

Domestic Violence in Papua New Guinea

MONOGRAPH NO.3

LAW REFORM COMMISSION



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**DOMESTIC VIOLENCE
IN
PAPUA NEW GUINEA**

Edited by
SUSAN TOFT

Law Reform Commission of Papua New Guinea
Monograph No. 3

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For the women,
and men,
of Papua New Guinea

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PREFACE

In response to a Reference from the Minister for Justice, the Law Reform Commission has investigated the problem of domestic violence in Papua New Guinea. Two extensive surveys, one rural and the other urban, have been completed and results published in Occasional Papers Nos. 18 and 19. The survey reports contain mainly quantitative material, so the papers in this monograph, which bring a qualitative aspect to the collection and analysis of data, add depth and enable a broader perspective on the topic. The authors are all professional anthropologists, who have done extensive field-work in the country, and the Commission is indebted to them for contributing their knowledge and experience in an attempt to understand more fully the social situation surrounding the incidence of domestic violence, particularly wife-beating.

Susan Toft

Port Moresby
October 1985

NOTE

This publication is one in a group to be produced by the Papua New Guinea Law Reform Commission during 1985 and 1986 on the topics of Marriage and/or Domestic Violence. The others are:

- Occasional Paper No. 18
MARRIAGE AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN RURAL PAPUA NEW GUINEA
the results of a national rural survey.
- Occasional Paper No. 19
DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN URBAN PAPUA NEW GUINEA
mainly based on results of surveys.
- Monograph No. 4
MARRIAGE IN PAPUA NEW GUINEA
a companion to Occasional Paper No. 18 — ethnographic information from the survey villages.
- Report No. 14
DOMESTIC VIOLENCE
summarising and concluding the recent research into domestic violence, with recommendations.

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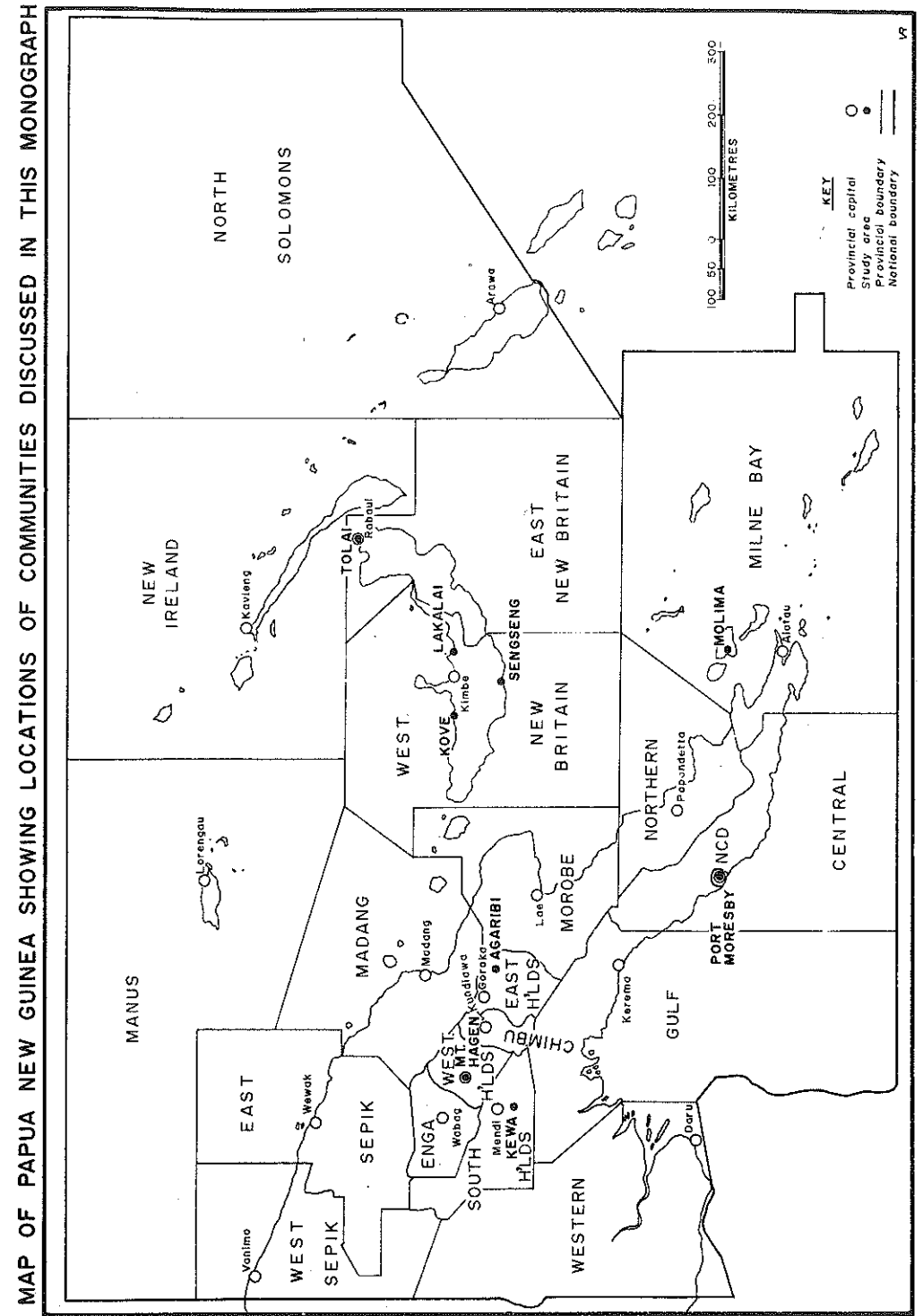
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INTRODUCTION

by

Marilyn Strathern

Introduction

Deliberations on law and order frequently bypass the subject of domestic violence. Conflict between family members is held to be a 'private' matter, something they should sort out themselves. It is a well reported phenomenon in Western countries, for instance, that even when physical assault is brought to their attention police may be reluctant to 'interfere' (as they see it). This applies especially to conflict between spouses, which may be treated as part of their sexual relations in a way that concerns them alone. Similar attitudes appear to be held in Papua New Guinea. Apart from leaving the conduct of people's sex lives alone, Papua New Guinean views also concern the authority which men hold over their wives (and to a much lesser extent, children). Furthermore, traditional assumptions about 'political' behaviour mean that domestic disputes often come to a public forum only if they can be translated into political terms — as involving conflicts of interest between men. The degree to which women can find remedy in today's courts, it follows, will depend on the extent to which such forums are seen to be part of or are separated from male politics. In certain areas it appears that village courts do provide a separate forum to which women can bring complaints, and are used as such. This is a good time at which to take stock of how the courts are thus utilised.

In this short paragraph we have moved from domestic violence as such to the issue of how domestic conflict is handled, and to women's access to remedies. The chapters which follow cover all these points. However, it is important not to adopt the easy assumptions that, one, domestic disputes are only to do with women, two, disputes involving women are only about sex, and therefore three, it is sex which leads to domestic violence, either directly or through challenges to male authority. This would perpetuate the view that domestic conflict is ultimately a private matter. Such a view is part of the problem which these chapters investigate; and they show how it is increased rather than diminished by new definitions of the nuclear family and by greater dependence of spouses on one another. There were many problems in traditional systems, to do with defining appropriate forums for the hearing of complaints: there was often a divide between the 'political' and the 'domestic' implications of a dispute. In some Papua New Guinean societies women are

still at a disadvantage because they do not participate in political life. But they suffer a new kind of disadvantage where changing forms of family life place more, not less, stress on the conjugal relationship, in tandem with traditional ideas about male control in this sphere.

These chapters emphasise some of the contradictions in modern family life. In spite of the development of judicial institutions to which women as well as men have access, and despite strong Christian and general educational teaching about companionate marriage and the respect persons should have for one another, violence between the sexes persists. No doubt a comparative study would show patterns of domestic violence in urban situations moving towards those sadly familiar in Western family life. At the same time there are particular factors at work in Papua New Guinea, which is why these papers consider both 'traditional' and less 'traditional' forms of relationships. A similar collection of papers compiled for traditional English society, for instance, could not avoid the topic of child abuse. Casual assault on children hardly appears in these pages. Instead they focus on relations between adult men and women, particularly husbands and wives.

Indeed, a principal reason for the Law Reform Commission's interest in domestic violence is precisely because this is an area which involves conflict between men and women, and the behaviour and treatment of women needs attention in its own right. Often conflicts involving women are dismissed as 'small troubles', as trivial and insignificant. But 'hiding' such conflicts, relegating them to a domestic or private sphere, is part of the way in which they are managed. This classification should not be taken at face value. Usually such a classification is offered by men, and usually it is women who find their affairs thus trivialized. It is important to go beyond this classification and consider exactly where women stand in judicial matters in general. As we shall see, the different kinds of access which the sexes have to particular remedies is directly connected to the question of violence within domestic relationships.

Chapters One to Four: VIOLENCE BETWEEN MEN AND WOMEN

Toft's opening chapter gets us at once to the heart of domestic violence — to the simple fact that it is generally women who are victims of physical assault from men, rather than the other way round, and that of all domestic relations it is the marital relationship which provokes violence. From an index of how often husbands are reported as 'hitting' wives, the paper moves to a comparison between two cases where it becomes clear that physical assault shades off into other forms of harassment.

It is important to realise that this violence on the husband's part does not usually arise from his trying to get rid of the wife but from his trying to sustain the relationship. The point is that it must be a relationship in which he is seen to be in control. Husbands want, Toft observes, complete submission from their wives. The harassment which the women suffer is compounded by the

fact that the urban and 'Westernised' context for their relationship fails to provide the kinds of controls on the husband's behaviour which might have been expected in rural society. The wife cannot effectively mobilise kin support, yet when she goes beyond the family to outside agencies, this is a provocation to more violence. The question of kin support is not simply a question of having kinsmen nearby — in fact, we see the help given by her kin to one of the women in Toft's cases. Rather it is a question of the extent to which kin relations are becoming redefined as simply a matter of personal 'family' relationships, and are drained of the significance they had for the conduct of political and social life in general in traditional Papua New Guinea society. This leads to something else which is absent in the urban situation.

Removed from the interests and politics of village or clan life, these marital relationships come to be conducted in something of a vacuum. What has gone are definitions of justiciable injury. General exhortations about proper marital conduct (from the Church and other bodies) are no substitute for the kinds of traditional controls embedded in specific expectations about people's reactions to specific acts. There were specific ideas about what constituted an injury and about what type of violence was justified and what was not. And these ideas affected men quite as much as women.

I want to stress the sense in which husbands, quite as much as wives, may thus be at a new disadvantage in urban situations, for some of the difficulties they face will lie behind the violence they perpetrate. It is common to regard assault against wives (or children) as a substitute outlet for men's frustrations in the world at large, where they may be made to feel inferior in employment or other situations. But I think there is something else going on in these cases, to do with the way injury is perceived. Removed from what, by way of shorthand, one may call its community context in rural/traditional society, the urban marriage is protected from the kinds of political conflicts which also have repercussions on relations between husbands and wives. This traditional source of tension has been replaced by problems to do with urban living itself, with employment prospects, status, and so on. The unhappy husband might take things out on his wife in either case. But one difference is that in the former situation he will take it out on his wife partly because of *her* connections to the people with whom he has a quarrel, whereas in the latter situation she may well have nothing to do with the cause of the trouble but simply present herself as a target near at hand. One does not wish to entertain a dubious psychology here, but one can surmise this will contribute to how husbands think about the injury wives do to them.

The immediate cause of assault is invariably the husband's feeling that he has been injured in some way by his wife. Traditionally, the sense of injury might be as vague as a question of 'disloyalty'. But whether this was sufficient grounds for the husband's violence, or whether the wife offered other provocations, in a community context he could expect support for as well as criticism of his reactions. People 'knew' when they had been injured, so to speak. In these urban cases, however, the sense of injury seems to turn on the fact of submission as such. And anything can feed into the husband's sense of

injury on this score. There are no limits to what he might take offence at, and in this sense he is as much without support as she is. There are unlikely to be interested parties who can help adjudicate on the spouse's behaviour. Support comes only in the guise of the generalised sexism of male colleagues who put a value on the submission of wives for its own sake.

Men thus find themselves in a context where conventions about appropriate grounds for complaint (what is properly justiciable) are eroded or non-existent. There is no arena for defining what constitutes an injury to themselves. Thus, in addition to new pressures on the marital relationship from outside there may also be greater ambiguity from within: perhaps some of the suspicion which Toft reports indicates the anxieties of persons who do not know whether they have been injured or not. Behind the appalling harassment inflicted on the two wives may be the husbands' desperation to 'test', to define what injuries have been done to themselves on criteria of which they alone are the judge.

It is important, therefore, to be reminded in Chapter Two of a 'traditional' situation where submission as such was demanded of wives. Bradley documents Tolai attitudes to the kind of obedience exacted from women. Tolai men can draw on a long tradition of punitive behaviour; indeed Bradley argues that men's violence towards women takes an established form. Male violence is coercive, a matter of men exercising control, whereas on a woman's part it appears defensive or demonstrative. Here is a society in which male violence is given some justification: it is legitimated by men's general domination over women and in the particular case of husbands by the bride-price¹ they give for their wives. Bradley makes the important observation, however, that though violence is expected, even tolerated in principle, by women, that does not mean that women do not mind being beaten. On the contrary, one may note from her figures (Table 6) the number of female respondents who thought that wives should react in some way or other to being hit.

It appears to have been the case, then, that Tolai husbands always exercised absolute rights to chastise their wives — and wives could expect little support from their kin. For they were tied to their husband in a personal way, owing him a range of services but not of course providing him with heirs. In marriage, the wife was subordinate; the question is what place marriage occupied in social life in general. As was typical of matrilineal systems in this region, the lineage held itself aloof from the intimacy of marriage, and brothers did not concern themselves with their sister's sexual affairs. They did have an interest in her children, which both drove a wedge between the joint concerns of husband and wife and also sustained the wife in a different, if limited, social context as matrilineage sister. As Bradley writes, traditionally the conjugal relationship and the nuclear family were less important than the sibling bond and the matrilineal descent group. This has changed.

In modern Tolai society, the conjugal relationship has become magnified in significance as one of the effects of the nucleation of Tolai family life. This has accompanied explicit teaching promoting respect and companionship within

marriage, and a condemnation of violence. Whether or not the couple deliberately espouse a 'conjugal' ethos, shifts in inheritance have also created new interests between the spouses. One may therefore ask why husbands' physical assault on their wives persists. Bradley's answer is very simple: all the changes have enhanced and supported the basic position from which men always felt it proper to exert punitive control: his authority as family head. The underlying 'cause' of violence, as she concludes, is thus as it always was: the belief that it is a man's right to control his wife. But what has changed of course is the scope of the marital relationship. In relationships between men and women, it is these days more, not less, important.

Bradley's suggestion that there should be reform of the bride-price system (since bride-price is regarded by Tolai as legitimating men's control over their wives) is overshadowed, then, by a much larger issue: the current legitimization of the notion that husbands are heads of households. This has been produced by society-wide changes in forms of property holding, income and wage earning, and other political-economic factors. The personal subordination of Tolai wives has become translated into (a new) economic dependency, and the one relationship from which women might need relief is more entrenched than ever. If bride-price reform dislodges this entrenchment, it is to be welcomed.

Chowning's chapter takes us out of urban or peri-urban society. It also takes us away from marital violence alone — Kove women are beaten by fathers, brothers, sons, cousins and kin in general. At the same time women may also act with aggression, assaulting mothers, daughters, sisters and co-wives, but only rarely husbands. In spite of this long list, it is clear that people in general pass judgement on what could be considered justified provocation for violence. Thus a husband could expect support in certain circumstances. As in Tolai, a wife's talk can be interpreted as aggressive, so that her kin might approve a beating if the wife talks too much. Talk, neglect of duties towards husband's kin, and other acts, are thus classified as specific injuries the husband may suffer. At the same time, the wife's kin are also concerned with excessive or undeserved retaliation. The husband may expect criticism or attack from her kin if he is too harsh; there are conventions here, though Chowning reminds us that conventions can always be flouted.

Like Tolai, Kove men's justification for domestic violence is supported by general claims of superiority on the part of men over women. It is assumed that men will show dominance through violence, and women's displays of independence may enrage them. It is important to note, however, that Kove do not trivialize women's violence. When a woman destroys household goods or her husband's possessions, she is seen as assaulting him. It remains the case, however, that women more than men are likely to suffer bodily injury at the hands of the opposite sex.

However, the conjugal relationship is far from isolated — on the contrary it suffers, one might say, from being an object of interest from the kin on each side. Chowning suggests that much of the aggression which men display as husbands they are also displaying as brothers-in-law. Men are under perpetual obligation to send wealth to their wife's kin, while men's 'control' of both

their wives and sisters is intimately bound up with the need to control supplies of this wealth. Difficulties arise in marriage both from failure to make exchange with the wife's kin and from problems on the wife's/sister's own part in channelling wealth. A woman has to assist both her husband and brother. If anything, pressures here have increased rather than decreased in recent years. Marriage payments themselves have become larger and more frequent, and Chowning speculates more violence may be a result, in so far as shell money is obtained through women and men must exert their control in obtaining access to it. Whether overall there is more or less domestic violence now than in the past is hard to say. Some Kove men seem to think that they are individually more free than their ancestors to act with aggression, while at the same time the institutions which inflicted brutal punishment on women for ritual offences and the like have disappeared. Rather than 'more' or 'less' violence perhaps one should talk of its de-institutionalisation. This would square with the new definition of violence itself as offensive behaviour. Access to the courts has helped implement this view. Kove nowadays condemn serious violence between spouses in general terms where before any retaliation would have been left to particular in-laws to pursue, or not, depending on circumstances.

To an outsider, it might seem unbalanced for Kove and Tolai men to react with physical assault simply because of the amount of talking their wives do. 'Talking back' in the first case history in Chapter One drew violence from the husband and verbal abuse is also provocative in Kewa, Chapter Four. Josephides' analysis of Kewa politics shows us in addition a male situation in which words may indeed cause injury and be interpreted as aggressive, and thus on a continuum with the violence to which they lead. In Kewa, public speech making, including in the context of dispute settlement, is a male prerogative, a factor which profoundly influences the handling of conflicts between men and women. Men themselves may put talk on a par with fighting. Holding courts at which parties to a dispute 'talk' may thus become assimilated to the kinds of political confrontations which characterise men's dealings with other men in general. Men 'exchange' talk with one another, whereas between the sexes there can be no equal exchange. Josephides indicates that village courts in Kewa also operate on this political model.

As in Kove, there is no clear evidence that violence towards women has increased since contact, though there seems no evidence that within the family it has decreased either. The important link between this chapter and the previous three concerns the manner in which marital conflict is insulated from or contextualised by other social relations. In a completely urban situation (Chapter One) one encounters the assumptions of privacy, people keeping out of the domestic affairs of others. A similar notion in both Tolai (Chapter Two) and Kove (Chapter Three) carries specific connotations: the exclusiveness of the marital relationship is defined in respect of other relationships with kin who have their own interests in the spouse's welfare. Chapter Four considers another set of issues for Kewa: the relationship of disputes to the conduct of political life in general.

The public settlement of disputes contributes towards men's political sense of themselves. Kewa women are at a disadvantage because they have no ready access to this forum, and thus cannot readily politicise their grievances. This does not stop them from trying to do so, because there is no other way to get a hearing. Josephides suggests that their general strategy to equalise male-female relations includes bringing the domestic into the political. For, on their part, men try to relegate women's grievances to 'domestic' matters. From the men's point of view, domestic violence can be classified as something which does not concern their political interests. If it is to be handled in public at all, then it must be translated into an offence which touches on these interests. Thus a dispute between a husband and wife can be turned into a political matter, and given public airing, if it is seen to concern the interests of men on either side. This state of affairs the author connects to the inequality inherent in the marital relationship, ultimately an economic matter concerning control of productive resources, by contrast with the formal 'equality' of men who co-operate and compete with one another in the politics they create for themselves. Formal equality means that men can retaliate in like kind: they meet violence with reciprocal violence, or can match an injury with wealth. But relations between the sexes — between husband and wife or brother and sister — are 'hierarchical'. Thus although either sex may act aggressively towards the other, the meaning put on their violence is not the same. They cannot exchange blows of equal significance.

A result is that for as long as marital conflicts are regarded as concerning the man and woman alone, they have little political currency. Thus violence in marriage appears as punishment (male) or protest (female). As in Tolai, whereas the husband's violence is interpreted as an act of domination, the wife's violence, even when she initiates it, is seen as defensive. Consequently, men are able to exert a power women are not, if for nothing else than the reason that when they act violently women are not seen as appropriating men's control but as impotently challenging it.

However, this chapter encourages us to stand back from the issues of women's subordination and note that it is not simply women's grievances which cannot be politicised, but domestic troubles as such. Men have domestic grievances quite as much as women. But Kewa men have cut *themselves* off from any effective public forum for airing their domestic problems: they subscribe to an ideology which demands that they settle matters privately, and through coercion if need be. They also pride themselves on autonomy and self-sufficiency in domestic life. Thus, whereas women externalise their domestic grievances, men keep them internal. This sets the scene for men to regard problems in their domestic relationships as assaults on their ability to control their own affairs. To such assault, they may react with violence.

Chapters Five and Six: REMEDIES, AND THE USE OF COURTS

How disputes are classified has implications for how they are settled, and the different way in which issues are settled also comprises a classification of

sorts. It is necessary therefore to pay attention to kinds of remedies to which people have access, and to how they evaluate particular conflicts in relation to them. The next two chapters deal with the use made of courts. Westermarck documents the whole range of cases likely to be brought to the village court in one part of the Eastern Highlands, while Scaglione and Whittingham draw on a nation-wide survey of sex-related offences. Both of them put domestic violence into a broad judicial context.

It is important to remember that while any judicial system rests on the principle that conflicts require regulation, in the separate context of ongoing relations between family members, someone who causes trouble may be trying to 'settle' or seek remedy for what he or she regards as a prior injury. Thus, while domestic violence is a source of conflict which requires regulation, it may also (as Bradley observed) be regarded by the persons concerned as a result of other conflicts, an effect of, rather than a cause of, other problems. Wife-beating may be the husband's remedy for what he perceives as disobedience. One must look, therefore, not simply at the quarrel or provocation which leads to violence, but to how this kind of reaction to a perceived domestic injury fits in with other reactions. What happens, for instance, to the conflicts which do not erupt in violence?

There are always at least two stages in the resolution of domestic disputes. The first is the decision whether or not to seek a public forum at all; the second is the decision as to which kind of public forum would be appropriate. As far as the second is concerned, Westermarck describes how Agarabi classify issues into 'big' and 'little' ones, for this determines whether the prospective litigants will seek out the village court or turn to the informal mediation of moots. Currently there seems a strong preference for the former in a whole range of matters. One may note a striking feature of the figures he produces from the court records. Although more than half the complaints overall are brought by men, Table 3 shows that out of 94 trials and reports concerning both sexes, fully 83 (88%) are brought by women against men and not the other way round. The author comments on the freedom with which Agarabi women feel they can approach the village court when they are unable to assert themselves in other public forums. One may compare here the way Kewa women take every opportunity to externalise domestic conflicts. Undoubtedly the fact that the courts are known to discourage violence in general is a factor in the reactions of Agarabi women. At the same time, women's ability to bring complaints to full trial (rather than report) continues to rest on how seriously men, in this case the magistrates, take the issue. Thus, whereas almost all rape and assault cases lead to trial, only half the 'marriage' cases do.

Let us turn to the more ambiguous matter of how domestic disputes become publicized in the first place. One of the arguments of Chapter Five is that the use of public forums must be considered in the light of other ways of handling issues. Village court officials hold that family and kinship matters should be settled by people themselves. No doubt they have in mind the closeness of such ties and the kinship obligation to be concerned for one another's welfare. What may be assumed for blood relatives may of course be more open to negotiation between spouses and in-laws. Nevertheless, the court figures give

indirect evidence that men do settle problems by other means: they are not the ones who bring family and marriage disputes to court. Westermarck comments that the way in which the courts respond to conflict allows disputants a flexible mix of strategies for handling their grievances. I return to a point already made: that violence can be seen as one such strategy when things are settled 'at home'. When court officials say 'you can straighten it out yourselves', they will not only uphold the values of kinship amity, but also those values which support a husband's right to chastise his wife.

Scaglione and Whittingham's survey (Chapter Six) confirms this pattern on a national scale. They analyse village conflict cases in respect of a wide range of remedy agents. Table 4 shows that out of cases brought into the open, roughly half are brought by men against other men, while out of the 144 cases concerning both sexes, fully 101 (70%) are brought by women against men. As the authors point out, cases recorded as between men will also subsume conflicts with women — as when a man converts a complaint about bride-price into a dispute with his in-laws, and *vice versa*. Their category of 'sex-related' offences thus includes adultery, which is frequently interpreted as an assault on the cuckolded husband.

They make two interesting observations about women in court. First, they regard the high incidence of women bringing along cases to the village courts or outside agents as an index of their failure to gain attention in informal public forums. When women act in concert with men as plaintiffs, they are more likely to be successful in the matter. Second, sex-related cases are more likely to involve physical assault than other delicts, this itself being a factor in their coming to the notice of the village courts. The authors suggest it is an index of their seriousness. But one may adapt the previous argument they make to this context as well. Presumably all husband-wife disputes come under the heading of sex-related; this means that women find it difficult to use informal methods against their husbands, or to get a hearing at the community level. They do have recourse to outside agents, but will be most effective here when a degree of violence has been reached. One must not exaggerate, however, since much of the violence in sex-related cases occurs over adultery, and is not necessarily between the sexes as such.

This chapter shows the important role which outside or introduced agents (including the village courts) play in providing remedies for women beyond the traditional milieu of male politics. Although women do not seem to be receiving equal legal treatment with men in the local level or informal political arena, they make good use of such agents. One should find it worrying, however, that men do not regard these new forums as viable sources of remedy for domestic conflict.

Chapters Seven and Eight: NEW FORMS OF DOMESTIC AND POLITICAL VIOLENCE

At first sight, these two chapters appear to introduce some unrelated issues. In fact they provide a significant commentary on how men seek remedies.

Strathern addresses a form of intersexual conflict that is non-domestic in so far as the relationship between the man and woman involved has been repudiated or is repudiated in the offence itself. In Hagen, as elsewhere in the Highlands, rape as a form of violence was a traditional aggressive act. In the past it was perpetrated occasionally against women who did not settle down in stable marriages, or who for some reason had been abandoned by kin or spouse. Relations of war, however, were by far the most significant cause for rape. Other men were attacked through attacks on their wives or sisters. Political vengeance 'justified' the most outrageous assaults.

Horrific as the incidents are reported here, they are no more horrific than incidents of war. What makes them disturbing, and Strathern refers to them as sadistic and pathological, is that they cannot be justified by any appeal to group interests or by a context of military aggression in general. There is no evidence that the targets of aggression were other men: the social targets as well as the victims of assault were the women themselves. But even here there is no attempt to justify the acts — the women are not made out to have injured the rapist or as being blameworthy in some other way. The stories are presented in terms of the men's casual whim; indeed, the absence of provocation is stressed by the story-tellers. Now military or moralistic justifications must make little difference to the sufferings of victim; but they are likely to make a difference to the incidence of attacks. If, as the circulation of these stories suggests, men simply become accustomed to thinking of women as in themselves appropriate objects of their violence, then women face a new danger.

There was, as far as one can tell, always some value put on Hagen men who 'got away' with outrageous behaviour. This is another element stressed in these stories, along with the insistence that otherwise the perpetrators of violence are quite ordinary people. Paradoxically, traditional warfare which provided pretexts for such cruelty in the past also provided some sanction against casual aggression. Unless a woman were destitute of all ties, there could be no attack of this order which would not have political implications — whether or not the men involved took action to see the affair through. One of these modern cases shows the aggressor handing himself over to the police to escape vengeance from the victim's relatives. The penalty imposed by the courts is weighed up against other repercussions: taking refuge in the court process here allowed him to get away with his deed as far as significant local relationships were concerned.

In Chapter Eight, Schiltz deliberately questions the relationship between new forms of violence and institutions of the state. His account of gangs in Port Moresby deals with all-male violence. In so far as these urban rascals are concerned to pursue their own particular interests against all-comers, there is continuity here with traditional politics. Attacks on women are part and parcel of their 'war' against the world. Unlike the Hagen incidents, there are no priorities between the rapists and the women they assault. The rascals are not repudiating these women in any way, let alone seeking any remedy or solution in a relationship with them. Moreover the social standing of the women seems

relevant only in gross ethnic or status terms. This is a form of 'political' violence in which the rascals promote their interests as they see them, female victims simply being instruments of their aggression.

Among the interests they sustain is the ability to attack anyone anywhere, and successful rapes are evidence of this. The rascals seem to be promoting three sets of self-definitions. One, they are male, and in that sense all women are potential victims; two, they are poor and therefore justified in committing outrage against the wealthy; three, they are against the state, and Schiltz comments on the indigenous idiom of warfare. Assaults on women are as much an instrument of their aggression under the last two heads as under the first. As Strathern intimates for Hagen, however, there is also a disturbing element of style or 'fashion' in the way sexual violence is taken for granted.

The analysis Schiltz offers contrasts the hierarchical values of the state with the rascals' assertions of equality in confrontation. Because they do not accept the hierarchical premise, the rascals are not 'afraid' to counter police violence with their own violence. The Task Force which did appeal to egalitarianism failed, all the same, to appreciate the political impetus of the gangs.

Sympathise as one might wish to do with the uprooted and unemployed, one cannot help remarking in the light of the preceding chapters, that we have here another instance of men creating political arenas for themselves. One would like to know how uprooted and unemployed women cope, and sustain their sense of identity. Unfortunately, however, it is unlikely that any lessons could be learned from them. As relations between the sexes stand, although women might have motives in politicising domestic conflicts, one cannot see that men would want to domesticise these particular political confrontations — and it certainly would not be desirable if it leads to men simply taking things out on their women folk in the manner described in the first chapter. Together, the first and last chapters offer a contrasting commentary on the different ways in which men respond to urban pressures. I press home the point that male violence against women must be understood in relation to men's access to remedy for their own problems. Cultural definitions of males as having to display their dominance can be counted among their problems.

Summary

The rubric under which these studies were done covered any form of physical assault among family members. Violence between husbands and wives turned out to be a principal focus. The following summarises some of the points raised in this book.

- 1 Toft and Bradley both underline the fact that domestic violence is a gender-related offence. Within the framework of marital conflict, it is men who assault their wives with violence rather than vice versa.
- 2 An interesting question is raised of why such conflict should be classified as

'domestic'. Intersexual violence must in fact be put into the general context of men's and women's dealings with one another. Chowning and Josephides do this for two largely rural Papua New Guinean societies. Domestic issues concerning men alone are handled within the privacy of close kin relations; it is unusual if they erupt. Between men and women, however, public eruptions are common but may be regarded as trivial or a nuisance — so that disputes are classified as 'domestic' matters which have been dragged into the open. However, women may have a specific interest in thus externalising domestic matters.

3 Here we encounter an interesting phenomenon, as the chapters by Westermarck and by Scaglione and Whittingham underline. Women tend to bring men to court, and not the other way round. Men tend to litigate with other men, on non-domestic matters. Indeed for some societies at least one can say that when women bring men to court then the conflict may be classed as a domestic one; when men bring other men to court, this introduces a political element into their disputations. What is taken as 'domestic conflict', then, is partly a result of how it is brought to public notice.

4 Within the husband-wife relationship, women's subordination to men's control was particularly marked in some societies. It was partly an aspect of women's exclusion from political life, including traditional dispute settlement forums, that they were subject to (physical) chastisement at home. Where a man would 'suffer' by having to pay compensation or being attacked in war, a woman might 'suffer' at the hands of her husband or male relatives.

5 In spite of the success of introduced courts and other agents for affording a forum in which women can air their grievances, it seems that *men* do not see the public forum of courts as appropriate for their own 'domestic' problems. Whereas men may litigate with a range of male social others, they are likely to get into conflict only with women with whom they have some specific tie, so that conflicts with women may be subsumed under relationships of kinship or affinity (with relatives-in-law). When men are faced with such difficulties in their relations with wives or female kin they tend to do one of two things: (a) They may turn it into a 'political' conflict, that is, interpret the relationship with the woman in question — a wife, a sister — in terms of relationships with other men — her lover, an in-law; or (b) they may try to solve the matter in an immediate way by asserting their 'control' over the woman, so that their perspective 'wins'. Violence is a means to this end.

6 Where women are intermediaries between sets of in-laws, men might in turn convert 'political' issues into 'domestic' ones by blaming or punishing the women concerned. The marital relationship is thus vulnerable to disputes originating outside it. Contemporary marriages, especially in urban or peri-urban settings, have acquired a further vulnerability in so far as increasing emphasis is given to the nuclear family.

7 Not only do wives face new dependencies on their husbands, the husband's position as a household head in control of his family is nowadays enhanced at the expense of other relations between men and women. This brings a new reason for wife-beating.

8 Violence inflicted on women must be understood in relation to how men perceive injury done to them. A contributing factor in urban contexts might be reduced opportunities for men to turn disputes with their wives into any political currency. Something of a modern anomie is reported by Strathern, by contrast with the politicised and organised violence to be found in the all-male gangs described by Schiltz.

Domestic violence does not simply constitute a class of offences. It also constitutes a class of reactions, and is part of the way people respond to and seek remedy for conflict. We shall not understand the prevailing victimisation of women at men's hands without understanding not only the various courses of action open to men but also how they select certain methods of coping with problems over others. There is nothing special about Papua New Guinea here. What is special are the particular connotations put on domestic relations — what family and household relations mean. Traditionally relations of domestic kinship carried many more social functions than the attenuated nuclear families of the west. The kinds of controls the sexes had, or did not have, over each other were an aspect of the productive and property relations entailed in the household, and of the political relations set up by marriage. This created its own problems for the husband-wife pair in particular. Removed from this social context, as in the towns, pressures take a much more personal form. Unfortunately they are none the less real for that.

Editorial Note

¹ **bride-price**: commonly referred to in anthropological texts as bridewealth; the term is used in this publication because it is the conventional one throughout Papua New Guinea to describe objects and money given to a girl's family in exchange for her hand in marriage. The bride-price symbolises the transfer or exchange of rights over a woman from her own family to her husband's.

CHAPTER ONE

MARITAL VIOLENCE IN PORT MORESBY: TWO URBAN CASE STUDIES

by

Susan Toft

Surveys into domestic violence conducted by the Papua New Guinea Law Reform Commission show that 67% of rural women and 56% of urban women have been hit by their husbands (though not necessarily with regularity) (Toft and Bonnell, 1985; Toft, ed. 1986). Whilst the surveys recorded the incidence of marital violence and its stated causes, detailed case studies enable a deeper examination and better understanding of why the violence occurs. This article seeks to identify causes of marital violence in urban Papua New Guinea through a close examination of two case studies.

The two cases presented here are both true, only the names are fictitious. It is difficult to say that they are typical of the violent relationships that exist between many spouses in urban Papua New Guinea today because each case has its own characteristics which make it unique. They are certainly atypical in that both women displayed great determination in attempts to end a bad situation by eventually taking their problem into the public arena to seek help from the courts; usually when a man hits his wife, it is seen by the general public as a personal matter, one which should be kept in the home. There are similarities between the two cases, however, which are not atypical of other such relationships and which make them interesting to examine.

Rose and John's Story

Rose was born in 1957, the fourth in, what is for Papua New Guinea today, an average size family of six children (two boys and four girls). Her mother had completed primary school and her father, also literate, worked as a Catholic catechist. His work took the family away from their home area and Rose was born in another province. In as much as she grew up away from extended family ties in her village, she did not have a typical traditional upbringing, but her early years were spent in rural villages. She completed high school and went to a secretarial college in another provincial capital for two years in 1973

and 1974, after which she was employed as a secretary in a government department in the same town. Quite early in her time at the college she met John. He is from her home province but not from her own ethnic group. They established a *de facto* marriage relationship when, in 1977, she became pregnant and began to live with him.

Her parents were particularly upset by her pregnancy. They had in fact already accepted half the bride-price payment for Rose from the family of a young man in their home village. Rose and the young man had met during a holiday period at home and both families had been eager to arrange a marriage between them. He had completed high school and was working in the provincial centre. The proposed marriage was now, however, abandoned and the boy's aggrieved parents demanded repayment of the bride-price.

From the time they lived together, Rose was being hit regularly by John. It was a weekly event, often severe enough for her to require medical attention. She says the main reason for the beatings was his jealousy of her absentee fiancé and of her working situation among other men, with whom he accused her of flirting. He also accused her, unjustly she says, of not fulfilling household duties. The beatings were all after he had been drinking alcohol and were associated, she believes, with peer group pressure. This pattern of behaviour is not uncommon in urban areas today. Men tend to mix, as they would traditionally, among themselves. They socialise in groups while the women stay at home, and a man who appears to be tied to his wife's apron strings is teased or ridiculed. If a car with a few friends called for John to go out drinking, as often happened, he was under strong social pressure to comply.

In January 1978 John moved to another provincial centre to take up a new post. Rose joined him five months later, after the birth of their first child. Four months after that, and following several heavy beatings, Rose, on her own initiative and without her husband's knowledge, bought herself a ticket to go home to her parents. Very few Papua New Guinean women would have either the financial or personal resources to do this unaided.

Initially her parents encouraged her to stay with them and to end her relationship with John. But after two or three weeks a letter came from John to one of Rose's brothers. It contained threats, instructions that Rose should be returned, and arrangements for his payment of her air fare. Her family's attitude then changed. They were afraid that John would attack them through magic if they kept Rose with them. He is from an area not too distant from their own which is renowned for strong sorcery. So, after an absence of only five weeks, Rose and the baby returned to John.

By the end of that year, 1978, John decided to move to the capital city Port Moresby and by the end of 1979 he was in his second job there as a clerk in a hotel. Their second child was born in 1980, and in 1982 John paid bride-price to Rose's parents. This formalised their marriage and the status of the children. Rose's father was not optimistic about the durability of the relationship, however, and did a most unusual thing. He did not distribute the wealth among the extended family, but banked the mainly cash elements of

this exchange, saying that if Rose ever wanted to end the marriage it could easily be returned.

Throughout periods of employment, John has contributed his pay to help Rose maintain the family, and she does not criticise him for misuse of money. The weekly beatings continued though, usually on Saturday nights when he had been 'out with the boys'.

In the middle of 1983, when Rose was eight months pregnant with their third child, John began to complain about severe headaches and stopped going to work. They heard of a special 'medicine man' in one of the distant provincial capitals. Rose paid for his ticket out of her earnings and John left for two weeks in search of treatment. A longer period was not possible because he was needed to look after their two children whilst she delivered the third.

John in fact stayed away for two months, returning well after the birth of the baby. Rose heard gossip that his prolonged absence was because he was having an affair, but she did not know whether to believe it. She had discovered, however, that he had been sacked from his hotel job because he had been found using one of the rooms with a woman. She realised the headaches had been a phoney excuse for not going to work after his sudden dismissal and that the journey for treatment had not really been necessary.

The day after his return he complained about pain in his bladder. She was suspicious, so refused him sex, for which she received a beating. The next day she gave him the money for medical treatment and later, through her own ingenuity, she discovered that he had been diagnosed as having a venereal disease. In due course Rose confronted John with the knowledge she had collected. He reacted by beating her heavily and evicting her from their home, telling her that he never wanted to see her again as he was planning to marry someone else.

She took refuge with a woman from her home village who luckily had adequate accommodation, and a period of separation began during which care of the children was a central issue. Both parents wanted them and there was a great deal of harassment from John at this time. Rose took herself to the Public Solicitor and in due course a case was brought before the National Court which resulted in Rose being given custody of the children.

Pressure was brought to bear on Rose from three directions. Firstly John's relatives with whom she had lived and socialised most in Port Moresby abused her for taking marital problems to a high court. The women told her she was arrogant. They said that she suffered at the hands of her husband no more than the average woman and asked why she thought she was so different that she had to go to court. They attended the court hearing in numbers and abused her loudly and publicly outside the court after the decision in her favour, and they were generally aggressive if they met her about town. A point to be mentioned here is that, having paid bride-price, traditionally a father could have been seen as rightful custodian of the children in the event of divorce, but not if he was considered to be at fault.

A second source of pressure was from John, who was aggressive before the court case but much more so after it. He made harassing phone calls to her

office and would constantly come to the house where she and the children stayed, beat her, damage property (the building, but he also, for instance, on one occasion burnt all her clothes) and generally made a nuisance of himself. The situation became intolerable. Rose was arriving at work beaten up, and on more than one occasion the office staff had to find clothes for her, because she was so dishevelled and had nothing to wear except a *laplap* (piece of cloth tied around her). She went to work because she was afraid of losing her job, and therefore her economic independence, but also because she had nowhere else to go for shelter and support. After several weeks this led to a formal court order restricting his access to her premises. There then followed an uneasy truce, during which Rose allowed him to visit the children, on condition his behaviour was acceptable.

Another incident towards the end of 1983, for which she cannot actually blame any individual, involved a phone call to say her mother had died and she was needed at home. Whether it was thought she would not take the children with her is speculation, but with borrowed money she did manage to take them, and arrived to find the story was false, her mother was alive. She returned to Port Moresby after about five weeks, mainly because of her job, and she brought the children with her fearing they would not be properly fed and cared for in the village.

