, at the same time they know such occasions upset their composure and risk aggravating worries. Very often visitors arrive completely unexpectedly; even when their appearance is planned, the meeting is charged with the prospect of departure (visits take place on the weekend and last for half an hour only). As they sit and eat food together, both parties are already considering the negotiation of goodbyes (Figure 3). Inmates are hungry for news about life outside the gaol, but as they listen to their guests’ accounts they know that this information will disturb them. Sometimes they claim that it is better to refuse weekend visits and therefore avoid the tearful face and catalogue of woes that visitors too often relate. Prisoners say that it can take days for them to recover from a letter or visit, to put aside memories of all they have read, heard or seen.

These worries may finally lead inmates to try and escape. Topkein, a convict from Kungia in Western province, one day took off from a work party after receiving a letter that informed him his mother was ill. He fled to Port Moresby and waited in hiding until his brother sent him money to buy an air ticket back
expulsions etc. all act to challenge the form that life takes at Bomana. Those persons who are locked outside the gaol continue to make elusive and brief appearances, often evading the control of both prison authorities and inmates. As a result the work of forgetting is constantly disturbed; inmates are reminded that living in the last place means living in exile. Yet without these interruptions prisoners' lives would ultimately be diminished. They do not really wish to be completely forgotten; the actions caused by the worries of people outside the gaol can be comforting, taken as evidence that love and concern for them still persists. These transmissions are also proof that detention remains a punishment, the orienting dimension of incarceration. It seems that only with the possibility (or threat) of displacement does the imposition of constraint gather power.

The example of interruptions or flaws in penal confinement, which at once undermine and exacerbate the need for the setting of limits, might be taken to provide a challenge both for anthropology and prison studies. I am asked to describe a place whose form is premised on what is taken away, yet continually ruptured by what returns. This dilemma leads me to question the portrayal of prisons as 'total' environments (Sykes 1958; Goffman 1961) and of inmates as subjects who primarily suffer from the structures of discipline within an enclosed, self-contained regime (Foucault 1977). The fact that the thoughts of missing persons are held to affect the constitution of prisoners, and vice versa, should be taken as evidence that imprisonment may always be considered as a mediated experience. Perhaps what is at issue is the degree of separation from those left outside the gaol. Prison life gains and loses its coherence as a result of that constraint and its interruption. This is where inmates' attention begins and ends.

And what of anthropology? Does it need to learn how to pay attention to its own narrative sneeze? Not just to the descriptions that may emerge as a consequence of imposing constraint, but also to those that may keep returning long after their apparent disappearance? For inmates at Bomana the persons and places made absent by their confinement do not simply vanish. Rather their displacement figures a shifting significance. In the same way the as if world established by writing constraints should always provide anthropologists with a route back to what is erased and which, as a result, now carries a quite different analytic weight. If imprisonment highlights both the pain and
inventiveness derived from taking something away, it also
cautions against placing too much faith in what that omission
allows.

Notes

1 Kahn (1996: 168) claims that for the Wamir people, who live on the south-
eastern tip of Papua New Guinea, places are ultimately 'emotional
territories'. They capture the past interactions of people and thus act as
memorials and moral landscapes, conveying stories about collective history
and social responsibilities.

2 Morris and Morris (1963: 164) quote from the testimony of an anonymous
inmate in Pentonville prison, England, to demonstrate where prisoners
locate the pains of imprisonment. The inmate states, 'as time goes on it
seems very long, and even the bitterness fades. But all one's worries are
magnified 100 times. The biggest punishment is being away from home; as
for prison itself, there's nothing to it'.

3 To me, the emphasis of prisoners on the potential of constraint recalls the
literary practice of the Oulipo (Ouvrages de littérature potentielle) group
(see Motte 1986a; Bellis 1993). Rather than assuming that 'inspiration', an
old and tired mythology, is the basis for literary expression, members of
the group advocated an aesthetic of formal constraint (Motte 1986b: 10).
Only by continually imposing new limits on their writing, a voluntary and
deliberately rigorous submission to experimental form, did they believe it
possible to release imagination. Members highlighted constraining forms
in all literature, but criticised the academy for converting them into natu-
ralised rules (Bénabou 1986: 41). The point of their endeavour was to
recover consciousness of choice in the selection of writing forms; an aware-
ness of what constraint enabled and disallowed, of the potential that lay
within newly imposed limits. Among the constraints favoured by the
Oulipo was the 'lipogram' (a word meaning lacking, gram means letter), a text
in which a given letter of the alphabet does not appear. The purpose of such
an experiment, and indeed of all Oulipian forms, was to produce a literary
work that spoke of its own constraint. In a sense, this is what incarceration
achieves for prisoners at Bomana; they live in a place that continually
reminds them of its limits, of the deprivations they must endure in order
to experience it.