A third source of pressure was from her own family, during her visit and by letters and phone calls afterwards. They think it will be difficult for her to manage alone. She is, in fact, unusually self-sufficient and disagrees with this, but she feels the weight of pressure from them. Maybe her brothers fear she will eventually make demands on them. They have certainly reminded her of possible recrimination by magic. As mentioned above, Rose's family are afraid that if she pushes him far enough John may take his revenge on one of their members at home in the village.

Throughout this period Rose struggled to fulfil her job. She maintained the children entirely herself because at the time she was granted custody John was unemployed and therefore no maintenance grant had been imposed. Gradually John calmed down, so that by mid-1984 he suggested that they should try to reopen their marriage. He said he realised she had defeated him and that he had been wrong in 'listening to too much talk' from his relatives and friends about 'their problem'. She told him he showed no respect for her; she would not change her ideas or behaviour; he could change if he wanted to, but she would not.

One day he rang her in the office and asked if he could go to her friend's house, where she stayed, to collect some shoes he said he had left on his last visit (he had arrived with them on and left barefoot). She arranged for him to have access to the house that lunch time and when she arrived home after work she found that he had brought a vehicle and removed all her and the children's belongings to a house he had been newly allocated with a recently acquired job. He had hung her curtains and tried to make the place like home. She was obliged to stay that night because of the problems of returning, after dark and with the children, to her old house, empty of their belongings. And Rose

stayed on there, initially tentatively, but when she saw John was making a genuine effort to co-operate she settled down.

Unfortunately John's new mood only lasted about four months. The first time he hit her after that was to admonish her for shaming him through the court. Now, a year later, he is hitting her twice a week. She is often forced to seek medical attention and take time off work. Recently she had stitches above an eye and could not eat for two days because of a swollen neck and throat after a beating. She says their arguments often start over household responsibilities. He accuses her of not doing his laundry or cooking his food according to his requirements, then she criticises him for spending his time with friends, not being an attentive father and not being prepared to help her with domestic necessities, such as going to the market and carrying back food, when she has a full-time job in addition to running the home. He then tells her she should not 'talk back' at him, and the quarrel escalates. Her full salary is spent on domestic requirements but nowadays only half of John's pay goes towards the home, the other half being for his social activities with friends, mainly at weekends when he is hardly at home. So despite the fact that he will not help in the house he benefits from the contribution made by her salary.

He has also reverted to phoning her constantly at work, sometimes every half hour, to make sure she is not sneaking out. He is, without justification, jealous. He presumably knows that she is unhappy and therefore suspects that she may be casting her net elsewhere.

Rose is now seriously considering reviving her court action. She says, "He can't change. Some men are like that". If she could only find accommodation for herself and the children she would seek custody of the children and then probably move back to her parents in the village, although their fear of John's threat of magic is still very real.

Margaret and David's Story

Margaret was born in Port Moresby, the capital city of Papua New Guinea, where her father was a government employee. Her mother had left their home village in a distant province to join him, and all the children, seven boys and two girls, were born there except for the first one. So in the early years Margaret grew up in the capital and just returned to her 'home' province for visits when her father went on leave. When she was in her teens, however, her father died and her mother returned with the children to their province where Margaret completed high school. The family is Catholic. She did well at school and went to university when she was nineteen, at the beginning of 1974, where she met David.

David, seven years older than Margaret, is from the same home province as she, but is from a different language group. Like Margaret his family is Catholic and his father was a government employee. He was a bright child and was sent through the church to high school in Australia; he returned to Papua New Guinea for university and was well into his degree when he met Margaret.

Margaret became pregnant in June the year of their meeting and this led them to plan marriage. However, one Sunday at the end of November when they were travelling together in his car, he suddenly took offence at the fact that she was smoking a cigarette (it is traditionally common in Papua New Guinea for both sexes to smoke tobacco, but David is not himself a smoker). He stopped the car and pulled her out of it into a roadside ditch with such violence that the pregnancy miscarried the following day. By default, in time the marriage plans were shelved.

Margaret says that this was the first time she realised how aggressive and violent David could be, but she did not then assume that it would become a characteristic of their relationship. She understood, however, that his dislike of smoking was strong, so after this incident she gave up the habit and did not return to it for nearly ten years. In retrospect she thinks that this was part of a pattern of submissive behaviour (expected and demanded by David) which subconsciously operated to support David's control through violence. At that time he hit her approximately once every two months, usually because he felt she had failed to comply with his expectations in some way, but she loved him and kept hoping that things would improve. He was often contrite after violent scenes and although he would not apologise he would be subdued and try to help her in small ways.

They went for the long Christmas vacation to their province and although David stayed for a while with Margaret's people he did not discuss with them anything to do with marriage or bridge-price as they might have expected. They drifted into a *de facto* relationship and when Margaret became pregnant again a few months later they did not marry. She had a baby girl early in 1976. By this time she had completed two years at university and had taken off the first semester of 1976 for the birth and care of the baby. David had graduated, joined the Public Service and had been allocated a government house where they lived. She became absorbed in the baby, stayed very much at home, placing few demands on her husband for outings or entertainment and seeing very few friends.

When the baby was about three months old, Margaret formed a suspicion that David might be seeing another woman. This was based on a reminder David had written himself and left in a shirt pocket which Margaret found when she did the laundry. Margaret and David had shared an interest in sport and during Margaret's period of maternity David had maintained his sporting activities alone. The Saturday following her discovery of the note, Margaret insisted on going with David to the sports ground as a spectator. There she met friends she had not seen for months and discovered in fact that David was known to be having an affair. On the way home in the car she stood up to him, for the first time ever, and confronted him with this story, which he neither denied nor admitted. That evening, uncharacteristically, David stayed at home with Margaret instead of going out with friends. She thinks this was to prevent her from leaving.

The next day, Sunday, when David went out, Margaret took some of her and the baby's belongings by taxi to her brother's house. It was not until

Monday evening that David came to look for her there. Margaret chose to remain at her brother's and David left, embarrassed because he considered that she had taken what he felt was their own domestic problem beyond the house. He did not know that Margaret had decided to travel to her home province so that she could get away from the situation and later leave the baby in the care of her mother before resuming her studies again at the university as she had originally intended. She had decided to end the relationship with David and made plans to effect this.

During Tuesday, when Margaret was alone with the baby, David arrived and wanted her to go back to their house. She refused, so he grabbed the baby off her lap and took it out to the car. He gave Margaret an ultimatum and said he was keeping the baby, so she could decide to go with them both or stay behind. She went with him. (All else apart, the baby was still being breastfed.) He began to change door locks on their house so that she would not have free exit or entry.

On the Wednesday her brother came when David was at work to see how she was and she returned with him to his house where David visited that evening and where, in front of her brother, his behaviour was controlled. On the Friday she kept to her plan and, unknown to David, left for the provinces. So at this point of the relationship Margaret took deliberate, active steps to end it.

David of course learnt of her whereabouts from her brother. He started to write letters, sometimes as many as three a week, saying how he missed her and the baby. And she discovered she was pregnant again. He announced that he would shortly take leave and join her in the village. Because of this and the pregnancy she postponed plans to return to her studies.

David spent about two weeks in Margaret's village, during which time it would have been appropriate to discuss marriage arrangements, including bride-price. But David did not broach the subject and, being aware of the problems, neither did her family, so the matter was ignored. David then decided to visit his own village, in another area of the same province, taking Margaret and the baby with him to introduce them both to his parents. This was a very definite statement of intent and Margaret was swept along in his wake, naturally submissive, genuinely caring for the man, and mother of his soon-to-be two children. They returned as a family to Port Moresby. Much later Margaret discovered that during her absence from town the woman with whom David was involved had at times stayed in their house with him.

A second daughter was born in the second quarter of 1977 but the pattern of the *de facto* relationship did not improve. David became something of an absentee husband, with a licence of his own. He would beat Margaret whenever he felt she was not behaving as he expected a wife to do. On one occasion, for instance, he came in at three o'clock in the morning, dragged her out of bed and beat her because he was hungry and no food awaited him. Sometimes he had been drinking, but Margaret stresses that his violence was not closely associated with alcohol consumption. He would usually hit her on the body where it did not show in public.

At the beginning of 1978 Margaret returned to university. She had no co-operation from David. She had to go home after classes and stay there —

library study was impossible — and his expectations had to be filled regardless of the fact that he himself was leading a virtually independent life. Through his work David (with his wife) was invited to many social functions to which he could easily have taken Margaret, who is educated and socially adept, but he never included her in his social life. This is not unusual among Papua New Guinean couples. On marriage, men usually continue to socialise in the way they did when single, so the only aspect of their life-style which changes is the strictly domestic one where a wife, rather than a mother or sister, performs domestic duties for them and stays at home. Later, when Margaret had social obligations through her own job, David would refuse to accompany her or even assist or chaperone by driving her; she had to arrange alternative means of transport.

Margaret completed her university degree at the end of 1979 and started work that November. She had found a good position in a private firm and began to make a substantial contribution to family expenses. A brother of hers however was the one who made the initial payment of a fare for a young sister to come from the provinces to mind the children whilst Margaret was at work. A third daughter was born in mid-1980, but three months after the birth she discovered that David was still seeing the same woman (now married) with whom he had been having an affair for four years, since 1976. When she spoke to David about this he told her, "You would not understand". She wanted to take the children and leave but had nowhere to go.

A month or two later David went abroad on an official visit and Margaret discovered that he had taken his lover with him. She managed to reach him by telephone whilst he was away but when she asked about his companion he hung up. This entire incident was so upsetting that Margaret became ill and had to take a week off work. The relationship between her and David was very strained after this, and the girl-friend's marriage broke up. (Margaret had contacted the husband and told him what had happened.)

Three more tense and intermittently violent years passed, however, before a situation arose which brought things to a crisis. In mid-1983 David made another working trip and during his absence Margaret had sexual relations for the first time with a man who had become a friend during the previous year. She was at this friend's home the night David returned from his travels. She says her behaviour was deliberate; an attempt to give him a taste of his own medicine. He found her missing from the house and the children in the care of her sister and a niece of his who had come to be with the family during his absence. He drove around looking for her at relatives' and friends' houses.

The next day David went to Margaret's office to find out why she had slept away from home and where she had been. He punched her in the face and broke her glasses. Ten days later there was another violent scene between the two of them when he demanded to know, and she told him, where she had been that night. He grabbed her by the neck, punched her, threw her against the wall and smashed a coffee mug against her face. Her jaw was broken. She was off work for three months during which time she had extensive medical treatment including surgery to wire up her jaw bone.

Not long before the incident she had been promoted to a very responsible

position. The confidence that her employers had shown in her and support from friends, particularly the man with whom she had stayed, had boosted her morale and had perhaps given her the spirit to oppose David in the way that provoked his attack. Now she was completely demoralised and felt totally defeated. She resigned from her job. The resignation was not accepted (though she was transferred to a position which subjected her to less pressure) and she was given full pay throughout her sick-leave — her employers went beyond the call of duty in their moral and real support for her.

On being discharged from the hospital after her jaw had been wired she went to stay at a brother's house in a different suburb from her own, but David would not let her keep even the baby with her, neither did he bring the children to visit. One day, after a week, she decided to go to her own home to see the children during the day when David would be at work. She found that there had been an accident and the baby had a damaged ear which was causing great pain. She rushed the baby to the doctor telling her sister to telephone David. He collected them from the doctor's, but although he returned Margaret to her brother's at her request, he would not let the baby stay there with her. Feeling that the welfare of the children was more important than her fear and her need to escape from tension, she went home with the family.

From then onwards David made her life generally unbearable. In addition, the assaults continued. On numerous occasions he demanded sexual relations with her. If she went to bed early, tired, he would disturb her by putting on the light, moving the fan around and generally making deliberate noises. If she did not respond to this he would grab her by the ankles and pull her off the bed. If she remonstrated with him he would beat her.

About nine months after the broken jaw incident, on an occasion when Margaret was sleeping and he came to the bedroom to wake her up, in order to avoid a fight she got up and before he realised it slipped next door to a neighbour. She asked the neighbour to drive her to a relative's house, which he did, leaving the children at home. The children were now old enough to realise and be disturbed by the aggression between their parents.

The following morning David came to collect her. She refused to go with him, so he left, but threatened to send the three children to his parents in the provinces. Margaret went to the police, and accompanied by a patrol car and one of her male cousins, she went home where they found open suitcases and the children's clothes partly packed. David was angry and told the police to stop interfering and leave.

Margaret and David talked for several hours. She told him she could no longer live with him and that she was prepared to let the court decide on the custody of the children. David promised that if she returned to him he would never hit her again. He told her that if he broke his promise she could take the youngest child and walk out. The older children were due to start the new school year two days later, so, for their sake once more, she agreed to live back at home.

Ten days later, acting on a false suspicion that Margaret had again been seeing the male friend with whom she had previously stayed, David entered the

bedroom where Margaret was in bed, grabbed her by the hair and punched her face. He accused her of 'screwing around', which she denied because it was untrue. During the argument she left the house, which was built on piles, and hid underneath it to shelter from the rain. After some time David came out holding a knife which he placed on a bench. She was very frightened, but was also extremely worried that he would carry out his threat to send the children to the provinces if she left home. So in due course she crept into the house and slept in one of the children's beds.

Three days later David demanded that Margaret have sexual relations with him. She complied to avoid argument and violence. During the next month he repeatedly demanded sex and persisted in going into the bedroom to disturb her if she went to bed early feeling tired. Then one night, she went to bed at about ten o'clock, and when David came in and demanded sex she refused. He became very angry, and one of the children woke up and started crying. He grabbed Margaret's ankles and pulled her on to the floor, tore off the shorts she had on and tried to rape her. She screamed for help and the lady next door ran over. By this time all three children were awake, as they had been on many previous occasions, witnessing the violence and foul language their father used against their mother. Everyone collected in the lounge where Margaret, distraught, told him she could continue this life style no longer. She says, in retrospect, that this attempted rape was the final breaking-point of her endurance, but she did not at that time move away from home.

Three days later however, at breakfast, again acting on a false suspicion that Margaret had seen her male friend, he hit her across the face and knocked her off the chair where she was sitting. This resulted in David being charged in court with unlawful assault, to which he pleaded guilty, and he was bound over to be on good behaviour for twelve months on a recognisance of 200 kina (approximately U.S. \$200, 1985). Unfortunately there was a gap of three months between the summons and the hearing of the case. David asked for this deferment on the grounds that he was going to be out of town through work. In fact he did not go away and used the three months to harass Margaret and to pressurise her, mainly through the children, to drop her charges. At the time of the summons Margaret went to live with relatives, where David would not allow her to keep the children overnight. One incident during this period illustrates that David's behaviour continued to be highhanded and violent.

David arrived unannounced one day to collect Margaret from work. He said he would drive her to her relatives' so that they could talk privately on the way. During the journey he changed direction and drove towards their home. She attempted to leave the car but he held the door handle and pinned her back with his elbow. He parked the car under the house, and as she made to walk off, he grabbed her and swung her round so that she slipped and fell onto concrete, cutting her head which bled profusely. She started to scream, the children ran out of the house and neighbours rang one of her brothers who in turn rang the police; in due course they all arrived at the scene. David meanwhile realised he had gone too far. He produced a knife and told Margaret to kill him, and when she refused he threatened to kill himself, if not

then, later. Knowing that the court case was already pending and feeling emotionally exhausted Margaret did not press further charges.

Around the time of the court hearing, Margaret was allocated by her employer a two bedroom home which would have well housed the children, but David would never allow her to keep the two older ones overnight. During the next year he constantly used the children as an excuse to further harass and abuse Margaret and make her life difficult. Unfortunately the way responsibility for the children was divided brought them into frequent contact in circumstances where it was necessary to liaise.

Within a few days of his conviction for assault he came to her house and rampaged in such a frightening manner that Margaret went to relatives, with whom she remained for ten days, until a brother arrived from the provinces to stay with her for protection in her own house. Roughly three months later, when she was taking the children to church, he found her about to enter the church, admonished her publicly and abusively for not leaving a message so that he would know where she had gone, snatched the baby off her hip and took off with the three children. On another occasion he came to the house in the early hours of the morning, woke the household and the neighbourhood whilst trying to get someone to unlock the garden gate, and then took the youngest child who had been sleeping there. Many times he waited outside her office with the children and forced himself on her, insisting on taking her home. He harassed her with countless phone calls to her office and with unexpected, persistent calls at the house. He ate most of his evening meals at her house, there to take the two older children to his place to sleep; then he often made social calls at other people's houses on the way home, so the children would be very late to bed.

There were incidents too numerous to list, but one of them has an ironic twist. After a Saturday night which had been particularly badly disturbed by David, on his arrival at her house the next day in an eminently arrogant and offensive manner, Margaret's chaperoning brother, obviously tried to his limit, swung a metal bar at David's car and smashed the windscreen. The result of this was that David charged Margaret's brother with assault! And Margaret reported David for breaking his good behaviour bond. Now, at the time of writing three months later, court cases are awaited on that assault and an official plea by Margaret to be given legal custody of the children. It is worth noting that according to the custom followed by Margaret's people, as David has not paid her bride-price, she would be entitled to keep the children.

Discussion

In trying to analyse the basis of violence in the marriages of Rose and Margaret, first the differences between the two cases and then the similarities will be discussed. A difference which occurs in any such comparison and which was not fully manifest in the cases above lies in the personalities of the actors. For the purpose of this discussion the significance of personality differences,

because of how they affect behaviour, applies not to the women but to the men. Today both women are seen by their friends as somewhat shy, not normally outspoken, and Margaret is certainly described as quiet, even timid, but they are both warm, open and giving with people they know and like. Margaret has a thin build and is naturally more tense than Rose who is rotund and calm. The women, particularly Margaret, say that they were very submissive at the beginning of their respective relationships and conformed to the expected role of subordinate wife. It was only after continuous and unfair subordination that both women changed and began to face up to their husbands. But their opposition incited the men to exert more control and a vicious circle developed. Neither woman ever initiated physical violence (there are other cases where women do take this role) but Rose has hit back, partly in self-defence and partly in sheer retaliation, on occasions when "... he has caused me too much pain". Both women became emotionally involved with their partners in the early days, were 'in love', and by the time they had a child felt a degree of commitment to the relationships. Although there were early signs of violence both women thought that things would improve, or at least not deteriorate, and they accepted the bad in their husbands with the good.

The men, on the other hand, appear to have been less tolerant of their partners. Both men are popular among their associates and are seen as pleasant, friendly, easy-going, and neither is habitually violent outside the home — David has sometimes shown aggression on the sports-field and John on rare occasions has hit an uncle and a brother. There is a marked difference though in the way the women describe their personal behaviour. Rose says that John's peer group, or, in general, any male friends with whom he socialises, have a strong influence on the fact that he spends so little time at home. Consequently, he gives her virtually no support on the domestic scene and this has become part of their problem — when he complains about her failure to meet with his domestic expectations, however unreasonably, she answers back accusing him of neglect and he sees this as provocative. David, however, is more of an individualist. Margaret feels that his period in an Australian high school made him arrogant and alienated him from his peers to some extent. She does not think that immediate outside social pressures have directly influenced his behaviour towards her. In fact she feels that, had he been susceptible to outside pressure, some relatives or friends may have been able to exert a good influence on him during bad times.

Relationships outside the nuclear family, with extended families and other women, illustrate two further differences between the couples. Whereas John has dallied with other women, Rose has not felt particularly threatened by it. She has objected but does not see it as a major obstacle in her life. David however has maintained a strong relationship throughout with one other woman who has had, it is believed, two children by him. This relationship has caused Margaret a great deal of anguish and it was her initial discovery of it that caused her to plan to leave David when her first child was only three months old. The question she has asked, and which is perhaps central to this discussion and an understanding of the problem is: why won't he let her go?

Instead of joining his other woman, he chooses to maintain a violent and unhappy relationship with Margaret, who has begged him to release her. It is difficult to know the extent to which his mistress has tried to influence a decision, but it is likely that both women want the same outcome.

Apart from this pressure, against David, there has been support, for Margaret, from her family. There are certainly cases of violence against women from their own families. This may happen when a woman is believed to be in the wrong or when a family is trying to pressurise a woman into complying with their wishes regarding her marriage — an illustration of the way some families view women's subordinate position. Neither Rose nor Margaret have had this problem, but Rose has not benefitted either from family support. She has no extended family members in Port Moresby and has been pressured from a distance by her family, afraid of magic, not to antagonise John too much. (This attitude towards magic is less to do with levels of sophistication than the belief in the strength of traditional magical powers in a particular ethnic area.) In addition, she has received openly hostile treatment from John's family through personal abuse and gossip to John about her. They certainly believe Rose should bear her burden more quietly.

Margaret's family, however, have given her considerable support: moral, financial and physical. She is most thankful and says her situation would have been even worse without them. And David's family has not opposed her; they have kept out of the affair which, in the circumstances and in view of David's status and individualism, is to be expected. Yet, despite this benign attitude from David's family and support from her own, Margaret was not able to end her relationship with David.

Another difference between the couples relates to status and education. Rose and John both have rural backgrounds, they both went to community based primary schools, both attended high school as boarders though did not excel, and can now be said to be average white-collar urban dwellers. Margaret basically grew up away from the fully traditional environment and David, after a rural beginning, was put into a totally Western environment. They are both university graduates who now hold prestigious jobs and belong to the top socio-economic stratum. It is worth noting here that although both partners of each couple are not from the same ethnic group, they are from the same province, and traditional cultural differences that exist are not considered to be significant in the context of this discussion.

The role of alcohol in the violence of the relationships is a further difference. Neither woman drinks alcohol, which is typical of Papua New Guinean women, but both men do. Rose asserts that alcohol is the main trigger of violence between herself and John but Margaret insists that it is not in their case. There have been times when David has been drunk and hit her but he does not always hit her when drunk and usually hits her when sober. Abuse of alcohol is commonly held to be a major cause of domestic violence in Papua New Guinea so it is interesting to note that in the urban survey into domestic violence conducted by the Law Reform Commission, although 71% of the female respondents opined that alcohol is the major cause of problems in

marriage, only 26% of those urban women who said they had been hit (56% of the total sample) said that the violence was due to alcohol (Toft, ed. 1986).

Now to look at the similarities in the pattern of the couples' relationships. To start at the beginning, both women met the men soon after leaving school, when Rose was sixteen and Margaret nineteen years old, and although Rose did not proceed to university, both are educated above the standard of the majority of urban women. The men, educated to the same level as their partner, had both been out in the world longer.

Soon after meeting, both couples became sexually involved and, although Rose did not become pregnant as quickly as Margaret, *de facto* marriages were established because of pregnancies. This seems to be common today in urban Papua New Guinea, particularly among women who are, so to speak, independent migrants, be it as students or members of the work-force. Many live in hostel accommodation and although they may have a relative or two in town they are virtually on their own. A man and woman strike up a relationship, later establish themselves as a couple and without going through any formalities, whether traditional or modern, describe themselves as married. In such a situation the couple are to a degree committed to each other and may be planning to marry eventually. The problem that these informal arrangements between couples raise for women regarding marital violence is that their families are not in a position to assert control on the husband in a way that would have been possible according to tradition.

In traditional Papua New Guinea, marriage was not a contract between two individual men and women, but between two kin groups. The extent to which rights over the woman were transferred from her own family to her husband's depended on the customs of a particular ethnic groups, but in virtually all societies a woman could claim and expect support from her own family if she was strongly abused by her husband, who would then have to atone for his behaviour. In the Law Reform Commission Rural Survey approximately three-quarters of both the men and women said that a beaten wife could expect help, and over three-quarters of those respondents said the help would come from relatives, the most likely ones being those of the wife (Toft and Bonnell, 1985). In a specific urban case, a beaten wife sought refuge with an aunt. Her husband, although not from the same ethnic group, observed the traditions of his wife's people and went to apologise for his behaviour to the aunt and another family member before asking the wife to return home. Unfortunately, for many urban dwellers this type of behaviour is simply not possible, either because the family is not there, as in Rose's case, or because tradition has already died. Although Margaret has had support from her family, it has not been in a traditional way, so David has not been obliged to submit to traditional checks on his violence. Margaret, her siblings and David, because their upbringing and education were not traditionally oriented, do not follow custom in this respect and older family members, if available, are too intimidated by their education and status to interfere. Further, if an extended family has not played a part in the upbringing of a woman, through care and contributions to welfare and education, that is to say has not made an

investment or stake in her, its members do not often feel they can rightly challenge her husband. So alienation from the village and family authority is from both directions. Many women in urban areas are thus isolated from customary controls in the case of assaults from husbands, and not many of them have the ability, determination and courage to seek the alternative form of control through the courts.

Many *de facto* marriages are initiated by unplanned pregnancies. It is not difficult to obtain free contraceptives but few single women seem to use them. One possible reason for this is religious conscience. The vast majority of educated Papua New Guineans have been influenced by religious dogma, regardless of sect, which forbids pre-marital sex. When people indulge in pre-marital sex it is initially private and a matter of personal conscience. To seek contraceptives is to take a big psychological step in admitting openly, both to oneself and the medical agent, that a wrong is being committed and, in some cases (for instance Catholics), that a further premeditated sin will occur. Many traditional values also hold that pre-marital sex is taboo, and other strict, inhibiting, traditional rules apply to sexual behaviour.

Further, whilst contraceptives are available on demand at chemists, it is at a price, and a customer has to know precisely what to ask for; the way to obtain free contraceptives is to go to a clinic where anonymity is lost, in the waiting room and in the filing system, so the whole public procedure is very inhibiting to most single women. No doubt another reason contributing towards the lack of contraceptive use is a cultural tendency to be casual in planning, even if the initial hurdle of conscience has been crossed. And some women just dislike the idea of pills or Depoprovera injections.

To return to Rose and Margaret, they were both involved in *de facto* marriages, so did not have to worry about divorce in order to break away from their respective husbands, although John had at a late stage paid bride-price for Rose; both of them had actually left their husbands successfully when their first children were only a few months old. When a traditional marriage has taken place there are usually constraints against divorce often involving the return of bride price, which the woman's family would be loath to do, but this was never the case with either Rose or Margaret (Rose's father having banked the payment). Bride-price is generally not returnable in full if the man is in the wrong or if children remain with him.

This brings us to another issue involving both couples — custody and care of the children. Both women have been financially independent (Margaret at a later stage than Rose, but earlier she had access to financial help from her brothers) and have to a great extent been supporting themselves and their children. Neither woman feels that money has been a central issue; even though the men have complained about expenses, the women have been contributing the lion's share to child maintenance. Accommodation, indirectly associated with money through rent, has been a problem, especially for Rose, but rents in Port Moresby are so high that few individuals think in terms of leasing homes. Employers are expected, though are not always obliged, as in Rose's case, to provide housing. A husband is automatically nominated as the

head of a household and he is allocated housing for the family. It is almost impossible for a 'married' woman to claim housing rights.

Rather than finance, the issue surrounding the children has been possession. A prime concern of the women has been the children's welfare, which is their acknowledged responsibility, and Margaret particularly was trapped by this, returning to David more than once because of it. John, more than David, is an absentee father, but one of the reasons Margaret continues to cook evening meals for David is because then she knows that the children are being properly fed; on leaving Margaret's house to take the older children home to sleep David often makes social calls at friend's houses and does not let the children's presence or bed-time deter him. Both men lead the independent social life of many Papua New Guinean men and spend time with their families according to whim rather than a sense of responsibility. They would find it extremely irksome, at least, to be sole guardian of their children. In fact, they would bring to the rescue a female relative, whom they would naturally have to support without the help of Rose or Margaret's salary. They would do this rather than let the children stay with their mothers. But there is another point to this. Both men, but particularly David, have used the children to manipulate the women into staying with them. It is clear that both men have tried to prolong the marriages and have in addition to the children used violence to intimidate the women into staying. It is also clear from both cases that an increase in opposition from the women led to an increase in violence from the men; especially when the women turned to outside authority, the police and the courts, the men reacted violently.

The other factor which has provoked extreme violence is sexual jealousy. Both men have double standards in this respect and their suspicions are unfounded (except in Margaret's one instance). This can also be interpreted as possessive behaviour. When the men are at work or socialising, their wives have no idea what they are up to. The husbands on the other hand keep a check on their wives with phone calls to the office and, in David's case because he has a car, unexpected visits to the office, spot-checks; and out of office hours both women are supposed to be involved in domestic affairs at home, or to inform their husbands when and why they plan to go out.

Regarding these double standards, Margaret says she feels that David is in effect practising polygamy. So, whilst it is alright for him to have more than one woman, as custom would permit and encourage in a big-man, which he is, she must remain exclusively at the side of only one man. Maybe the men's false suspicions are stimulated by the fact that they know the women are unhappy and therefore wonder if their wives are susceptible to other men; this is assuming that both men are aware of their wives' unhappiness and are affected by it.

It would seem then that four factors have provoked violence. Both men, David more so, have complained that the women have failed to fulfil their marital obligations. This means that the women are not living up to the expectations that the men have in them as wives, however unreasonable those expectations are. In the case of David and John these expectations include

accomplishment in domestic chores, being willing sexual partners and being compliant with a husband's wishes or demands. They want complete submission, and although they have married educated women capable of earning a considerable portion of the household income which they welcome, they do not treat their wives as equals but as subordinates.

The second provocative factor, which was the direct cause of Margaret's broken jaw and is in fact the main trigger for John's anger, is sexual jealousy. Jealousy seems to be an accepted, justifiable emotion and genuine cause for grievance in Papua New Guinea, whether relating to sexual suspicion or envy of success in others. Traditionally, a jealous person was one who could be expected to attack the object of his or her feelings through magic. So in the past it was, and is still today, considered inadvisable to arouse jealous feelings in a person. Jealousy relates to sex through the possessiveness which a person may feel for a sexual or marital partner. So both John and David have reacted violently to the fact that they suspect they may not have full control over their wives' relationships within the social world, especially with other men. They do not want their wives to be socially oriented, and treat them as if they have no right to any independence.

A third factor which causes violence is opposition by the women to the men, especially when this is externalised. This is perhaps the most obvious example of how any attempt to undermine or sever the man's control over the woman drew violence. Instead of realising that violence was not achieving the desired results the men continued with renewed efforts to try to beat the women into submission. That women are traditionally seen as subordinate to men is illustrated in many ways, from the small village boys in many Papua New Guinean societies who are not expected to respect the wishes of or accept discipline from women as they must from men, to the fact that women who lack support from male relatives are of low esteem and are usually called *rabis meri* (rubbish woman). Women are not viable as individuals, only in the context of their relationship to men, whether husband or male relatives.

The fourth provocateur, alcohol, applies only to John. Whether John's violence has been alcohol-related due to the fact that it releases his inhibitions, that it makes him bad tempered or that it has other effects on him is not really relevant here. Suffice it to say that in his case it triggers and aids angry assaults upon his wife.

From the cases of Rose and Margaret, therefore, it appears that wife-beating has been an attempt by the husband to dominate the wife completely. It has not meant that the man wanted to end the union, he just wanted complete submission. He has maintained an interest in his wife and views her as a possession over which he holds control. (Although there are also some cases of wife-beating where the man has tried to impose his will to the reverse effect: to force the wife to leave the marriage.) Whether the violent attacks are provoked by the wife's failure to come up to scratch in a specific situation, by the husband's jealous illusions or by her opposition to him, the issue has been male dominance and control. Violence has occurred when this has been threatened.

David and John chose to become involved with women who have, through

their education and experience, developed the independence necessary to fulfil their various modern roles, but both men failed to anticipate that an intelligent, educated woman, who is assertive and viable in the modern urban environment, is also likely to have a mind of her own at home. The weapon of modern independence is usually double-edged, like a sword, not blunt on one side like a kitchen knife.

As noted in the introduction to this article, the two cases are atypical in that the women looked beyond the family for help by going into the public arena. In other words they opposed their husbands in an extreme way and demonstrated publicly their husband's lack of control. They attacked the male ego and in return were inflicted with extreme violence. Can it be expected then, that as more women change their concept of female status through modern socialisation, and object to being hit by their husbands (as Law Reform Commission surveys have indicated is already happening: Toft, ed. 1986) and therefore oppose their husbands, that violence will increase both in extent and degree? There are many Papua New Guinean men today who do not hit their wives, and it can be assumed that some other men's attitudes will mellow, just as women's ideas are changing, through modern socialisation. Meanwhile it seems probable that some of the women who have the spirit to oppose will be subjected to considerable degrees of violence from which their families will not be in a position to protect them.

In rural areas traditional machinery is still well oiled and runs reasonably smoothly, but in urban areas today the machinery lacks lubrication and use. Urban women have little recourse to customary jurisdiction and state jurisdiction is usually out of reach or little understood. So the state needs to facilitate the handling of the criminal offence of assault where women are concerned. The present consensus of national public opinion adheres to the concept that women are mere possessions of men, by treating a husband's assault on a wife as a private matter. This is against the constitutional rights of women, which need to be protected. Officers placed in the Public Solicitor's Office to deal exclusively with women's cases would be an effective beginning in helping women who are suffering physical violence from their husbands.

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CHAPTER TWO

ATTITUDES AND PRACTICES RELATING TO MARITAL VIOLENCE AMONG THE TOLAI OF EAST NEW BRITAIN¹

by

S. Christine Bradley

Introduction

The Tolai people inhabit the north-eastern tip of the Gazelle Peninsula on the island of New Britain. They are the major ethnic group in East New Britain Province and, excluding the outlying islands, those living in rural areas number nearly 60,000 according to the 1980 Census. They live within a radius of roughly 40 km of the provincial capital of Rabaul, built by German colonisers in 1910 around the shores of Blanche Bay. Because of circumstances of location and colonial experience the Tolai have had a favoured history, which has led to them being regarded as something of an elite among the peoples of Papua New Guinea.

The superb natural harbour within Blanche Bay enabled Rabaul to become the centre for trade, plantation and missionary activities in the islands of New Guinea and the Solomon Sea from the 1870s onwards. Those Tolai, both female and male, who were educated in schools set up by the Methodist and Catholic missionaries, found plenty of opportunities for employment in the Gazelle, as well as elsewhere in New Guinea, for Rabaul was the capital of German and, later, Australian colonial domination of New Guinea until 1942. The rich volcanic soil of the Gazelle produced an abundance of crops with relatively little effort, so that those who had paid work were able to save their earnings and use them to start small businesses of their own.

The area suffered severely during both World Wars, but substantial War Damage Compensation payments assisted an economic revival. The post-war Australian Administration embarked on a programme to provide basic infrastructure for the development of the peoples of its New Guinea Territory and to prepare them for eventual political and economic independence. Although the Territory's capital was moved from Rabaul to Lae following eruptions of the Matupit volcano near Rabaul in 1941, the relative

advancement of the Tolai people made the Gazelle an obvious choice for the introduction of certain experiments in development, such as the growing and fermenting of cocoa on a commercial scale, a co-operatives movement to encourage local ownership of and participation in business activities of all kinds, the introduction of elected local government councils as a first step towards democratic self-government, and the establishment of village women's clubs with a view to reducing the gross disparity between men's and women's opportunities to participate in developmental activities.

The economic and social development of the Gazelle went ahead rapidly, while political development received a sharp boost during the late sixties and early seventies from the activities of the Mataungan Association, which helped to hasten the granting of full Independence to Papua New Guinea as a whole in 1975. Since the mid 1970s, the effects of the world recession and of the reduction of financial assistance from the central government following the decentralisation of some powers to provincial governments have been felt in the Gazelle, slowing the rate of development and limiting the number of job opportunities for school leavers. The population continues to grow and in some areas, notably those surrounding the towns of Rabaul and Kokopo and areas where land alienated to foreign-owned plantations has not yet been returned to local ownership, shortage of land is becoming a pressing problem.

Despite the relatively large numbers of Tolai in wage employment, particularly those from the peri-urban villages, the Tolai economy overall is based on the production of cocoa and copra for export and garden crops for home consumption. Land, therefore, is very important. Most land in Tolai ownership is owned corporately by matrilineal clans. Clan membership and, consequently, rights to land are inherited matrilineally; that is, children belong to the clan of their mother, and a man inherits land rights not from his father, but from his mother's brother. Women also inherit rights to clan land in the same way, but since women move to live on their husband's land at marriage, women are less able to activate their claims to land, and the land of a sibling group (set of brothers and sisters) is controlled by its senior male member. In pre-contact times, the matrilineal descent group (*vunatarai*) was the most important social grouping, and the power of matrilineage elders was based on their ability to allocate land. Nowadays there is no new clan land to be allocated, the power of lineage elders has declined and the nuclear family of husband, wife and children has taken over as the most important social unit.

In order to understand violence in marriage, it is essential to see it in the context of relations between men and women in general, and between husbands and wives in particular. Changes in Tolai gender relations, the marriage relationship and the concept of the family have been enormous over the hundred or so years since the Tolai first came into contact with the Western world. As described by early European observers at the end of the last century, Tolai society was strongly male-dominated. Women were regarded as inferior to men and were controlled by them, the men using physical force whenever they felt it necessary (see page 45). Tribal warfare and cannibalism were rife and male bravery, strength and fighting skills were highly valued. Masculinity

was celebrated in the powerful male cult of the *tubuan*, whose members often terrorised women and children and sexually abused widows and women without a male protector (Parkinson 1907:473). Women who discovered cult secrets or approached the cult's ceremonial places were killed. There were many cultural expressions of the greater value attached to men and male activities. This might at first sight seem surprising in a matrilineal society. However, it must be remembered that matrilineality is a method for reckoning descent, not a system for giving power or status to women. Motherhood was respected but women were nevertheless second-class citizens.

Men and women mixed very little in daily life. Women were obliged to stay away from all things and places associated with male activities such as fishing, hunting and warfare, on pain of severe penalties, even death. Women were believed to be polluted by their own menstrual blood, hence close contact with women was considered polluting and dangerous to men and was kept to a minimum. Men slept in the men's house and had intercourse with their wives only for procreative purposes. Taboos prohibited men from sleeping with their wives at certain times, especially when men of the clan were undertaking important activities.

All sources of power and influence in the society were in the hands of men. There were no formal positions of leadership, but individual big-men gathered followers by their own initiatives. Possession of shell money (*tambu*) was important for organising ceremonials and attracting followers, but new *tambu* shells could only be obtained by making long and dangerous canoe journeys, which were prohibited to women. Land, the other major valuable, was controlled by male lineage elders. Only men could learn the strong forms of sorcery, such as those associated with the male *iniet* cult, and of course only men could be war leaders.

It was in the marriage relationship that women's subordination was most clearly marked. A woman was bound to obey her husband in everything, by virtue of the bride-price that her husband's relatives had paid to her own relatives. The payment of bride-price entitled a man to the woman's labour, her sexual services, and her full obedience (but not her children, since these always belong to their mother's descent group). Men who could afford it were polygamous. On marriage, a woman went to live with her husband on his land. Once he had cleared the trees from a plot of garden land, it was the wife's job to support her husband and her children by her labour in the food garden. The husband's responsibilities were to protect the family in times of war and to provide fish and occasional small game whenever possible. Women were not necessarily consulted over the choice of husband, and divorce was difficult if not impossible for a woman to initiate, because her relatives would have to be persuaded to return the bride-price.

If a woman was divorced by her husband, she and her children returned to live with her parents or maternal uncle, and the husband had no further obligation to them. If the husband died, the wife and children inherited nothing from him: his sisters and their children claimed house, land, shell money and property. Boys lived with their parents only until puberty, when

they moved to live and work with their mother's brother on the land that they would one day inherit. It was the mother's brother and not the father who sponsored a boy's initiation into the *tubuan* cult and later organised payment of bride-price on his behalf. Bonds of affection certainly developed between men and their children, and often between spouses, but men's main responsibility was to their sisters' children. Consequently, the conjugal relationship and the nuclear family were less important than the sibling bond and the matrilineal descent group.

Nowadays, Tolai society is still male-dominated, but there have been many realignments in the relative positions of the sexes. Beliefs in the pollution of women have almost disappeared and the sexes mix much more freely than in the past, although there are still some restrictions on women's freedom of movement. Since pacification, male fighting skills are not necessary for group survival and, outside the family, violence is no longer a normal part of everyday life. Nevertheless, men are still socialised to become aggressive and dominant, whereas women are trained to be passive and obedient. Also significant nowadays for male prestige is men's greater sophistication or competence in the world outside the home. This competence is attributed by the Tolai to innate male ability; social and cultural factors that restrict women's mobility and their participation in activities which would allow them to acquire the skills, experience, confidence and relative sophistication admired in men are not generally acknowledged.

Men's former control of shell money has been eroded as *tambu* shells have become more easily accessible and the significance of shell money is now symbolic and ritual rather than economic. Nowadays, all Tolai are involved to a greater or lesser degree in the cash economy. Although the cash economy is dominated by men through their greater access to jobs and business opportunities and their control of cash crops and the income from them, female education and the opportunities for paid employment that it has opened up have had a major impact on male-female relations. Methodist missionaries insisted that their schools would close if parents prevented their daughters from attending classes with the boys (Danks 1933:47). Catholic missionaries too encouraged education for girls, with the result that even before the Second World War, the majority of Tolai of both sexes were already literate in their own language. This has meant that many Tolai women have been able to get jobs, mainly in the 'female' fields of teaching, nursing and secretarial work.