4 Imprisonment does figure in the history of the foundation of Melanesian
anthropology. Early ethnographers in the region often viewed the colonial
prison as a resource; it was one of the first places they visited upon arrival,
assured of finding subjects upon whom they could practice interview tech-
niques (I am grateful to Professor Michael Young for first bringing this
connection to my attention). Thus, Seligman spent many days interview-
ing prisoners and measuring (their heads on Samarai Island (Journal for New
Guinea 1904: 61 and 116), in what was then the colonial Territory of Papua,
followed a decade later by Malinowski on his way to conduct fieldwork in
the Trobriand Islands (Malinowski 1967: 45–47). Of course neither of them
were interested in what prisoners had to say about their captivity. Instead

inmates stood for them as types of cultural groups, plied for information
about customary practice at home. For anthropologists, as voyeurs of what
they took to be society making outside the gaol, the world of inmates only
held value as a microcosm of that wider social laboratory.

5 The methodology of Strathern contrasts with much reflexive writing in
anthropology. While others set about critiquing anthropological represen-
tations that rely on ideoms of totality, unit and presence by highlighting
what they take to be the ambiguous, continually deferred and transient
ground of cultural practice (Clifford and Marcus 1986; Cliffor 1988 and
1997; Taussig 1992 and 1993), she takes constraint itself as her operating
principle. Strathern is suspicious of claims that make literary techniques
such as collage or narrative evocation the key to closer correspondence;
effect ambiguity does not in her view achieve much of a revolution (it is
not clear how that effect resolves the dilemma of representation).

6 I believe that The Gender of the Gift might usefully be considered as a kind
of lipogram (a text that is written with the constraint that a given letter of
the alphabet may not appear). Members of the Oulipo group chose Georges
Perec's novel, La Disparition (A Void, 1995) as the most distinguished
example of this experiment, since it was written without using the letter
E, the most important vowel in the French language. Its success lay not
just in the concealed qualities of language that emerged as a result of this
violent erasure or 'disappearance', but also in what that absence said about
the letter's usual orienting presence. La Disparition is held to exist in two
dimensions, as the story of what is portrayed and that of the constraint
that allowed it to be recounted (Motte 1986b: 12). The same, I believe, might
be said of Strathern's text.

7 Strathern (1988) uses the term 'sociality' as a descriptive device that allows
her to talk about a Melanesian social imagination that does not incorpo-
rate anthropological assumptions about the relationship between
Individual and Society.

8 Strathern (1988) argues that in Melanesia it might be more profitable to
imagine the person as a composite of these relations, what Wagner (1991:
163) terms 'an entity with relationship integrally implied'. Sets of relations
and the social order are given, and embodied in the person.

9 Sneeze and other physical reactions exemplify the ways in which for pris-
oners absent persons and places are felt as well as heard or seen. Feld (1996)
highlights this multisensory conceptualisation of place among the Kaluli
people of Bosavi. He calls for anthropologists to pay attention to all the
senses that are used when people evoke place (not just the preference for
visualism that dominates the European concept of landscape) (94).

10 Members of the Oulipo group held that no system of constraint should be
taken as completely coherent or imposed without a nod to its own trans-
gression. They advised that readers should be aware of interruptions or
'anti-constraints' as well (Motte 1986b: 19). Indeed, Motte asks whether
creative freedom might be assured not by constraint itself, but rather by
the flaw it necessarily contains (1986b: 20).
CHAPTER 1