In the villages within easy reach of Rabaul or Kokopo, where land is short and the population is heavily dependent on income from wages and salaries to supplement agricultural and business earnings, significant numbers of Tolai women work in town. For example, in Pila Pila, a village of approximately 600 inhabitants 5 km from Rabaul, on which much of the research for this study was based, 25% of females aged between 15 and 60 years were in employment in June 1978, either locally or outside the province. In 8% of households the sole wage-earner was female.

Women's earnings are their own, although the traditional duty of a wife to

provide the family's basic requirements from her own labour means that married women's earnings usually go on household expenses, freeing their husbands to spend their wages as they choose. Nevertheless, having their own income does give working women more independence and more prestige, a fact which prompts some men to forbid their wives to work for money, fearing that their own authority in the home will be threatened. It is unusual for husbands to allow their wives to work unless they themselves are also working, to avoid being in the humiliating position of having to ask their wives for cash. However, those married women who do not work, and they are in the majority, are finding that increasing needs for cash and the growing shortage of land for food gardens are making them more financially dependent on their husbands, who have more access to cash through wage employment and the control of cash crops.

Women's increasing participation in the cash economy has not been matched by any significant increase in political participation. A seat is reserved for a women's representative in the Provincial Assembly and in each of the community government councils, but this merely perpetuates the view that politics and government are male preserves, since the token female participants are confined mainly to 'women's affairs'. Women have a limited public role through their village women's clubs and church fellowships, which have been valuable in training women's leaders to organise local women's activities, but public power remains a male province. A few exceptional women have stood in open elections against men, with occasional success, but the system of appointed women's representatives and the emergence of the provincial Council of Women as a pressure group for women's interests has effectively quashed any prospect that women will challenge men in the political arena, and the separate and unequal political development of the sexes is virtually assured.

As regards marriage, many diverse influences have been at work to modify traditional expectations of the roles of husband and wife and the concept of the family. Of these, the teachings of Christianity have been the most direct, since much of Tolai life revolves around the church. From earliest childhood most Tolai regularly attend weddings and services where Christian ideals of marriage and conjugal and parental responsibilities are expounded at length. In the United Church, couples are encouraged to think of their marriage as a partnership, with husband and wife as equal partners (Taylor 1970:14-15). Marriage vows made in church weddings are identical for both partners, each promising to love, respect and obey the other. This egalitarian and companionate ideal of marriage sits uneasily with traditional attitudes regarding the proper relationship of husband and wife. It is still commonly said that once a woman is married she comes under her husband's control entirely (*a vavina i ki ta ra varkurai kai ra tutana*), and she owes him complete obedience. A Tolai woman still often speaks of her husband as her 'boss' or her 'master', using the English or Pidgin words. At home, it is the man who is the head of the family.

As in the past, a husband's authority over his wife continues to be justified

by the payment of bride-price. Bride-price is still regarded as essential for legitimating the union in the eyes of the community, whether or not a church wedding is held later. The bride-price system has survived despite strong opposition from the churches, which has succeeded only in standardising the amounts paid so that bargaining is no longer involved. The churches have tried to portray bride-price as a token of good intentions rather than as a transaction in which rights over women are exchanged for shell money. Consistent with this is the increasing tendency for women themselves to claim the bride-price paid for them, although the shell money is usually received and looked after on their behalf by third parties. In Pila Pila in 1978, 80% of women under 30 years old had successfully claimed their own bride-price, compared to only 44% of over-60 year olds. Nevertheless, many Tolai, especially among the older generation, still feel that the payment of bride-price puts the husband in a superior position in the marriage and entitles him to control his wife, by force if necessary.

Over the last century, the Tolai have gradually moved closer to the model of family relationships introduced to them through contact with Europeans. Again, Christianity has had a profound influence on Tolai concepts of family roles and responsibilities. Christian ideology makes much use in its imagery of patriarchal family relationships, and idealises the father-son relationship. From the point of view of this study, the main relevant features of the Christian model of paternal behaviour are the emphasis on the father's enduring authority over his children and his duty to provide for all their material needs and prepare them for an independent life, since these aspects were not part of the Tolai father's traditional role.

Direct Christian teaching has of course been only one amongst many factors influencing Tolai concepts of marriage and the family. Much of the current legislation of Papua New Guinea embodies Western concepts of family relationships and is based on the assumption that wife and children are materially dependent on the husband/father. An example is the *Deserted Wives and Children Act*, which allows a wife to claim maintenance payments for herself and for the children until they reach 16 years of age. In Tolai custom, a man is responsible for his children's upkeep only while they live with him, and he is bound only to provide land for the wife to garden on while the marriage lasts, all else being the responsibility of the wife's brother, the children's maternal uncle. However, the introduced notion of a man's duty to maintain his wife and children until the children are independent has become so widely accepted among the Tolai that maintenance orders for the support of deserted wives and children can now be made and enforced through the village courts, courts which were set up principally for the application of customary law. Similarly, Papua New Guinea law, based on the Australian, also obliges a man to support his illegitimate children until they reach 16 years of age, completely contrary to custom, and this too can nowadays be dealt with by village courts. Pension schemes, and accident or death insurance for workers and motor vehicle drivers also recognise a man's wife and children as his dependents and heirs in keeping with European priorities but in

contradiction to Tolai custom, in which the benefits of a man's work should go after his death to his matrilineal relatives, rather than to his wife and children.

European disapproval of the matrilineal system of inheritance as cutting across the 'natural' bonds between a man and his children and as a drag on development has also put pressure on the Tolai to conform more to the European pattern of nuclear family with patrilineal inheritance. For example under the Australian Administration, grants and loans were given more readily for land in individual rather than group ownership so as to encourage men to buy land from their matrilineal descent group for passing on to their own children. The education system too has had a lasting effect on Tolai concepts of the family. From the earliest days, mission teachers insisted on enrolling children using their father's name as a family name, although the Tolai had only individual names. The creation of a system of patrilineally inherited family names in a matrilineal society is somewhat incongruous. School text books were of course imbued with European concepts and attitudes, showing the typical family as one in which the husband goes out to work to support the family while the wife stays in the house to look after the children and service the family. Until recently, most teaching materials were written by non-Papua New Guineans and were based primarily on those used in Australia. Imported films, magazines, books, newspaper features and radio programmes also portray Western models of relations between the sexes and of marital and family relationships.

The European-style image of the nuclear family under the headship of the husband/father that is conveyed by the Christian churches, by the legal system, in teaching materials, in bureaucratic procedures and by the media is reinforced by the growing economic dependence of wives and children on the husband/father as provider. Men's assumption of the role of family breadwinner and their greater involvement in the cash economy puts most women in a position of financial dependence, emphasises their primary identification with home-making and strengthens the nuclear family unit and the authority of the husband/father over it. The man is the head of the nuclear unit, which is known by his name. Electoral rolls, census forms and the Village Books list the population by families, each under the name of its male head. Women and children are classified by their relationship to the husband/father, who has legal, financial and moral responsibility for them and who represents them to the outside world.

Thus male-female relationships inside and outside the family have been, and still are being, redefined in response to changing circumstances. Traditional sex-role stereotypes are being challenged daily, and individuals' expectations of acceptable behaviour in a marriage partner can vary enormously. On the one hand, tradition and custom define women as inferior to men and wives as subordinate to husbands; on the other, modern Tolai are aware that the Papua New Guinea Constitution calls for equal rights and duties for males and females as citizens and as marriage partners and that the 7th of Papua New Guinea's 8 National Aims requires the 'equal social and economic

participation of women'.² It is against this background of rapid change and uncertainty about appropriate behaviour between the sexes, particularly within marriage, that marital violence among the Tolai must be seen.

Incidence of Marital Violence

Before enquiring to what extent marital violence takes place among the Tolai, it is necessary to establish what exactly is meant by the term. Marital violence refers to physical assault taking place between a married or cohabiting couple, the neutrality of the expression implying that either partner is equally likely to be the perpetrator. In reality there is no such equality. Amongst the Tolai, as in other societies in which studies have been conducted (Dobash and Dobash 1979; Langley and Levy 1977; Gayford 1975; Moore ed. 1979; Pizzey 1974; Scutt 1983), marital violence is a gender-linked offence.

Most marital violence is inflicted by men on women. It is not surprising that this should be so, given men's greater physical strength and the sexual division of labour which requires men to be able to use violence either aggressively or defensively for certain socially approved purposes, such as (in the Papua New Guinea context) tribal warfare, pay-back, and protection of the family. Indeed, as will become clear, among the Tolai the control of wives is itself one of the purposes for the use of male violence which receives a considerable degree of social approval, whether tacit or explicit, from the Tolai generally. In the main, then, marital violence in the Tolai context consists of what is more commonly and colloquially known in Papua New Guinea as 'wife-bashing'. Regular or severe 'husband-bashing' is not a phenomenon that the Tolai recognise as existing among themselves. Tolai women seldom initiate violence against their husbands, and when they do, it is usually in specific circumstances and of limited nature (see pages 48-50). In this study, the term marital violence is used to refer to violence perpetrated by either spouse, but it must nevertheless be remembered that most such violence among the Tolai is in fact unidirectional from husband to wife. When dealing specifically with violence by husbands against their wives, the more appropriate term 'wife-beating' will be used.

It is important to state from the outset that most marital violence among the Tolai is inflicted by men on their wives (whether the marriage is a traditional or legal one, or merely *de facto*), because the expression in the Tolai vernacular most frequently used to denote wife-beating is itself ambiguous. Instead of saying 'The man is hitting/beatng his wife', (*a tutana i rapu/ubu kana vavina*), the Tolai normally say 'The married couple are fighting' (*dir tamana varubu*). However, all Tolai informants with whom I discussed this terminology assured me that what they understand when they hear '*dir tamana varubu*' is not that the man and wife are fighting each other, but that the husband is hitting the wife. Although women sometimes do defend themselves, there is certainly no necessary implication that the wife is hitting back (*i balbali* — she returns or retaliates). Indeed, most Tolai maintain that it

is wrong for a woman to hit her husband even in self-defence. Informants stressed repeatedly that, despite the literal meaning of *dir tamana varubu*, they always assume that it is the man who hits first, and most. Whether the woman's response to being hit is violent or non-violent, informants agreed that their automatic assumption on hearing the phrase '*dir tamana varubu*' is that it is the man who is the aggressor, the woman the victim.

Having clarified the sociological and Tolai terminology, we can move on to an assessment of how much marital violence goes on in Tolai society. Reliable statistics on the extent of marital violence are notoriously hard to construct for any society. Cases which figure in the records of official agencies such as the police, the courts, welfare offices, counselling services, crisis centres or hospitals represent only the more extreme cases, while random sample surveys among the general population may produce results biased towards what the respondent thinks the interviewer wants to hear (see below, page 41). For the Tolai situation, the records of the police, the district court and the welfare office are unhelpful, because these organisations are town-based and serve mainly the largely non-Tolai urban populations of Rabaul and Kokopo. The government hospital and the clinics serve both Tolai and non-Tolai populations, but most victims of marital violence requiring medical attention are treated as out-patients and no records are kept.

It is to the village courts that most Tolai bring those cases of wife-beating considered serious enough to warrant court action. Although copies of summonses issued are kept by each village court's clerk, it is often difficult to distinguish cases of wife-beating from other types of cases from the summons forms alone. The relationship of the complainant to the defendant is not usually specified on the form, and the description of the offence may be couched in vague terms. Since wife-beating often arises out of other problems in the marriage, another complaint, such as the husband's adultery, might appear on the summons form, although it may have been the accompanying beatings that prompted the wife to seek a solution through the village court.

As there are no ready sources of statistical data on the incidence of marital violence among the Tolai, and a survey of a sufficiently large random sample of Tolai households was not feasible due to constraints of time and resources, it was necessary to use other means to piece together some approximate picture of the incidence of marital violence. This was done for Pila Pila village by discussing each married couple in the village with the village councillor and with the foremost women's leader to find out which marriages are known to have involved violent incidents, whether hospital treatment was necessary, and what action was taken by the woman. In a densely populated village such as Pila Pila there is little privacy, and people's personal problems soon become common knowledge. While I feel it would be unwise to rely on third persons for information on the causes of violence in particular marriages, I am confident that the information provided by my two main Pila Pila informants as to its occurrence or non-occurrence among couples known well to them over a period of many years is certainly as reliable as that which could be produced by direct face-to-face interviews with the couples themselves. When

conducting interviews with Tolai about their personal experiences and trying to check their testimony against the observations of neighbours, I found several instances in which it appeared that informants had downplayed the frequency and severity of violence in their own marriages.

There could be several reasons for this. Relative to other Papua New Guinean peoples, the Tolai in general and Pila Pilans in particular have had a longer exposure to Christian values and Western-oriented education, making them more ambivalent about the acceptability of marital violence. No doubt some informants assumed that I, as a Westerner, would disapprove of marital violence, and edited their evidence accordingly so as not to lose face. Again, all informants had been known to me personally for several years, and some might have found it easier to disclose details of marital problems to a total stranger rather than to someone with whom they already had an existing relationship.

For information on other villages, it was necessary to rely on estimates by informants about the extent of marital violence in their home villages, and on the written responses of 58 Tolai high school students to a questionnaire on marriage problems. These students, aged between 17 and 18 years, were not yet married and therefore had no first-hand experience of marriage problems, but all had formed opinions on the subject, based on their observations of the conduct of married couples in their own villages. The small samples used (75 Pila Pila marriages, 58 student questionnaires) can produce only crude statistics, yet they are adequate to give at least some indication of the extent of marital violence and to allow some preliminary conclusions to be drawn.

To begin with Pila Pila village, of the 75 marriages for which information was obtained, 65 (87%) involved recurring wife-beating (with or without physical retaliation by wives) that had been witnessed or heard by co-villagers. Only 10 marriages (13%) are known not to involve violence, except perhaps the odd blow on rare occasions. Of the 65 wives who have been hit, 10 (15%) have needed hospital treatment on one or more occasions. No men have needed hospital treatment as a result of being hit by their wives. Forty-seven of the 65 wives who have been hit (73%) considered the violence sufficiently problematic as to seek assistance of various kinds outside the marriage. The various avenues for action open to women who have been beaten by their husbands will be discussed in more detail in a later section.

As regards other villages, when informants were asked how many women in their own villages had been hit by their husbands, the usual response was that many or most had been. When asked how many men had been hit by their wives, the reply was that only a few had. However, when informants were asked how many men in their villages currently hit their wives, estimates given ranged from 'a few' to 'many'. A Tolai former welfare officer with several years' experience of dealing with marital violence cases in Rabaul believes that almost all men in his village of Bitapabeke in the Vunamami area have hit their wives at some time or other, although very few wives have ever hit their husbands.⁴ From his own observations, he estimates that of the roughly one hundred married men in his village twenty currently hit their wives, but in his

opinion the violence only constitutes a serious problem in about a quarter of these cases (or 5% of all marriages).

In default of any concrete data on the severity of marital violence, informants were also asked whether marital violence (and in particular wife-beating) was considered as a social problem in their villages. All said that they thought it was a problem, but that it was seldom brought up at village or leaders' meetings at which other social problems are discussed. Most informants agreed that the majority of women experience some degree of marital violence at some time during their married lives, but varied in their assessment of how many women experience a degree of violence that is unacceptable to them. Estimates ranged from 'very few' to 'forty per cent of all women'. The boundary between 'acceptable' and 'unacceptable' degrees of violence is obviously a matter of subjective judgement, and as such is influenced by a complexity of factors, some of which will be discussed in the next section, on attitudes towards marital violence.

The students who gave written answers to the questionnaire on marriage problems, from which the data in Tables 1 and 2 are taken, all come from villages within a 10 km radius of Rabaul. From Table 1 it can be seen that

Table 1: How many men hit their wives?
Questionnaire responses from high school students

	% of Responses:		
	Female	Male	Total
None	0	0	0
Some	50	71	61
Many	46	22	33
All	4	7	6
Total	100	100	100

Note: Responses in this and all subsequent tables are taken from a questionnaire completed by 28 female and 30 male Tolai high school students aged between 17 and 18 years.

Table 2: How many women hit their husbands?
Questionnaire responses from high school students

	% of Responses:		
	Female	Male	Total
None	22	27	25
Some	67	66	66
Many	11	7	9
All	0	0	0
Total	100	100	100

female students' estimates of the number of men who hit their wives are substantially higher than those of male students (although readers are reminded that the student sample is a small one, thus the margin for bias must be higher than for a large sample). For violence by wives against husbands, Table 2 shows that the sexes are in agreement, over two-thirds of both female and male students declaring that few women hit their husbands. One quarter of the respondents believe that no women hit their husbands, whereas none think that no husbands hit their wives. As to the severity of the violence, 77% of students could cite cases of women requiring hospital treatment for injuries received from their husbands, while 20% of students knew of men who had required treatment for injuries received from their wives. Roughly half the students had witnessed their father hitting their mother.

Neither the questionnaires nor the personal interviews produced worthwhile data on the frequency of marital violence, beyond the general observation that a great deal of wife-beating takes place on government pay-weekends when the men are drunk. Neither was any systematic information obtained on types of injuries sustained, although some informants commented that injuries to the head and face (rather than to the body) seem to be particularly prevalent amongst working women. When one or both partners are working outside the village, the marriage is put under additional strain in a number of ways, resulting, in the opinion of some informants, in a higher rate of wife-beating among couples where the wife is working. Unfortunately, the Pila Pila sample is too small to confirm or refute this, although my own impression is that it is true. This point will be discussed in more detail later (see page 66).

Wife-beating is not associated with any particular level of education, skill or income, and is certainly not restricted to poorer and less well educated families. All categories of worker are represented among the 65 men in Pila Pila who hit their wives, from the small farmer scraping a living from insufficient land to the successful businessman and the senior public servant. It is more interesting to look at those men who do not hit their wives. Out of the ten, two are pastors of the United (formerly Methodist) Church, two are lay preachers, and two are what is known as *a tena lotu* (strong supporters of the church). This would seem to imply that Christianity has an inhibiting effect on wife-beating. However, it must be pointed out that a number of *tena lotu* are also to be found among the 65 men who do hit their wives.

The incidence of wife-beating seems to be much higher among newly married couples. This was mentioned frequently by informants, who pointed out also that marriages which were arranged by parents on behalf of the young people (*a varkukul vakuku*) take much longer to settle down than marriages where the couple had chosen each other (*dir varmaingai*). When a couple knew each other well before choosing to get married, it is said that they have had plenty of opportunity to plan their future and talk over their expectations, so that by the time they have had one or two children (after 3 to 5 years of marriage), they have either overcome their major problems, or they have separated. Where a marriage is arranged by the parents between a boy and girl who may never have actually met each other, the marriage is expected to take

longer to reach an equilibrium. In both these types of marriage, violence may also occur later from time to time as specific problems arise, but is not necessarily an ongoing feature of the marriage. Only in a small number of marriages does violence become a regular event, a permanent aspect of a relationship which may nevertheless endure in a turbulent fashion for many years.

It is regrettable that information on villages other than Pila Pila is not sufficiently detailed or comprehensive to allow comparisons to be drawn between Pila Pila and more rural villages. The incidence rate of 87% for Pila Pila seems extremely high and it cannot necessarily be assumed that such a high rate prevails generally among the Tolai. Pila Pila is not a typical Tolai village (if such a thing exists) and it may well be that special factors operative in Pila Pila (such as proximity to Rabaul, relatively large inflow of cash from wages and salaries, ease of access to alcohol, the number of working wives, and so on) have influenced the rate of wife-beating there. However, without comparative data from other villages, it cannot be said with any certainty whether wife-beating is more prevalent in Pila Pila than elsewhere in the Gazelle, and if so, what the main contributing factors might be. Marital violence is a relatively new research interest in Papua New Guinea, and it is to be hoped that further work will be able to use these preliminary observations as a starting point for more in-depth research on the incidence of marital violence among the Tolai.

Attitudes Towards Marital Violence

The first point to be established in relation to attitudes towards marital violence is how far such violence is socially approved. This is not as simple a matter as it might seem. One may indeed ask the straightforward question 'Is it alright for a person to hit his/her spouse?' and receive a straightforward 'Yes' or 'No' in reply. But further questioning produces many 'ifs' and 'buts' and 'maybes', indicating that the issue is far more complex and confused than at first appeared. Not only does the acceptability of marital violence vary according to the circumstances in which it is employed, but informants often contradicted themselves if allowed to talk at length, or gave different answers to the same question when phrased differently. Many people expressed one view as a general principle, but a contradictory one when advising their children on how to behave. Women in particular were likely to profess one opinion when discussing wife-beating in general terms and another when it came to their own case, amounting in effect to a double standard: wife-beating is alright when other women are hit, but not when it concerns themselves.

A large part of this confusion can be attributed to the existence of two opposing moral codes. On the one hand, there is the traditional view that a man who pays bride-price for a woman acquires the right to control (*kure*) her and to ensure her obedience by force if necessary; on the other are the teachings of Christianity, which emphasise the co-operative partnership of

husband and wife and condemn any form of coercion. When Europeans first arrived in the Gazelle at the end of the last century, they were shocked at the harsh treatment to which Tolai wives were subjected by their husbands. Tolai men beat their wives frequently and regarded it as perfectly normal (Pfeil 1899:24; Powell 1884:57). (What the wives felt about it is not recorded.) Numerous cases are cited in the writings of early European observers of men who inflicted severe physical punishments on their wives, even resulting in death (Danks 1889:293; 1933:171; Brown 1908:188; Powell 1884:85). Wives were described as 'beasts of burden' (Schnee 1904:74), 'mere slaves' whom their husbands could do with as they pleased, (Kleintitschen 1906:22), since every husband was 'absolute master in his own house' (Parkinson 1907:66). Therefore it is probably reasonable to assume that wives rarely, if ever, dared to hit their husbands. Modern-day Tolai are fully aware that there was a great deal of wife-beating in the marriages of their ancestors, and that its legitimacy was based on the payment of bride-price.

Opposing these traditional views on marriage and violence by men against their wives are the teachings of Christianity. Both the Roman Catholic Church and the United Church maintain in principle that violence in general and marital violence in particular are un-Christian. They emphasise the conjugal bond and the importance of affection, respect and equality between marriage partners. Yet both churches still propound the notion of the husband as head of the family, and even committed Christians may justify beating their wives on the grounds that it is consistent with their responsibilities as family head. The range of existing attitudes towards wife-beating can best be illustrated by a selection of informants' replies to the question 'Is it alright for a man to hit his wife?'

- Female: Sometimes, I can say that it's correct. When the wife has made him cross, or has not washed the babies or his clothes, or has done something that he advised his wife not to do, he's got the right to fight his wife. In the other way, when the poor wife has been working hard, and he arrives at home and starts getting cross and belting her, that's wrong.
- Male: No, it is not okay. But when you are tempted, you just cannot think properly, all you can do is whatever you can do at that time when you are really hot.
- Male: Yes. People would say that once in a while, it pays to. If the woman is acting 'bighead', it is acceptable to hit her to keep her in her place. This is at the back of the minds of some people. But regular beating for no reason is not acceptable.
- Female: In a sense, yes. If they've talked over the problem for some time, and still the wife goes on with her behaviour, then I think it is right that the husband comes in. Because what else can he do? He has the feeling inside him that would create a fight, so he has to do something.
- Female: Yes, sometimes. If it is very necessary. For the first time, it is best to

give her a chance. If she disobeys the second time and the third time, that is pure disobedience. If she does it the first time, she might have a reason for disobeying. There is still a chance for them to talk it over. But if she continues doing it for quite a few times, he's got good reason to hit her.

Female: No, it is not alright. Because a woman is something very important. She is always busy, working hard around the home. She takes care of the family, she prepares their food, she washes their clothes, she keeps the house and yard clean. After that, she tries hard to find some things to sell at the market, so she can buy food for the family. Then she comes home again and cooks the meal. So it is not at all good for a man to hit his wife. He must respect her, like it says in the wedding service: 'Respect your partner, and your partner will respect you'. In your marriage, each of you must respect the other.

Male: No, it is not right for a man to hit his wife. If he sees that something she is doing is wrong, he should talk to her, and later he could take her in front of the leaders' committee so they can talk to her about her behaviour. But fighting is bad. But then, some women damage their husband's property, like things for traditional dances, or they burn his clothes, because they want to be single again and do not want to stay and do the work of a wife. And then their husbands beat them although they should not really. Well, sometimes it is alright. Sometimes it is good, sometimes it is bad. Sometimes the feeling that comes to a man to make him hit his wife is quite correct, if she has not been doing her work well. But other times, if a man just does it for nothing, that is not correct. It is bad.

The last quotation illustrates the kind of indecision that was common amongst informants. The speaker starts off by saying wife-beating is wrong, then changes his mind and says that it is alright, and ends up by saying that sometimes it is alright and sometimes it is not. It often happened that informants would begin by saying that wife-beating was wrong, and then would contradict themselves during the course of the interview, or at least modify their original statements. The reverse also happened. People who said that it was justifiable for a man to hit his wife 'if she deserved it' invariably said that they would advise their own sons never to hit their wives, but to settle their problems by discussion:

Female: I would advise them that it is bad to treat your wife in that way. I'd tell them fighting is no good, it just leads to more trouble. I think the best advice for me to give them would be just talking, talk-fighting. You never use your hands, you never use weapons. The best thing to do is just talk together, just fight with words.

Female: I will tell him that his wife is a human being, and should be treated like a human being, not like an animal. It is no good bashing her if something is wrong, because then she does not know why he's

bashing her and cannot put it right. He should just talk to her, so she'll know what the problem is.

It is interesting to compare the stated attitudes of some of the informants quoted above with their own practices in real life. For example, the first female informant whose attitude towards wife-beating was cited (on page 45), and who condoned wife-beating in certain circumstances, is a working woman who left her husband immediately the first time that he beat her, after 17 years of marriage. She felt that in her own case the beating was unjustified and, when she agreed to return to live with her husband nearly three years later, she made it clear that it was only for the sake of their children and that if he ever tried to hit her again she would leave him for good. He has never hit her again.

The second female informant is someone whose husband has beaten her on several occasions during their eleven years of marriage, always when drunk, but has invariably apologised when sober again. She is also a working woman, but has never done anything about the husband's violence, blaming the drink and not the man for the beatings, although she felt that in every case it was entirely undeserved on her part. The last female and male informants whose general opinions were quoted are married to each other, and both are active in the United Church. He has beaten her several times in their 16 years of marriage, at least once using a weapon, and on one occasion causing her to need outpatient treatment at the hospital. In her husband's presence, the wife accepted blame for one of the incidents, but in private later she pointed out that even though she might have been wrong in what she had said to him, he still should not have hit her for it.

Table 3: Circumstances under which it is acceptable for a man to hit his wife. Questionnaire responses from high school students

	% of Responses:				Total	
	Female		Male			
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
A Whenever she does something wrong.	48	52	47	53	47	53
B When she has done something wrong a few times.	55	45	77	23	67	33
C When she speaks disrespectfully to him.	59	41	63	37	61	39
D When he is drunk.	8	92	20	80	14	86
E When his wife has hit him first.	38	62	30	70	34	66
F At any time, because a husband has the right to hit his wife.	11	89	7	93	9	91

The questionnaire for high school students was intended to discover more about the circumstances under which it is acceptable for a man to hit his wife. Table 3 above shows the range of responses to the question 'Is it alright for a man to hit his wife?' under six different conditions that had been mentioned by adult informants in preliminary interviews. Only two female students and

five males (12% of all respondents) answered that it is not alright for a man to hit his wife in any of the circumstances listed. Table 4 shows that when asked simply whether it is alright for a man to hit his wife with his hands, 93% of all students agreed that it is alright, a much higher degree of consensus than appeared from Table 3. No students answered affirmatively to all questions. The 9% of students who support the notion that it is still a man's right to hit his wife answered in the negative to either D or E. One fifth of the males indicated that it is alright for a man to hit his wife when he is drunk, implying perhaps that a drunken man should not be held responsible for his actions. Only 8% of the females go along with this view.

Table 4 shows that there is a strong consensus between both sexes on the use of implements in marital violence. Of all students (not just those who had previously stated that it is alright in some circumstances for men to hit their wives) 93% said that it is alright for men to hit their wives with their hands. By coincidence, exactly the same percentage condemns the use of sticks or weapons by men against their wives. It is less acceptable for a woman to hit her husband, but if she does, it is also less frowned on for her to use a stick (25% of students saying that it is alright), presumably because of women's lesser physical strength and greater vulnerability. It must be understood that women hitting their husbands are usually assumed to be defending themselves, and not initiating the violence (see pages 49 & 50).

Table 4: Permissibility of hitting spouse with hands, stick or weapon.
Questionnaire responses from high school students

	Using hands only		Using stick		Using other weapon	
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Woman hitting	77%	23%	25%	75%	0%	100%
Man hitting	93%	7%	7%	93%	0%	100%

There are other circumstances apart from self-defence under which some women may apparently hit their husbands, as Table 5 shows. However, the preponderance of opinion is against the acceptability of wives hitting husbands by a factor of two to one, or more. One quarter of respondents answered 'No' to all questions, and one third answered 'No' to all except hitting in self-defence. A selection from adult informants' statements will give some understanding of the range of opinions about women hitting their husbands.

Male: It's not proper, because in marriage it's the man who is the head. The man pays for the woman, and the woman must respect him. When the two of them are angry, she must not hit her husband. Even if her husband hits her first, in our custom we think it's not right for her to hit back, because then she'll make him even more angry, and he'll hit her worse.

Female: No, it's not right. Only if her husband is hitting her and she feels her

body is hurting, that's the time she might hit him, so she can run away.

Male: Who would ever dream of hitting the husband? It's an unspeakable thing to do. It's very, very rare. Not like the Sepiks, where whenever there's a quarrel, the wife hits the husband and there's a proper fight. But Tolai women don't do that.

Male: It depends on what the argument is. The woman has the right too to hit her husband, if he is in the wrong. But if she uses something to hit him with, that makes her automatically wrong, unless he'd hit her already. Then she can pick up anything she finds to protect herself, like a stick, or a stone, and hit him back.

Female: No, it's wrong. The man is the head of the family, so his wife shouldn't hit him. If necessary, she should take him to court. But at the time, it's best to run away. She should only hit him if he's fighting her and it's essential, to allow her to make her escape.

Female: Here is not like some other provinces where the wife can belt the husband. Here, only the man can fight the woman, the woman can't fight him.

Table 5: Circumstances under which it is acceptable for a woman to hit her husband.
Questionnaire responses from high school students

	% of Responses:					
	Female		Male		Total	
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
A Whenever he does something wrong.	32	68	23	77	28	72
B When he has done something wrong a few times.	25	75	37	63	31	69
C When he speaks disrespectfully to her.	43	57	33	67	36	64
D When she is drunk ⁶ .	15	85	20	80	18	82
E When her husband has hit her first.	35	65	30	70	32	68
F At any time, because a wife has the right to hit her husband.	0	100	0	100	0	100

In view of men's greater strength and power to hurt, when a woman does hit her husband without having been hit first, it implies that she is convinced that she is in the right, and has good reason to expect that her husband can be prevailed upon to concede this. The wife reaches a boiling point of righteous indignation and lashes out at her husband, who accepts the blow without retaliation, thereby tacitly acknowledging his error. Of course, this does not always work. A husband may not be as ready to see his wife's point of view as the wife thinks he should be, and he may retaliate with violence of his own. However, the occasional use of violence by wives in this way (usually a single blow that does little damage) does receive a limited amount of social approval. The following case illustrates the kind of incident that may occur:

Anna and David have been married for 11 years and have 3 children. Recently Anna had to go away for three weeks on a government patrol, leaving the children with her parents. On her return, she went straight to her parents' house to see the children, and waited for David, who knew of her return, to come and take her and the children home in the family car. He did not come until the third day after her return, when he waited in the car on the main road and sent a message to tell Anna that he had come to get her. Anna was furious that he had not bothered to come for her and the children earlier, so marched right up to him in the car, and without saying anything, punched him in the face. There were no witnesses, and she told no one about it. She went back and got the children, and they all went home. Anna said: "When we got back to our house afterwards, there was no problem. He realised he was wrong, so he couldn't do anything. He said, 'It's my own fault, I deserved it'. We were lucky that he understood this. If he didn't admit that the mistake was on his side, he could easily have hit me back. Everybody in the village saw the black eye, and they were asking where he got it, but he took it as fun, and said 'Forget about it'. I realised later on that I shouldn't have done that, and I apologised. But he forgave me straight away. He knew that he himself was wrong!"

The above anecdote shows that it is sometimes acceptable for a woman to hit her husband, provided that the husband has done something that both consider wrong. The same applies to the much more common occurrence of a man hitting or beating his wife. The general rationalisation for coercive violence against wives is that it is 'corrective', 'educational', 'informative', or 'for teaching a lesson', to use the words of informants. If a Tolai woman does something wrong in her husband's eyes, hitting her is a way of letting her know it, and making her try harder to live up to her husband's expectations, which is part of her duty as a wife. Correcting his wife is still seen as one of a husband's duties by many Tolai. Yet there is a difference between men's and women's use of this kind of violence (apart from frequency and severity), in that women's violence is demonstrative, whereas men's violence can also be coercive.

In this respect, wife-beating can be likened to the physical chastisement of children, which Tolai see as essential for the children's own good. Physical punishments are universally used by Tolai parents on their children from the age of about 2 up to 12 or 13 years, the age at which children finish their primary schooling. Every person whom I spoke to and every questionnaire respondent had been hit by his or her parents as a child, and many had been hit more frequently with an object such as a stick, coconut broom, cane or belt than with only the hands. No-one questioned parents' rights to hit their children, and all adults interviewed hit their own children without any qualms, believing that they were acting in the children's best interests. Just as the judgement of parents is accepted as being superior to that of their children, so the judgement of husbands is still accepted by many Tolai of both sexes as

being superior to that of their wives. Men are often said to be acting in the best interests of their wives by chastising them physically, and this kind of wife-beating is seen as beneficial to the family as a whole. As one male informant put it:

Some bashing is very helpful, because it is a means of educating the wife to extend her responsibilities, teaching her to do the right thing, so the total family is happy and at peace.

Whereas 'correctional' wife-beating is acceptable to most Tolai, beatings whose purpose is merely to relieve the husband's bad temper, especially when drunk, are generally not acceptable. However, the Tolai do recognise that even 'correctional' beatings serve also to vent the husband's feelings of anger and frustration, because when a man hits, it is usually a spontaneous rather than a calculated action, arising out of the heat of the moment. Provided no serious damage is done, this type of wife-beating seems not to be a problem, and is in fact considered by many Tolai of both sexes to be a normal or even a necessary part of marriage.

Some other aspects of Tolai attitudes towards marital violence, on which there is a high degree of consensus, deserve mention at this point. The first is that marital violence should be as private as possible. Questionnaire responses showed that 93% of the students thought that marital violence should take place only in the couple's own house or yard. The following remarks give an indication of informants' views on marital violence that takes place in front of other people:

- Male: I think it's shameful thing to do, because some people, when they fight, they tend to tear their clothes, or they come undone, and they say shameful things too, which is very shameful in front of other people. But in their own house they can do what they want, provided nobody sees.
- Female: They shouldn't do it. They should sort it out on their own premises. Even if it's outside, so long as it's their premises, that's okay. But not on the road, or a public place. I always feel sorry for women whose husbands hit them in front of other people. It's too embarrassing. He'll probably regret it too, when he thinks about what he did in front of everybody.
- Male: It's not alright, because they don't know who's there. It's not the done thing to belt your wife in front of her brothers, or even her clan fathers, because of exposing the body in front of these people, and during fights, clothes get ripped. Sometimes the wife ends up just in her underpants!
- Female: It's embarrassing. It should be something for just the two of them. If they've got family problems, they should keep it between the two of them and not let everybody else know about it. Otherwise people gossip about you. It's best to keep it private.

A second point on which there was unanimous agreement is that marital violence should not take place in front of the couple's own children. The following quotations illustrate informants' attitudes:

Female: It's very bad to fight in front of the children. That's one of the things that finally made me get fed up with my husband. I told him already we should never fight in front of the children, but he wouldn't listen. Both of the two boys, they knew how to talk then, especially the older one, and even now he's six he still says, "Daddy is no good, he used to fight Mummy". Because being short-tempered, he fought me in front of the children, in front of the two boys, and it's there in their minds. They remember it. The older one, he doesn't forget. He has it clearly in his mind, that Daddy used to fight Mummy.

Female: That's really dangerous. I mean, to me, I'm not too happy about it. Quarrelling too. We should try and hide it from the children. I hate it when some people, when they are quarrelling, the Daddy will get hold of the child, and then the mother is grabbing it, and the poor child is in the middle, wondering what is going on. Sometimes too, if they're quarrelling and one of the kids happens to be in their way, they'll say nasty things.

Male: It's very very bad. Very bad. I have come across people who fight with their children crying around, and it's very sad. I certainly don't like to see husbands and wives fighting in front of their children. It's too frightening for them, and a very bad example for them for the future.

Female: It's not a good example. It makes the children frightened, and the next time the husband comes home late, they think that Daddy's going to do this and this to Mummy, and it disturbs their sleep. It develops a feeling in them that every time their father comes home late, they expect that he's going to hit their Mummy again this time.

The final point on which there was a high degree of consensus is that a man is automatically in the wrong if he hits his wife when he is drunk. Of the female students 92% and of the male students 80% espoused this view, as did almost all adult informants. The main reasons given were that drunken men do not know what they are doing, cannot control themselves, and might end up by inflicting serious injury on their wives, or even killing them. The disapproval with which drunken wife-beating is viewed is interesting in view of the fact that alcohol is seen by informants as the single most important cause of problems in Tolai marriage nowadays (see pages 60 & 61).

In summary, Tolai informants express varying attitudes towards wife-beating, but it seems on balance that Tolai public opinion is still tolerant of a certain amount of wife-beating. It is no longer considered a man's right to use physical force on his wife at will, but only when she 'deserves' it. The majority of Tolai would still agree that circumstances exist under which it is permissible or even desirable for a man to hit his wife, although they may not

agree on what constitutes such circumstances. Christianity, both through direct teachings and through indirect influence via the legal, educational and bureaucratic systems, has challenged the acceptance of a man's traditional right to beat his wife, but not his authority as family head, thus leaving leeway for individual interpretation of how much force a man can justifiably use to control his wife's behaviour in his capacity as head of the family. Other influences, such as the Papua New Guinea Constitution and the 7th Point of the 8 Point Plan encourage sexual equality, but it is easier for the Tolai to relate this to the workplace or the education system than to relationships within the family. At home, the husband/father is still regarded as the head of the family, with the right to control the behaviour of other family members. Some Tolai may question the means by which this right is applied in particular instances, and many would endorse action to curb wife-beating, but by and large, wife-beating as a means of ensuring wives' obedience still receives a considerable degree of social approval.

What Can the Wife Do?

This section looks at the wife as victim and considers her options for dealing with physical assault by her husband. As stated earlier, most victims of marital violence are female. It is rare for wives to initiate violence against their husbands unless they feel the husbands are unquestionably in the wrong and not likely to retaliate. Those few men who may have suffered physical assault from their wives such that they need help from third parties would be able to follow the same channels as are outlined here for women. We will consider firstly what women can do when they are actually being assaulted, and secondly what they can do about it afterwards.

Table 6: Recommended action for a wife while being hit by her husband.
Questionnaire responses from high school students

	% of Responses:		Total
	Female	Male	
Run away	93	83	88
Call for help	50	53	52
Fight back	36	3	19
Accept it and do nothing	4	27	16
Other	4	7	5

Note: Many students recommended more than one course of action.

Table 6 above shows the high school students' suggestions about the best course of action for a woman to take while being hit by her husband. Running away was clearly thought to be best solution if she had the chance, while calling out for help was thought to be the next best. Many students

recommended the woman to do both simultaneously. Because marital violence should be a private act, the arrival of onlookers brought by the woman's shouts or screams may often act as a deterrent to the man. The viability of this course of action is affected by the density of population. In a village such as Pila Pila, where houses are close together, people will appear on the spot almost immediately, whereas in villages where land is still abundant and settlement is more dispersed, other houses may be out of sight and earshot, help cannot be expected from neighbours, and the wife is more likely to have to defend herself by fighting back.

There is a noticeable difference between female and male responses on the desirability of the woman defending herself by hitting back. Over one third of the students thought it advisable for a woman to defend herself (which ties in with Table 5, where 35% of females thought it acceptable for a wife to hit in self-defence), whereas only 3% of males actually recommended a woman to fight back (compared to 30% of males in Table 5 who considered it acceptable for a woman to hit in self-defence). Again, only 4% of females advised that women should put up with being hit without doing anything to help themselves, whereas a much larger proportion of males, 27%, recommended women to do nothing. Other suggestions volunteered by students were that the woman should plead verbally with her husband to stop hitting her, or that she should pray to God for her husband to stop.

There is no particular category of persons who are expected to come to a beaten wife's assistance. Anyone who happens to be nearby can intervene, if he or she feels brave enough. Persons to whom the husband owes particular respect, such as the parents, brothers and close maternal relatives of his wife, or village leaders, might cause the man to be ashamed and desist just by their presence, or by standing between him and his wife. At other times, adult men will step in and physically restrain the man if it looks as if the woman is in danger of being badly hurt. However, unless the beating is severe, neighbours usually just stand and watch, coming forward to help the woman only after the husband has finished and gone away. What goes on between a husband and wife is felt to be their own affair, and outsiders, even parents and close relatives, are reluctant to interfere.

A woman who has been beaten may react in one of several ways. She may accept the situation and do nothing, she may take retributive or remedial action by various means (see below) with the intention of improving the marriage, or she may opt to end the marriage by divorcing her husband. What she chooses to do will depend on why her husband hit her in the first place, how badly he hit her, and how frequently he had hit her in the past. Where the wife accepts some blame for the beating, she will probably do nothing. If not, and if the problem of violence is a new one in the marriage, the woman will first wait and see if her husband will voluntarily compensate her (*varporong*) with a fathom or two of shell money. (In severe cases, I have known husbands on their own initiative give their wives over K100⁷ in compensation, to dissuade them from taking the matter to the village court.) If he does not, she will ask advice from friends, and then try to talk over the problem with him privately.

If the husband does not react favourably, or if he repeats the offence, she may go and discuss the situation with a church worker or village leader (usually male), or ask him to come and talk with both partners in their own home.

If the husband will not respond to this informal counselling, the wife may approach the village's community government councillor and ask him to convene a meeting of his *gunan komiti* (village committee) to arbitrate (*kure*) the case. The committee may consist of 8 to 12 respected members of the community, of whom usually one is a female delegated to represent the women of the village. Cases of any kind requiring arbitration are generally heard during the afternoon after the weekly village meeting, by upwards of two committee members, often with the local village court magistrate sitting in. Sometimes marital cases may be heard outside the house of the couple concerned, but wherever the case is heard, there is no privacy. Anyone can turn up to listen, and the principal parties are uncomfortably aware that the details of their marital dispute will be talked and joked about all round the village for the rest of the day.

Community government councillors and their village committees have no official authority to hear cases, and consequently no power to enforce their decisions. On the other hand, they do have the advantage of having a thorough knowledge of the background and personalities of the disputants, and are often able to arrive at a decision acceptable to both parties. Normally they impose some small compensation (*varporong*) of up to five fathoms of shell money or K10 in cash to be paid by the offender to be at fault. If the man refuses to attend for arbitration (*varkurai*) by members of the village committee, or attends but ignores their recommendation, the woman's only remaining recourse is to summons him at the village court.

The village court is subject to the same lack of privacy as the village *varkurai*. This, together with the formality of the proceedings, can be a deterrent to women, who are not accustomed to speaking in public and are easily intimidated by male magistrates, who they feel are often unsympathetic to the woman's viewpoint. Though women act as principals on their own behalf, they do not usually attempt court action unless they have sympathetic support from their fathers or male relatives. An advantage of the village court is that summonsed persons can face a gaol sentence for non-attendance, and so usually turn up, and decisions can be enforced by the same means after endorsement by a local or district court magistrate.

A drawback of village court hearings in the eyes of the Tolai is that probably only one and possibly none of three magistrates sitting at any one time knows anything of the parties and their history. Far from endorsing the Western ideal that magistrates should have had no prior knowledge of or involvement in cases which appear before them, the Tolai feel that cases of a complex nature are better dealt with by persons who are already familiar with the personalities and issues involved (provided that none of the magistrates is too closely connected with either of the disputants). By the time the case gets to the village courts all other remedies will have failed, and it is difficult for magistrates to explore the background to the case in sufficient depth for them to be able to do

anything constructive. Informants say that usually the magistrates impose a heavy compensation and/or court fine on one or both parties, and tell them to go away and behave themselves in future. In the four cases of wife-beating heard by Pila Pila village court between January and June 1978, no resolution was reached.

Village court magistrates can endorse or adjudicate over the dissolution of traditional marriages, but are reluctant to do so. No statistics are available, but it is my impression from talking to welfare officers, village court magistrates and community government councillors that the village court has a low success rate for resolving marital problems brought to it. In view of the intimate nature of marital cases and the circumstances of the courts, one could perhaps not expect otherwise. It seems that the village court is generally able at best only to slow up, but not reverse, the gradual deterioration of a marriage. Couples can and do go on for years resorting to the village court from time to time, but the usual outcome is that they eventually separate for good. A study to follow up marital cases appearing at village courts is needed to assess the effectiveness or otherwise of village courts in dealing with marital disputes.

There are, then, a number of remedies that a wife can employ, according to the seriousness of the problem. In Pila Pila, of the 47 wives who suffered violent assault from their husbands sufficiently serious as to cause the wives to seek assistance outside the marriage, 16 (25%) had asked for counselling from a church or village leader, 18 (28%) had gone as far as bringing their cases for arbitration by members of the village committee and 13 (20%) had gone on to take their husbands to the village court. Pila Pila village court has only been in operation since January 1978, and all cases occurring before then had to be dealt with by village leaders. In all, 73% of beaten wives have taken some degree of formal action as a result of being beaten. Unfortunately, however, I have no way of knowing how many times these women experienced beatings without taking action. Nor is it possible to say whether or not the action taken resulted in a permanent or temporary reduction in beatings. A long-term study of the outcome of such cases would be of great interest.

Perhaps the commonest strategy of all is for a woman temporarily to separate from her husband, while thinking what to do, waiting for tempers to cool, or pursuing one of the other remedies described. When a woman and her children leave home temporarily because she had a quarrel or fight with her husband, it is known in the Tolai language as *tabunua*. The woman takes the children and a few of their things and goes to stay with her parents or maternal uncle for a week, a month or even a year or more, depending on the seriousness of the situation. Because of the strong tendency for people to marry within the same locality, when a woman and her children go to stay with her parents or uncle it may only mean a move of a mile or two, or even less. The children can probably continue to go to the same school, and the village grapevine can keep both partners in the marriage informed of what the other is doing.

The houses of her parents or of her maternal uncles are safe places of refuge for the woman, because her husband is in a relationship of respect and

avoidance with these people and should not threaten her or try to bring her back by force while she is staying with one of them. Sometimes the separation is sufficient in itself to effect a reconciliation. Once tempers have cooled, either the wife returns of her own accord, or the husband will send her a *varporong* of a few fathoms of shell money to signify his willingness for her to return. If she accepts the shell money, she then prepares a special meal which she and the children will eat with her husband on their return. Informants say that women *tabunua* less frequently now than in the past, because couples who marry in church are constrained by their marriage vows to stay together through the bad times as well as the good. In fact, nowadays some men are prepared to use force to prevent their wives leaving with their children, so as not to break up the family unit even temporarily. However, for most women this is still an option that they can take up whenever problems arise in their married lives, even after the death of their own parents, for they never lose their rights of clan membership and there is always some senior person in the clan whose duty it is to take them in, at least for a while.

Divorce is also a possibility for women who suffer excessive violence from their husbands. The formalities of divorce for couples married in the traditional way by payment of bride-price are relatively simple. If the man is at fault, he forfeits the bride-price and may pay an additional lump-sum compensation to the wife and children. If the woman is at fault, she must repay part of the bride-price, according to how long the marriage has lasted and how many children she has born. Now that women generally control the bride-price given for them (though it is usually looked after by someone else), the return of all or part of its presents no serious difficulty to most women. In fact, if both partners want the divorce, they may separate by mutual agreement with no formalities at all.

Church marriages in Papua New Guinea usually include state marriage registration according to the Marriage Act (Chapter 280, Revised Laws of Papua New Guinea). So for couples married in church, divorce can be a problem. If both parties want to separate, they usually make private arrangements according to custom, with the understanding that each will be free to establish a new union by custom only. If one party is opposed, the marriage can only be dissolved by the national court, which involves lengthy and expensive legal proceedings which few people can afford. Moreover, knowing the emphasis that European and many non-Tolai Papua New Guinean judges might put on patrilineal inheritance and the role of the father, many Tolai women are afraid they would risk losing custody of their children if they applied for a divorce for a state registered church marriage. This ungrounded but none the less real fear of losing their children is sufficient to deter almost all women from divorcing until their children are over 16 years old.

Tolai women, regardless of whether they are beaten by their husbands, do not resort lightly to divorce. In Pila Pila, 11 of the 65 surveyed marriages known to have involved violence (or 17%) have ended in divorce, which is the same divorce rate for all marriages in Pila Pila which up to 1978 had ended in divorce. The Tolai ideal of marriage is life-long monogamy, and the majority

of Tolai do attain this ideal. Societies like the Tolai which combine matrilineal inheritance with virilocal residence (where a wife moves to live at her husband's place on marriage) tend to have relatively high rates of divorce, because the ties of the kin group compete with and are more compelling than the ties of marriage and the nuclear family (Richards 1967:208; Schneider 1974:16-20). Amongst the Tolai, however, separations of varying durations are common, but divorce much less so. A.L. Epstein (1969:228) attributes the relative stability of Tolai marriages to two distinctive features of Tolai domestic arrangements. One is 'the husband's strong powers over the wife ... amounting in the old days to the power or life and death', and the other is the lack of authority on the part of the girl's parents or kin to intervene in a marriage once it has been contracted.

Epstein's assessment was based on field-work carried out in Matupit village in 1959, and although it seems as if divorce rates have increased somewhat since then, the tendency for Tolai women to stay in unhappy marriages merits some comment, given the ease of customary divorce procedures and the fact that the matrilineal system assures women of their rights to whatever clan land is available, and of custody of their children (for customary marriages). To the two factors identified by Epstein as contributing to the stability of Tolai marriage, in the present-day context I would add two more: firstly, the growing importance of the nuclear family, and secondly, the increasing financial dependence of most wives and children on a male breadwinner. The various moral and material pressures that have led to family allegiances taking priority over those of matrilineal kinship have already been described. 'Being a family' is now very important to the Tolai, and most people are prepared to make sacrifices to keep the marriage and the family unit intact. Children still take their clan membership from their mother, but whereas in the past the Tolai would speak of the children of a marriage as belonging to the wife, nowadays the children are regarded as belonging equally to both parents. Most men's efforts are now on behalf of their own, not their sisters' children, even to the extent of trying by various methods to pass on their matrilineage lands to their own children. Currently there is no clear consensus on how nuclear family property should be divided, so that if the marriage breaks up, the wife and children may well be left with nothing, in line with Tolai custom. This is an incentive for women, particularly those who are not working, to stay in the marriage even if it means putting up with being beaten. As one informant put it:

Nowadays, most Tolai fathers think that whatever they are doing now belongs to their children. They feel very strongly that everything they do these days, especially business, they're doing it for their children, not their nephews and nieces. Only the old people are still thinking of their nephews and nieces on their mother's side. A lot of women are thinking of this. So that means they either stay with their husbands, or they'll have to give the children to their husbands, so that the children can benefit from what the husband is doing.

Several other reasons why women often stay in violent marriages deserve mention here, although they are not specific to the Tolai situation. Men who beat their wives do not do so all the time. In between violent episodes they may well be loving and kind to their wives. Very often they apologise sincerely for their violence, try to make amends and even promise not to do it again. Their wives are therefore ready to give their husbands another chance, and another, in the hopes that things will improve. 'They love their husbands again and don't want to hurt them' was how informants frequently put it. Other women are reluctant to take action against their husbands for dread of the shame that they will feel at having to make public the intimate details of their marital difficulties. A few women are too frightened to help themselves because their husbands have threatened to kill them if they should attempt to leave or complain to outsiders.

It is important to understand the force of pressures on a woman to stay with the marriage, so as not to be deluded into thinking that women who stay with men who beat them perhaps do not really mind being beaten. Most emphatically, Tolai women do mind. Even those women who agree in principle with a man's right to beat his wife object very strongly to being beaten themselves. But married women, especially women with children, are not free agents. They have many material and moral considerations to weigh against the risks to their personal safety. That more women do not divorce husbands who beat them should not be taken as an indication that these women condone the use of violence against them, but rather as an indication of the importance of marriage and the family in Tolai society, and of women's subordinate position in these institutions.

Causes of Marital Violence

Several difficulties beset the investigation of why marital violence occurs. One is the problem of distinguishing between the triggering cause and the underlying cause, for many violent incidents are sparked off by a trivial event ('the straw that broke the camel's back'), although the situation may have been building up for a long time previously. Moreover, husband and wife often disagree on what caused particular instances of violence. Perhaps the thorniest problem is the level of causality. Take for example the common case where a man comes home drunk and hits his wife. One's first assumption would be that the violence was caused by the alcohol. Then we find out that the beating commenced when the wife began complaining about her husband's behaviour, from which we might infer that the beating was brought on by the wife's complaining. We then discover that the wife's complaints concerned the fact that as well as drinking away the family's food money, the husband was going around with another woman while out drinking. This might lead us to conclude that the causes were the husband's adultery, and money problems. Going deeper still, we might discover that the couple had had several children close together, that they had very different educational backgrounds, were

married very young due to parental pressure and had never been happy together. What then are the 'real' causes of violence in this case? Clearly each of these factors is relevant at some level, and several of them are interconnected, but without a thorough exploration of each couple's background it would be impossible to come to any meaningful conclusion about the 'real' causes of violence in a particular marriage. For present purposes, this study will rely on informants' own generalisations about common causes of problems in marriage leading to wife-beating. As already stated, wives hitting their husbands is not perceived as a problem by the Tolai, and therefore no further discussion is required here.

From the cases which I collected and from informants' own recollections it seems that most wife-beating among the Tolai arises out of a domestic argument over some problem in the marriage. Any problem can lead to an argument, and thence into violence (often triggered by some minor event), but adult informants and student questionnaire respondents were in agreement that the most important causes of problems arising in marriage these days are drink, adultery and financial problems, whether occurring together or separately.

Of the three, drink is seen as the most prevalent problem, both by the students (see Table 7) and by adult informants. In interviews, drink was mentioned by every informant as a major cause of marriage problems, and specifically of wife-beating. Drink is seen both as a direct cause of wife-beating, as when drunken men beat their wives apparently for no other reason than to relieve their aggression ('they get drunk and just feel like fighting' was a common remark), and as an indirect cause, when drunken behaviour causes or contributes to other problems, such as damage to property, shortage of money, infidelity and so on, that lead on to violence later. Many women reported that their husbands only hit them when drunk. However, it does not necessarily follow that if these men were prevented from getting drunk they would never hit their wives. Some women appear to use the excuse of the husband's drunkenness to exonerate him, perhaps in the hopes that blaming the drink and not the man holds out a better chance for the marriage to improve in the future. A great deal of present day wife-beating does seem to be drink-related, but it must be remembered that wife-beating was common in traditional times, before the advent of imported or home-brewed alcohol. It cannot be said that the relationship is one of simple causality. Not all drunken men hit, and not all men who hit are drunk. Drink may well be a catalyst for wife-beating, but it is unlikely to be the sole cause.

Alcohol seems to be a much more important contributing factor to wife-beating in Tolai villages all over the Gazelle than it is elsewhere in rural Papua New Guinea (Toft and Bonnell 1985). This is because of the special conditions that prevail in the Gazelle Peninsula and the relative affluence of the Tolai. Many Tolai have regular incomes from jobs or small businesses, and there are no marked seasonal harvest periods for the main agricultural crops of copra and cocoa comparable to the 'coffee flushes' of the Highlands. Most villages have their own euphemistically-named 'social club', and licensing hours are liberal. Alcohol for home consumption can be bought at liquor outlets all over

the Gazelle on any day except Sunday. Men who want to drink away from the village can do so fairly easily, since the Gazelle has an excellent network of all-weather roads, and an abundant supply of public and private vehicles. Much of the information for this study was gathered from inhabitants of villages close to Rabaul where the number of liquor outlets and clubs is greatest, but generalisations about the availability of alcohol relative to other rural areas of Papua New Guinea and its relation to wife-beating hold true for all but the most remote Tolai villages. This being so, there could be implications for other parts of Papua New Guinea where a marked rise in prosperity and mobility is expected and where alcohol sales are subject to minimal restrictions.

The fact that 'husband hitting wife' is ranked only twelfth in the list of causes of problems in marriage, despite the prevalence of wife-beating among the Tolai, seems to indicate that much wife-beating is perceived by the Tolai as being the effect of other problems, particularly drinking, rather than a cause in its own right. As mentioned earlier, being beaten may make a woman leave her husband for a while, but it is not usually sufficient cause for her to seek divorce, unless the beatings were severe and/or frequent. Only in a relatively small number of marriages does wife-beating appear to constitute a distinct problem in itself.

As regards adultery, the suspicion of adultery is quite sufficient to disrupt a Tolai marriage as is shown by answers 2 and 3 in Table 7 below. Traditional incest taboos⁹ and marriage prohibitions bar sexual relations between many adults of opposite sex, but if a man and woman are not so barred, it is enough

Table 7: Main causes of problems in marriage.
Questionnaire responses from high school students

	<i>% of Respondents</i>
1 Husband's drinking	71
2 Suspicion by the wife about her husband and other women	67
3 Suspicion by the husband about his wife and other men	48
4 Shortage of money or land	45
5 Problems over children	38
6 Wife fails in her duties for the family	31
7 Getting married too young	24
8 Failure to pay bride-price	22
9 Gambling	16
10 Dislike of the partner	14
11 Husband fails in his duties for the family	12
12 Husband hitting wife	7
13 Children not spaced properly	7
14 Interference by parents	5
15 Wife cannot have children	3
16 Arranged marriage	3

Note: Students were asked to indicate which of the above list were, in their opinion, the three or four most important causes of problems in marriage these days. Responses were obtained from 28 female and 30 male students aged between 17 and 18 years, but answers from both sexes are presented together, as there were no significant differences between female and male replies. Because of the small size of the sample, ranking must be regarded as only approximate.

for them to be seen walking, talking, sitting or chewing betel nut together for rumours to fly. Proof of actual sexual intercourse is unnecessary.

Table 7 shows that 20% more students felt that suspected adultery by the husband is a greater cause of problems in marriage than suspected adultery by the wife. Interviewed informants also put most of the blame for infidelity on husbands, who usually have more opportunity than wives for forming extra-marital liaisons. Women spend most of their time in the villages or gardens, usually in the company of other women, and once they have children their movements are even more restricted. Most men, however, are away from home for most of the day, either at work in town or in their cocoa or coconut plantations, at the beach, at the *tubuan* cult house, in the bush, or elsewhere. In Pila Pila, where quite a few married women work in town or at Nonga hospital, the result of their extra mobility and freedom can be seen in the increase of sexual jealousy and suspicion by their husbands, which contributes to what seems to be a higher rate of wife-beating amongst couples where the wife is working. This point will be returned to later.

It is interesting that 31% of the high school students considered that problems over children are an important cause of marriage difficulties, since not one of the adult informants cited children as a problem. Several adults and students mentioned that having children too close together caused problems, but this was separately listed in the students' questionnaire, and ranked only thirteenth. The 'wife fails in her duties for the family' referred to what was seen as the wife's slackness or laziness in performing her daily chores for the family, such as washing clothes, cleaning up the house and yard, taking care of the children and making sure that their sores and ailments are treated, gardening for food, shopping, and getting meals ready on time. The husband coming home and finding that his food is not ready is a common trigger situation for wife-beating, although this cannot always be classified as a failure by the wife in her duties, since refusing to cook is a standard way for a wife to show her husband that she is cross with him.

The 'husband fails in his duties for the family' was ranked by students as being a far less important cause of problems in marriage than failures by the wife. This is perhaps because it is the woman's input that keeps the home running on a day-to-day basis, and therefore her failures can be expected to be more frequent and more obvious. If the family has sufficient land, the wife can probably provide most basic necessities from her own labour, at least for a time, so the husband's responsibilities may consist mainly of providing cash for special expenditures. As one informant put it:

Whenever the family has to have money, like for the children's school fees, for feasts, or donations to the church, or for the tax to the community government, that's when a wife complains to her husband that he's not getting enough money for them, and so he hits her.

Getting married too young was mentioned by nearly one quarter of students as being an important cause of problems later in the marriage. In interview,

adult informants linked this with young people having much more freedom to mix with the opposite sex than formerly, when all activities from puberty onwards were strictly segregated by sex. While traditional village activities continue to be segregated by sex, most introduced activities are not. Adolescent girls and boys have plenty of opportunity to observe and interact with each other and, despite being forbidden to meet in private, many are able to escape their elders and arrange secret assignations, which sometimes result in girls becoming pregnant. To avoid the danger of an illegitimate birth most parents are anxious to get their daughters safely married as early as possible, preferably to boys of the parents' choice, but to the daughters' own choice if need be. In 1978, the average age at marriage for a sample of 20 women under 40 years old living in Pila Pila whose ages could be fairly reliably established was 17.5 years, while for their husbands it was 24.1 years.

Failure to pay bride-price was often linked to the previous problem, of getting married too young. A couple are politely referred to as married (*dir taulai*) if they are living together, whether or not the bride-price has been paid. Bride-price is still paid in shell money on the boy's behalf nowadays by his parents, older siblings and maternal relatives. Shell money cannot normally be bought with cash, nor inherited. It must be worked for, and it takes a long time to amass the 100 to 150 fathoms required for bride-price. Therefore a young man is still dependent on older people to pay bride-price for him. If the parents do not approve his choice of wife, they will delay as long as possible in paying over the bride-price, or even refuse entirely.

This situation causes problems for the relationship in two ways. Firstly, since a husband's rights over his wife are still regarded as stemming from the fact that he paid bride-price for her, where none is paid the relative positions of each partner are unclear, the woman can legitimately dispute the man's attempts to control her, and the negotiation of a working compromise can take longer than in a 'proper' marriage where there is a more established consensus about the rights and duties of husbands and wives. Secondly, the failure of parents and relatives to pay bride-price signifies their disapproval of the match, and the young couple must consequently do without the emotional and material support from family and relatives that most married couples can rely on when setting out in their life together.

Gambling as a cause of marriage problems refers to card games, indulged in mainly by men. It is seen by non-gamblers as a time-consuming waste of money, because gamblers often play in the daytime when they should be looking after their cocoa and copra, and because any winnings are spent on drink. Dislike of the partner, which was listed by 14% of the students as an important cause of marriage problems, was linked by adult informants with arranged marriage, which only one student thought was problematic. For 86 marriages in Pila Pila in 1978 on which data were gathered, 49% had been contracted by the couple's own choice and 51% had been arranged on the couple's behalf, with or without their consent. Usually when parents take the initiative in arranging their child's marriage they show great concern for their child's wishes and take pains to choose someone who is not only suitable from

a point of view of the material considerations involved, but who will also be temperamentally compatible with their child. Normally the young couple's consent is obtained, although I do know of a few cases where girls were beaten into acquiescence in the marriages arranged for them. Boys can usually avoid an unwanted marriage by absconding.

Of the causes of marriage problems listed in Table 7 and not yet discussed, interference by parents and the barrenness of the wife received only three and two mentions respectively. That parental interference is not a significant problem is at first surprising, since most married couples live with the husband's parents for the first year or two of marriage. This could either be taken as an indication of the strength of the principle that what goes on between a husband and wife is no one else's concern but their own and even parents are careful not to interfere, or it could show that problems in a couple's relationship only come to a head once they have set up their own separate establishment. Most probably both apply.

A significant number of Tolai women are barren. As far as I am aware, no statistics on barrenness are available for the Tolai population as a whole, but in Pila Pila 5 out of 47 women over 40 (10.6%) had been unable to have children. Because of the matrilineal system of descent, children belong to the descent group of their mother, a man looks to his sister (not his wife) to give him heirs, and childlessness is therefore not a prominent cause of marriage problems. This system is changing somewhat nowadays, as more people model themselves on what they see as the more 'modern' type of family, in which the husband/father is the breadwinner and provides for his own children, not his sister's.

In any case, adoption is a ready answer for women who cannot have children of their own. Adoption is widely practised among the Tolai, by couples who have had no children as well as those who have had a preponderance of children of one sex. When a child is adopted from a woman's own sister (real or classificatory), the primary kin connections and rights to land are not necessarily affected. In Pila Pila, the average number of live births for 47 women whose childbearing was completed was 7.5. Some families are of course much larger, and finding a baby to adopt is not usually hard, although it may become so in the future as more and more Tolai couples use introduced methods of family planning to limit the size of their families (see Bradley and Peberdy 1981).

It is easy to understand why problems in marriage can lead to arguments, but why do arguments lead on to marital violence, mainly wife-beating? Violence seems to occur when communication breaks down, and more specifically, when the husband does not want to hear what the wife has to say. This was mentioned so frequently by informants that it appears that the syndrome of 'wife talks, husband hits' is a common one, as the following statements from informants about the causes of wife-beating show:

Female: When fights come up, it's usually for a reason, because the wife was said something to her husband. Like if something happens in the

family so that the wife complains to her husband, and this makes the husband really cross, that's when he starts fighting her.

Female: It's caused by the husband's fooling around with another woman, or the husband's drinking. He comes home and then they just start arguing, because some men, they just can't sit down and discuss a problem. What they do is they want to take it out by fighting. Or if the woman started talking, the husband just gets up and says "You shut up", and that's how the fighting starts.

Female: Sometimes a man wants his wife to do what he thinks is right, or what he wants to be done. Sometimes it's when the wife might be busy doing something and they start quarrelling. They'll be just quarrelling, and then — it's typical of men! — they don't want the wife to overrule them. When they think that the wife is trying to put them down, that's what makes him more cross, and then he wants the wife just to shut up and listen to what he's saying. And when the wife starts saying something back, it makes him more cross, and that's what results in bashing.

Male: A lot of men hit their wives when they're drunk. When they get the money from selling coconut or cocoa and go drinking, then they forget about their children's education, their clothes, their food. Once a man gets together with friends, that's when he's going to spend all his money. By the time he gets back to his family, then the wife will say, "Now, where's the money from this copra we cut?" "Oh, I finished it off". So that is when the argument comes in, and at the end: Bang!

Male: What happens is this: a man goes drinking with friends, and when he comes back home he demands food. The wife just says, "Well, you're wasting your time and money out there drinking, why should I provide you with food? You know you have responsibilities here at home". He knows that it's true, but he doesn't want to hear it from her, so he hits her. When she's got a swollen lip, that will stop her from talking!

Female: Some men spend all their money on drink. So that makes the women very cross, because they are living with nothing, the money is wasted on drink. Nothing to buy the food, nothing to buy the soap for washing the clothes, or paying for the school fees and things that the children need. So these problems make the woman worry. But when she tries to talk to her husband about it, he just hits her. Some husbands never want to listen to their wives.

The above is only a small selection from many similar statements made by Tolai of both sexes. The inference that can be drawn from all the above remarks is that if the women had kept quiet, they would not have been hit. Does this mean, then, that the wives 'provoked' their husbands, who were therefore justified in hitting them? Among the meanings listed under 'to provoke' in the Concise Oxford Dictionary are 'to incite', 'to instigate' and 'to

cause'. If a wife initiates a discussion or argument with her husband knowing that he might hit her, should she be seen as inciting, instigating and causing the violence? In other words, is she to blame for her own injuries, rather than the husband who inflicted them? The answer must surely be no. To expect a woman to have to put up with any treatment from her husband without being allowed to make even verbal protest would be to reduce her to the status of a slave, animal or inanimate object. Tolai women themselves recognise this, as the following quotations from informants show:

Female: Most of the time, I know that if I talk, I'm going to make him really cross, and that's when he's going to hurt me, really beat me up, so I would rather keep my mouth shut. Although if I can't stand it any longer, I still have to stand up and talk. I'm not an animal, for him to do what he likes with.

Female: There have been a few times when I've carried on talking. Even though I know he's going to hit me, I still keep on talking. That's if it's about something very important, like money for the family. I have to try and do something, even if he hits me. I can't stay quiet, like a piece of wood.

Seemingly related to this tendency for women to get hit for talking is the apparent higher rate of wife-beating amongst couples where the wife is working. Due to the small size of the Pila Pila sample I am not able to support this assertion with statistical evidence, but several informants were of the opinion that working married women get beaten more by their husbands. It seems that working women frequently remind their husbands during domestic arguments of their financial independence, particularly if husbands themselves are not working. Working wives have less need than financially dependent wives to tolerate bad treatment from their husbands and are more likely to make their dissatisfaction plain. Scutt (1983:113) has made the same observation for western societies:

Women in paid employment and working two jobs — one in the home, one outside, whilst their husbands work only one — may ... be less likely to accept violence, less inclined to adopt a submissive pose.

Many Tolai husbands of working women react to their wives' claims for independence by beating them, in an attempt to reassert control. Every Monday morning after pay-Friday brings a crop of black eyes and swollen faces among female workers in Rabaul. Couples where the wife is working face additional strains because an employed wife cannot look after the home and children to the same standards as non-employed wives. Some couples rely on female relatives or other household members to do at least the basic cooking and washing, but others prefer to save money and reduce their obligations by doing as much as possible themselves. These husbands either have to rally round and help with some of the traditionally female domestic

chores, or put up with late meals and less regular clean laundry. Another problem which has already been alluded to in marriages where the wife works is that while the wife is out at work, the husband does not know where she is or whom she is with. Sexual jealousy by the husband, whether justified or not, often becomes a problem. Sometimes a man deliberately inflicts visible injuries on his wife, so that she will be embarrassed and ashamed when her colleagues see the state that she is in. Some men carry their humiliation of their wives even further, following their wives to the office and beating them up in front of their colleagues to demonstrate their control.

Male control is the issue underlying violence against all Tolai wives, whether employed outside the home or not. While modern life has affected the circumstances which precipitate wife-beating (drunkenness, wives working outside the home, shortage of land and resources, etc.), at a deeper level the cause of wife-beating is the same now as it was in traditional times, namely the belief that it is a man's right to control his wife. This principle is supported by the bride-price system and by the whole complex of beliefs and practices that create and maintain the ideology of male superiority. Marriage among the Tolai is an inherently unequal relationship in which the husband's authority is reinforced by numerous social and economic factors, such as the modern tendency for wives and children to be financially dependent on the husband/father, the growing importance of the nuclear family and the declining significance of the matrilineal descent group, the model of family relationships contained in the legal, educational and bureaucratic systems, and so on. It is Tolai women's subordinate position in Tolai society, and especially within marriage, that is the ultimate cause of violence against Tolai wives.

Prospects for the Future

While much wife-beating is accepted by the Tolai as normal, everyone knows of marriages where the violence is so frequent or severe as to be considered abnormal. The Tolai see these as constituting a social problem, about which 'something should be done'. Informants offered many suggestions about how marriages could be improved and wife-beating reduced, covering preventive and remedial as well as punitive measures. Preventive measures stressed better moral and emotional preparation for marriage, to be carried out by the churches, by youth and women's groups, by schools, and by parents. Some people suggested that the minimum age for marriage should be raised, or even that young people should be prevented from marrying until they have a house and a source of independent income. Many people felt that restricting or even banning alcohol would have an immediate impact by reducing marital conflicts, and thereby wife-beating. Since large families have more money problems, several people recommended a concentrated Family Planning campaign as a means of reducing wife-beating. More imaginative suggestions included the abolition of school fees so that parents would argue less about money, and a law to make husbands take their wives with them when they go to dances and official functions.

For existing marriages when wife-beating is a problem, counselling was the main remedial measure proposed. Most informants felt that this work was best carried out by church workers but that their present training was inadequate. Members of village committees who frequently arbitrate in marital disputes, were also suggested as candidates for specialised training in counselling, but such a training programme would be expensive, as committee members have to stand for re-election every three or four years. It is also questionable whether anybody but church workers would take on time-consuming marriage counselling work without some extra remuneration.

Many informants thought that stronger punitive measures were needed to curb wife-beating. The village courts came in for criticism for ineffective handling of marital disputes, and more training and supervision of magistrates was called for with more co-operation from the national police in arresting and gaoling offenders convicted of persistent wife-beating. Some informants recognised that the woman herself might be too frightened to take court action against her husband and recommended that third parties, such as the wife's parents, should be able to summons the husband on the wife's behalf.

While some of the proposals made by informants might well be effective in reducing wife-beating to some extent, it is unlikely that any of them will be carried out in the near future. At the present time, wife-beating is not an issue of urgent public concern in East New Britain Province, and no organisation or body shows signs of taking the matter up whether at the village level or higher. The obvious candidates for such action are the village women's clubs and fellowships, and their umbrella organisations, the provincial Council of Women and the Catholic Women's Association. Individual women's leaders have from time to time raised the idea that village women's groups should provide support to those of their members who are being beaten by their husbands, either by reasoning with the husbands, or by encouraging the wives to persevere with action through the village courts, but the proposals have not so far been taken up. Neither the provincial Council of Women, nor its predecessor, the *Nilai ra Warden* Association, has raised the issue of wife-beating as a matter for serious concern at provincial level, except to cite it as one of the evil effects of drinking during their campaign to have alcohol restricted. Until Tolai women themselves initiate action to reduce wife-beating or assist the victims, either through self-help schemes or by lobbying organisations such as the provincial government and the churches, it is unlikely that any measures will be taken in the province with a view to controlling wife-beating.

The fact that in Pila Pila 73% of beaten wives have tried to do something about their own situations shows that women do not want to be beaten. The violence nevertheless goes on because there is as yet no consensus among the Tolai that wife-beating itself is wrong. Each case is treated as a problem of individuals, and may be judged wrong because the beating was inappropriate in the circumstances or wrong because it was too extreme, but few Tolai would hold that violence against wives is wrong, *per se*. The belief that the husband knows best and that it is the wife's duty to obey him leads to the concept that

some wives 'deserve' a beating, and creates a situation where a beaten wife is presumed guilty until she proves herself innocent.

Like other Papua New Guinean societies, Tolai society is strongly male dominated. Wife-beating, sexual assault and rape are the most extreme means by which men assert their dominance over women. Many other diverse social, economic and ideological factors maintain sexual inequality in Tolai society and keep women in a subordinate position, particularly within marriage. For wife-beating to be eliminated would require far-reaching changes in every aspect of Tolai life in which the principle of male superiority is embedded in order to reduce sexual inequality and invalidate the belief that men have the right to control women.

In the perpetuation of sexual inequality and wife-beating, attitudes are crucial. As long as some use of force by husbands against wives receives a measure of social approval, wife-beating will continue. There will be no significant reduction in wife-beating among the Tolai without a change in attitudes. Changes in law, or the introduction of other measures to protect women from being beaten by their husbands, will have minimal effect while Tolai public opinion is largely in favour of a certain amount of wife-beating. However, the introduction of such changes could itself be instrumental in influencing current attitudes about the acceptability of wife-beating.

Male-female relations among the Tolai are not fixed, but are undergoing a constant process of realignment in response to changing circumstances. As we have seen, there is already much confusion, doubt and contradiction in the minds of many Tolai about how much wife-beating is permissible. Evidence of official support from governmental and non-governmental bodies for measures against wife-beating would certainly have an effect on the climate of Tolai opinion. However, while the bride-price system persists, which it seems certain to do for the foreseeable future, the belief that it is a man's basic right to control his wife will be hard to shake. Attempts in the past to abolish bride-price have met with failure, nor is it likely that any medium other than shell money would be acceptable, but it is possible that the amount could be drastically reduced so that only a token payment is made, or that a system could be introduced of counter-prestations from the woman's side to the man's, so that there is an exchange of equal value. Without some reform of the bride-price system, the payment of bride-price will remain the major legitimation for men's control of their wives, and for their use of violence against them. So long as men continue to dominate women in Tolai society, particularly in marriage, the physical expression of male control will persist.

Notes

¹ Fieldwork for this research was conducted mainly in Pila Pila village, 5 km from Rabaul, between June and September 1984 (see Bradley 1982). Previous fieldwork in

Pila Pila from August 1977 to August 1978 and from June to September 1981 provided supplementary background information. Over 40 hours of interviews specifically on marital violence were recorded and transcribed from nine female and seven male Tolai informants. Written questionnaires were completed by 28 female and 30 male Tolai final year students at Boisen High School, 3 km from Rabaul, for which the co-operation of Mr. Cyril Banaba was much appreciated. I would also like to thank the Premier of East New Britain, Mr. Ronald ToVue, and the Secretary of the Department of East New Britain, Mr. Nason Paulias, for their active support for this research. To the people of Pila Pila, and other informants who contributed to this study, I extend my heart-felt thanks. To preserve confidentiality I shall not name them here, but they know who they are. Their assistance is sincerely appreciated.

- ² See Section 55(1) of the Papua New Guinea Constitution and, in the Preamble to the Constitution, National Goals and Directive Principles 2(5) and 2(12)
- ³ *Dir tamana* literally means 'the two who are related as father and child', but can be extended to mean also 'a man and his wife', in reference to the authority that a man holds over his wife as well as over his children.
- ⁴ I am indebted to Karolus Walangat, now Assistant Secretary for Community Governments with the Department of East New Britain, for this information.
- ⁵ This is not to imply that, if marital violence is socially approved, the law should not concern itself in the matter. Cannibalism and pay-back killings, for example, are socially approved in some Papua New Guinean societies, but have had to be controlled by legal means as far as is possible, whether for moral or pragmatic reasons.
- ⁶ Tolai women very rarely drink alcohol. This question was included only for the sake of consistency with Table 3.
- ⁷ K = kina; the Papua New Guinean kina is currently (1985) worth about one United States dollar.
- ⁸ In Pila Pila in 1978, 91% of married women were living within one mile of their parents or a section of their matrilineage.
- ⁹ The Tolai are divided into two moieties. By custom, marriage between members of the same moiety is prohibited, and sexual intercourse within the moiety is regarded as incest. Other restrictions apply to marriage or intercourse between certain categories of persons related through their fathers or connected by marriage.

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CHAPTER THREE

KOVE WOMEN AND VIOLENCE: THE CONTEXT OF WIFE-BEATING IN A WEST NEW BRITAIN SOCIETY

by

Ann Chowning

Introduction

There are several reasons why I have chosen to focus on the Kove, out of the four Papua New Guinean societies in which I have lived. First, my observations there are somewhat more up-to-date, with my latest visit in 1983¹. Second, the large consolidated villages and the locations of my own dwellings made it easier for me to notice episodes of violence as they occurred; the residential situation in the other three societies made this harder to do. Third, as the only local source of medical aid until my latest visit, I was often brought the injured to treat, and was usually told what happened by an onlooker, if not by the victim.² Finally, my own impression was that wife-beating, as a particular form of in-group violence, was particularly common and severe in Kove. I was not alone in this impression: in 1976 the Papua New Guinean government officers stationed at Talasea, from which Kove was administered, announced that they intended to make much more frequent patrols simply in order to hear complaints about wife-beating while they were fresh, before the victims and their kin were persuaded to say nothing to officials.

I must nevertheless stress that my impression may have been an accident of my opportunities for observation in this particular society. Domestic violence may have been equally common in Lakalai, Molima and Sengseng, and simply not so often brought to my attention.

It is, however, safe to say not only that it is common in Kove, but that one of the main reasons for it, the desire by men to obtain shell money by bringing pressure on women, does not exist in the other societies. Neither does the tendency, found in Kove, of men to attack their mothers and sisters. Women are not simply victims, however, and the use of violence against them must be understood in a broader social context. I shall accordingly describe the overall Kove situation, and then compare it with what I found in the other three societies.

Background

The data here refer to the main body of Kove-speakers,³ who all live in the Kombe Cenus Division, and not to the two villages (Tamuniai and Arumigi) located far to the west, which have had a different history of government and mission contact. The Kove villages, with one exception, are located directly on the coast or on tiny off-shore islands. Each contains one or more men's houses, associated with separate patrilineages, which contain ritual paraphernalia which cannot be seen by women. The fact that the ceremonial importance of the men's houses has been so strongly maintained in Kove is one of many indications of their desire to retain the core of their traditional way of life in the face of outside influences. Shortly before the First World War the Kove were partly pacified by German officials, who appointed the first *luluais* (village headmen). Despite much pressure from later governments, the Kove refused to accept local government councils until 1977. They also have a reputation among missionaries for resistance to their teachings, although a Roman Catholic mission was established in Kove in 1930, and a Seventh Day Adventist one in the early 1950s. Other missionaries (Baha'i, Jehovah's Witnesses, etc.) have visited Kove with increasing frequency in recent years, and almost all Kove claim some sort of church affiliation. Church teachings have affected belief, particularly concerning what happens at death, and also behaviour, making people reluctant to work on holy days or to eat certain foods. The direct church influences on sexual and marital behaviour, however, have been slight. The changes that have occurred owe more to new laws (such as the one penalising a man who attacks his daughter's seducer) and to contact with foreign ways of life, which have led to a shift towards greater premarital sexual freedom and to more individual say in choosing one's spouse. Nevertheless, no matter how a marriage is initially contracted, its stability depends, as in the past, on the ability of the couple to satisfy their kin. In particular, and reportedly to a much greater degree than in the past, it is necessary for a man to keep making payments in shell money to his wife's kin as long as the wife lives. Failure to provide large enough payments leads at best to public scolding and shaming, and at worst to the possibility of divorce or death from sorcery, both threatened by the wife's male kin. Shell money was once obtained primarily by trade with outsiders, but now most of it is manufactured within Kove, with women doing the bulk of the work. Nevertheless, the money she manufactures is not usually considered to be the woman's to do with as she likes; only the money she receives in ceremonial exchanges or earns by selling such goods as mats falls into that category. Most of what she makes is considered to be the joint property of herself and her husband, to be paid out as part of her bride-price at ceremonies honouring the children of the marriage, especially the first-born.