Dark Place

Out of sight

Bomana Major Central Area Correctional Institution (Figure 4) is the largest prison in Papua New Guinea (it usually holds between 600 and 700 inmates, supervised by nearly 200 warders). Contained within its extensive grounds are not just prison compounds, but also housing for staff and a national training centre for new recruits. The prison complex is divided into general sections, including A Compound for male national prisoners (550 to 600 inmates), E Division for expatriate male prisoners (one to five inmates) and a juvenile compound for boys (twenty to thirty inmates).¹ These sections are each surrounded by their own cyclone wire fence (eight feet high), but together are enclosed behind a perimeter fence (nineteen feet high). A Compound contains by far the largest number of cells at Bomana. Constructed of breeze-blocks with corrugated iron roofs, concrete walls and floors, barred ventilation windows just below ceiling level, back rooms with drop toilets and taps for washing, and a single heavy metal door at one end, these barrack rooms or dormitory-style houses usually hold between thirty and eighty men. Some of them run back-to-back, joined and separated by small detention or punishment cells. A Compound itself is further divided into three adjacent sections, each with its own yard and cyclone wire fence (Figure 5). There is a section for remand inmates (200 to 250 inmates), which has three cells, and two sections for convicts (300 to 400 inmates serving sentences ranging from a few weeks to life terms); the larger one has ten cells and the other, designed for those classified as well behaved, has two. Within the Compound there is also a mess hall where convicts and remand inmates collect and eat their meals and a large communal toilet block with showers. Just outside the gate of A Compound are a guardhouse and watchtower, the prison library and chapel, and behind it a sloping grass parade ground, where every morning and afternoon roll call is taken.
demands on their money and hospitality (56). Indeed, Monsell-Davis states that those earning modest wages in the city sometimes find it easier to leave work (and rely on language mates themselves) than to try and meet the expectations of wantok (57).

8 Strathern (1999: 96) has more recently argued that the perception of intensified sociability, of coerced action, is linked in people’s minds to the specific qualities of money. In particular, the divisible nature of currency, its capacity to be broken down into smaller units, to be held back and used for multiple transactions, is said to increase the frequency and therefore expectation of small gift giving (106). Strathern argues that money activates the mind’s divisions (97), accelerating obligation and the demands for action.

9 It is worth pointing out that prisoners often present the act of urban migration as a deliberate attempt to flee the expectations of kin (see Chapter 2). Young men and women leave the village or hamlet precisely to avoid the surveillance of parents and the pressure that exists to marry and take up affinal responsibilities (see Strathern 1975).

10 Inglis (1982) provides an account of one criminal sentenced to death by the colonial regime and executed in Port Moresby before the Second World War. Her book includes historical descriptions of the condemned man’s last days in prison and subsequent hanging.

Conclusion

Homesickness

A quite wild native was sent into Port Moresby as a prisoner, and although homesick and very frightened, appeared in the very best of health. After a short time, he began to show signs of abdominal pain and to vomit. In the course of a few weeks these got worse and he finally died without any very definite signs and without marked wasting. (Papua Annual Report 1917–1918: 53)

It might be expected that when colonial officers diagnosed ‘homesickness’ as the cause of unexplained prison deaths (see Prologue), they were drawing attention to a feeling of exile from which they too suffered. Themselves far away from familiar faces and land marks, it was perhaps easy, even comforting, to imagine that in equivalent circumstances the less travelled and innocent ‘native’ might pine, sicken and die. And not just colonial officers and missionaries, but also early anthropologists working in the region. In his fieldwork diary, Malinowski describes his own ongoing struggle to combat a longing for home.

‘Homesickness’. I summoned up various figures from the past, T.S., Zenia. I thought of Mother. (Malinowski 1967: 52)

That journal reads as a eulogy for those people left behind when the anthropologist travels abroad. Malinowski laments the ‘absent ones’ (194). His thoughts of them continually intrude; the arrival of post on the Trobriand Islands disturbs his composure, bringing on what he describes as a ‘sudden rush of (their) presence’. At rest the anthropologist thinks about missing persons and places, at night he dreams about them:

Toward the end of the day’s work hidden longings come to the surface, and visions as well: yesterday I saw the western end of Albert Street, where the broad boulevard cuts across it towards Lonsdale St.... At moments I long violently to go South again (175).

At night, sad, plaintive dreams, like childhood feelings. I dreamed about Warsaw, about our apartment in the boarding school, about some apartment with a bathroom (Zenia and Sta8) in Warsaw. Everything permeated with Mother... Tiny details recollected; the linen Mother gave me when I left. Continual memories and associations (295).
Indeed, Malinowski frequently depicts his fieldwork as a form of imprisonment (162; and Rapport 1997), an act of self-imposed detention that has him counting the days and months before the ‘moment of liberation’ (205), his date of departure.