The husband putting on such ceremonies obtains only a fraction of the money from his wife. The bulk comes from his sisters (and their husbands) in return for 'gifts' of other goods that he has made to them over the years, and the rest from both borrowing and calling in loans that he has made to his

brothers for their own ceremonies. (For a fuller account, see Chowning 1974, 1978.) In this system, a married woman tends to be caught between the desires of her husband to accumulate large sums for his own ceremony and also to pay his debts, and the desires of her brothers, who may need shell money urgently for their own ceremonies and debts. Women only occasionally receive shell money at ceremonies, being more likely to get other goods such as clay pots and wooden bowls, but those who do have some may also be subject to demands from other kin, such as a son, for help when debtors are pressing. Much violence against women comes from men annoyed or frustrated in their attempts to obtain shell money from them (see below).

Treatment of Children

At first glance, Kove babies seem to suffer an exceptional degree of physical violence because of the adult fondness for provoking a baby to tears, often by slapping it until it begins to cry, after which it is usually laughed at and cuddled. In fact, the slaps are light ones, and it is unlikely that the baby is really hurt. Prolonged crying is thought to endanger a young child's health, and is rarely permitted, though some mothers are more impatient or hot-tempered than others, and may strike a child that another mother would simply ignore. Often if children are squabbling a mother will punish one at random, without finding out who is to blame. Other kin, particularly grandparents, may intervene if they think a child is being treated too harshly, even if the offence is one which usually demands punishment. Children are in theory not punished until they are old enough, at six or so, to have good judgement, but a much younger child who torments a baby or destroys property is likely to receive a slap. Otherwise punishment, administered with the hand, a stick, or a broom, is most likely to be given for such an offence as failing to look after a younger child who is then hurt; neglect of domestic duties; deliberately injuring another child or a pig; carelessness resulting in breakage or loss of valuable property such as a paddle or a knife; or behaviour likely to anger other adults such as damaging their property or hurting their children. By contrast, small children are not usually punished for physical or verbal aggression against older members of their own family, including their parents, or for refusal to run errands or carry out other requests. On the contrary, children are generally encouraged to be aggressive so long as they do not risk being hurt or getting their parents into quarrels with other adults whose child or pig has been injured. Very young children, often waving weapons such as knives, or, for boys, miniature fish-spears, chase parents and grandparents who pretend to be frightened; if the child is unarmed, it is only laughed at when it strikes an adult. If the child has been hit by another child, it is ordered to return the blow as long as the other child is not larger. Furthermore, to entertain their parents, boys too young to be talking well may be held by adults and told to hit each other even when they pull back and burst into tears. I have not seen this done to girls, but it is noteworthy that with young children, there are no sexual constraints on physical aggression. The

Kove have rigid rules about the different behaviour expected of males and females, and a little boy who tries to use a broom, or a little girl who picks up a fishspear, is likely to be scolded for acting like a person of the opposite sex, but a girl is not reproached simply for fighting. Rather, as she grows older she tends to restrict physical aggression to children or to other females. The only man a grown woman is likely to strike is her husband. In contrast to some other societies, including Lakalai and Sengseng, there are no formal occasions in Kove on which girls and boys are allowed to attack boys and men.

Possibly because real warfare ended so long ago, adults also do not encourage boys to fight each other. On the contrary, adults warn older children of both sexes not to fight with children of other households, since doing so would create trouble and possibly expense for both sets of parents. (The expenses include possible fines in the village court and, if a first-born child is injured, the necessity for his father to make a feast at which pork and shell money are given to the child's mother's kin.) Children who fight with each other may also be reproached because they are kin; in particular, cross-cousins⁴ are supposed to have friendly, joking relationship (calling each other *wanplei* in Pidgin). There is consequently a real discontinuity between the amount of physical aggression allowed in children too young to do real harm and that allowed to older ones. Only within the family are these older ones likely to continue using fists and weapons against each other (see below).

As a substitute for physical aggression children are taught to use insulting language to each other and to adults. This takes the form of set formulas: some sexual; some calling the other person ugly, lazy, stupid or poverty-stricken; and some boasting of the higher prestige of the speaker's family, including the ceremonies honouring him or her. Whether such insults are taken seriously depends on the situation, including the possibility that they might be true. In general, adults regard such talk by children as amusing, so that even an angry parent will start laughing as the flow of invective continues. Teaching children to boast and to insult others is part of a general Kove pattern of training them to be proud of themselves and independent. Parents often boast that a particular child is a real *bikhet* (big head), stubborn and disobedient (though the child may not be regarded so tolerantly by others in the community). Equivalent behaviour tends to continue into adulthood; the Kove enjoy their reputations as *bikhet* in the eyes of their neighbours and of government officers. However, the use of insults can lead to serious quarrels and violence among adults, whereas a child who really annoys an adult by something said is likely to be turned on and chased, but rarely gets hurt.

The one exception to the pattern of allowing children to act in this way comes from a few of the most fervent Christians, who believe that they are following European patterns, as exemplified in the schools, by beating children to make them docile and obedient. One such man contrasted the 'bad' independent behaviour of his oldest child, who had not received such treatment, to that of the much better-behaved younger children. In line with these beliefs, some villages have also appointed officials to discipline the children, usually by caning, for such offences as truancy from school or hurting another child. Partly because some of these officials think that all

children should be punished for the acts of one, their actions are often resented by parents. Parents generally accept that teachers have a right to use force against children but do not readily grant that right to anyone else apart from close kin. It is said that in the past, the older men would take offence if children misbehaved, even simply by making too much noise, in the vicinity of a men's house, and would throw spears at them or threaten to kill them by sorcery. Nowadays they only complain.

Adolescence and Marriage

Once a girl is old enough to be considered for marriage, she is subject to a new set of pressures. Traditionally, most girls became engaged very young and had nothing to say about the choice, and quite often the boy's wishes were not consulted either. All of the arrangements were made by the parents, leading to years of exchange of food, wealth, and labour before the couple were fully married. Such arrangements are still common but often fall through, not only because of the increasing independence of young people but because of the problems caused by the pattern of most young men going away to school or work while the girls stay in the village. Even if the boy does not get interested in someone else while he is away, he may return home to find himself engaged to a girl who does not appeal to him. On the other hand, if he is happy with the engagement but stays away for several years, the chances are high that the girl will become interested in someone else. Parents try to persuade boys to stick to previous arrangements rather than lose the wealth they have already given to the girl's family, but do not normally use physical force on them. Girls, however, are often beaten by their parents and brothers to induce them to go along with an arranged marriage. Occasionally in the past a girl would actually be married against her will, and if she was particularly recalcitrant was tied up and left on a desert island with her new husband until she gave in (or, sometimes, killed herself). Forced marriages no longer occur, but it is still common for a girl's kin to use much physical force to get her to agree to a particular marriage, or to prevent her from entering into one they dislike.

They may have several reasons for disliking a proposed match — old quarrels between the families, a bad reputation on the man's part, or the fact that he already has a wife. The most common objection, however, has to do with the question of whether the marriage will be financially profitable for the girl's kin — her parents and above all, her brothers, who will receive the bulk of the life-long marriage payments. One woman told of being knocked unconscious and losing some teeth when beaten up by her first cousin, her nearest male kinsman, because he did not want her to marry a man from a poor family. (She did marry him, however, and he turned out to be a very satisfactory in-law.) A girl does not necessarily yield to her parents' wishes, especially if the prospective groom is willing to elope and stay out of reach of her parents until tempers have a chance to cool. But even when she is married, she can still expect physical violence from her own kin as they try to coerce her to give shell money or get it from her husband.

Despite the possibility of bringing a court case for assault, a man who has an affair also runs the risk of physical violence at the hands of the woman's kin or, if she is married, her husband's kin. The chances that a man discovered in an affair will be beaten up are high, even if the affair leads to marriage. Often these fights develop into general brawls as his kin come to his aid, but the ideal is to take him by surprise and chase him from the village before he can be rescued. This is virtually the only situation in which a young man is subject to physical violence at the hands of residents of his own village.

A girl who has many or open affairs, even if she is not engaged, is likely to be beaten by her male and female kin because they are shamed by her behaviour, which is felt to reflect on them. If she gets pregnant, some parents become even more violent, especially if they cannot arrange a marriage to the man responsible, or if he is unacceptable. Although illegitimate births are becoming more common, they are still considered shaming. In one recent case, a man who forbade his daughter to marry the man responsible for her pregnancy (partly because he already had two wives) is reported to have beaten his daughter severely in order to force her to leave the baby at the mission station as soon as she gave birth, and to have no further contact with it.

Apart from considerations of shame, most violence against unmarried women at the hands of men of their patrilineage derives from the desire to gain financial profit, and so prestige, from exploiting them as a source of shell money. Men often say that the easiest way to become rich and important is to have many sisters, but of course only if these marry the right men, who will fulfil their obligations to their brothers-in-law.

Unmarried women also risk violence or other harm from rejected suitors. The same personality traits that are encouraged by Kove patterns of child rearing lead to highly insulting behaviour from a girl approached by a man who does not appeal to her. (Her family may also act insultingly if approached by the family of a man they dislike, and the girl may again suffer the consequences.) The angry suitor is considered likely either to rape the girl or to try to harm her by sorcery. Both possibilities are constantly mentioned, and the serious illness or death of any exceptionally attractive girl is always blamed on a man who was not able to marry her. Nevertheless, such girls continue to speak insultingly to men they dislike.

If, however, a girl and a young man like each other, then the threat of violence comes from other women involved with the same man, including his wife. All fights between young women are attributed by onlookers to sexual jealousy, even when the participants give other reasons such as rude remarks. The fights may be ferocious, with fists, fingernails, feet and teeth used; they are comparable to the fights that frequently occur between women married to the same man. Women, then, are not just victims of violence; they also practice it. Young women use it not only against rivals in love, but within the family against their younger siblings of both sexes and their older female kin. Fights between a married woman and her elderly mother, or a grown girl and her middle-aged mother, are by no means uncommon, even though they are

condemned by outsiders if the older woman is badly hurt. But if a grown girl chastises a younger sibling, there is no more condemnation than when a boy does the same. It tends to be assumed that the beating of a child is punishment for real misbehaviour, but outsiders rarely intervene in family matters. On the contrary, I have seen onlookers laughing and cheering on a grown girl who knocked down, kicked, and repeatedly hit with a stick her younger sister who had just said something teasing about the older girl's marriage arrangements.

Once a girl is actually married, she faces the new problem of actual violence from her husband. With young couples, the most common cause is sexual jealousy. It is considered to be natural if the woman has any contact with a man known or thought to have been a former lover, and women report always being beaten when the husband catches a glimpse of the name of a former lover that a woman may have been unwise enough to have tattooed on herself. A degree of sexual jealousy is tolerated; for example, it is taken for granted that most men will refuse to accept the wife's child by another man, even a long-divorced husband, because of not wanting to be reminded of him. Many women, however, claim that their husbands are unduly jealous; it is considered unbecoming constantly to suspect a wife (even one who is already a grandmother) of straying. On the other hand, if a woman actually has been unfaithful, she expects her husband to beat her (and as was noted above, the man is likely to have been beaten up also). Adultery does not necessarily lead to divorce, but it is said always to lead to wife-beating. An aggrieved husband may take more extreme action, ranging from severing the wife's ear lobes to actually killing her. Even today, almost all Kove women have stretched ear lobes in which they usually wear ear-rings, and tearing these does the greatest harm to their beauty. In addition, since the ear-rings are connected with the wife's patrilineage (each having different designs), a man offends his in-laws if he damages the ear-rings. In a recent adultery case, a husband was thought to have gone too far when he cut off one of his wife's ear lobes and threw it away, and he had to pay her compensation in addition to the compensation that she had to pay for the adultery. The actual killings seem to have been done in sudden fits of rage; of the few cases in the recent past, gaol has always been the result.

In a separate category from sexual jealousy is excessive sexual desire on the part of the husband, most commonly shown by a man whose wife is suckling a baby too young to be weaned. Apart from her concern for the child, whose life is thought to be in danger if it continues to suckle while the mother is having intercourse, the mother will be condemned by everyone if she gets pregnant again before the baby is no longer dependent on her milk (see Chowning 1975). Yet some men try to force themselves on their wives and severely injure them if they resist. One man pushed his wife onto the hot stones she was preparing for cooking, burning her badly, and another actually killed his wife by stabbing her with a fish-spear. In these cases, the men were thoroughly in the wrong, and both were gaoled. A less clearcut case is that of a man whose frequent beatings of his middle-aged wife are said by some to be caused by her refusal of intercourse on the grounds that she is too old. She is a grandmother, and it is

agreed that grandmothers should not continue to bear children, but many people think that traditional contraceptive methods would safeguard them. It should be added, however, that a woman who refuses intercourse for any reason is likely to become jealous if the husband then turns to another woman.

As has already been mentioned, women frequently resort to violence against co-wives — beating and kicking them and tearing their ear lobes. Sometimes one wife succeeds in driving another away by these means, though she may turn to magic to achieve this (love magic to attract the husband, and a kind of repulsion magic to make him turn against the other woman). Most Kove agree that women do not know forms of sorcery that would actually injure or kill a female rival, but occasionally the death of a co-wife is blamed on action by a woman or her male kin, offended at her being displaced.

The reasons for the quarrels may not simply be sexual; frequently the husband neglects one wife by not working with and for her, and sometimes does little for his children by her. But even if he divides his time and attention equally between them, as ideally he should do, the chances are high that they will resent each other. In the quarrels that erupt, one wife may turn her attack on to the husband, normally using a piece of wood, knife, or axe to counter his superior physical strength. The Kove do not seem to share the attitude reported for neighbouring and culturally very similar Kaliai (Lusi) that it is totally improper as well as futile for a woman ever to strike a man (Counts 1980:339-41). True, if asked a theoretical question, the Kove will say that only a 'bad' woman would strike her husband, but in specific cases the woman's behaviour is often excused. It is still rare for women to use physical violence against their husbands. Much more often they turn it against possessions, cutting up his clothes and other property, or damaging their joint house by tearing at the thatch and destroying the vine lashings. The woman who destroys her husband's possessions is likely to be severely beaten for doing so, and to get little sympathy from others. Damage to a house, which can be triggered by other kinds of quarrels, is treated more lightly.

Apart from actual sexual misconduct on her part, the female action that seems to most men to justify wife-beating is neglect of duties to the husband's kin. These duties begin long before the principal marriage payment is made, but become more important and more onerous at that time, since it also typically marks the permanent shift of the wife to a house in her husband's hamlet. (Until it is made, sometimes several years after the marriage, the couple may continue to live in the wife's hamlet.) Since marrying within the patrilineage is forbidden, almost all marriages⁵ involve a move to another hamlet. On the other hand, many women dislike leaving their own villages, and especially moving to ones in which they have no close kin at all to support them against their in-laws. In most cases a married woman will have some kin living nearby who will help her if they think she is being mistreated. All of them, however, would agree that she owes a duty to the men of her husband's hamlet, who probably contributed heavily to the brideprice. Her obligations include providing cooked food and water for the men who gather and sleep in the

men's house, and for their own guests. Cooking only for one's own household is strongly criticised and may lead to pressure for the marriage to be ended. A man who beats his wife for neglect of these particular duties will be supported by the women as well as the men of his hamlet, and quite possibly by his wife's kin as well.

Women are not supposed to behave disrespectfully towards in-laws either, especially those of senior generation; to refuse to help them; or to quarrel with them. At the same time, a father-in-law or mother-in-law should not strike the woman, regardless of the provocation. One big-man told me of doing this on two occasions because of losing his temper, and said that he immediately and voluntarily offered compensation because he was in the wrong. He may scold her as he likes. A woman who behaves improperly towards her parents-in-law, however, may be beaten, and sometimes her own kin will do the job. So when one young woman, in the course of a quarrel with her mother-in-law, publicly broke the taboo on eating in the older woman's presence (see Chowning 1974:192), her own brother beat her.

Balancing the insistence on respect to the elders of the hamlet is their general obligation to keep wife-beating from getting out of hand. I have been told that a man who beats his wife too much may be sorcerised by her brothers, but this was not given as a reason why older men warn younger ones against it. They simply seem to be showing some concern for the welfare of the woman and, as a corollary, her children. One young woman who had several times been severely injured by her husband when they were newly married (including being speared through the ankle and being knocked unconscious twice) said that the big-men had repeatedly scolded her husband for his behaviour, especially once she became pregnant, and he had improved greatly since.

If a woman 'talks too much', her being beaten may be approved by other members of the community, including her own kin. Such disapproved talk is of two kinds: lengthy nagging, even if the reason is misbehaviour by the husband; and public quarrels, boasting, and malicious gossip about others (see Chowning 1974:189). The first kind is most likely to lead to wife-beating; the second, which often involves supporting the husband against his rivals, is more likely to lead to criticism from others. Some women are notoriously bad-tempered and, since the establishment of village councils, have sometimes been fined, and are frequently reprimanded, for verbal aggression against others, but to little effect. When one of these women quarrels with her husband, those overhearing can predict that eventually he will respond with physical violence, but she seems unable to control her own temper. By contrast, one man paid me an unexpected visit at night saying that he felt he had better get out of the house or he would hit his wife, who was carrying on about his suspected adultery.⁶ I do not mean to suggest that women provoke most of the physical violence that is used against them, but sometimes they do, either because of their personalities or their behaviour. I have heard a man speak approvingly of the beating of his own brother's daughter: "She talks too much and doesn't obey". Women are expected to be, on the whole, quiet. Although a respected elderly woman may make public speeches, women who interrupt village

meetings are likely to be told by other women (as well as men) to shut up and stay out of masculine affairs.

Retaliation against a woman who simply nags may nevertheless be regarded as excessive. Men frequently tell their wives that if they say any more, they will be hit (even if the wife is, for example, trying to dissuade the man from a dangerous enterprise). The kind of man who too often simply strikes, without issuing such a warning, or who uses fists or a weapon rather than simply the flat of his hand (see below), may anger other men. I was once asked by the sons of a woman who was beaten often and badly to write a letter to a patrol officer complaining of their father's behaviour. Such men often use violence where others would only complain, splitting a woman's lip and knocking out teeth for such an 'offence' as not having a meal ready when the husband was hungry. Of course, since so many marital disputes take place inside houses, others do not necessarily know the true cause, especially if there is no loud quarrel, though explanations may be given later. What is frequently heard is the sound of repeated blows and the woman's wails; outsiders often gather outside the house but rarely go in.

If the reason for the beating is shell money, then there is almost always an audible preceding quarrel, as the man loudly demands money and the woman refuses to give it. The masculine desire for shell money can lead a man to attack not only a wife or sister but also a mother. The same young man who diminished his wife-beating at the urging of the big-men beat up his mother when he was under pressure to pay a debt and she refused to help him. (She and her second husband were trying to accumulate wealth in order to sponsor a ceremony for their only child.) Another young man injured his mother as she tried to prevent him from breaking into the box in which she kept money received from the marriages of her daughters. The desire to keep control of even small amounts of money can lead to violence, as when a man kicked his wife in the belly and burned her arm because she gave a short length of shell money to her mother so that the old woman could buy a little rice. Men are reported often to beat sisters who fail to give them shell money on demand, and husbands turn on wives who pass on the criticisms, received from their families, of men who do not fulfil their obligations to their in-laws.

Both husband and wife tend to be caught between conflicting demands for shell money, but she is more likely to suffer physically; women often mention this major hazard of marriage. Quarrels about shell money also lead to violence between men, including full brothers or father and son, but women are more vulnerable for three reasons. Not only are they physically weaker, but they are more likely to be attacked inside a house, with no one to help. Most quarrels between men occur in the open, and other men tend to join in. The third reason is perhaps the most important: a combination of male insistence on their natural superiority and right to boss women and a feeling of solidarity with other males. Men feel that all men are entitled to demonstrate their dominance and authority over women by using physical force. Equally, women expect to be struck from time to time, and often acknowledge that sometimes, though not always, they provoked the attack. I have heard an

older woman tell a younger one that she should not even retaliate verbally no matter what her husband said to her or how he beat her; he had paid for her and owned her.⁷ Few women would agree, but men often do expect sympathy for verbal insults from their wives.

It is worth noting that a woman realizes that a husband who beats her may still be fond of her. On the ceremonial occasions when women act out amusing episodes, I have seen two women joke about times when their husbands knocked them unconscious and then, fearing that the women might be dead, alternately kissed them, wailed over them, and called for help. It is said that a woman beaten excessively by her husband may commit suicide, but this seems to happen only when she thinks that the beatings are connected with loss of affection, because he is interested in someone else.

A woman who is enraged by her husband's behaviour can sever relations temporarily by 'calling the bones' of his dead kin (and he can do the same to her). Until there is a formal reconciliation, with the exchange of shell money between the two and their kin, it is taboo for them to stay and particularly to eat together, and one will move to another hamlet for several weeks, often after damaging their joint house so it is no longer habitable. This device works better than gaol sentences imposed by officials, which are likely to cause resentment and a desire for revenge against those who laid the complaint. For this reason the wife's kin may be reluctant to institute a court case, especially if the husband has a reputation as a sorcerer. Unless the offender acknowledges that he went too far, as with the man who cut off his wife's ear lobe, high fines are also resented; if a man has any spare money, it is already designated for other purposes.⁸

The overall picture in Kove is one in which women often provoke aggression by insulting or independent behaviour. They are encouraged by their parents to behave like this when they are young, but trouble usually results when: they get older and accept men who do not please their parents; jeer at men who do not please them; return insult for insult even with those they are supposed to respect; and demonstrate their freedom of choice as to which man — brother, husband, or remote cousin who has been generous — will receive the shell money they can allocate. Meanwhile men use force to try to control the independence that in theory they admire, as when they often proclaim that, "It takes a real man to be married to a Kove woman" (and to keep her and her kin happy). Other men tend to agree that women must be kept under control, and use the same methods themselves. No one, male or female, suggests that women should never be beaten; complaints have to do with specific cases in which the beating of oneself or one's kin is said to be unjustified or too severe. Women too assume that one naturally uses force against those who are physically weaker; a woman cross with her husband may beat their child. Except when they are fighting other men, men do not equate the use of force with manliness. On the contrary, it is considered more admirable to seduce a girl by love magic than to rape her, and to induce a sister to hand over shell money by generous behaviour rather than threatening violence or sorcery. But violence is nevertheless considered the natural reaction of anyone who is

angry or frustrated. Women destroy household goods; men hit women. At present men have little training in learning to control their tempers, now that the power of the older men who gained obedience through fear of their spears and their sorcery has been eroded by Western influence.

The recent warnings against using fists or weapons do not seem actually to influence a man who is cross, any more than does the fear that if he beats his wife she may poison him by putting sexual secretions into his food. Wife-beaters tend to hit first and think later. If angry with a man, a man who has not been drinking needs strong provocation before attacking, but a woman may be struck if she has done nothing more than to frustrate the man's desires. Some such frustrations are inevitable and, even if Kove women never behaved provocatively or broke the rules of the society, they would still be beaten.

Recent Changes

Although missionaries preach against wife-beating (and often say that good Christians, including all Europeans, do not practise it) their admonitions have not affected Kove behaviour. Even the men who say that they punish their children in emulation of European patterns do not claim to abstain from wife-beating for that reason. Statements from government officials have been more effective: people of both sexes often say that now it is forbidden to use weapons in fights, and for men to strike women with the fist rather than the open hand and to aim blows at the abdominal region. In 1976 I heard a Kove magistrate, who supported what were generally foreign ideas, tell people to abandon wife-beating, and by 1983 this was one of the offences that were supposed to be handled by village officials. What has actually happened reflects the persistence of attitudes that run counter to those of outsiders. First, Kove of both sexes accept a certain amount of beating of daughters and wives as normal, expectable behaviour which if 'deserved' does not even elicit protest from the woman. If, for example, she has committed adultery or struck her mother-in-law in the course of an argument, she shows little resentment of being beaten. What she does complain about is 'undeserved' beating — resulting from the unjust suspicions of an exceptionally jealous husband, or a quarrel triggered by the mother-in-law's insults. Whatever the cause, however, both she and her kin will complain of an unduly severe beating, and it is with these that government 'rules' against using fists or drawing blood are likely to be invoked. There may be additional reasons for outrage, as when one husband not only severely beat a wife who had been brought up in his household from childhood (a particular form of childhood betrothal) but attacked the women of her village who helped her move back to her father's village. Only fear of gaol kept all the lineages of the father's village from uniting to attack the husband.

Until the 1983 regulation, which included a minimum penalty for wife-beating, men who practised it were sometimes reported to a government officer but more often admonished and fined by a village court. The new

penalties caused a problem, however. Not only did most men feel that they were too severe, but it seemed to me that officials were reluctant to enforce the regulations because they too sometimes beat their wives. In a specific case, a woman whose forehead was split to the bone by a blow from her husband (enraged by complaints that he was neglecting her for a new wife) was persuaded not to lay an official complaint, though the husband was warned that there would be trouble if he did it again. An official that I questioned said that the reason for the persuasion was that a wife would so frequently withdraw her complaint at the last minute because of 'feeling sorry' for her husband and not wanting him to be punished so severely. Certainly this does happen, but I doubt that it would have in this case, and it seems relevant that a few days later the same official was beating his own wife.

As has been indicated, the Kove agree that only within this century has the demand developed for ever larger marriage payments to be given while the marriage lasts. Earlier, they were much smaller, and only a few men competed to make large payments, but now every man's prestige and security depend on being able to do so. Almost surely women have become subject to more violence as a result of the new system, because shell money is obtained through pressure on them, but I have not actually heard the Kove say this. Women simply speak of the difficulties created by quarrels between their brothers and their husbands as an inevitable part of marriage, which most of them nevertheless see as a desirable state for other reasons, including their wish to have children.

What is agreed to be a new threat is the use of alcohol, which is steadily becoming a basic part of all the ceremonial exchanges. Although the worst abuses of women from drunken men are said to occur in the towns, it is generally believed that drinkers are likely to become violent. Women and children may be at risk if the drinkers are not controlled by others, and village councils regularly issue proclamations on the subject. In some cases it has been possible to block proposals to have taverns on the small islands, because on these it is impossible to keep the drinkers away from the rest of the villagers. An additional problem results from the fact that a number of women drink, and a typical result is for a drunken woman to boast of her extramarital affairs, provoking her husband to beat her (see Chowning 1982).

The one area in which violence seems to be decreasing, but only in some families, is that concerned with attempts to control a girl's sexual behaviour and choice of spouse. Though many parents and brothers continue to beat girls who follow their own inclinations, others argue that nowadays young people have a right to make their own decisions. Even if a girl gets pregnant her family may be kind both to her and the child. Today if a girl is abused by her parents she may simply leave home, joining kin elsewhere or possibly eloping with a non-Kove man. Marriages with non-Kove may be tolerated, especially if the spouse lives in north-west New Britain, but parents usually prefer a Kove son-in-law who can more easily be induced to fulfil all his obligations to his in-laws. Knowing that with the present legal system the family cannot actually force a girl to obey them, they are more likely to use

verbal means than physical ones to try to get her to follow their wishes. Forced marriages no longer occur, although village officials may threaten couples with fines for immoral behaviour if they pursue an affair without agreeing to marry. In these cases, their influence may run counter to the desires of both sets of parents.

Differences from Other Societies

The Kove seem to be distinctive in several ways when compared with the Lakalai, Molima and Sengeng. First, in Kove, there are fewer general social pressures against frequent and severe beating of a woman, and her own kin are not so quick to help her. Second, even after marriage a woman fears violence from her brother and even her son as well as her husband. Third, women are relatively passive when beaten, rarely fighting back successfully. These differences are not absolute, as will be seen, but simply represent tendencies more highly developed in one society than in another.

Among the Lakalai (West Nakanai) the fact of matrilineal descent inhibits a brother from beating his sister; she is the continuation of the matriline, as he is not. He should never do it except if she goes into his basket without permission (because he might be carrying love magic which would accidentally affect her). It is also an offence to beat a woman in the presence of her father, and wife-beating is generally forbidden during the ceremonial season as an infringement on the peace of the village. Married women normally live in the husband's hamlet rather than remaining in that of the father, but a father may still intervene on his daughter's behalf, and does not hesitate to report his son-in-law to a patrol officer. Bride-price here is said to be paid for the privilege of having children by the woman; her husband does not own her. More importantly for women who live far from their own parents, the usual source of support is the husband's brother, who traditionally lived in the same house. Furthermore, as in Kove, the big-men of a hamlet join to reprove a man who is thought to beat his wife excessively.

In the past, Lakalai women nevertheless suffered considerable physical violence from men — beatings by masked figures during the yearly ceremonial season, and casual rape even by men of their own village. On the other hand, they were allowed on various ceremonial occasions such as marriages to attack men (who did not resist) with sticks, torches, or other weapons. There was no condemnation of a woman who fought back when her husband beat her. Even today, a Lakalai woman can also shame a man unbearably by verbal insults, and men report that they try to avoid offending their wives too greatly precisely for this reason.

Before pacification, it was reported that men often beat their wives, and occasionally other female kin, very severely for certain offences, particularly stealing from someone else's gardens.⁹ A woman's doing so, of course, also shamed her husband. At that time, too, women were often forced into arranged marriages against their wills, and since a certain amount of wife-

beating was taken for granted, a woman's kin would not necessarily intervene or keep her if she took refuge with them from the husband's fists. But lacking any continuing economic interest in the marriage once the initial payments were made, her father and brother would support her if they thought she was badly mistreated. A man had more to lose by divorce than a woman had, especially if there were children (since some would always go with her), and very few men showed so much violence as to drive their wives away.

Lakalai has been much more affected by Christianity than Kove has, and the fact that a patrol post has been readily available since 1954 has made it more likely that offences are reported promptly. The power of the masked societies has been diminished, sanctioned rape has been eliminated, and there are no more forced marriages. Men still speak casually of beating a woman who acts jealously or shows an interest in another man¹⁰ and, as in Kove, it is not rare to hear the sounds of a violent quarrel coming from inside a house without knowing the cause. Drinking has made the situation worse in some cases. Nevertheless, the overall situation is one of much less social tolerance of great and repeated violence against women than in Kove.

Among the Molima of Fergusson Island in the D'Entrecasteaux, there are no clans, and it is considered improper for parents to profit financially from the marriages of their children, though they take a deep interest in the arrangements, wanting in-laws who will work with and for them. Especially in the past, when more marriages were arranged, girls might be beaten by their parents to try to get them to obey, but in general the threat to women comes only from their husbands. These can be very violent; in 1975 two women died after being hit with weapons by their husbands (the cause of the quarrel being unknown in both cases). Another woman's spells of insanity were attributed to frequent beatings around the head from her ex-husband when she had reproached him for his many affairs. The Molima have a general reputation in Milne Bay for quick tempers, and an extraordinary number of men have served gaol sentences for assault while working outside Molima itself. Fights within the village are also common. Women, however, are far from passive. In the past, those who were childless even went to war, and as in Lakalai they are permitted very aggressive behaviour on certain ceremonial occasions. A woman who is beaten will fight back or leave her husband; in fact, excessive beating ('all the time') was given as the principal or only reason for divorce in a number of cases. In such cases, a girl's parents will support her, saying that she is not a pig or dog to be treated like this. Traditionally the Molima did not have any institutions such as sacred men's houses or masked societies that excluded or abused women and, although one could not say that their status was as high as that of men, they were allowed much more independent behaviour than in any of the three West New Britain societies discussed here.

The only serious risk to women lay in the belief that all deaths were caused by the activities of female witches. In the past a woman might be suspected and killed if she behaved oddly or if someone simply dreamed that she was a witch. Killing is of course forbidden now, though the suspicions remain, and the long-time presence of village councils to settle serious quarrels gives support to

women whose kin do not intervene to help them. (In theory, the council only hears cases in which blood is shed.) Divorce was traditionally much more common in Molima than in the other societies, and although the kin on both sides would try to settle minor disputes rather than return any of the marriage payments, it was relatively easy for a woman to escape continuous abuse.

The Sengseng of West New Britain differ from most other Papua New Guinean societies because of their custom of women attacking men as the central part of courtship. As soon as they can toddle, little girls are encouraged to hit others, usually with sticks, and as they grow up, boys tease them into continuing the pattern. When the girl gets old enough to be interested in marriage, she is expected to attend a dance in the village of the chosen man and to attack him (but only if he is in the correct kinship category) at the end of the dance. He gives her a payment to make her stop striking him, and if all goes well that is the first instalment of the marriage payment. The marriage does not take place unless her kin agree, but girls were not married against their wills.

Sengseng marriage was supposed to last to eternity. Not only was there no divorce, but when a man died, it was expected that the widow's closest male kin (father, brother, son) would immediately kill her and bury her in the same grave. Doing this was an obligation they owed to their in-laws, whose relationship to them was hedged about with many restrictions, including ones on quarrelling and fighting. By contrast, within the family violent quarrels were common, with two brothers or a father and son confronting each other with spears. Wives too were not treated as in-laws, and quite often were beaten by their husbands, especially in the early years of marriage, when sexual jealousy was common. A woman who was beaten did not react passively, however, but fought back, and a woman might also attack her husband even when he had not hit her first. I several times treated men who had been injured by women using weapons other than the light wooden club which women use in general brawls. (Like the Molima, Sengseng women did not stay aloof from fights between villages.) Women also fought with each other, pursuing quarrels within the village (Chowning 1974:164). Polygamy was rare because the society, for whatever reason, contained fewer women than men, but co-wives often had bitter fights. A woman who was angry with her husband could go home to her family for long periods, but because of the absence of divorce, it was expected that eventually she would return to him.

Children were rarely beaten by their true parents, but since many were orphaned, they were not always treated so well by others. Violence between kin became more common with age. Since all women married, they did not necessarily see much of their own families after that, but sometimes brothers-in-law would unite against a woman. For example, one man beat up his sister for supposedly striking down her husband when she joined a fight. By contrast, another man's own parents physically attacked their son for knocking down his wife; they had cared for her when she was an orphan child, and were particularly attached to her.

The situation that I am discussing is one that began to change after

pacification took place in the 1950s. Many of the interior Sengseng are still not Christians, but the traditional power of the old men to punish offences has weakened, and women now divorce unsatisfactory husbands. In the coastal villages, where people have had longer contact and are Christians, I found in 1980 several cases of men notorious for their tempers, whom the village councillors tried to deal with or to refer to outside authorities. One was reputed often to strike his mother-in-law as well as his wife, and another beat up his father and burned down his house (for allegedly looking lustfully at the man's wife) before then beating the wife badly. Neither man's behaviour was condoned, but it could not be said that contact had led to less domestic violence. There were more ways to deal with it, however, and it was generally thought that the abolition of killing widows was a major advance. I saw no evidence that drinking had created new problems.

Conclusion

In all of these societies, it is taken for granted that a man may sometimes strike his wife without incurring any criticism from other members of the community at large, both male and female, though the specific incident may be resented by the wife herself and her close kin. Sometimes, however, no complaints are made by any of those concerned. *Luluais* (who still exist among the interior Sengseng), local government councillors and other village officials almost all strike their own wives and so are reluctant to prosecute other men except when exceptional brutality is involved. There has been widespread acceptance of government pressures against the use of weapons in any fights and of the use of specific forms of violence against women, and these are cited if it is decided to prosecute a case, but not every instance leads to prosecution. It is true that wives often 'feel sorry' for their husbands and refuse to prosecute even when urged by their kin, especially if the penalty is gaol or a heavy fine. Not only do these often penalise the wife as well, but the husband's resentment of his sentence does not make for improved relations afterwards.

It does seem to be generally true that outside influences from various government officials and missionaries have tended to reduce or eliminate many forms of violence against women (such as the brutal punishment of those who stumbled on men's secret rituals) that were practised in the past. The situation has also improved somewhat as older men who grew up in a more traditional society die off. It is no longer possible for a man to kill his wife and escape punishment, as sometimes happened in the past if he had many kin to protect him from pay-back. Nowadays more people condemn and wish to punish serious injuries to women or bad beatings, especially if the cause seems to be a trivial misdeed on her part. Furthermore, both the re-definition of such violence as offensive, and the existence of official bodies with the power to punish it, provide sanctions that did not exist in the past, especially for people then living far from patrol posts. The Kove sons who prosecuted their father would once have been unable to take action.

At the same time, it must be recognized that almost no one thinks that wives (and, in most cases, sisters and daughters) should never be struck. In all four societies, neglect of duties and anything construed as sexual misbehaviour is typically handled in no other way, although with the latter fines may be imposed as an additional penalty. Each society also recognizes more specific offences (such as risking the health of an unborn child) that also 'justifiably' demand violent punishment. The same Molima man who condemned a grandfather who beat two wives 'until the blood ran' to make them work harder also beat at least one of his own two wives. The greater freedom that women now have to travel outside their own villages, or to interact with visiting strangers, seems actually to have increased occasions that arouse a husband's jealousy. The same factors also make it more likely that unmarried girls, less closely guarded than in the past, will be beaten by parents trying to enforce an earlier code of conduct, and brothers may be just as concerned to control their sisters as parents are. In addition to the Kove situation described above, I recorded a case in which Lakalai parents (themselves particularly lenient with their children) were told by their oldest son, a policeman, to beat their oldest daughter so she would be obedient and not marry against their desires. In traditional Sengseng society an unmarried man was forbidden to have anything to do with the behaviour of married people, but in 1980 such a man, with the approval of onlookers, repeatedly struck his first cousin for running away from her husband. There seems to exist a widespread feeling that with the breakdown of traditional sanctions enforced by the older men, what are considered disciplinary problems have to be handled by the near kin.

The traditional institutions, however, allowed more violence against women than do any modern ones. The major protection afforded married women in all three societies was the common practice of marrying someone who was already a relative and who in any case almost always lived near the woman's own family, so that she was rarely at the mercy of an unrelated husband and in-laws. Particularly in Kove, where pacification led to widespread travel, it has become increasingly common for women to marry into distant villages and then to complain that they must simply bear terrible beatings because there is no one to help them. On the other hand, I have heard a Lakalai man condemn another man who beat a foreign wife, saying that it had been agreed that this should not be done because foreign women, lacking supporters, were so docile. He did not interfere, however (and he spoke casually of having beaten his own local wife).

As regards the use of violence, the data from these four societies shows no correlation between the treatment of young children and of adults. In a broader sense it does seem to show correlations between the ways in which children of both sexes are taught to behave and what happens in later life. The gradual withdrawal of Kove girls from hitting boys who are their age or older, coupled with their continued use of verbal insult, seems to be one factor in their tendency when grown to provoke attack but rarely fight back when it occurs. They are just as aggressive towards other women such as co-wives as the Lakalai, Molima, and Sengseng but, if struck by men, they are more

inclined only to weep than to retaliate. A general belief that men are much stronger than women, like that reported by Counts for the Kaliai, may help explain their relative passivity. (When women do attack men, they usually strike the first blow after a verbal disagreement.) The Lakalai share the belief in the much greater weakness of women (as the other two societies do not), but in their society it is one reason for the cultural safeguards against excessive male violence.

The treatment of women by Kove men reflects a combination of attitudes, pressures, and practices. Some of these are shared with other Papua New Guinean societies while others are distinctively Kove. Legislation which imposes minimum and strong penalties is unlikely to alter the unhappy situation in which many married Kove women find themselves. For the present, most complaints are probably better handled by village officials who have more control over the scale of penalties. If, however, notorious wife-beaters continue to be chosen for these offices, there will be no improvement. Furthermore, an outside authority is certainly needed as a second resort. The young men themselves say that they as a group are more violent than their parents because they do not fear the new institutions that came with independence.

Notes

¹ My time in Kove, 18 months in all, was composed of several visits between 1966 and 1983. The first visits (1966, 1968, 1969) were supported by the Australian National University, those in 1971-2, 1972-3 and 1975-6 by the University of Papua New Guinea, and that in 1983 by Victoria University of Wellington. In 1978 I paid a brief visit on behalf of the Papua New Guinea Department of Environment and Conservation. I shall also refer to material collected among the Lakalai (West Nakanai) of West New Britain between 1954 and 1974; among the Molima of Fergusson Island in 1957-8 and 1974-5; and among the Sengseng of West New Britain between 1962 and 1981.

² I was also the only local source of medical aid for most of the time I was in Sengseng, but the tiny scattered population made observation much more difficult there.

³ In speaking Pidgin the people call themselves Kombe and are generally known by that label to outsiders, but their local government councils are East and West Kove, reflecting the term they use in speaking their own language.

⁴ The children of a brother and sister are cross-cousins to each other.

⁵ Sometimes a hamlet contains more than one lineage, as when a child has been adopted. Almost every village contains more than one hamlet, each with its own men's house, and marriage within the village is permissible.

⁶ She was right to suspect him and, later, when he took a second wife, he beat each of them for complaining about his behaviour to the other.

⁷ In this case, he had called her mother a whore, and she had retaliated by saying the names of her husband's parents, which are taboo to her.

⁸ Kove shell money is pegged to the kina and is acceptable locally for fines, taxes, purchases at the trade store, etc.

⁹ The missionary who was told about traditional life in Lakalai by some school children thought that the accounts of severe beatings indicated very bad marital relations in general, but it seems clear that all the cases were ones in which the women had committed major offences. See Hees (1913).

¹⁰ There is a strong double standard in Lakalai. Women are expected to be completely faithful after marriage, but many men expect to philander without too strong objection from their wives. The wives do in fact object, however.

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CHAPTER FOUR

THE POLITICS OF VIOLENCE IN KEWA SOCIETY (SOUTHERN HIGHLANDS)¹

by

Lisette Josephides

Kewa men often describe themselves as very irascible and unable to separate verbal arguments or disagreements from physical fights. They say that, in the old days especially, they would come to blows very easily, without first attempting to make their point in a calm and non-violent manner. 'We would talk and fight at the same time'. It is perhaps noteworthy that the examples they give to illustrate this disposition concern violence towards sisters or wives. Though violence does indeed erupt frequently in the village, reasons for its deployment, as well as its evaluation, efficiency and end result vary depending on the context describing the belligerents' social relations with each other. Here I will distinguish between the domestic and non-domestic contexts, and argue that it is the failure of domestic violence to become politicised which accounts for these differences. I employ no methodological or ethnographic shifts from 'before' to 'after', since traditional and modern conditions are now inextricably wedded to the 'present', which is what concerns me here. In this rural area, I found no evidence that violence towards women had increased in the wake of other social changes.

The Kewa² are a patrilineal society in which women move to their husband's place on marriage (virilocal residence). Marriage is by bride-price, seen by men as a transaction in which their payment of shells, pigs and money to the bride's kin compensates them for the transfer of her productivity and procreativity to the husband and his kin. Women explain bride-price in terms of their husband's desire to have them, and their own wish to make gifts to their kin, but elaborate no further on the implications for their labour power. It is clear, however, that they see bride-price as expressing an appreciation of themselves as desired women (persons), rather than producers.

A woman's relationship to land as a means of production is always reckoned through a man, usually her father, husband or brother. She does not hold land in her own name and her gardens are usually lost to her when her status changes, as on marriage or divorce. All girls are destined to be wives; female

celibacy is unknown, as indeed is male celibacy save in exceptional circumstances. But marriage involves no transference of political loyalties or a swop in localities for men, who remain on the land which is in their name. This state of affairs largely determines how domestic violence is perceived, and what it can achieve.

Though physical aggression was part of boys' socialisation in the past when they were expected to grow up to be warriors, and is considered manly today, girls were not encouraged to fight and a reputation for aggression was certainly not thought proper for them. In spite of men's insistence that blows can be part of verbal exchange, not always distinguishable from non-physical forms of aggression, they do differentiate between degrees of physical violence, depending on whether weapons were used and on the severity of the injury. They say that brothers can be involved in 'hand fights', but should not use weapons; that fights which do not draw blood are negligible, but blood must be compensated for. Within the domestic unit a certain amount of violence is acceptable, and victims may have no legitimate channels of appeal or compensation. Violence outside the domestic unit also occurs, but even when socially approved it is expected to lead to further violence and/or compensation, and the victim's right to retaliate is not questioned. Domestic violence has different rules. Before comparing the outcome of a number of violent episodes in the different social contexts, however, it is necessary to delineate those contexts themselves: the domestic and non-domestic, or political.

In the Kewa context, domestic relations are those between people who are economically interdependent: husbands, wives, their children before they have set up independent households, unmarried sisters and brothers, sometimes elderly parents. All these may co-operate in their productive activities and pool their production for common consumption, for sale or exchange. Exchange relationships are 'political' ones; typically they involve people from different domestic units but often within the same agnatic group or tribe. Brothers exchange with brothers and other kinsmen who are peers, with their married sisters and their husbands, or with unrelated partners. These relations are ostensibly egalitarian but fiercely competitive, creating inequalities in practice. Within the household on the other hand, a formal hierarchy exists from the beginning. While the sexual division of labour means that husband and wife are complementary and interdependent, the fact that the husband is the head of the family and formal owner of the means of production also shows marital relations to be hierarchical. It is expected and accepted that a man should rule over his wife, but in the political field all men are formally equal. In this distinction between the political and the domestic, women appear only in the latter; political relations are not thought to be one of their social options.

While bearing in mind this characterisation of marital relations as hierarchical as well as interdependent and complementary, it cannot be said that wife-beating is a regular Kewa practice. Physical violence between husband and wife is also initiated by wives. By far the highest proportion of these cases is to do with sexual jealousy; with fears that the husband was

having sexual relations with another woman, fears that he will marry again, or a belief that he was showing preference for a co-wife. Though expressed as sexual jealousy, these fears clearly relate to very important issues for women in terms of their perceived social position and rights. For this reason I do not interpret them as narrowly sexual, though men do present them as manifestations of women's insatiable sexuality.

Men's reasons for initiating fights with their wives are usually different. Certainly a woman caught in a secret tryst with another man, or even giving cause for suspicion, would be physically attacked by her husband. In the old days especially, women could be killed for this reason. Desertion by his wife is also thought to shame the husband, who even today may succeed in catching up with her and killing her. However, women have few opportunities to engage in extra-marital sex, especially as they do not travel around as much as men. The most common reason for a husband beating his wife is when she disobeys him or fails to do his bidding, or over money, especially when he wants it so that he can marry a second wife. Wives are most commonly beaten in the context of being punished, corrected or coerced, or in husbands' attempts to control wives' products so as to bring about a state of affairs undesirable to the wives; whereas by their own violent acts women try to block moves which they see as detrimental to their living conditions, and register a protest at this deterioration. Put differently, while men use violence from a position of power and in order to exert tighter control over women, women strike out from a subordinated position, in an attempt to retain some control over themselves and their activities. Thus women's violence could be seen as defensive even when they initiate it, whereas their husbands' violence appears an aggressive, punitive act of domination.

As a social relationship, Kewa marriage itself is inherently violent because it is founded on unequal relations and sanctions the use of force to uphold these relations. While both partners have rights over each other, a number of factors ensure that their relationship is essentially asymmetrical. In the first place, the practice of polygyny means that while a woman's wifely duties are concentrated on one man, a husband may spread his marital obligations over a number of wives. In these circumstances one co-wife's gain is clearly another's loss. A wife is expected to give the whole of herself to one man and in return gets a fraction of him. Secondly, the payment of bride-price is seen by men as acquiring complete rights over a woman's sexuality, her procreative powers and labour products. In this sense husbands 'own' wives in a way that wives do not own husbands, even though husbands have certain duties towards them. Thirdly, the fact that men, not women, own land means that women need them for access to land, and their products can therefore more easily be controlled by them. It also reinforces the idea that women do not own anything, but are themselves owned. In addition, it means that divorced women will not be able to take with them part of what in their married state was considered joint property. Fourthly, virilocal residence means that women find themselves in a *..cak* position, without ready support from kinspeople, when they want to protest at what they perceive as unfair treatment.

That marriage as an institution ensures the domination of one sex by another can be readily adduced from these observations. While bringing men and women physically together, it pushes a wedge between them by delineating different roles, duties, rights, dispositions and abilities for each sex. Nor do these differences make for complementarity but ultimate equivalence. That men may need to correct their wives from time to time by inflicting corporal punishment is acceptable, though the degree may be contentious; but the context of such punishments betrays the real intent, which is not to correct the woman so as to make her a better person (which would be to treat adults as wayward children in the process of being socialised), but beat into her the understanding that her husband has authority over her.

In the case of sexual relations, it is quite clear that different rules apply for men and women. Even leaving aside the institution of polygyny, it is common practice for married men to attend courting sessions or to flirt with young women. They remain eligible and marriageable no matter how many wives they already have. Especially when they are pregnant or lactating, women who want to keep their husbands by their sides are thought by men to be unreasonable, if not sexually insatiable. They say that the husbands are doing the right thing by keeping away from their wives, because it would be wrong and harmful for the baby if they engaged in sexual activity with them at this time.

In Yakopaita, a settlement with only six young couples, three were famous for the frequency and ferocity of their fights. Couple A, John and Gail, married for about ten years, had three children and were expecting a fourth. John was a driver, and the two had been used to living 'in town' for a number of years but were now staying in the ceremonial longhouse which had been built in preparation for a pig kill. As the local councillor-cum-businessman's driver, John was away a lot and often returned home very late and very drunk. Gail believed he was carrying on an affair with another woman, and this appeared to have some foundation. Their fights, always with physical violence, were frequent over this. On one occasion he returned home at midnight with his employer, both of them drunk. When he knocked Gail out of bed and demanded that she prepare food for them, she retorted that she would not cook for a man who had been eating another woman's vagina. His protestations that he had been working and not playing around with women earned him a kick from the incensed Gail. The fight became very rough and John's brother Reuben, concerned about Gail's advanced state of pregnancy, tried to separate them. He was in fact responding to John's cry for help. Eventually they settled for tearing up each other's spare sets of clothes, and John told Gail that she smelt bad and he would marry the other woman tomorrow. From his own house Reuben called out to John to cut off what belonged to his wife, give it to her, and go. This insult was a way of getting at them both: the woman for allegedly being wanton and interested only in her husband's penis, and the man for being unable to control his wife. Gail picked up her things and went to the neighbouring settlement, while John drove to his girlfriend's village.

The affair did not end there. John had a summons served on Gail for 'using bad talk' and she had to appear in the village court. He claimed at the time that he wanted to divorce her, but eventually he brought her back. The girlfriend was awarded 20 kina (K20)³ against Gail for defamation of character. Before the case went to court there were many discussions in the settlement, and it was clear that men and women had different assessments of it. One elderly man voiced many men's feelings in the matter. He said that women who behaved like Gail were being unreasonable, they were jealous and possessive and made their husbands miserable with constant nagging. He conceded that their husbands may carry on innocent flirtations but claimed that anyone could see they did not possess the wealth for a more serious relationship, so their wives were making a lot of talk out of nothing. Men who had no bride-price would not engage in 'true' extra-marital affairs, for this would involve them in costly compensation payments. (Even if we accept this assessment however, we must bear in mind that married women's 'innocent flirtations' would not be so kindly looked upon).

Gail's story was quite different. She said it was a lie that John could not raise bride-price, and in fact another woman had told her that the men were already organising a collection. Furthermore, as a wage-earner John had money of his own. She herself did not want a divorce — she was pregnant after all — but she had been chased out of the place and was convinced that the village magistrates would be against her. She admitted quite freely to hitting him first and giving him 'bad talk', but added that that was because he wanted to marry another woman.

In spite of their many fights, Gail was never the one to take John to court. Ruth, of couple B, often did so with Walter. The two had been married four years, but were childless. The fights started after he took a second wife, and occurred almost daily. If Ruth did not start them, she was said to give much provocation by her constant nagging. Invariably the immediate reasons were Ruth's complaints that Walter showed a preference for his second wife in all marital dealings; this included spending more time with her as well as giving her things or doing things for her. Ruth always demanded her share of her husband's attention, and attacked the property that she considered the second wife had come into as a result of this unfair distribution. On one occasion, when Walter helped this co-wife to clean some coffee and then put it into her room Ruth threw it out saying that his labour belonged to her equally so he should have divided the cleaned coffee between them. Robin, a young unmarried kinsman, lived in the same house as the threesome, so the fights usually ended up involving all four. The alignment of three against one was quite obvious on those occasions.

Ruth was an oddball in a number of ways, and her readiness to take Walter to court over a variety of issues which she handled as if she were in a position of equality with him dismayed both men and women in the village, and without exception turned them against her. In effect, this was Ruth's attempt to politicise her domestic quarrels, since she perceived that this was the only way to achieve an equal base, at least at the outset. Gail, on the other hand,

never strove for this politicisation. (I will discuss further below what I mean by 'politicisation' in the context of court hearings.) When Walter wanted to divorce Ruth she laid claims on their pigs, chickens and gardens, all on his patrilineal land. She refused to leave his place, as women must do on divorce, arguing that since she helped build the longhouse she was co-founder of the settlement. She was unsuccessful in all these claims because, according to custom, women do not accrue rights to their husband's place but only have usufruct while married. Whereas a complaint while they were still married that his pig spoiled her garden was dismissed on the grounds that both pig and garden belong jointly to a married couple, her request while he was divorcing her that she should be awarded some of this jointly-owned property was given little serious consideration by the village magistrates, since if she were no longer married to him she was co-owner of nothing.

The case of couple C is somewhat different since it never appeared to concern conjugal jealousy but always either pride or property. Elizabeth and Carl had two children. Her old parents lived most of the time with them, but this did not appear to put any restraint on the violence which frequently erupted between them. They fought mostly over money, when Carl, an inveterate gambler, ferreted out Elizabeth's few hidden savings, or beat her until she gave them up. On occasions she initiated the fight when she found he had taken her money or other hidden treasures; quite often they fought over food, or rather domestic arrangements and rights over food. When he sent her off to pick greens, promising to cook the sweet potatoes in the meantime, and she returned to find him cooking the red pandanus, a male fruit, she threw it out and replaced it with sweet potatoes, which led to a fight. On another occasion he denied her rights to game that he had caught, letting his brother's wife eat it instead. This was a calculated insult, a flagrant flouting of her wifely rights. Being a 'strong' woman Elizabeth took off to the bush to hunt her own game, and spent a large part of the night there catching and eating rats. On yet a third occasion, he took her to court for making 'bad talk' to him. He was awarded K50 compensation, but she opted for a gaol sentence which she claimed she could decide when to serve.

These three cases reflect the different personalities of the men and women involved, but they are also representative of the range of women's reactions to marital conflict. While Ruth's response appeared always to be a tactic in the general strategy of equalising male-female relations by bringing the domestic into the political, Elizabeth was concerned mainly with keeping her money and showing her mettle, while Gail's main worry was to keep her husband to herself. Of course a number of couples appear not to fight at all, or at least not to come to blows. Often these are monogamous couples in which the husband has no claim to big-manship. (But there are also couples in this category that *do* fight.) Without exception, women resisted polygyny when it concerned their husbands.

Often domestic fights spread to include the whole family, especially the couple's children. Husbands sometimes beat young children to get back at their wives, and daughters invariably go to their mothers' assistance and attack

an aggressive father. On occasions the whole family ends up in hospital. Fights between grown brothers and unmarried sisters to some extent reflect similar ideologies and power hierarchies as those between husband and wife. It is accepted that, because of their relationship to certain women, men have the right to correct them by inflicting corporal punishment. The argument may simply be over who has this right. For instance, John was angry when Dick beat a kinswoman who had been accused of engaging in illicit sex. He considered this woman more closely related to him than to Dick, and protested that if anyone should beat her it was him. Michael thrashed his sister 'for spreading rumours', and hit his brother's wife while the two were engaged in a fight. The village court later ruled that it was permissible for him to come to his brother's aid in this way. I have heard of no cases of sisters thrashing their grown-up brothers merely in order to correct them, but only when what they have done affects the sister or infringes her rights. But a brother is likely to have to compensate his sister if he acts impetuously and without ascertaining the facts. In the episode just referred to, Dick had to pay his sister K2 when she was cleared of the charges which occasioned the beating.

Violence also occurs in other social contexts. Only between brothers or close kinsmen is it abhorred and socially disapproved of, though it does occur. Between more distantly related or unrelated individuals or groups, violence is not frowned upon; but even when it is socially approved, the victim's right to retaliate is accepted and never questioned.

Although brothers do sometimes go to court over disputed rights in property and non-payment of debts, cases of physical violence between them with no ostensible 'civil' reason rarely go to court. One fight erupted when John was drunk and taunted Carl with being a 'bush *kanaka*' and not knowing how to enjoy his money. As in all such cases, their animosity had a long genealogy. John had borrowed money from Carl in the past in order to buy pork from X. During card-playing Carl won this money back from X and so the debt was cancelled, especially since everybody partook of the pork. But when with drunken insolence John told Carl that his money was like peanuts which he had eaten in one day, Carl remembered past, unrequited debts in money and labour, so the two came to blows. John's closer kinsmen came from the neighbouring settlement to defend him, and the fight broke up, but not before he had been hit on the head with a stone and was therefore quite badly hurt. Although court action was discussed, it was never followed up.

On another occasion, Tom attacked John. The two were brothers' sons living in the same settlement, so their agnatic relationship was very close. The immediate reason for this attack was what Tom considered John's proprietary air of speaking about arrangements for the pig kill, and calling himself the initiator. Quite unexpectedly, Tom took a large log from the fire and struck him on the side of the head. The fight was stopped quickly, since an extension would have been quite serious. I learnt later that there was much rancour behind this attack. John was in the habit of pouring scorn on Tom, calling him a rubbish man and challenging him to produce his wealth or show his mettle. Tom retorted always that his wealth had gone on paying the compensation

payment incurred by the fatal accident that John had caused in Ialibu, in which he also wrecked the clan-owned truck.

Another fight, between sub-clans A and B, followed the sentencing of a youth from A for indecently assaulting a three-year-old girl from B. When a contingent from B came to collect a pig awarded to them by the village court as compensation, sub-clan A brothers fought them off and a serious fight ensued. B got reinforcements and the incident resulted in a pitched battle, with women now joining the men armed with sticks, spades and axes. The case went to court and the aggressors, in spite of sustaining some nasty injuries, were fined an additional K80.

The fight between Joe and Billy over beer was considered particularly dastardly because Billy was a sort of *protégé* (or, at least, regular drinking partner) of Joe's, a much older man, and was enjoying beer belonging to Joe when he struck him for extending his generosity to another youth. The case did not go to the village court but was discussed in the settlement with a village magistrate presiding. Billy had to pay a pig in compensation to Joe, though his pig was seized, killed and cooked by members of another clan. Adam, Joe's brother, gave a small pig to Joe because he 'felt sorry for him' (but with the precondition that this was to keep, not eat), and Billy's father's brother added some money. An interesting sideline to this case is that Adam, whose adopted brother Joe was, took this opportunity to affirm a really political exchange relationship that the two had.

In most of these fights involving closely related men the most common cause appears to have to do with questions of prestige and personal reputation. Invariably, violence erupting between two men, whatever their kinship relationship, becomes immediately politicised and draws in larger groups. Whereas domestic violence between husband and wife or brother and sister remains confined to the household, with perhaps a brother helping a brother, but little further interference or polarisation within the group or between groups. The last case illustrates well this politicisation, the confrontational alignment and the ethic of equality/reciprocity characterising political in contrast to domestic relations. Billy was from Joe's adopted sub-clan, B, and of the descending generation. Normally, B would have received compensation for injuries to its members. But since the aggressor was also from B, another sub-clan of the same tribe, A, immediately mobilised as the injured party and demanded compensation. So B in effect has to compensate A for injuring one of its own members. Even in cases when violence erupts within the sub-clan, a number of men will immediately align themselves on each side — though, of course, some will also remain neutral.

A greater social distance exists between clans bearing the same tribal name but living in different localities. A fight breaking out between individuals here becomes politicised and spreads immediately. Injuries will have to be compensated for, and such cases invariably go to court. In awarding quite high compensation, village magistrates explain that this is to avert escalation of violence to a full-scale war. Clearly, injuries sustained in a domestic situation are not treated in this way, for they are not expected to have serious

consequences for the whole group. Fights between individuals or groups from different tribes, whether neighbouring or distant, signal immediate danger and may occasion the deployment of police. Invariably they spread, and end up in court.

All forms of violence are predicated on, and flow from, certain basic power relations. The reasons for this violence, and the way it is dealt with when it is identified as a 'problem' needing to be resolved, are also determined by these power relations. So the different cultural classifications of violence — the different meanings given to the different contexts in which it occurs — themselves signal the nature of the power relations between belligerents. Further, within the domestic unit itself, women and men usually initiate fights for different reasons, and sue each other in court for different reasons. This itself is indicative of their asymmetrical relations.

Almost invariably, women initiate a fight or provoke it by verbal abuse which they know will bring on blows when they feel that their standing with their husband, and therefore their social and living conditions, are somehow threatened. This is usually when they suspect that he is having an affair with another woman, or when he shows greater favours to a co-wife. Sometimes his appropriation of their money is the reason, especially when they think it might be used for obtaining another wife. Conversely, husbands beat their wives: when they disobey an order, often to do with preparing food; to extract some property from them; to stop them 'nagging'; to get them to accept a co-wife; but most generally and frequently, to 'correct' them and curb their stubbornness. Cases of sexual misconduct by married women are rare and suffer serious reprisals.

Women take men to court for rape or indecent assault, beatings, garden damage. As under most western countries' laws, they can not sue their own husbands for rape, and in cases of rape as well as indecent assault much of the injury is thought to be sustained by the woman's male guardians. As far as I am aware wives do not sue their husbands for 'bad talk', and while I was in the field no woman initiated divorce proceedings. The women I talked to always denied they wanted divorce, and the cases I heard of were initiated by men. Yet men always placed the ultimate responsibility for divorce on women. The village court chairman told me that they bring it about by their lack of industry, while many elderly men blamed what they considered women's 'constant nagging' and 'bad talk'. On the other hand, women claimed that their husbands would attempt to divorce them when they wanted to marry other women. It must be said, however, that although men often threatened women with divorce, and sometimes went as far as a pre-hearing, very rarely did they see it through.

So far I have tried to argue that domestic violence is denied political status, since the relations of people within the domestic unit are not deemed political. In effect, this amounts to a denial that women's grievances or aspirations can be political at any time. And in a sense this is true. If by 'politics' we mean an incompatibility of interests and a mobilisation to champion one's own interests over another's, then clearly domestic relations are only partially

political, though culturally even this is denied. Yet in individual cases there is ample evidence that a woman trying to stop her husband taking a second wife acts on her perception that this would be detrimental to her interests, though she does not possess the resources to mobilise behind her a group which shares those interests and fights for them alongside her. It is in this sense that domestic disputes cannot realise their full political potential for women. And it is from this marginal political position that women resort to violence. This is not to say that if they were not politically weak they would not resort to violence; but that in that case the outcome would be different, and the violence itself differently evaluated.

Since the village court operates on a political model, where supposedly 'equal' individuals come to transact their differences in a forum from which they will emerge momentarily as victors or losers, therefore 'unequal', domestic disputes cannot be dealt with by it. Marilyn Strathern (*n.d.*) has remarked that, in these conditions, such disputes going to court are either converted or perverted. I would add that they are also often rejected, deemed not to be within the jurisdiction of the courts. A case of a widow's rape by her brother-in-law was so dismissed, as were sundry cases involving a recognition of the separation of property between husband and wife. The court took the view that a married couple owned their moveable property jointly, though in practice the husband could dispose of much without the wife's consent or knowledge. When it came to divorce, however, everything except the woman's personal belongings was considered the husband's property, or, rather, to belong to the land which was his patrimony.

It is noteworthy that some women do nonetheless attempt to convert these disputes in court. Whereas men generally try to avoid domestic fights or at least contain them to the domestic unit, women externalise them at every opportunity. They can see that only in the political context can they strive for some equality. But this politicisation can be achieved only partially, when women point out incompatible interests and claim equal treatment to men. They do not have the base from which to mobilise. Among women living in one village — co-wives, sisters-in-law, daughters, mothers — there is little co-operation and solidarity, much hostility and competitiveness. Of course they do on occasions stick up for each other, and the mother-daughter bond is strong; but there is no common ideology linking them together, as agnatic ideology does for men. This partial politicisation of domestic disputes by certain women can, in these circumstances, backfire when threatened males make a concerted effort to quash them. To the extent that modern-day legal sanctions and rulings diverge from, or add to, customary beliefs and practices, their successful implementation depends ultimately on actual political alignments in the community. Further, these political stances are conjoined with an economic base which for women is a vicarious one, to be validated through men. It may be argued that this does not bespeak inequality, because women are never deprived of access to and usufruct of this economic base. But this is not really a question of usufruct or access, or even of control; rather, it is one of cultural idioms, and how they validate the monopoly of a social

context by one sex. This is not to make the whole question a superstructural one, for by 'culture' is meant here the totality of all aspects of a society's reproduction of itself. Though I stress the cultural idiom, it is itself authenticated and legitimised by reference to this basic economic arrangement.

In being culturally consigned to a domestic situation, women are relegated to positions which are formally outside the political arena where equality or superiority can be achieved, since the domestic unit is supposed to represent a unified complementarity and interdependence. Yet in a culture where physical violence is part of political action as well as a means of domination, the fact that women may not politicise domestic violence means not only that they do not get equality within the home, but also that they cannot obtain wider political recognition abroad. Thus they cannot turn violence to a lasting political advantage the way that men can (by killing or vanquishing an enemy, subduing a wife, gaining a reputation for being ferocious, attracting large compensation payments and mobilising political units for war), but turn to it only as a form of protest to publicise what they consider an unacceptable situation, and to achieve a measure of redress. As indicated, this may backfire on them and reinforce their politically weak position. The reason why women do not have as high a regard for violence as men is not so much because they are physically weaker, and likely to be beaten in a fight with them, as that culturally and politically it does not benefit them. They suffer violence even as they inflict it, while men may reap long-term benefits from it even when they suffer it.

Though the argument in this paper has been built around a number of episodes illustrating the use of physical violence, the foregoing paragraph, following an analysis of these episodes, calls for a widening of the debate to include symbolic violence or the *threat* of physical violence. As far as their practical applicability is concerned, these last two amount to the same thing. I have said that the married situation is inherently violent because of the impossibility of escaping from, or reversing, the hierarchical relationship between husband and wife. This relationship is not reflected in constant sadistic wife beatings, but in the implicit threats of violence contained in references made to women's dependent and politically weak position. The comparative ease with which men may force their wishes on women, the few moral tales of the grisly results of women's disobedience, the cultural acceptance of a certain amount of wife beating, the observation of the outcome of this compared to husband beating, the perceived weak position of women in their husbands' settlements, and especially the husband's authority over his wife, all go towards this corpus of cultural practices which define symbolic violence. Elsewhere⁴ I commented on the idiom of warfare and violence in which marriage exchanges are conducted. In addition, men often say that they pay bride-price for a woman because they gain control over her labour and reproductive powers (though they do not stress sexuality). Violence is done to a woman when the products of her labour are alienated without her consent, and what she considers to be her rights are denied. The physical violence that she may resort to then, in sheer frustration, is far less effective

than men's grim comments that wives who leave their husbands deserve to be punished, especially when these follow an account of how a man killed his ex-wife (and her sister) who had divorced him for another man. The threat of violence is a reality lurking behind many everyday, apparently reasonable, marital expectations of women.

Rather than concentrate narrowly on the occurrence of marital violence, I have tried in this paper to assess the importance of violence in general in this society, and its role within political relations on the whole. Though violence is an acceptable part of everyday life, the different contexts in which it occurs demonstrate also that it can have different social evaluations, functions and results. These differences have been linked to the socio-economic status of women in this society. While violence outside the domestic unit is part of the political relations of exchange, marital violence is confined to the domestic and therefore appears only as punishment or as protest: men use it offensively, pre-emptively and punitively, women defensively and because no other channel is open to them.

Notes

¹ I would like to thank the Social Science Research Council in England for supporting my fieldwork in Kagua, Southern Highlands Province, during 1979-81.

² For a full ethnographic description of the Kewa, see Josephides 1985.

³ K = kina; the 1985 kina is approximately equivalent to the United States dollar.

⁴ Josephides 1985.

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CHAPTER FIVE

FAMILY DISPUTES AND VILLAGE COURTS IN THE EASTERN HIGHLANDS

by

George Westermarck

Village courts provide a new accessibility to official justice for the rural areas of Papua New Guinea. Whereas before 1975 local courts operating in the country's towns were the primary forums should disputants wish to take their grievances beyond unofficial village hearings, during the past decade the new courts have come to deal with an extensive range of conflicts. My purpose in this paper will be to explore how village courts respond to a segment of that range, namely, those disputes associated with family issues. Given the theme of this collection, I will be particularly concerned with the treatment of those family disputes that generate violent interactions.

As is the case with other institutions introduced by the state, the village courts have been susceptible to local level modifications that reflect the distinctive blend of cultural and social factors existing in the areas where they have been established. Because there has been relatively little official supervision of the day-to-day workings of the courts, distinct court procedures have developed as village court officials have gone about carrying out their tasks in their rural communities. Coupled with the well-noted diversity in customs around Papua New Guinea, these procedural differences suggest that generalisations be advanced with caution. Nevertheless, the similarity of the court discussed in this paper to some other reported examples (Gordon and Meggitt 1985, Warren 1976, Zuckerman 1982) indicates that my findings based on a single case may reflect trends found elsewhere in the country.

The ethnographic focus for this study is the Agarabi area of the Eastern Highlands Kainantu District. From 1977 to 1978 I studied several of the courts working in that census district.¹ I begin with a brief description of precolonial Agarabi society, and then describe a number of the social changes experienced over the past fifty years. I next turn to the procedures of the Agarabi courts, before looking specifically at family disputes.

Precolonial Agarabi Society

Prior to colonization, the Agarabi pursued a style of life common in the Eastern Highlands. A horticultural people living in small hamlets surrounded

by their gardens and pigs, they formed limited alliances with similar nearby settlements for the purposes of defence. Such sets of adjacent settlements which shared contiguous territories formed named local groups, and two or more local groups formed a phratry, the most extensive political unit within which warfare was restricted.

Relations within the phratry were phrased in the idiom of patrilineal descent, with segments of the named clans in each phratry dispersed among the local groups. Yet, as a consequence of the near-constant threat of war, the alliances upon which the traditional Agarabi social system was based were subject to frequent redefinition. Violent confrontation and movement coloured most domains of Agarabi experience, but it is clear that the handling of disputes within groups was strongly affected. Traditional social relationships between Agarabi in conflict influenced their responses to disputes. Closer relationships led to easier settlement; yet an aggrieved individual was responsible for pursuing his own dispute, along with those kinsmen and allies he could mobilise (cf. Lawrence 1969). Reactions varied from debate to armed combat. Negotiations were held within the men's house, though Agarabi today frequently stress the prevalence of interpersonal duels with bows and arrows as the initial precolonial response of allied disputants. Compensation would typically follow these defences of manly honour. Without judicial forums where authoritative decisions could be handed down, big-men attempted to influence the actions of disputants within their groups to reflect their own interests in maintaining followers or establishing alliances. Thus, dispute management took place before a back-drop of diverse political considerations.

Social Change in Agarabi

Independence and village courts came to the Agarabi in 1975 after nearly fifty years of social change had transformed their precolonial society. Numbering some 13,500, the Agarabi still live in small settlements surrounded by their animals and subsistence gardens, but today these elements of their traditional lives exist alongside towns, trucks, and cash-cropping. With three other major ethnolinguistic groups, the Gadsup, Kamano, and Tairora, they occupy the Kainantu District of the Eastern Highlands Province. The fact that Papua New Guinea's major artery, the Highlands Highway, bisects Agarabi territory as it links the coast with the more western Highland provinces has meant that the Agarabi people have experienced each new change as it entered the Highlands. None of the some thirty Agarabi villages is more than nine miles from Kainantu town, the district's bureaucratic and trading centre.

The economic developments of the last thirty years have gradually incorporated the Agarabi in the world economic system. Although some Agarabi men have begun raising cattle for commercial sale, and women from villages near Kainantu town plant vegetables for sale in the town market, the primary link between the Agarabi and the world economy has been their production of coffee. The Australian Administration introduced coffee to the

Agarabi at the end of the Second World War. The first Agarabi who experimented with coffee began to earn cash in the early 1950s, thus stimulating an interest in the crop in other villages. Production increased among the Agarabi and the Gadsup from ten tons in 1957, to eighty tons in 1960, to 400 tons in 1970 (Young 1973:36). In addition to actual production, many Agarabi who own trucks act as coffee buyers, purchasing coffee in the more remote villages of the district for resale at a better price to coffee factories in Kainantu town; Goroka, the largest Eastern Highlands town; or as far away as Lae, the coastal terminus of the Highlands Highways.

Political changes began to occur for the Agarabi in the 1930s. They were one of the earliest of the Highland peoples to be brought under the control of the Australian Administration. In 1933, the first Highland census was taken and the first *luluai*² (village headman) appointed in Agarabi villages. Since the Second World War there have been other political innovations. The Agarabi were the first Kainantu District ethnolinguistic group to participate in an Australian-sponsored local government council, organised in 1960. Since 1973 they have participated with the other peoples of the district in an experiment in subcouncil government unique in Papua New Guinea. The current district-wide council concerns itself with general services such as schools, roads and health aid-posts, while the thirty-five mini-councils, or *Eria Komuniti* (Area Community), concern themselves with problems pertaining to their member villages. Villages voluntarily join the *Eria Komuniti* of their choice and elect their own officials; each *Eria Komuniti* can set its own rules and its own taxes.

Appointment of official government leaders opened new dispute management possibilities. The administrative definition of the *luluai*'s role did not include judicial powers; however, most *luluai* heard cases and levied fines unofficially, with the tacit permission of the *kiaps* (officials responsible for the co-ordination of government services at District level). When councillors replaced *luluai* in 1960, they adopted their unofficial role in handling disputes, as did the village representatives of the *Eria Komuniti* in the 1970s.

The Agarabi also experienced the procedure of Western courts outside the village as they participated in the *kiaps*' Court for Native Affairs. This court, along with the local court that replaced it in the 1960s in Kainantu, did not actually process a large number of cases. Nevertheless, they provided the Agarabi with over 40 years of Western legal socialization prior to the inception of village courts.

Additional examples of social change might be cited to demonstrate the alteration that has occurred in Agarabi society. However, the economic and political transitions enumerated above should be sufficient to indicate the continuous nature of social adaptation that the Agarabi have undergone over the past five decades. Those who were young when this process began have led their lives adjusting to introduced and traditional beliefs and values. The village courts that began in the Kainantu District in 1975 were adapted to Agarabi society on the basis of this long history of involvement with Western institutions.

Agarabi Village Courts

Village courts in Papua New Guinea were strongly supported by the country's new leaders, because they were 'essentially indigenous and would ensure the involvement of the people in the legal system' (Chalmers 1978:71, n. 68). The Village Courts Act created a system of forums that was intended to apply customary rules and procedure in the settlement of disputes. Although the Act did not eliminate adjudication from the courts' powers, it clearly favoured mediation as a method of dispute handling (Chalmers and Paliwala 1977: 88-89). Once the courts were in operation, however, many did not adhere to this favoured pattern. Rather, they have given greater emphasis to adjudication, styling themselves after common law courts (cf. Gawi *et al.* 1976:264). The Agarabi village courts are examples of this pattern.

This development of Agarabi village court procedure follows from the court officials' understanding of their role, which one magistrate described in the following way to a disputant:

You have brought this case because you want to follow our custom, the custom of our ancestors. But we have this work, i.e., the village court now, and we must judge according to today's and our ancestors' law. If you stayed in the village with this case, then you could just follow the way of our ancestors. But the way of the court is for us to hold the book and sit down at the table. You have come inside and so we must hear your case according to the new way, the way of the white man.

In blending their own ideas of a traditional past with the requirements of their new institution, the officials' emphasis on Western courts is reflected in the physical structure of the courts and the behaviour that occurs there.

The courts' architectural and interior elements do not encourage the participatory style of interaction envisioned by the creators of the village court system. Agarabi court officials used the symbolic weight of space and furniture arrangement to distinguish the court from the typical village setting. With a tall pole flying the Papua New Guinea flag, borders of painted fences or stones, stone-lined paths, and symmetrical plantings of flowers surrounding the courts, the emulation of the local court and other government offices in Kainantu town is obvious. The aura of officialdom pervades the interior of the court, with officials typically sitting at tables facing the litigants, who either stand or sit on benches. The magistrates and court clerk may have separate tables, and sometimes the table of the magistrates is on a dais.

Court paraphernalia such as the magistrates' handbooks, the court clerk's order books, and all the officials' badges of office affirm the court's links to the government. In the late 1970s, during the author's first visit to Kainantu, court officials were pressing for the issuance of uniforms and handcuffs so that they would have 'full power'. By 1982, their wishes had been fulfilled; the colours of the uniforms even distinguished the magistrates, court clerks and peace officers.

The distinctiveness of the village court from moots in the village is matched by the officials' attitudes toward evidence and behaviour. Whereas in the village moot many people are included in the discussion as participants and audience, and the ideas and events discussed may be loosely associated with the dispute under consideration, both participants and relevant evidence are limited in the court. Unlike the free flow of communication in the moot, behaviour in the court is severely restricted. Although the Village Courts Act states that the court should hear whatever evidence comes before it, the magistrates limit evidence to the specific issue before them. They will not consider a dispute that preceded the case under consideration, even though it may be one of its causes.

For village court magistrates, reconciliation should be one element of the village moot, what they call the 'outside court'. They expect that disputants in the village court will be intransigent in their opposition to each other, and they call cases where the disputants are too friendly *giaman kot* (false court). Cases they consider most suitable for a hearing in the village court are those in which disputants are unlikely to reach an easy settlement.

Magistrates are not opposed to the idea of mediated settlements and reconciliation, but they have arrived at their own system for classifying those cases that should be mediated and those that should be adjudicated. They distinguish cases that appear before them as either 'big trouble' or 'little trouble,' and generally handle the former by court adjudication and the latter by outside mediation. In categorising a dispute as one type or the other, they weigh the social relationship of the disputants as heavily as they do the issue in question.

Use of the Court

The data presented to this point indicate that the Agarabi village courts operate with a style that emphasises formality rather than informality, but that they have defined a certain range of disputes, the 'little trouble,' that should be heard before informal moots, or 'outside courts'. This pattern is a modification of the village court structure introduced to them by the government. It emerges from the understanding of court procedure developed during the 40 years preceding the village courts, though it also reflects the pragmatic needs of administering these institutions amidst the egalitarian relationships of village life. Further, the direction the Agarabi courts have taken was made possible in the context of minimal supervision.

Whatever the form of the courts and their supervision, however, the critical question is the response of potential disputants. Although it is difficult to define precisely what success would mean in such a programme as the village courts, one measure must certainly be the extent of use by people in the jurisdiction. Another indicator would be the use of alternative forums. In this section, I examine both these indicators of acceptance as applied to the Agarabi village courts.

Table 1: Ankuantenu Village Court Case Record, June 1977-September 1978

Type of Dispute	Residence of Complainant and Respondent								TOTAL
	Within Ankuantenu V.C. Jurisdiction				Involving Another V.C. Jurisdiction				
	Same Village		Different Village		Ankuantenu Complainant		Ankuantenu Respondent		
	Tr	Rp	Tr	Rp	Tr	Rp	Tr	Rp	
Livestock Damage Garden	21	11	5	2	0	5	0	0	44
Livestock Injured/Killed	11	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	16
Property Damage	20	1	2	1	0	0	0	0	24
Debt	18	4	5	3	0	1	0	0	31
Bride-price	10	3	3	0	0	1	6	0	23
Theft	12	11	4	1	0	0	0	0	28
Assault or Battery	29	2	1	1	0	0	0	0	33
Rape or Attempted Rape	10	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	13
Sorcery	3	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	4
Slander	2	1	2	1	0	0	0	0	6
Land Ownership	5	6	3	1	0	1	0	0	16
Prohibited Land ³	2	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	3
Marriage	11	9	1	0	2	2	1	0	26
Child Custody	2	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	4
Eria Komuniti Work Day	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3
Offended Court	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3
Sub Total	162	49	32	11	3	12	8	0	277
TOTAL		211		43		15		8	277

KEY: V.C. = Village Court, Tr = Trial, Rp = Report.

My record of the disputes brought to the Ankuantenu village court between June 1977 and September 1978 (Table 1) clearly shows that village courts absorbed most village disputes. With a population of 2,284 in the villages of its geographic jurisdiction, it is the largest Agarabi court. The table divides the cases according to the types of dispute and the residences of the litigants, and distinguishes 'trials' (cases where the two parties appeared before the court) from 'reports' (cases brought to the attention of the court by a plaintiff without the defendant being present). Thus, in the 16 month period, 277 disputes were brought to the court, of which 205 were trials and 72 reports. Some cases that appeared before the court were not easily resolved and had multiple hearings. There were 89 hearings of these multiple-hearing cases, for a total of 366 hearings in the 16 months. Given that the court meets twice weekly, but holds few meetings in December and January, I estimate that there were approximately three hearings per court session.

Moreover, Table 1 demonstrates that the vast majority of disputants appearing before the Ankuantenu court were from the same village. Village courts are not an addendum to village dispute management in 'outside' courts. By the end of the 1970s they were the most frequently used forum among the Agarabi.

Another way of measuring court activity is to compare it with the hearings of alternative village forums. Between November 1977 and September 1978, in the Agarabi village with which I am most familiar, there were 33 cases heard in outside courts, or village moots. During this period, members of this same village brought 71 disputes to the village court, over twice as many disputes as were heard in the village. The outside court cases were mostly between litigants who were related and lived in the same hamlet. Of the 33 outside cases 20 were between people with these social ties. Yet this group also brought their disputes to the village court: 5 of the outside hearings had prior hearings in the court house; 7 cases were brought to the court house after hearings in outside courts.

Interviews with the litigants in cases from the Ankuantenu village court for three months (April, June and August 1978) also indicate that few forums other than the village court were used in processing disputes. Outside hearings were attempted before a case was brought to the village court in only 7 of the 81 cases in these three months. Two cases saw post village court hearings in cases in these three months. Two cases saw post village court hearings in outside courts. Two other cases were taken by dissatisfied complainants to the local court after their case was heard by the village court, though in neither instance was the case accepted by the local court. One case was taken to the welfare office in town after the person had presented it to the village court.