In setting out the principles for ethnographic work, Malinowski insists upon this separation, not just from loved ones back home but also from the company of other ‘white men’ in the Territory (1922: 6). The kind of contact that scientific fieldwork demands is held to be premised on first cutting oneself off or taking something away, becoming confined in ‘native’ life and society. While ethnographic work is the cause of homesickness, Malinowski believes it is also the cure; by keeping busy with fieldwork, he can make his worries disappear (1967: 201). That exile is held to be painful but productive, the source of what anthropologists can know.

Those working in Papua New Guinea today still figure their project as a particular kind of displacement. Kahn (1996), who works among the Wamirs at the southeastern tip of the country, describes her motivation for travelling to the region – ‘I had decided to work in Papua New Guinea precisely because it was the last place in the world in which I could imagine myself being’ (168–69). This deliberate uprootedness, the professional requirement to place oneself outside the familiar, is for her the basis of anthropological insight and knowledge. Kahn reports her initial bewilderment when Wamirs took her strategic position as a predicament; they expressed their sorrow for the sake of loss she must feel at being away from her own place (170). For them, the idea of self-exile, purposefully seeking the furthest location from home, was incomprehensible, an act that denied the crucial relationship between people and the land in which they saw themselves reflected.

My own presence at Bomana sometimes drew the sympathy of prisoners, especially on Christmas Day, when many came up to say how sorry they felt that I was such a long way from the people and places I knew. Their reaction to my situation revealed their own predicament; they diagnosed themselves as sick for home. The embarrassment I felt at receiving such attention highlighted the difference between our circumstances; for myself (like other anthropologists) spending time out of place was a choice, for them it was a punishment. Among prisoners there remains great anger and bitterness at what has been taken away, the ambitions that are thwarted and the obligations left unfulfilled. These frustrations show themselves in inmates’ songs and poems. I remember one in particular, a song written and performed in ‘heavy metal’ style by a male convict and his band during the prison’s annual Independence Day celebrations. The singer delivered his lyrics with a rasping, angry voice, accompanied by the sound of thrashed electric guitars. It was the most popular song of the day:

In the field of dream,  
I ain’t enjoying one bit of its passing day.  
Everyday it is a pain in the arse  
And I don’t like it all.  
O, I miss my home.  
Sweet home.

Like the lilies of the field,  
I was born wild,  
Like the shadows of yesterday.  
Yesterday’s gone,  
And today is another day of pain and isolation.  
I was blind to all reasons.

Circumstances don’t suit me,  
But like it or not circumstances prevail.  
Someday they’ll be an end to all this anguish and pain.

Bye bye Bomber city.  
I had enough of you.  
Too much, too little, too late.  
Bye bye Bomber city.

(Antony Ume)

Prisoners claim that the act of detention makes ‘home’ appear to them. The term embodies everything that is missing in gaol; it is an artefact of the constraint of living in the last place. At Bomana prisoners feel cut off or hidden from people outside the gaol, caught in a dark place where home exists in the past and future, but not the present. As the song says, these circumstances may not suit, but they prevail. ‘Sweet home’ is what prisoners long for, what they spend their time dreaming and worrying
about, and what they aspire to eventually recover. And finally, home is what always seems to evade their grasp.

Taussig (1992: 149–50) argues that for anthropologists today the complaint of homesickness is double-edged. Not only do they hark back to what is missing when conducting fieldwork; in their subsequent writing, they display nostalgia for what is familiar. Ethnographic description relies on ‘home’ metaphors to make fieldwork experiences communicable. Taussig says that anthropologists are both sick for these conventions and sick of them (homesickness motivates Strathern to impose certain constraints on her writing), if not exactly escaping home metaphors, at least making their presence felt.

In her survey of inmate memoirs from North America and Europe, Duncan (1996: 24) reports a general sense of dis-ease with home. Indeed, prison is often depicted as a peaceful and safe place when compared with the dangers and insecurities of life outside the gaol. Those who leave accounts of their incarceration tend to express nostalgia for their period of detention, which is distinguished as a time of suffering, but also of unmatched intensity and comradeship (see Chapter 5). Prison is a place where ‘serious things happen’ (23). At the same time it is a place of dependence, where inmates are reliant on others to feed, clothe and shelter them and where the need to make ordinary life decisions is taken away. In memoirs, this release from responsibility is usually depicted as a source of satisfaction (27) – no more worries about paying bills, finding or keeping employment, wondering what to eat, what to wear or do. Locked up in gaol, the individual is no longer faced with bewildering choices, with the threat of not meeting his or her life expectations.