One aspect of the Agarabi village courts' effectiveness that should be emphasised is the nature of the outcomes reached in these forums. Table 2 shows that compensation, a significant characteristic of traditional dispute management, was the most common order made by the Ankuantenu village court. It was used primarily in those cases where there was a loss, whether it was due to livestock damaging gardens, the killing or injury of livestock, or some other damage, but it also figured prominently in debt cases. Fines were

Table 2: Ankuantenu Village Court Decisions, June 1977-September 1978

Type of Dispute	Decisions								
	Fine	Com- munity Work	Com- pensa- tion	Other Court Order	Warn- ing	Dis- miss- ed	To Out- side Court	To Other Court	No Deci- sion
Livestock Damage Garden	1	1	12	0	0	2	0	0	10
Livestock Injured/Killed	2	0	5	0	0	2	2	0	2
Property Damage	2	0	8	0	2	5	0	0	5
Debt	0	0	13	0	0	1	6	2	1
Bride-price	0	0	4	0	0	6	2	1	6
Theft	1	0	3	0	0	7	1	1	3
Assault or Battery	16	3	1	0	5	2	0	0	3
Rape or Attempted Rape	6	0	1	0	1	4	0	0	1
Sorcery	0	0	0	0	0	4	0	0	0
Slander	1	0	0	0	2	1	0	0	0
Land Ownership	0	0	1	1	1	0	0	5	1
Prohibited Land	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	0
Marriage	0	0	0	4	2	2	3	0	2
Child Custody	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	2
<i>Eria Komuniti</i> Work Day	2	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
Offended Court	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
TOTAL	33	5	48	6	13	37	17	10	36

used less frequently, and two-thirds of the fines were penalties in cases involving violence.

A singular feature of the Ankuantenu magistrates' decision record is the large number of cases in which no penalty was imposed. The five columns on the right side of the table show that in over half the court's cases, the magistrates either issued only a warning, found for the defendant or made no decision at all. The last option is particularly noteworthy, as it indicates a plaintiff's ability to withdraw his dispute voluntarily from the court if he wishes to do so. The court typically does not pursue such cases, even in criminal matters. For example, many plaintiffs fail to return to court after the magistrates order a second hearing so that a witness can be brought to court, or so that some other evidence can be checked.

This orientation of the Agarabi courts is possible because, although the official rules of the court set guidelines for court officials, the rules can be variously interpreted. Because Agarabi courts respond to community disputes brought to them, litigants are better able to pursue their own strategies as their disputes evolve. It appears that one reason the Agarabi courts are found useful by disputants is that they expand the range of methods for handling disputes that the disputants can apply as they see fit.

Family Disputes in the Village Court

Although village court officials tend to view disputes between people who are closely related as more suitable for outside courts, when family cases involve violence or divorce they become 'big trouble'. Moreover, unresolved cases from outside courts may later be brought to the village courts; the fact that mediation has not led to a settlement is evidence that the matter is serious.

The most frequently contested family issues in the courts are marital problems and assaults. Table 3 shows that those who complain most frequently about both of these matters are women.³ Causes for the marital difficulties include one or more of the following: alcohol, assault, co-wives, infidelity, religious differences, and work habits. If the problem has become serious enough for complainants to come to court, however, they usually come to request a divorce. While treating such requests as worthy of discussion, magistrates are reluctant to give approval. The fact that over half these cases in the Ankuantenu court never came to trial indicates that reporting the problem to the court may have assuaged the complainant's feelings or actually eased the marital conflict. In divorce cases that did come to a full court hearing, only two resulted in court approval of the divorce. Magistrates typically lectured the disputants about their responsibilities to each other and the importance of marriage, warned them about separating without court approval, and then sent them back to their community to attempt conciliation.

Violence is regarded by court officials as a threat to both village harmony and judicial authority. Assault and rape were the two offences that most consistently were sanctioned with fines. In the assault category, the largest

Table 3: Ankuantenu Village Court Case Record, June 1977-September 1978

Type of Dispute	Sex of Complainant and Respondent											
	Male/ Male		Female/ Male		Male/ Female		Female/ Female		Husband/ Wife		Wife/ Husband	
	Tr	Rp	Tr	Rp	Tr	Rp	Tr	Rp	Tr	Rp	Tr	Rp
Livestock												
Damage Garden	17	11	8	5	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0
Livestock												
Injured/Killed	12	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Property												
Damage	17	3	1	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
Debt	12	5	5	1	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Bride-price	15	4	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Theft	4	5	5	6	2	0	4	0	0	0	1	0
Assault or												
Battery	6	1	5	1	0	0	11	0	0	0	6	0
Rape or												
Attempted Rape	5	0	8	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Sorcery	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Slander	1	1	0	0	0	0	3	1	0	0	0	0
Land Ownership	5	3	3	3	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
Prohibited Land ⁴	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Marriage	3	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	9	10
Child Custody	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
Sub Total	105	37	39	16	7	1	19	2	2	1	17	11
TOTAL	142		55		8		21		3		28	

KEY:

Tr = Trial, Rp = Report

number of cases involved co-wives: all but two of these cases were between women linked through a polygynous marriage. The unequal distribution of the husband's money, sexuality or work were the causes most often cited for these conflicts.

Magistrates hearing cases of marital violence have been severe with male defendants. A husband's use of physical abuse to punish his wife, though prevalent in earlier eras, is no longer acceptable to the court. One magistrate described the change in the following way to a defendant:

In the past, in the time of the *luluai* and *tultul*, if you hit your wife there would be no trouble. Now the government has passed a law against such behaviour. You cannot touch or swear at a woman today without having to go to court.

In addition to this emphasis on the government's proscriptions, magistrates always remind the defendant that his wife is critical for contributing to household functions, the implication being that the husband could not succeed in his endeavours independently.

The ability of women to use the village courts, whether they come as disgruntled wives, the owners of damaged gardens, or the victims of theft, is a significant aspect of the case breakdown in Table 3. Over 40% of all hearings in the Ankuantenu village court during the research period were initiated by women. I observed no instances where laws were applied unilaterally against women, and only rare examples of what appeared to be discriminatory actions by court officials. That women should be such frequent users of the court, when in other public contexts they tend to refrain from asserting themselves, suggests that they view the court as an effective method for responding to their conflicts.

Case Studies

The impact of the village court on family disputes is not limited to those cases which, because of the seriousness of the offence, enter the court for a full hearing. An accurate appraisal of the court's role in the resolution of these conflicts can only be determined when they are seen in the context of other methods for handling disputes utilised by family members. In the two cases described below we see how the court can play a significant role in dispute management even when it is not the primary or initial forum selected by disputants.

The Case of the Pawpaw (Papaya)

The parties in this dispute, a mother, her eldest son, and the son's wife, fought over a pawpaw. Both Ere, the mother, and Oro, her son, claimed that they were owners of a pawpaw tree that had sprung from the seed of a discarded

pawpaw. The tree was located in the garden of Bake, Oro's wife; but both Bake and Ere looked after the tree. The day before the dispute occurred, Ere decided that she would take a particularly ripe pawpaw to the market to sell the next day. When she went to the tree the following morning, however, the pawpaw was gone. She went to Bake's house immediately, and asked her about the pawpaw several times before Bake uncovered the fruit, rolled it toward Ere, and told her that a pawpaw was not something worth talking about. Later, Ere heard Bake say that she would cut down the pawpaw tree if it was going to cause so much trouble. When Ere discovered that Bake had carried out her threat, she retaliated by cutting down several pawpaw trees belonging to Bake and Oro. A heated shouting match ensued between the two women, which exploded into a fight when Ere hit Bake with her shovel. Oro interceded, pushing the women apart. As a result, Ere tripped and fell, cutting her arm on a stick.

All of these facts came out in the statements of the parties to the dispute. In addition, Ere mentioned a previous dispute they had had a year before over coffee. Ere brought the dispute to the village court because she felt that Oro and Bake were trying to keep her from picking the coffee she had planted with her deceased husband. Bake contended that Ere was improperly giving the money from the sale of this coffee to her new husband.

Although the facts and the law were not irrelevant in the handling of this case, the *Eria Komuniti* officials stressed conciliation. One official commented that Ere could have received compensation if she had not cut Oro and Bake's trees, but the focus of the hearing was upon the proper attitudes of the family members towards one another. To accomplish a reconciliation, the officials spoke about ideal behaviour in a family, and criticised the disputants' actual behaviour. They pursued the possibility of an underlying cause for the conflict, inquired of Bake why she continually quarrelled and discussed the events surrounding the previous dispute over the coffee. They also suggested an exchange of K2 between Bake and Ere, not so much as a compensation, but as a method of setting in motion the pattern of exchange and sharing that should typify family social relationships.

They did not fail, however, to support their appeals for reconciliation by emphasising the consequences if the disputants returned for another hearing in the village court:

You understand the way of the law. If you want to cut something that belongs to another you must first go to see an *Eria* or village court official. The owner of the tree planted it for *bisnis* (business), so if you damage the plant they will bring you to court. You two shouldn't hurry and come to the village court. They will make a big case out of it, and you will have to pay a lot of money. You must stay in the village and let an *Eria* official straighten out your dispute. The *Eria* official won't make you pay big money. You are one family so you shouldn't come to the village court. You should go to the *Eria* official, or you can straighten it out yourselves. If you pay big

money, then you will go back to your hamlet and have bad thoughts about each other. You must sit down together and talk about this dispute and then give each other a little money. You can't hurry and come to the village court because they will make you pay big money.

As the official's statement indicates, the social relationships of the disputants were preeminent in the minds of the officials in this case. The magistrates, taking note of the family ties of the disputants, defined this case as a 'little trouble', and the dispute was handled through mediation by *Eria Komuniti* officials outside the court.

The Case of the Burning House

A large house, recently built by members of one lineage, and shared by four families, was burned to the ground. Besides the house, many household items such as plates, cups, pots, and blankets were destroyed. It also was claimed that K800 (U.S. \$1,000, 1978) hidden in the house was burned. The defendant was the wife of one of the lineage men. Her husband and accusers said that she had burned the house because her husband had brought her co-wife to live with him in the new house while the accused lived in a house nearby. The husband had become a Seventh Day Adventist, and supposedly had given up his second wife in accordance with Adventist doctrine. But he had fallen away from the church, and when his family finished the new house, he brought back his other wife from her parents' home where she had been staying.

There were two types of evidence against the defendant, although she denied that she was responsible for the fire. First, her husband's brother's wife saw her go into the house shortly before the fire began. Though she did not claim that she had seen the defendant start the fire, the complainants argued that there was no reason for the defendant to be in the new house, especially since her co-wife was not living there. Second, the elder brother of the defendant's husband consulted a diviner who, through his dreams, identified the accused as the culprit.

Armed with this evidence, the elder brother went to the police with his case. The police counselled him to go back and handle this trouble in the village, since the defendant was his sister-in-law. Several Adventists then suggested to the elder brother that he consult the coastal evangelist about the possibility of performing the Bible oath. He did so, and the evangelist agreed to come and hear about the dispute.

There were approximately 50 to 60 people present for the Monday morning hearing, including the defendant, her parents, the elder brother, a village court magistrate, and the coastal evangelist. The evangelist began by explaining what could happen if the defendant took the oath: if the defendant lied while holding the Bible, she would die; but, if she was falsely accused, her accuser would die. The evangelist said that he had seen many people die on his home island after an oath was taken on the Bible.

Following the evangelist's speech, several people, the father, the elder brother, and a brother of the wife, urged the wife to come forward and take the oath. The village court magistrate, who described himself as the father of both co-wives (actually an elder member of their clan), took a more conciliatory tone. He told the wife that he knew why she was angry: her co-wife was living in the house that the defendant had helped to build; the co-wife rode in the truck that the defendant helped to pay for; and her husband had given her co-wife money to play cards. All of this money had come from the sale of coffee that was a result of the defendant's efforts, not those of her co-wife; everyone knew the co-wife was lazy. Wasn't it because of these things, the magistrate asked her, that she was angry? And hadn't she gone in to burn something of her co-wife's, but had accidentally set the entire house on fire? With that, the defendant broke down and admitted that what the magistrate suggested was true.

The magistrate said he understood her anger, and that it was good she had admitted causing the fire, since now the family could end their trouble. He criticised her husband for giving her co-wife the defendant's money, as it was their *kastom lo* (customary law) that a husband should not give the things of one wife to another wife. The defendant was right to be angry. Now that the defendant had admitted setting the fire, the elder brother's wife said, they could take the case back to the police; but the magistrate asked her why they had ignored the village court in this case, and he encouraged them to go there next.

Eventually the case was taken to the village court, where the husband and the defendant were ordered to rebuild the house and pay K200 (U.S. \$250, 1978) to those who had lost household goods or cash in the fire. By this stage in the dispute, a diviner, the police, the village court, and an Adventist oath had each been brought into play.

Conclusion

The procedural style adopted by the Agarabi village courts limits the number of family cases that actually come for a full hearing in this forum. Nevertheless, even when not participating in the handling of a dispute, the court's existence has an obvious influence upon the general pattern of dispute management. In the first case, for example, the mediation was conducted by *Eria Komuniti* representatives who a number of times contrasted the leniency of their hearing with the severity of the village court which threatened a large fine. With the aid of this threat, the mediators were able to encourage movement toward conciliation. The variety of methods applied to the dispute in the second case demonstrates how the village courts can be used in combination with both official and unofficial alternatives.

Two key characteristics of the courts are reflected in these cases: decision and flexibility. Accessible culturally, linguistically and physically, the courts provide the possibility of adjudicating disputes with little delay or cost.

Because they respond to the demands of complainants rather than reacting to village disputes on their own initiative, however, they allow disputants to mix a variety of strategies for handling their grievances. The ready availability of the court stimulates negotiations and mediations that might not occur without this adjudicatory catalyst. For those who do not hold an especially strong bargaining position, such as women, the court serves as an important ally. Although I can only speculate at this point, one consequence of the court's strong stand against divorce and violence may be to help ameliorate the social and economic pressures causing conflict and family instability among the Agarabi.

Notes

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² Italicised words in this paper are *tok pisin* (Pidgin English).

³ The number of cases in Table 1 and Table 3 differ for two reasons: Table 3 does not include those cases (1) where both complainant and respondent were groups of Agarabi and (2) where the complainant was the court itself (Table 1 rows titled 'Eria Komuniti Work Day' and 'Offended Court.')

⁴ Prohibited Land is that land set aside from use as an aspect of mourning.

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CHAPTER SIX

FEMALE PLAINTIFFS AND SEX-RELATED DISPUTES IN RURAL PAPUA NEW GUINEA

by

Richard Scaglion and Rose Whittingham

Introduction

One of the main problems facing researchers who wish to generalise about legal matters across rural communities in Papua New Guinea is a simple lack of information. Anthropologists have provided detailed studies of many aspects of conflict and its management in the country (see Strathern 1972a, Scaglion 1976, Podolefski 1978, Westermarck 1981, Goldman 1983). However, their analyses have tended to be focussed on a particular village or small region, making generalisation difficult. On the other hand, nationwide statistics often suffer from superficiality and inconsistency in data collection. In fact, a joint study by the Institute of National Affairs (INA) and the Institute of Applied Social and Economic Research (IASER) on law and order in Papua New Guinea recently addressed this problem. In a chapter entitled, 'Dimensions of the Problem: The Shortcomings of Papua New Guinea's Record Keeping', it was stated that, 'This chapter should have been entitled "Why we do not know the dimensions of the problem"'. (INA 1984a:16). The report goes on to detail why nationwide police statistics, for example, may be unreliable:

In many areas of Papua New Guinea, rural crime is simply not recorded at all by the police. . . . Officers investigating rural crime see little use in completing crime reports due to their inability to successfully pursue the investigation. Limited police transportation, the remote location of many rural crimes, lack of police familiarity with the people in the area, all cause crimes to be ignored or superficially investigated (INA 1984a:36).

As a result of this polarisation of research efforts, very little mid-range data is available to legal planners. Gordon and Meggitt (1985) have recently produced a valuable regionally focussed study which partially fills this gap.

The study upon which this paper is based seeks to add to mid-range data through an alternative approach: the analysis of anthropological conflict case data gathered by knowledgeable researchers in a comparable format over a broad range of research locations.

The specific purpose of the study is to provide an overview of village conflict cases which involve inter-sexual and domestic issues and to assess the ability of village women to pursue their grievances. The survey is based on a corpus of 481 cases collected in 1979-81 as part of the Customary Law Development Project of the Law Reform Commission, under the direction of the senior author. These cases cover a cross-section of diverse village settings in Papua New Guinea and are concerned with the full range of 'remedy agents' (persons or organisations that settle disputes) in rural communities. Cases were collected by student researchers of the University of Papua New Guinea working in their home areas. Background data on these cases, including a general description of the research methodology and reports by the researchers on their fieldwork are published in Law Reform Commission Monograph No. 2 (Scaglion 1983), and a preliminary analysis of the data appears in the INA/IASER report (1984b:209-226).

In seeking to contribute to mid-range studies, the research design for this study necessitated an unhappy compromise between methods familiar to anthropologists, which include in-depth, detailed observations by researchers familiar with the cultural milieu of disputes, and the large-scale, large-sample statistical techniques used by legal sociologists. Briefly, student researchers were asked to record all cases which arose during their research period (their long university vacation). These cases were to be supplemented with recent memory cases (accounts given by informants of past events) and written records from the past two years which could be collected from litigants in their study communities.

The resultant corpus of cases has the virtue of having been collected by knowledgeable researchers familiar with the local language and customs. On the other hand, it is in no way a 'random' sample of village disputes in Papua New Guinea. In fact, since no enumeration of this universe exists, it was impossible to randomly sample village conflict cases in the statistical sense. Rather it should be taken as a broad sample indicative of trends in conflict management in a broad range of Papua New Guinea villages. We hope to provide some idea of the range of formal and informal forums for conflict management available to rural villagers, to assess the place of sex-related conflicts within this broader framework, and to provide some sense of the ways in which female plaintiffs pursue their complaints in the village setting.

The framework

Type of Cases

Standardised schedules were used for the recording of all cases, regardless of source. A breakdown of types of cases by source is found in Table I.

Table 1: Source of Cases

Type of Case	Number of Cases	Per Cent of Cases
Memory	284	59.0
Observed	129	26.8
Current but not observed	39	8.1
Written records	22	4.6
Other	7	1.5
TOTAL	481	100.0

Memory cases (remembered from the two years immediately preceding the field study) total fewer than twice the number of current cases, suggesting that memory cases do not constitute a total sample of all recent cases in the research sites. Since informants tend to remember important and/or severe cases more than petty or routine matters, the sample is probably biased against what informants considered to be 'minor' types of disputes.

The coding of cases according to 'type' of dispute is always a problem because findings often depend on the analytic framework of the researcher. For this research, two coding schemes were used to categorise types of cases. The first is based on broad groupings which preliminary research indicated were commonly used by various peoples in PNG. It was designed to record the 'base' or 'root' cause of the conflict (see Table 2).

Table 2 shows that a very large proportion of all village conflict cases are sex-related. The most common type of dispute begins with sexual jealousies

Table 2: Types of Cases

Type of Case	Number of Cases	Per Cent of Cases
Sexual jealousies	105	21.8
Land and water rights	57	11.9
Theft	51	10.6
Petty domestic issues	41	8.5
Domestic animals	28	5.8
Injury	27	5.6
Traditional obligations	19	4.0
Sorcery	15	3.1
Defamation	15	3.1
Incest	14	2.9
Homicide and murder	14	2.9
Accidental damage	10	2.1
Disturbing the peace	8	1.7
Ritual pollution	6	1.2
Rape	4	0.8
Other (traditional-type cases)	45	9.4
Other (non-traditional-type cases)	22	4.6
TOTAL	481	100.0

which, together with 'petty domestic' or marital relations-type cases, constitute nearly one-third of the sample. While these types of cases are not always considered to be 'serious' in Western law, it is obvious that the types of problems being considered in this volume are of real concern to villagers in Papua New Guinea. It can be deduced that these kinds of disputes are considered important because they have the latent ability to create large-scale disharmony when they escalate beyond the immediate family unit involved.

The second coding scheme was based on breakdowns of disputes according to the Handbook for Village Court Officials. Using these codes, all cases could be analysed by employing the categories found in village court records. This coding scheme provides a more detailed breakdown of cases, and was designed to indicate the nature of the problem which actually precipitated litigation.

Cases which are rather clearly related to marital or cross-sex issues include sex rights (42 in number), adultery (39), marriage problems (14), incest (11), customary divorce (9), bride-price (8), child custody (4), and neglect of dependents (2). Together these cases make up about one-quarter of the total sample. By comparing the two coding schemes, it appears that roughly 20% of

Table 3: Types of Cases in Categories found in the Handbook for Village Court Officials

Type of Case	Number of Cases	Per Cent of Cases
Theft	48	10.0
Assault	45	9.4
Sex rights	42	8.7
Adultery	39	8.1
Land use	31	6.4
Domestic animals	24	5.0
Sorcery	16	3.3
Customary obligations	15	3.1
Compensation	15	3.1
Marriage problems	14	2.9
Incest	11	2.3
Insult	10	2.1
Food trees	10	2.1
Customary divorce	9	1.9
Defamation	8	1.7
Disturbing the peace	8	1.7
Bride-price	8	1.7
Taboo	7	1.5
Land use	7	1.5
Debt	6	1.2
Property damage	5	1.0
Drunk	5	1.0
Child custody	4	0.8
Other village court matters	69	14.3
Other non-village court matters	25	5.2
TOTAL	481	100.0

all cases that start with sexual jealousy or marital relations issues go on to become more serious and precipitate other types of litigation.

Sex of Litigants

When one observes the sex of litigants involved in a case from a statistical point of view, the dispute may appear to be a male-male conflict. However, when sex-related issues which disrupt village harmony are scrutinized, one observes a complex web of kinship interrelationships. For example, a conflict between a husband and a wife generally enmeshes the kin groups of both, such that what is, at the onset, a petty domestic squabble may escalate into an assault case between male in-laws. Other types of cases are equally complex, involving several litigants, sometimes of mixed sex. Occasionally when the plaintiffs are of mixed sex, the case involves a male pleading a case on the behalf of a female relative. Table 4 ignores these cases for the moment, and concentrates on two-party disputes.

Table 4: Sex of Litigants

Sex of defendant	Sex of Plaintiff	
	Male	Female
Male	227	101
Female	43	22

The not surprising result is that most village conflicts (over half) are still male-male disputes, reflecting the fact that, in traditional Papua New Guinean societies, litigation is generally considered to be the domain of men. In two-

Table 5: Types of Cases by Sex of Plaintiff

Type of Case	Male Plaintiffs		Female Plaintiffs	
	Number of Cases	Per Cent of Cases	Number of Cases	Per Cent of Cases
Sex-related	79	27.1	67	52.3
Land and water rights	43	14.8	2	1.6
Theft	36	12.4	13	10.2
Domestic animals	24	8.2	4	3.1
Injury	17	5.8	6	4.7
Traditional obligations and ritual pollution	14	4.8	7	5.5
Sorcery	12	4.1	0	0.0
Defamation	7	2.4	6	4.7
Accidental damage	9	3.1	0	0.0
Other (traditional-type cases)	10	3.4	3	2.3
Other (non-traditional-type cases)	40	13.7	20	15.6
TOTAL	291	100.0	128	100.0

party disputes involving both sexes, the woman is usually the plaintiff (the aggrieved party) and the man is the defendant. Men rarely bring cases against women, and female-female disputes are even rarer.

Table 5 illustrates the particular concern of women about sex-related disputes (sexual jealousies, rape, incest and domestic disputes). When these cases are grouped together, they have a far greater proportion of female plaintiffs than any other type of case.

Over half of all the disputes brought by women for settlement involved sex-related disputes. This is not surprising when one considers that these types of cases — sexual jealousies, incest, rape, and domestic disputes — intimately involve women and women's issues. In contrast, only about one-fourth of cases where men are plaintiffs involve these issues. However, men are much more likely to be defendants in these sex-related cases. Women are also comparatively likely to be the plaintiffs in theft cases and in certain types of non-traditional cases (particularly those involving liquor-related problems). They are unlikely to complain about matters involving land and water rights, sorcery, and damages, which remain part of the male domain.

Dispute Processing

As the previously-cited INA/IASER study pointed out (1984b:218), one of the most interesting aspects of this data base is the material it provides on dispute processing. The study showed that extended cases are often quite complex, as litigants try first one and then another remedy agent. Generally, litigants start with informal remedy agents, such as self-help or mediation by a local big-man, then move to more formal remedy agents. The data indicate

Table 6: Remedy Agents Finally Settling Cases

Remedy Agent	Number of Cases Settled	Per Cent of Cases
Village court	125	26.0
Local government council officials	86	17.9
Self-help	85	17.7
Mediation by relative or big-man	51	10.6
Moot (informal village meeting)	43	8.9
Local court	29	6.0
Welfare office	7	1.5
Police	6	1.2
District court	5	1.0
<i>Luluai</i> or <i>tultul</i>	3	0.6
Land mediator	3	0.6
Customary rituals	2	0.4
Religious agencies	2	0.4
<i>Kiap</i>	1	0.2
Others	33	6.9
TOTAL	481	100.0

that informal remedy agents are extremely important in the processing of disputes in rural Papua New Guinea, settling many more cases than do the formal courts. Village courts, both in their formal and informal operations (Westermarck 1978, Scaglione 1979), handle a considerable number of all cases. Formal sittings of village courts have a success rate of nearly 80% in solving disputes, a rate higher than that of any other remedy agent. Table 6 illustrates which remedy agents were ultimately responsible for settling the village conflict cases.

Sex-related Disputes

In this section we explore ways in which 'sex-related' disputes differ from other types of disputes in the village context. Sex-related disputes can be identified in two slightly different ways using the two coding schemes for identifying 'types of cases' which were discussed earlier. The first scheme (the one used for Table 2) identifies the 'root' cause for the dispute, and, for sex-related complaints, is the most inclusive. In this categorisation, sexual jealousies, petty domestic complaints, rape and incest, which together number 164 cases, or 34.1% of the sample, are considered as 'sex-related cases'. The second scheme (used for Table 3) was more precise in identifying the legal issue which was the basis for the formal complaint. However, since 'petty domestic issues' sometimes resulted in 'assault' cases, which could not be identified as 'sex-related', the categorisation is less inclusive. We have considered the following types of problems to be sex-related: sex rights, adultery, marriage problems, incest, customary divorce, bride-price, child custody, and neglect of dependents. Together these constitute 26.8% of all cases. When we speak of 'sex-related' disputes in general terms, we use figures based on the more inclusive coding scheme, whereas statements about precise types of sex-related disputes derive from the second coding scheme.

Certain regional trends were noted in sex-related disputes. Highlands societies were slightly more likely to have sex-related conflicts (36.1% of all cases as compared with 33% of all cases for the rest of the sample as a whole) whereas societies in the New Guinea Islands were less likely to have such problems (only 24.1% of all cases were sex-related). Adultery complaints were more common in the Highlands than complaints about sexual jealousies, perhaps reflecting somewhat more formal and restrictive attitudes about marriage in that area. Incest was also of major concern in the Highlands, perhaps reflecting larger and more rigid kinship units. In Papua, problems involving bride-price seemed to be more common than in other areas.

Sex-related cases are somewhat more likely to be heard in village courts than are other types of cases. Sexual jealousy cases are particularly common problems for village courts to consider, although many go on to be heard in local courts. Because sex-related conflicts were rarely settled informally in the village, adjudication (a relatively formal settlement in the form of a decision rendered by a third party such as a judge, who can enforce a decision) is a

more common settlement technique for sex-related problems than for other disputes. Since less formal techniques such as mediation or arbitration were not successful, it appears that sex-related problems are considered to be very serious by Papua New Guinean villagers, who are concerned enough to use formal agencies to pursue their grievances to effect a final settlement.

Welfare offices were resorted to as a remedy agent very infrequently to hear the cases in our sample, probably owing to their inaccessibility for the average villager. Yet most of the cases which are heard by welfare officers involve sex-related disputes, so this would seem to be an appropriate forum for this type of litigation where such agents are available.

An interesting finding of this study concerning the nature of the cases themselves is that sex-related cases are more likely to involve physical violence than other types of cases, again suggesting their relative importance to the disputing parties. Physical violence occurred in about 26% of non-sex-related cases, but was observed in 35.7% of sex-related disputes. Adultery disputes are a particular problem since over 40% involved physical violence. This gives substantiation to our earlier comment that many so-called assault cases may be rooted in sex-related problems.

In general, sex-related cases seem to be of two general types. The first type, which can be labelled the 'petty domestic' problem, is generally heard informally in the village and settled there. Women, sometimes aided by male relatives, are often the plaintiffs in these cases. Settlement usually involves some sort of ritual recognition of mutual agreement. Public apology is a common 'punishment' as is a token compensation payment. The second type of case, which we might label 'serious sex-related' is generally heard outside the village in a more formal setting. Since these disputes often go to court, fines are more common punishments. These types of cases often involve physical violence.

Women as Plaintiffs

Much has been written about how males pursue their grievances in rural Papua New Guinea, in as much as male-male conflicts are intimately associated with local-level politics. On the other hand, relatively little has been written about how women litigate in the village context. Considering cases in which women were the plaintiffs provides some insights into this process.

As previously mentioned, women are the sole plaintiffs in only about one-fourth of all cases. Regional differences are again noted in the frequency with which women pursue their grievances. In both Papua and the Highlands, men were the sole plaintiffs in about 60% of the cases, with women as sole plaintiffs in only about 30% of all cases. The remaining cases involve plaintiffs of mixed sex. In the New Guinea Islands, women plaintiffs again constituted about 30% of all complainants, but frequently (14% of the time) women joined with men in pursuing their complaints, such that men were the sole plaintiffs in less than half of all cases. In the northern New Guinea mainland area (Momase),

Table 7: Remedy Agents Finally Settling Cases by Sex of Plaintiff

Remedy Agent	Male Plaintiffs		Female Plaintiffs		Plaintiffs of both sexes (jointly)	
	Number of Cases Settled	Per Cent of Cases	Number of Cases Settled	Per Cent of Cases	Number of Cases Settled	Per Cent of Cases
Village court	74	25.4	45	35.2	3	5.9
Local government council officials	51	17.5	29	22.7	5	9.8
Self-help	54	18.6	13	10.2	17	33.3
Mediation by relative or big-man	29	10.0	10	7.8	11	21.6
Moot	23	7.9	14	10.9	5	9.8
Local court	22	7.6	6	4.7	0	0.0
Welfare office	5	1.7	2	1.6	0	0.0
Police	3	1.0	2	1.6	1	2.0
District court	2	0.7	1	0.8	0	0.0
<i>Luluai</i> or <i>tutul</i>	0	0.0	0	0.0	2	3.9
Land mediator	2	0.7	0	0.0	1	2.0
Customary rituals	2	0.7	0	0.0	0	0.0
Religious agencies	1	0.3	1	0.8	0	0.0
<i>Kiap</i>	1	0.3	0	0.0	0	0.0
Others	22	7.6	5	3.9	6	11.8
TOTAL	291	100.0	128	100.0	51	100.0

females were the sole plaintiffs in only 20% of all cases, but joined with men about as frequently as in the New Guinea Islands area. Thus, women in the New Guinea Islands are more likely to pursue their complaints, and women in Momase are less likely.

Females were more likely to bring suit against close relatives by marriage (33.6%) than males (15.5%), and males were more likely to bring suit against close blood relatives (25.1%) than females (16.4%). This suggests that females are bringing suit against their husbands or husbands' groups rather than the reverse. Also, it again implies that the concerns of males and females differ.

The remedy agent of first resort for women tends to be roughly the same as that for men, except that women even in the beginning are somewhat more likely to go outside the village to seek redress — to local government council officials, and sometimes to missionaries and to the welfare office. However, there are marked differences in which agencies ultimately settled the complaints of men and women.

It would appear that when women are the sole plaintiff, village courts and local government officials most often settle the case. This suggests that women, acting alone, do not feel they get satisfaction for their grievances at the informal village level, and feel they receive 'fairer' treatment or better satisfaction for their grievances outside the village, using introduced remedy agents for justice. However, when acting in concert with males as plaintiffs, women seem to be successful in settling cases informally in the village, since 55% of all such cases were settled through self-help or informal mediation. Women are less likely to settle their grievances in local courts, however, perhaps supporting the frequent claim that local courts, administered almost entirely by males, do not give women a sympathetic hearing. Table 7 summarises these patterns.

Women apparently have to 'shop around' a bit more than men for an appropriate remedy agent before their cases are finally settled. Female plaintiffs accounted for 26.6% of all cases submitted to a remedy agent of first recourse. However, this rises to 30.2% of cases submitted to a secondary remedy agent and 32.1% of cases submitted to a tertiary remedy agent. In the end, however, women seem to get a reasonably sympathetic hearing. The defendant received some sort of punishment in 59.5% of all cases brought by women while male plaintiffs were successful in 62.6% of their cases: not strikingly different.

Discussion

In most traditional Papua New Guinean societies, the jural status of women differs from that of men. Dispute processing is traditionally a male domain in which women have little part. Strathern (1972b:239) describes a typical situation in Hagen:

Women not directly involved in a case contribute little to hearings. If they are gathered for some other purpose

(e.g. a bridewealth function or Sunday church meeting) they will listen in on a dispute, and local wives in any case usually make up part of the audience. But, unlike men, they do not often travel to attend courts held away from home, and rarely participate in the discussion. Their presence is tolerated rather than welcomed by men, who become restless as the day wears on, for the wives are not seeing to their proper work. As a body, men may turn on the women and tell them to be off to the gardens. Hearing courts is essentially male business, and women do not question this. Women may be required to act as witnesses in cases otherwise not concerning them, or in offences in which they are held guilty but not liable to provide compensation.

Other researchers have documented similar social patterns in other Papua New Guinean societies. Meggitt (1964:220-1), for example, describes Mae-Enga women as 'jural minors' who have no title to valuable property, rarely participate in public affairs, and are little more than the legal wards of males.

Yet there is little doubt that the legal status of women is undergoing dramatic changes in Papua New Guinea institutionally and processually. The Constitution [Section 55 (1)] clearly states that 'all citizens have the same rights, privileges, obligations and duties irrespective of . . . sex'. Under Section 50, women have full franchise, can take part in the conduct of public affairs, and can hold public office. The National Goals and Directive Principles [2 (5)] specifically call for 'equal participation by women citizens in all political, economic, social and religious activities'. Although at least one author has pointed out how some of the constitutional provisions asserting women's rights are seriously circumscribed (Johnson 1985:66) there is little doubt that women in Papua New Guinea are moving in the direction of jural equality with men. This research suggests that the village court system plays an important part in this process.

Relatively few studies focussed on the jural status of women in the late colonial period. Consequently, it is difficult to establish an historical baseline from which to assess change in the post-Independence period. The most comprehensive research is that of Strathern (1972a, b) for women in Hagen. Strathern describes a referral system for dispute processing in Hagen similar to that found in this research, where litigants first try informal remedy agents and then move on to more formal agents when informal mechanisms fail:

Cases which cannot be handled by Komiti are referred to Councillors, and those the Councillors cannot conclude satisfactorily are referred to Kiaps (Pidgin English, administration officers). There is a perceived gradation in the amount of power these officials wield, but it is this rather than any sense of their alien character which distinguishes the Kiaps' courts from those heard by Councillors or Komitis. Since Coun-

cillors' courts are unofficial, they can make no direct use of the sanctions (e.g. jail under police supervision) which Kiaps have at their disposal. One of the sanctions they do use is the very threat to take a dispute to the Kiaps' court, and cases in deadlock are often brought to a head in this way. . . .

Apart from appeal to Councillors or Komitis, grievances are resolved informally; while these may amount to no more than verbal placations, compensation can also pass privately between the contenders. Debts with affines and exchange partners are often settled away from the public eye. Disputes most frequently brought to the notice of Councillors involve divorce and bridewealth matters, adultery, quarrels which have led to one party striking another, damage to crops, and theft. (1972b:225-6)

Women, not receiving a fair hearing within the village context, seemed to be likely to seek out introduced remedy agents to pursue their complaints:

Among people with some education, [the welfare office] is an agency to which women in particular feel free to carry complaints. Women may also approach missionaries directly. But unless they are equipped with letters from either of these two bodies, they are not so likely to make a direct representation to a *kiap* or [local court magistrate]. The church and welfare office are known to have special attitudes towards women's marital problems and to support sets of values which present alternatives to certain traditional family values. (1972a:81)

Yet it was clear from Strathern's work that, whether women pursued their grievances within the village, at an informal legal level, or at the formal level, they encountered serious problems. At the informal level,

Certain traditionally disadvantaged categories of persons, primarily women *vis-a-vis* men and low-status men *vis-a-vis* big-men, remain at a disadvantage in the unofficial courts, as far as the ease with which they can obtain a hearing or present their own point of view in a persuasive manner is concerned. It should also be remembered, however, that *komiti* will usually give an ear to what complaints are brought to them and, although they may decide a matter is too trivial for a full court, may be able to offer comfort if not justice. (1972a:143)

At the formal level,

When a demonstrable injury has been inflicted, for which repercussions are known to be fairly automatic, women may alone take reports to the police station

[although] my impression is that the sub-district office and court-house are regarded as public areas in which men discuss things and most women are shy about broaching issues by themselves where verbal presentation is all-important. (1972a:81)

If the situation as described by Strathern represents a common colonial pattern, this research suggests the nature of changes which are taking place in women's access to justice in Papua New Guinea. First, it appears that women are making good use of both formal and informal introduced remedy agents to resolve family-oriented disputes. On the basis of proportions of disputes submitted to village agencies and the success rates of these forums for dispute management, however, women still do not seem to be receiving equal legal treatment in the villages. Also, some of the extra-village agencies previously used by women to pursue their grievances seem to be falling into disuse. Only about 4% of women's complaints were ever taken to the welfare officers. Missionaries and church agencies were hardly utilised at all.

Without doubt, the most dramatic changes have come about as a direct result of the introduction of village courts. According to the Village Courts Act of 1973 (sec. 18), the primary function of village courts is 'to ensure peace and harmony in the area for which [they] are established by mediating in, and endeavouring to obtain just and amicable settlements of disputes' by applying relevant native custom. Ideally they should bridge the gap between traditional conflict management techniques and the formal court system. Village court jurisdiction in family law cases is quite extensive. Courts have unlimited mediatory jurisdiction, so that consensus settlements can be recorded and enforced as orders of the court (secs. 16-18). Adjudicatory jurisdiction is unlimited in matters of custody of children and bride-price, and courts may hear family cases of all types.

The women in our study made good use of this forum, which settled over 35% of all their resolved complaints. Local government council officers, who serve a parallel function in areas which do not have village courts, accounted for another 22.7%. As previously noted, village courts had an extremely high success rate in settling family law cases, to the apparent satisfaction of female plaintiffs.

By removing their grievances from the village, which traditionally is a male-dominated political milieu, and submitting them in other arenas which recognise local customs, women in Papua New Guinea appear to be achieving some measure of legal equality. However, evidence suggests that women still have problems in pursuing their grievances at higher levels. Local and district courts are rarely used by women and even when these agents are utilised, their success rate is not high. Thus, women seem to be truly caught 'in between', unable to obtain justice at both lower and higher levels. For the moment, the village courts appear to be their most favourable forum for dispute management.

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CHAPTER SEVEN

RAPE IN HAGEN

by

Andrew Strathern

Introduction

The title of this short paper, itself rather terse, reflects a deteriorating situation in the urban and peri-urban areas of Mount Hagen over the last five years (1980-85). Up to this time, Mount Hagen was known, certainly, for its problems of inter-group fighting, uneven development, and the sometimes uncertain steps of its provincial governments. Since then, however, another phenomenon has increasingly come to command attention and concern: that of the 'rascal gang', whose members conduct armed robberies, break-and-enter offences, car thefts, abductions, killings, and rape. During the first half of 1985, reports of such activities appeared regularly in the newspapers: a rape here, a robbery there, a killing. Mostly, these reports relate to the peripheries of the town itself and its extension to Kagamuga and Kindeng where many people have been resettled from the Enga and Southern Highlands Provinces. Ordinary people have become apprehensive at this turn of events and are afraid to move around at night time. It is quite impossible for the police to ensure safety throughout the road system. They do attempt to break up gangs by raiding their known hideouts, but sometimes compound the problems by choosing to destroy or confiscate property belonging to people who are themselves quite innocent. Their continual presence in Hagen also contributes to an odd atmosphere of fear and tension, and perhaps even gives gang members a sense of challenge. The members of these gangs are young men who have travelled to other places, notably Lae and Port Moresby; they possess high school education often, but are out of work; they are touched by a chauvinistic ethic deriving partly from their own traditional cultures, partly from observation of violent films, and partly from Australian influences. They are 'warriors', 'cowboys', 'baddies', drop-outs.