To illustrate her point, Duncan quotes from the journal of James Blake (29–30), a convict in Florida prisons during the 1960s. Blake conveys the regard he had for detention, while at the same time criticising the assumption that everyone has a ‘home’ to which they resolutely wish to return:

I think it was then I realised I wanted to go back to the tribe, to my people, in the joint. And I said to myself, home is where, when you go there, they can’t turn you away. Homesick, how about that? And homesick is where, when you go home, they make you sick. (Blake 1971: 378–79)

If prison provides a refuge, it does so at a high cost. Blake states that gaol is his home, but it also makes him sick. Homesickness is therefore not just a longing; it is also the act of return or homecoming itself. Being at home, whether inside or outside the gaol, has its drawbacks or ill effects. Indeed, for Blake home is a negative, a site of reluctant obligation – the place where ‘they can’t turn you away’. Homesickness makes him write his memoir and ultimately choose to re-offend (Blake was arrested and imprisoned again).

At Bomana prisoners claim that they learn to regard the idea of ‘going home’ as constraining. If homesickness leads them to worry about the obligations they fail to meet, it also makes them sick of feeling coerced by kinship. Sick for home and sick of home, prisoners are radicalised by their experience of detention. Being away from home allows God to appear to them (see Chapter 5); it makes radical forms of social engagement, such as the claim to live one-one (see Chapter 6), seem possible. Their loss has the potential to reconstitute sets of relations through acts of forgetting; and, by reifying what is lost into the category ‘home’, to make life outside Bomana seem suddenly open to judgment.

Despite their efforts to forget, home keeps intruding. It makes its presence known through sneezes, dreams, letters, weekend visits or earaches. The idea of homecoming dominates the thoughts of prisoners at Bomana; men and women imagine a return to civilian life. They try to anticipate the kind of reception they can expect outside the gaol. Maria, a female convict whose date of discharge was only six months away, related to me the dream she had experienced the night before:

Maria returns to her house in Port Moresby. There she sees her daughter and son-in-law working a garden. The plot is small and yields few crops. She stands at the front door and calls out, 'Lizzie, come here!' The woman keeps on working, but her husband looks up and recognises Maria. He shouts excitedly to his wife, 'Your mother has returned, she must have finished her sentence!' The two of them drop their tools and run towards her. All the people that Maria knows in the city follow them. Men and women, including the kin of her victim, eagerly shake Maria's hand and welcome her home. But Maria feels embarrassed by this greeting because she realises that everyone knows she killed a woman. The people see her shame and offer reassurance. Maria smiles and tells them, 'I thought you were cross with me, but you are happy, so I know we can live together.' She then indicates for them to sit down, to close their eyes and join her in prayer. Afterwards everyone claps hands and sings gospel songs.

In her dreaming, Maria sees herself back in Port Moresby, greeted warmly by her daughter, son-in-law and by others she knows well in the city (she is even welcomed by the kin of the
woman she killed). This dream pleased Maria, easing her fears about her own upcoming release.

Other prisoners, however, find the thought of returning home too disturbing to contemplate. Male prisoners are fond of reciting the story of a life-term convict from the Goliath region of Central province. After the conclusion of his twenty-five-year sentence, this man refused to go home. He told warders that his parents were dead and that other people in his hamlet had long ceased to think of him. Instead of returning to that place, the ex-convict preferred to remain locked up at Bomana. Eventually a compromise was found: the man agreed to be released on the promise that he would be given employment as a cook at the staff officers’ mess and accommodation within the grounds of the prison complex (where he remained during my time at Bomana). Faced with the prospect of unkind or hostile reception, I was told that some end-term convicts actually lose their minds (go long long). This is another kind of homesickness.

Leaving Bomana is an event that affects the composure of many people, not just the soon-to-be-discharged prisoner and those waiting for him or her outside the gaol, but also the state of mind of fellow inmates. A convict’s release risks upsetting the feelings of other prisoners, undermining their efforts to live as if home does not exist (when my own time to go came I felt confused – a mixture of relief at finishing my fieldwork and of guilt at leaving everyone behind). Those who are sensitive to this situation try to play down their imminent departure. In the weeks or months before discharge, they begin to consciously withdraw from the company of other prisoners and so attempt to minimise the harm caused by their release. Of course the endeavour is never completely successful; those inmates who remain at Bomana must work hard at making the discharged figure disappear, adding him or her to the list of must-be-forgotten persons.

Taussig (1992: 150) believes that for anthropologists one can take the sentiment of homesickness further. He says that when fieldworkers return to the academy, they develop longing for the time spent away and the lost powers their position in the field allowed. A second home emerges, and with its loss, accompanying pathologies. Kahn (1996: 189) observes that on her return to the United States she was surprised to find she still felt uprooted – ‘I went home and thought, talked, and wrote about Wamira. As people had predicted, I cried about it, too. I was, as Alice (a Wamiran) had warned, “homesick”’. The anthropologist longs to return or to

recover that experience in writing, to make the memories live and there find relief. But she or he discovers there is no final resolution for homesickness, no ultimate homecoming.

Even those discharged prisoners who find a friendly reception outside Bomana may be dismayed to discover that home is not everything they expected. There remains a sense that something or some place is missing. Prisoners told me that those who gain release often think back to their time in gaol, they find themselves surprised at the realisation that discharge does not necessarily bring an end to the sense of constraint. They may be reunited with kin, but at the expense of losing contact with comrades in prison. They may revel in free movement, but regret the loss of the vision of God (and the space for critique) that Bomana provided. It seems that for them too a second home appears, from which they remain displaced. That loss is registered in sneezes, dreams and letters from those left in gaol; also on the bodies of men, whenever they look down at their incised penises or view the tattoos that spread across their arms, legs and torsos. So there is no simple resolution, no return to full Society. The place known as ‘home’ is not what they remember. Those discharged pine for the home they believe they had before incarceration and for the home forced upon them at Bomana. They do not usually wish to go back, but they sicken for the version of freedom that they first imagined in prison.

Freedom

O freedom! O freedom!
The day goes and I talk about you.
The night comes and I dream about you.
You look beautiful and so pretty.
What time, which month, which day,
Which year, will I come and see you?

And I hear you singing,
Shouting, laughing and crying.
O freedom!
I stand and looks to the east, west, south and north,
But the bars surrounding me.
O freedom! O freedom!
You looks pretty.

(Henry Tiare)
Notes

1 Rapport (1997) makes the point that Malinowski's decision to conduct fieldwork in the Trobriand Islands was not entirely a free one, faced as he was with the alternative of internment as an enemy subject (during the First World War) in Australia. In a literal sense then, the Trobriand Islands were for him a kind of prison.

2 Kahn (1996: 170) records that upon her arrival the Wamirans told her: 'Someone like you should be in your own place with your family and friends, not so far away all alone.'

3 Kahn (1996: 187) says that when she returned to the United States she found a letter waiting for her from a friend in Wamira. It read: 'But when you are home again sitting in your room all alone, you will think about Wamira and cry. You will tell stories about our place to your friends and play our tapes for them. They will hear everything, but only you will really know. You will cry for Wamira. You will be homesick for Wamira. Only you have been to our place. Only you will really know.'

Glossary

The following glossary includes all Tok Pisin words that occur more than once in the text and may appear in untranslated form. For further information and etymology see Mihalic (1971).

bikboi: 'big boy'; a senior gang mate.
birua: 'enemy'.
binias man: 'business man'.
bis kanaka: 'bush man'; a person without knowledge of the way of the white men.
dak: 'dark'.
dak peles: 'dark place'.
dak rum: 'dark room'; cell cubes or screened corners.
disko meri: 'disco woman'; a woman who goes to nightclubs and has casual unpaid sex.
driman: 'dream'.
gumam: 'government'.
hap meri: 'half woman'; male prisoner who consents to anal penetration.
husman: 'men's house'.
kalabus: prison.
kalabus man (kalabus meri): male prisoner (female prisoner).
klia ples: 'clear place'; a cell without screened corners or cubes.
lait: 'light'.
las pies: the 'last place'.
lus bodi: 'loose body'; a prisoner to whom no one claims a relation.
lus tingting: 'lose thoughts'; to forget.
munn (manner): 'month man' ('month woman'); convict with less than a year to serve of his or her sentence.
patna: 'partner'.
pe: 'face'.
plies: 'place'; ground of one's ancestors.
plesman (plesmeri): 'place man' ('place woman'); person who lives in the village or hamlet of his/her ancestors.
prem: 'friend'.
raskah: 'rascal'; spectral figure of criminal.
rot meri: 'road woman'; sex worker.
sell: prison 'cell'.
stilman: 'steal man'; a thief or a man who deliberately breaks the law.
tamin beh: 'turn emotions'; to convert to Christianity.
waitman: 'white men'.