Associated with the general increase in serious crime there is a persistent element of sadism towards women. Forced sexual intercourse with women had its part in pre-colonial time, as did voluntary but illicit affairs, marriage by capture, and occasional wife-stealing. In verbal accounts of these events, what men tend to stress most is the idea that these acts were a part of warfare as such, that if one could defeat the enemy then one would try to have intercourse

with their women and/or abduct them as well. Rape and abduction were a part of the general demonstration of victory and dominance. Isolated rapes and seductions also occurred. Where the groups involved recognised friendship through marriage and exchanges, compensation would subsequently be paid if the actions came to light. The category of rape is not signalled by a special term in the Hagen language, but the difference between forced and willing sexual intercourse is clearly recognised in principle. In both cases, however, the solution is via compensation payments, and this is so whether the action involved married or single women or was committed against an outsider's or a relative's wife/daughter. Stories of rape, seduction, adultery in this kind of context occur nowadays also. There is little emphasis on, or elaboration of the idea of violence as such. The significant point is that a woman was violated or that a pair had intercourse. Legal and political consequences flow from these facts in themselves. In short, there is no great suggestion of sadism in these events and accounts about them. Violent and forcible they were, but uncomplicated by torture, mutilation or what we might call a neurotic sense of obsession. It is quite otherwise with a *genre* of stories about violence to women which has now sprung up concurrently with the efflorescence of gangs in the Hagen countryside.

The purpose of the paper is to illustrate this contrast by reference to three accounts of 'modern' violence. The informant for these claims anonymity because of the possible dangers associated with telling stories of this sort. The stories have not been verified with others, for the same reason. They may have been elaborated somewhat in passing from mouth to mouth. But it is certain they are not entirely apocryphal; and it is worthwhile to bring them forward as an indication, at the very least, of the state of rumour in Hagen today, of what people speak of as happening, whether it is actually happening or not. My own view is that the stories are substantially true, and that they therefore illustrate a negative trend in social circumstances towards the alienation of persons from each other. On the one hand, these stories depict the actions of a few deviants; but the fact that this type of deviant behaviour is emerging tells us something about social patterns at large.

There is always, of course, a danger, especially when one writes in an evaluative way, of 'making things up'. In this case the danger would be to gloss over the brutalities of the past and to highlight those of today. This is not, at any rate, my intention here. I am not arguing that life in general is more violent or brutal nowadays than formerly, or *vice versa*. The point I am making is a narrower one, that the accounts of rape, at any rate, show an increasing trend towards sadism nowadays. After the accounts have been given, some further comments will modify and amplify that point.

Story 1:

This is a story about two rascals. These two men must have some kind of magic. Whenever they are in court on a charge they always win the case. One

of these two was married to the sister of two men who are lawyers. He killed his wife. Before, he had a girlfriend who is now married to another man, from Hagen. When they were friends, he suggested to her that she go out with him in his car. As they were friends and used to go around together, she thought that this was quite all right and he picked her up in the car and they went off together, all the way to Lae, into some deserted bush area where there were no people living, a long way out. There he raped her. She was his girlfriend anyway, but he raped her, again and again. Then he took a rope and strung her up by it, tying her legs to two separate trees and binding her wrists together. He abandoned her there, in that remote place, and went away in his car. When he was gone she gradually struggled to get herself free, loosening first one foot then the other, and then started to make her way in the forest, naked, her genitals exposed. The man had thrown her clothes away somewhere, so she was forced to travel just as she was. She went on and on and on in the forest. She didn't care about the snakes and all the other dangerous things, she just wanted to survive and so she kept going, on and on in the dark until eventually she came to someone's house. A woman found her and took her inside and gave her a blouse and a *laplap* to wear. She stayed with this woman for about a week until her body was in a reasonable state again. Then one day she washed and dressed herself and went out to the road with her friend and she found one of the buses that regularly go on the highway to Hagen and she boarded it. She reached home, and after a while she got married to a different man, from Hagen.

This same man, as I said, killed his wife with a gun. He was put on trial but won his case. He and his brother are from the Wahgi area. They are famous as rascals, for breaking into places and stealing. They have powerful motorbikes. I think they store them underground. They live underground themselves. During the day they carry on with ordinary jobs, at night they bring out their motorbikes and go around as rascals. By day they appear respectable, by night they are rascals. They have expensive cars too. They are brothers, from the Wahgi area.

A: I have a question. When the woman got back to Hagen, did she not take the man to court for what he had done?

Answer: Yes, she did take him to court. But, look, people take these two to court and yet they always win. This woman didn't die, even in cases when they commit murder, they still win! That is what I've been telling you.

A: So, she did take him to court but she failed to get him convicted?

Answer: Yes.

A: Oh.

Story 2:

Now I will tell a story about a Hagen man. This is a man whom I know by sight myself. He once had a girlfriend from the Wahgi area and they used to sleep

together, he was talking about marrying her. One night he called for her along with four of his male acquaintances. She suspected nothing and went with them in the car. They travelled to the Wahgi river. There he himself first had intercourse with her. He continued until he had satisfied his lust on her and then he told his friends to have intercourse with her too. Perhaps there were four of them, or maybe there were six. I think six, I'm not sure. Each one took his turn to have intercourse with her, as they pleased. They continued to have her again and again, until her legs had no strength left in them. They kicked her muscles with their shins until they went limp, so that she couldn't get up and run away. After they had their fill of her, they rolled her over and pushed her into the Wahgi river, and they themselves went off, leaving her to die, and thinking that her body would not be found. However, she was not going to die. Her bottom was heavy and pulled her down, but she kept her head above the water, just surfacing, while the lower part of her body was still numb from the treatment she had received and it dragged her down. She just kept her head above the water, and the current took her on and on, it was very cold, but she kept moving, until the river brought her to a place near to where some Tambul men were living. They had built some long houses there and were living as migrant workers on a coffee plantation owned by John Leahy or someone like that. Anyway, here she caught hold of some long grass that grew down into the water and pulled herself out. She saw at once the pathway which people used and she crawled up it slowly until she came to a place where they had dug a big ditch, a very deep one, if you went down into it you wouldn't be able to jump out. She crept across a log bridge, surrounded by thick undergrowth. Then she came to the house and knocked on its door. Out came all those Tambul men. You know what the Tambul men are like. They were pleased to see her and they said that they would all have sexual intercourse with her too. They gave her one of their *laplaps* which they had hung out to dry with their towels and they were happy and told her they were going to have intercourse with her.

She said to them, "All right, but several men have just had intercourse with me and thrown me into the river and I thought I was going to die and I've only just got out of the water. It's OK, I can sleep with you, but can you just come to me one by one and not all in a rush? If we do it inside your house maybe the police will come and find us". (Or what was it she said? Anyway she gave some excuse why they should not do it inside the house but rather outside, in the open.) She said to them that she would call out for each one of them to come in sequence, after one was finished with her she would call to another. She went to the other side of the big ditch and called out for one of them to come. As he crossed over, planning to have sex with her, she was waiting for him and suddenly pushed him down into the ditch. He tried to cry out, but how could they possibly hear him? The other men thought that the two of them were still busy having intercourse and that she would later call out and one of them would go to her next. In actual fact the man had fallen down into the ditch and injured his back and was lying there moaning. Meanwhile the woman herself followed the pathway and kept going on and on until she reached the main road. She came out somewhere on the Baisu road or

somewhere else near there. There perhaps she slept out in the open or maybe she found a house of some Hagen people and stayed there overnight, then in the morning she got on a bus into Hagen and laid a court charge against the men. Perhaps if it had just been rascals who had bound her eyes and raped her she would not have taken the matter to court, but this man was her boyfriend, she had trusted him. He had deliberately invited his friends along and had taken her out and they raped her, so she was angry and took them to court and they each got six years in gaol for it. They spent six years in gaol at Baisu and were released in 1983.

A: What about the woman? Did she marry anyone?

Answer: How should I know? She is not from Hagen, but from the Wahgi, I just know this story about her.

Story 3:

This story is also about a Hagen man. He is not a rascal as far as I know but just a working man. Like the one in the previous story. Perhaps he is also a rascal, I don't know, but he does a job like anyone else. He and his wife used to fight all the time. They had two children, a boy and a girl. They fought continuously and were always in court about it. Eventually their marriage was dissolved by a court order and the woman went back to her own place. The marriage itself was dissolved but the welfare people said that the children were to be divided out later, meanwhile the man himself was looking after them. He did so, and later he became angry about it. "Did I not marry a wife, then?" he thought. "Why am I having to do all this hard work?" So he thought, and Satan began to take control of his mind.

He was told that his wife had remarried a man from the Wahgi area and that the two were now living together. He found out where they were. He and his friends set out at four o'clock in the morning and at five they reached the couple's house and knocked on the door. The two were sleeping together. The woman did not know what was going on. She opened the door to see who it was but the men had covered up their faces with things like masks. They pointed a gun and held the couple up. They seized hold of the man, warning him not to yell out by pointing the gun close to his face, then they went inside and captured the woman and brought her out. "This is my wife whom I married", the invader said, and while she watched they shoved her new husband into a large copra sack. The woman herself they at first pushed into the front of their vehicle. While another man drove, the previous husband himself had intercourse with her. When he had finished doing this, he said to his friends, "Now let me drive the car and you yourselves have intercourse with her. Do whatever you want to, satisfy yourselves with her". Some of the men sat on top of the new husband in the sack and kept punching him and trying to suffocate him so that he would die, while others took turns to rape her. The old husband said, "Before she was my wife, but then we were divorced, so she

is nothing to me now. Before she bore my children, but now she's just someone else, don't worry, just do whatever you feel like with her. Have her".

He told them to take the new husband in the sack and throw him into a river, perhaps the Wahgi. They did this, but the man was not to die. He was carried in the sack up to some rocks at the water's edge and the bag got stuck there. A female relative of his, married into a Hagen group, recognised him and found him there and released him.

Meanwhile the old husband took the woman home and while she herself was still conscious and watching he cut open the joints of her fingers on her hand, did the same to her feet, broke her nostrils and her ear drums and finally, to kill her, he shoved a piece of iron up into her vagina, right up into her insides where her blood circulated. All this while she was still alive, you know! She called his name and asked him why he was doing this to her, and he replied, "Just to make you realize, shut up! Think you can make me do all the hard work of caring for the children while you go off and enjoy life with a new husband, eh? Well you can't, see!" He shoved the bar harder up inside her and she died. He went out, locked the door, and went to the police, and explained that he had just killed her, they should go and fetch her, and he asked them to lock him up in a cell. He knew that the woman's relatives would try to kill him when they heard what he had done and he wanted to be safe in a prison cell. I don't know what happened in the court case. I haven't seen the man around, though.

A: When did this take place?

Answer: Perhaps the beginning of 1983 or maybe during 1982. The man's kin paid a car, I think, and cassowaries in compensation.

A: What about the Wahgi man whom she had remarried?

Answer: He escaped alive. I don't know any more than that. I just know this story as I've told it. These events happened one Saturday morning and when we went to town we heard the story about it that same day.

Discussion

The dominant themes which appear in these stories are sadistic rape, treachery, multiple sexual intercourse by several men with one woman, jealousy, and violent revenge. Taking them together, it is hard to avoid a feeling that the behaviour of the men, as it is depicted, is pathological. In all three stories this sadism and treachery/revenge is shown towards someone who was a previous sexual partner. In the last story it is part of the punishment and humiliation of the ex-wife; in the first two there is no reason given for the behaviour of the rapists. In the first two, again, the men deliberately deceive their girlfriends, then violently abuse their trust and try subsequently to kill them; in the third it is perhaps the wife who 'provokes' her husband, but his reaction is extreme, and the cruelty he displays in torturing her to death appears psychotic. Ordinarily a man would be glad to gain the children from a

broken marriage and would soon find another woman to help care for them. The theme of punishing a woman by forcing her to have intercourse with several men does appear, incidentally, in some other stories from parts of the Highlands. And the theme of intercourse followed by murder is found in accounts of *maua* or *uro* sorcery as it is known in Pangia in the Southern Highlands. But the Hagen stories are not ones of 'sanctioned' punishment or of fantasy about sorcery, they are simply plain stories of what some men are supposed recently to have done. Each mirrors an extreme breakdown of empathy between persons who should be showing it: sexual partners. And each shows how this leads to sadistic violence. In the first story rape is followed by tying a woman up and abandoning her; in the second the men rape the women in turn and then throw her into a river to die. She survives, turns the tables on a second set of would-be sexual adventurers, and gets her own back. In the third a woman has an unhappy marriage, escapes, but the husband follows her, rapes her, gives her to his accomplices to rape too, then tortures her to death, and finally gives himself up. These are horror stories, playing around a limited set of themes, showing a remarkable coherence and sharpness. If they are fiction, they are a disturbing kind of fiction, the more so because they are told in a rather matter-of-fact way, as if to say, "This is what men do, you know". If they are fact, they provide ample reason for women in Hagen to be afraid as they go about their ordinary lives.

What should be done? Heavy penalties for rape should certainly be available to the judges in courts, and judges should be given back their discretion to decide on penalties. As with the problem of 'rascals' in general, the public at large should be educated not to accept or tolerate those who do this kind of thing and get away with it, even if they are their own relatives. The issues should also be brought out into the open and discussed in public meetings and should be taken up also by the churches and other bodies which claim to be concerned with community affairs. While the problem of gangs in general has much to do with unemployment, the criminals in the stories given here were not unemployed and homeless youths, but grown-up men with jobs, and what I am suggesting is that such men should not be allowed to retain any prestige or standing. At present they do, being thought of as rather daring or tough, rather like the 'bad' big-men of the past, who were mean fighters if not good orators or exchangers of wealth goods. Finally, urban life and cars provide the settings in which these events can take place. People can move out of their clan areas, women are lured away from safety, men watch films in which violence is enacted and they get ideas in this way, and people in general are simply not so closely bound in with their kinsfolk as they used to be. These circumstances cannot now be reversed. What can be done is to make women more wary, punishments where truly deserved tougher, and to attack any signs of an ethic which can justify men in this kind of action.

CHAPTER EIGHT

RASCALISM, TRADITION AND THE STATE IN PAPUA NEW GUINEA¹

by

Marc Schiltz

Gangs of wayward young men who rob, rape and forcibly invade residences have become a serious menace to people's personal safety and to socio-economic development in many parts of Papua New Guinea. Commenting on these violent marauders (euphemistically known as 'rascals'), a recent report on *Law and Order in Papua New Guinea* observed that:

Youth gangs in Papua New Guinea have a culture all their own — not traditional, not western but with elements of each. This needs further study (Clifford *et. al.* 1984 II:176).

A year later, the need for such a study seems ever more urgent, given the rapid escalation of violent crime in Port Moresby as well as various other centres. While gaol break-outs have become recurring news items and the police force seems incapable of keeping up with the rising tide of rascalism, the public has become increasingly cynical about the erosion of law and order in the country. The disturbing facts are that each year thousands of young people, especially school drop-outs, keep drifting away from their home communities to the urban areas. There, in the sprawling suburbs, they mix with other unemployed youths and form gangs that live by robbing those who enjoy job security and affluent life styles. In response, the latter keep guard dogs, erect fences, install burglar alarm systems, and hire security guards. This fortress-building strategy is now receiving a fresh boost as developers are opting for highrise blocks which are easier to protect against intruders. But sooner or later the rascals catch up with the technological innovations, or else they divert their operations. Rather than breaking and entering they may assault people as they alight from their cars after an evening out. Or they may shift their raids to strategic spots outside the townships and ambush motorists or a party enjoying a picnic at the beach. So as the years pass by rascals become bolder and more prone to use violence. Instead of waiting until people have gone out to work, break-ins are now schemed for the dead of night. The terrified residents are physically assaulted and forced to hand over their money

and valuables. Accompanying this trend there is also a notable increase in rape incidents, especially pack rape. This use of violence can no longer be accounted for by the quest for money motivation only. What is clear, however, is that once the use of physical aggression has become the fashion the chances are that this trend will go on and diversify, perhaps by resorting to kidnappings or the planting of bombs.

In following the developments of the rascal phenomenon in Papua New Guinea the nexus which seems to the public to be at the root of the present law and order crisis is the economic one, and especially the alarming rate in youth unemployment. Therefore, the need to promote youth development programmes through vocational training and self help projects is high on the priority list of many political and church leaders. That the same rascal phenomenon also reveals a political nexus is perhaps less clearly grasped since rascals do not play an obvious part in the nation's political arena. Their public role seems to be a negative one as law breakers who constantly run foul of the police and the courts. However, in the light of recent events the government, public, and media have come to realise that rascalism is a power to be reckoned with. That rascals themselves are aware of their power was demonstrated when Port Moresby gang leaders told national politicians the following:

We determine Papua New Guinea's image abroad; we control the country's economy; we are the carpet you walk on; and we are your time bombs.

As a power which is pitted against the modern state, rascalism has built its strength not on material capital assets or radical ideologies but on communal gang organisation. Unlike modern state power which is concentrated in corporate organisations and articulated through complex bureaucratic structures, gang power rests on secrecy and direct personal bonds of loyalty, mutual protection, and sharing. Being a rascal is not so much an occupational specialisation as a commitment to a way of life as a gang member. So while individual rascals may be caught by the police, or enticed to engage in legal activities only, the gang phenomenon itself has remained refractory to the actions of either state, church or welfare organisations. Gangs have demonstrated that their activities can be highly effective in disrupting the law and order infrastructure upon which the internal functioning of the modern state depends.

In the light of these observations I will now investigate the rascal phenomenon in greater depth by analysing its relationship both to tradition and to modernity.

Rascal Gangs

According to Tau Po'o (1975:33), a high ranking public servant and former gang member, rascal gangs were unknown in Port Moresby prior to the mid-1960s. Another old-time observer of the Port Moresby scene points out

that while gangs of unemployed youths have existed for a long time, their involvement in criminal activities became overt only some twenty years ago (Parry 1975:30-31). Ostensibly then, rascal gangs are a modern development that has much in common with similar gangs of unemployed, frustrated youths in urban and suburban slums throughout the world. In my description of them this link with modernity will be much in evidence. Links with tradition are less obvious. Some youths even go as far as to assert explicitly their break with tradition, claiming that they no longer belong to the *kaukau* (sweet potato) people. Elucidating the links with tradition will therefore require a more thoroughgoing analysis, but it will also yield a better understanding of the rascal phenomenon.

Recently, the *Times of Papua New Guinea* (28. 4. 85) printed a map of Port Moresby showing the various suburbs and the names of the fourteen major gangs associated with each. These locations are approximate only, for gangs are very mobile, and, depending on their membership, may have branches spread over other suburbs. In addition there are fringe groups as yet unrecognised by the major gangs. Though rascals are secretive about their personal identities², gang identities are boldly asserted by colourful names which are both enigmatic and provocative. *Goi-Pex 105*, for example, is a composite name where *Goi* stands for *Goilala*, the area of origin of the founding members, and *Pex* refers to *Tapex*, their first leader. The additional 105 has no numerical meaning and is just a clever way of writing *GOI* upside down. Other acronyms and numerals include: *Raipex 585*, *GGB 707*, *G105*, and *Cats 32*. More provocative names are: *Mafia*, *Tigers*, *Apes*, *Nazis*, *Devils*, and *KKK*, while *Bomai*, a very large gang with many sub-branches, refers to an area in *Chimbu* province.³ Clearly, apart from a few vague allusions to some gang leaders' places of origin, the identities expressed in these names would be bewildering for the older generation of village people unfamiliar with the magic of numbers and the written words, or with *Boeing*s, *American* secret societies, and *Asian* predators.

Unlike voluntary associations in Port Moresby which often tend to recruit their members on an ethnic basis, most rascal gangs are typically multi-ethnic in composition. With the exception of two major ones with roots among the *Motu* and *Koita* people around *Hanuabada*, most other gangs are based among the migrant populations of the various suburbs. *Pidgin* and *Motu* are therefore the most commonly spoken languages, though for passing on information and warnings gang members devise their own secret codes of communication.

Concerning the question of what sort of people are involved in gang activities in Port Moresby, two independent accounts by ex-gang members, *Po'o* (*op. cit.*) and *Utlurea* (1980), clearly distinguish four categories. *Po'o* first lists those who are in employment. They are generally older, their ages ranging from 20 upwards. Often they are leaders, as they have more experience and ready cash to provide beer and other handouts to keep gang members happy. *Utlurea* includes public servants in this category, but does not specify their rank. Some, he says, are rascals because they are greedy and want to fill

their own pockets, others because they are concerned with the well-being of unemployed youths. This assessment of the personal motivations of leading gang members points to the existence of a moral code, and especially to expectations concerning the proper behaviour of people who own the good things in life towards those deprived of them. In the second category, both authors put unemployed youths with little or no education. They see them mainly as young rural migrants who have drifted to the city where they stay with *wantoks* (relatives, friends). They are often jokingly referred to as 'home scholars'. Utulurea places this group in the 20 year-old age group, but Po'o's assessment of 15 is probably nearer the mark. The third and largest category is that of school drop-outs. This includes youngsters who left school at any point between Grades 7 and 12. Here we find the youngest gang members, some only 13 years old. Utulurea mentions both boys and girls, but at present most Port Moresby gangs tend to be exclusively male, at least as far as leaders and frontline members are concerned. Typically, gangland is the macho domain *par excellence* for today's urban warriors.⁴ Finally, both authors also mention a category of young rascals still attending school. Their ages range from 13 upwards. They are few compared to the previous category, but include high school students, vocational school students, and even university undergraduates.

In the light of these insiders' categorisation of gang members it becomes clear that the popular stereotyping of rascals as unemployed school drop-outs is too simplistic and therefore a misleading generalisation. Consequently, creating more jobs and allowing more youths to further their education are urgent needs, but they are not in themselves definitive answers to the problems of youth delinquency and gang organisation.

The internal organisation of rascal gangs is at once rigorous and flexible. The rigour can be seen in the thoroughness with which gang members carry out raids. Accurate timing, division of tasks, and co-ordination of efforts are essential requirements for a successful break and enter job. Internal discipline is needed in order to outsmart a disciplined force like the police. 'When the police get tough, you have to plan better and get inside information', one rascal stated, and added: 'Young boys of about nine or ten are often sent in advance to stake out houses to wait for the occupants to leave' (*Niugini Nius*, 15. 6. 1985). Similarly, a young man who had just served a gaol sentence said:

We plan a break and enter very carefully. It may take us three to four days and, after being sure that we know what we are going to do, we strike (*Post Courier*, 27.5.1985).

The rigour is shown especially in the recruitment of new members. Utulurea (*op. cit.*: 2) mentions two vows a new member must take in order to show his commitment to the gang: a vow of obedience to the leaders, and a vow of secrecy. That leaders expect loyalty and obedience was much emphasised in conversations I had with gang leaders. One former leader also said that informers would immediately be expelled from the gang, and may be further

ostracised within gangland generally. Other gang leaders added that they would suffer the most severe and humiliating corporal punishment before being re-admitted to the gang. Not even gaol can provide sanctuary for them. Clearly, then, secrecy is the most crucial prerequisite for a gang's power. Without it individual members' crimes and the gang's internal functioning would soon be exposed. When it is rigorously maintained the whole gang can engage in corporate action, operate its internal command/obedience links, and be effective as a strike force.

The rigour of gang organisation also rests on the articulation of a three-tiered internal structure. At its apex stands the leader to whom members refer as 'Father'. This classificatory kinship term is indicative of the highly personalised bond of loyalty and dependence tying leaders and members together. Ultimately a leader is responsible for his gang's welfare, and this depends in great measure on his success in organising break and enter raids, as well as the fair distribution of the loot.⁵

Closely associated with the leader is a core group of frontline men. They participate most actively in the raids. They share all the secret information before and after the event, and also take the greatest risks. For efficiency's sake frontline men are few, perhaps about twenty in one gang. Finally there are those whose participation in organised raids is more peripheral, yet still necessary. They may be less informed and run fewer risks of being caught, but success in a raid often depends on their role as a rear guard which will warn and protect the frontline men in case of sudden danger.

Flexibility is as important as rigour in gang organisation. The ability of gangs to exercise greater flexibility than the organisations they confront lies primarily in the fact that they are unencumbered by bureaucratic red tape and capital outlay, such as a budget to cover their operational costs, or material assets such as stocks, equipment, buildings, or investments. Neither do they have territories to defend in the way that clan groups do. To say that a gang considers a particular neighbourhood in Port Moresby as its turf should not be understood to mean that all the robberies that take place there are committed by that gang. The notion of 'turf' here means primarily that a particular neighbourhood is the base where a leader and his gang members live most of the time. They will keep a watchful eye on all that goes on there, but in Port Moresby it is no longer the case that gangs stake out their exclusive target areas for robberies (*The Times*, 28. 4. 1984). Individual mobility definitely is a characteristic of young delinquents. When things get too hot, they can easily activate *wantok* networks and shift their residence to a different neighbourhood. Flexibility is shown also in gang members' skill in combining illegal pursuits with ostensibly legitimate day-time occupations, such as attending school or working. Extreme but by no means exceptional cases are those of young men who work as security guards while continuing gang membership. One young man who led such a double life commented that he and other rascal security guards he knew resolved their conflicting commitments by making sure that their own gangs did not break into those businesses or estates that they guarded.

The absence of corporate assets implies also that gangs exist only while individual gang members can secure some kind of existence within specific neighbourhoods. In Port Moresby, neighbourhoods are of different types. The city is built beside a natural harbour. The total population of almost 123,000 people (Norwood 1984:13) is spread over various clusters of built-up areas which are intersected by large spaces of unused land, hills and gullies. Within the total built up areas (spread over 120 square kilometres — *ibid.*: 9), 65% of the population lives in conventional houses most of which have been built by government agencies. Usually high covenant houses are clustered in more or less exclusive neighbourhoods. Individual residences are surrounded by lawns and trees, and are protected from intruders by tall wire fences. Adjoining these are discrete clusters of low and medium covenant houses. There are also a number of traditional Motu and Koita villages which have been incorporated into the National Capital District. These total 10% of the city population. Finally there is an estimated 25% scattered over a number of squatter areas. While the high covenant areas, reserved for high income bracket residents, are prime targets for break and enters, the gangs themselves are based in the various low income bracket areas. As most rascals are young men, they reside with their parents, friends, or *wantoks* from their areas of origin.

Accounts and interpretations of the relationship between rascals and the people they live with vary. Two contrasting stereotypes of rascals are that they are parasites who intimidate their hosts and create constant trouble as well as a bad name for them, or that they are Melanesian Robin Hoods who rob the rich to give to the poor who feed and shelter them. Paradoxically these are not necessarily mutually exclusive views, but reflect in simplified form the complexities and the ups and downs of the love/hate relationships between rascals and their *wantoks*.

It is especially the media and the police who are instrumental in projecting the image of rascals as parasites on the poor neighbourhoods. That gangs recruit most of their members within such neighbourhoods is well known; but since it is very difficult for outsiders to ascertain who is and who is not a rascal among the poor there is a tendency to take two shortcuts. First, by tarring low income-earners and unemployed people generally with the same rascal brush. The assumption here is that *wantoks* who shelter rascals are knowingly co-operating in crime. Secondly, by singling out squatter settlements as havens and breeding grounds for rascals. Every so often the newspapers report on statements by politicians, or print letters from readers calling for the dismantling of squatter settlements. Yet some urban villages and low covenant housing neighbourhoods are equally, if not more, notorious as rascal havens. Probably nearer the truth is the view that many urban squatters are hard working people who provide a cheap labour pool for the government and private sector employers. Far from being parasites, many unemployed squatters use waste land for home and market gardening, while others make a living by providing various services, such as lawn mowing and domestic work for the well-to-do, collecting empty bottles, or manufacturing furniture and

artifacts. These people know that certain young delinquents give them a bad reputation, so relations between rascals and their host communities are often strained. One hears many disclaimers and attempts at dissociation. A typical statement by one resident was: "In our cluster of houses on Gordon's ridge we have no rascals. But further down, among the Gollala people, I heard there are some". Others admit that some of their own folk are involved in crime, but strongly dissociate themselves from any involvement. "We tell these young men off, but they don't listen. They just go their own way."

In contrast to these views it is not uncommon to hear accounts from rascals portraying themselves as actively helping their parents and *wantoks*. Some go as far as to make their parents accountable for their criminal activities. This is how one young man recalled his first faltering steps as a rascal:

When I dropped out of school and could not get a job my father was so angry he threatened to throw me out of the house. Later I joined other school drop-outs and we formed a gang. To get money we went out bashing people up, stealing cars, and breaking into houses. So when I started to bring home stolen money, food and clothes, my parents were very pleased. My father never inquired how I obtained these things. All he used to say was: "I don't care what you do as long as you don't get into trouble with the police".

Once set on a career of robberies, rascals build up a chain of obligations and counter obligations with their hosts. Whether or not goods and services are exchanged sporadically or regularly, with or without explicit expectations for a return, or as an 'offer you cannot refuse', people never lose sight of the fact that relations of give and take, now as in the past, are always somehow obligatory. In the light of this, two points should be made. Firstly, as rascals and their *wantoks* are linked together through multiple reciprocal obligations, lots of people are likely to become caught up in criminal activities for a variety of reasons. This may include: accepting stolen property, harbouring wanted criminals, or obstructing police investigation by withholding information. Secondly, as it is always more prestigious to give than to receive, distributing spoils from robberies to *wantoks* enhances one's name. By giving generously one builds up social credit, and making people obligated is the most elementary form of creating bonds of domination/subordination. Port Moresby rascals know these age-old political strategies just as well as those village men who try to make a name for themselves by giving away pigs or shells.

This does not mean, however, that the exchanges of goods and services between rascals and their *wantoks* are the equivalents of ceremonial exchanges between traditional big-men competing for prestige. In searching for cultural continuities I would compare the generosity displayed by rascals with that of village men interacting with their own supporting factions, but not with their competitors. Generosity is a public relations act through which rascals try to validate and/or impose their presence within a neighbourhood. It is their way of consolidating a power base outside the gang which will enable them to go

into action at a moment's notice, and to melt away into the motley crowd whenever the police are on their tracks. Consequently, behind the popular Robin Hood image one perceives also strategies for either buying stooges, or intimidating neighbours to co-operate and keep their mouths shut (cf. Reay 1982:625-6).

Given these ambiguities, it is not surprising that relations between rascals and residents are often strained, and loyalties precarious, as the following examples illustrate.

One night in 1984 Steven, a security guard at a company's housing estate, confronted four rascals trying to break into one of the flats. In the scuffle that followed Steven sustained a severe stab wound, but eventually succeeded in chasing his assailants. The following morning he reported the incident to the police who immediately suspected some rascals they had dealt with on a previous occasion. "As soon as we entered the nearby settlement where the suspects were known to live", Steven said, "the local people either tried to make themselves scarce or passed the police search party with blank expressions on their faces. On the other hand, nobody made any attempt to warn the suspects. So when the police sneaked up to their house they caught them sitting outside playing cards".

During the State of Emergency in July 1985, the police and army staged a number of surprise pre-dawn raids on settlements in order to round up suspects and retrieve stolen property. After a raid on Morata settlement a local village court peace officer told reporters:

Rascals have ruined Morata and turned it into a place of fear and crime. I have been here eight years, and I have seen crime grow among the people (*Post Courier*, 19.7.1985).

Other Morata residents, however, felt outraged at the heavy handed police tactics. Particularly incensed were those who had items of property confiscated simply because they could not show receipts.

Ambiguities in the relationships between rascals and their co-residents, then, tend to remain suppressed in everyday life but become critical the moment the police step in and put everybody under suspicion. So far urban low income neighbourhoods lack community spirit, despite government efforts to place them under the jurisdiction of village courts which are patterned on the rural village set-up. If, however, these neighbourhoods were to develop into well-organised communities, the future of gang power would depend much on whether local residents opt to co-operate with the police. Consequently, in the conflict between youth gangs and the state the local communities remain a potential third power.

So far I have argued that it is from the manner that rascals try to recruit loyal supporters within the community (either by sharing loot, or through

intimidation) that we perceive how old-time power strategies become adapted to specific present-day needs. Now as in the past, people know that the exercise of power rests on highly personalised relationships which are articulated through reciprocal exchanges. However, in traditional Melanesian societies these exchange relationships linked not only leaders and followers within a particular community; the leader also sought the followers' support in order to engage in reciprocal exchanges with rival leaders in other communities. These exchanges could be highly competitive, and success or defeat resulted in either renown and prestige, or shame. Well known examples of these competitive exchanges are the *moka* and *tee* ceremonies in the Highlands, and the *kula* trade in the Massim region.

This second dimension of traditional relations of give and take leads to the following question: Do rascal leaders and their gangs also engage in competitive exchanges? Clearly, exchanges of the *moka/kula* type cannot be found among them. However, competitive exchange relationships include more than just ceremonial transfers of items of wealth such as pigs, shells, or food. In the past, exchanges of wealth items and the public display and distribution of food to visiting groups usually took place against an undercurrent of potentially hostile inter-group relations. Feasts might initiate or consolidate friendly alliances, but fresh disputes, or shifting allegiances, were ever-present liabilities that might transform peaceable exchanges into acts of aggression or payback killings. In other words, war and peace were interconvertible power strategies in the political processes of many pre-colonial Papua New Guinean societies, for one may dominate either by giving wealth or by exchanging 'blows' (Strathern n.d.; Schiltz n.d.). Although rascals do not ceremonially exchange wealth, they certainly do grab wealth most unceremonially. In this act they transform themselves into urban warriors, flouting the state's law enforcing prerogative while at the same time superseding the social inequalities which state formation engenders.

There are thus two dimensions to rascalism. From the point of view of the state, rascals are individuals who habitually break the law, and who are identified with the urban poor. This dimension is strongly hierarchical as it accentuates the social contrasts of the rich versus the poor, and state law versus individual law breaking. From the point of view of the gangs, however, modern society represented by the state is an opponent who is unwilling to enter into exchange relations with them, and thus enable them to compete for, and participate on an equal basis in, the nation's wealth and social processes. I shall call this the 'equalising dimension' of rascalism. It expresses itself in the violent confrontation of rival powers who exchange blows, rascal gangs versus the state. This state power is epitomised on the one hand by high income earners, members of the elite, and capitalist enterprises, and on the other by the police and other law enforcing agencies. The former are the habitual targets of rascals' negative reciprocity, the latter are the agents of the state's coercive power, those who reciprocate physical violence.⁶

This interpretation of the violent, warlike propensities of rascalism as an actual power confronting the state would have been too fantastic if we were

analysing the situation ten or twenty years ago, when rascals were not yet organised in large, well co-ordinated gangs. When they began to proliferate there was much negative reciprocity in inter-gang warfare, as gangs competed in staking out their turfs, drawing recruits, and showing their strength. But this situation has now changed, and in recent years gangs have started to co-operate actively. Port Moresby gang leaders confirmed this when interviewed by press reporters:

We respect each other's territories and trade experts in each gang. . . . We are very small and poor, so we get together to fight those who have a lot of things. . . . Sometimes we get together for big jobs (*The Times*, 28.4.1985).

In her description of rascal gang organisation in the Mid-Wahgi area of the Western Highlands province, Marie Reay (1982) also points to the effective ways in which local gangs co-operate with each other. For the whole Mid-Wahgi area there is a grand leader who exerts considerable authority over the local gang leaders. Similar forms of a loosely centralised but effective gang organisation are reported for neighbouring centres, so that from Enga to Hagen and from Mid-Wahgi to Chimbu there is evidence of a vast underground organisation, linked in a chain of overlapping rascal gangs (Reay 1982:624).⁷

In Port Moresby also there is evidence of some form of overall leadership, though there still seems to be a rift between the gangs that recruit their members among the 'true' natives of the National Capital District and those recruiting from immigrants or sons of immigrants to the city. There is also evidence that gangs operate networks for mutual co-operation across the nation. This greatly increases the resilience of their organisation, enabling wanted criminals in Port Moresby, for example, to travel to Lae or some other centre and find protection with local gangs.

That the Papua New Guinean government, the media, and the public are aware of the growing menace of rascalism has become abundantly clear since a mass demonstration in Port Moresby in October 1984. Since then even the most high ranking officials in the country do not hesitate to choose the idiom of warfare to describe the relationship between the gangs and the nation state. At the national Remembrance Day celebrations of 23 July 1985, the Governor-General stated in his official address:

Criminals are enemies of Papua New Guinea. It is time for everyone to reject those who break our law. I ask Papua New Guineans to follow the brave examples of those who died fighting in the Second World War to protect our society, . . . (*Post Courier*, 24.7.1985).

A day later, in an address to police trainees, Papua New Guinea's Police Commissioner said:

We have demonstrated . . . that crime can be fought and beaten by a team effort . . . against a common enemy —

the criminal. We have won the battle, the first battle, but we have yet to win the war (*Post Courier*, 25.7.1985).

The idiom used in these statements is not so much that of law enforcers lashing out at one or even a bunch of delinquents, as that of men who perceive the situation in military terms. For them 'the enemy' denotes a collective power that has to be neutralised. In order to achieve this they must do more than capture individual foes. Only when the enemy is routed, and his organisation crushed, will there be victory. From the point of view of the state, however, the situation is more complex. Rascals are, after all, also citizens who have democratic rights and obligations as laid down by the constitution. They can not be treated as enemy warriors or foreign aggressors. Consequently, the state must try to neutralise their criminal behaviour and integrate them into mainstream social life at the same time. Given the present magnitude of rascalism, this is certainly a daunting task which stretches beyond the scope of the state's law enforcing agencies — the police, courts, and corrective institutions.

So far rascals have tended to take advantage of this situation by oscillating between their roles as enemies and citizens of the state. This has enabled them to build up their gang power and overcome their powerlessness as predominantly underprivileged citizens (youths, school drop-outs, unemployed, urban drifters). Their responses as gangs have been made in the best tradition of Melanesian power politics, that is, by confronting their opponents as equals rather than as revolutionaries or just rebels. To this end they have either defied state power through acts of lawlessness, or responded to attempts at dialogue and working out a truce. By keeping the 'equalising options' open, they have, from this position of power, at times shown willingness to engage in legal ways of earning a living. To see how these contrasting forces are played out in real life I shall now turn to the dramatic sequence of events that has been unfolding in Port Moresby in recent times.

From Dialogue to Repression: The State's Dilemma

Increase in burglaries, assaults and rapes have made Port Moresby residents some of the most security-conscious people in the world. Nevertheless there are limits to people's tolerance of such a situation. A triple pack rape in the suburb of Badili, early in October 1984, triggered off the largest demonstration ever seen in Port Moresby. Its spontaneity was demonstrated by the range of participation: women and men, rich and poor, expatriates and nationals, all came to voice their anger, which was perhaps best summed up by a placard which read '*Katim bol bilong ol!*' ('Castrate all of them').

The fact that a pack rape sparked off this wave of moral panic⁸ is revealing of how rascals and the public have come to perceive each other. No longer is the rascal portrayed as the school drop-out who steals from the rich in order to survive. In the eyes of many (see, for example, a whole spate of letters to newspaper editors), rascals are 'animals' whose uncontrollable sex drive is a

menace to all women. Cheap psychologising then invites moralising, especially by those who blame fashion-conscious women for being the irresistible red rags that make the bulls charge. While this view is popular among church people and many Papua New Guinean men, expatriates often use the rape incidents to support their evolutionary views that 'civilisation' is still far away from Papua New Guinea. This view sells well in the media overseas, and the moral panic then backfires on the economy and capitalist development generally, to the extent that it scares off overseas investors and contract officers.

Rascals themselves are not unaware of the fear they instill, and cunningly use terror and intimidation to achieve their objectives. Therefore, a more fruitful approach to the explanation of rape and violence than the psychological one is that of power relations. In her report on *Sexual Offences as Defined in the Criminal Code (PNG)*, Marilyn Strathern rightly points out that rape is above all

an aggressive act, analogous to other forms of physical violence but where sex is the instrument. In the past, in a number of societies, this was one of the many normal acts of hostility taken against enemies (directed primarily against the woman's male relatives or husband rather than herself) (1975:34).

As present day urban warriors, rascals follow this tradition. Their targets are not so much the women they rape as the menfolk, the families or companies to which the victims belong. The following unsolicited testimony of a gang leader during a group discussion (not on rape but on the stigma of being a rascal) was revealing in this respect.

People say that we rape girls because we want to have sex. This is not true. But whenever we see a nice girl and try to befriend her, we are given the cold shoulder as soon as she and her people hear that we have no job. They snub us and say: "You rubbish man, you think you can get a girl for nothing!" This makes us really mad; that's why we want to take our own back and go out and rape."

To appreciate the gravity of this statement we must remember that marriage in Papua New Guinea continues to be regarded as an exchange relationship between two families. The family that gives a daughter in marriage receives wealth in return. While bride-price payments become inflated as people participate more fully in the cash economy, young men depend on their relatives for the cash needed to obtain a wife. But when they drift into criminal activity they become cut off from the sphere of marriage exchange relations. Consequently, incidents of pack rape can be seen as formal negations of a society in whose exchanges of wealth, services, and women they do not participate. They are instances of 'negative reciprocity' just like theft and assault. As a result, women find themselves doubly hampered in their bid to participate on an equal basis with men in the processes of the modern state. As

the danger of being raped increases, women also become more dependent on their menfolk for protection.

In picturing the rascal gangs as locked in battle with the state I have tried to elucidate some important links with tradition. Nevertheless, the rascal phenomenon as it unfolds itself reflects also the inequalities and incipient class conflicts to which the modern state system gives rise. So far it is still the mass of unemployed youths that make up the bulk of gang membership. On the other hand, gangs thrive and proliferate as the cash sector develops and creates more targets for robberies. How has the Papua New Guinea government responded to the moral panic which the Badili rape incident generated?

The first step was the promulgation by the National Executive Council of *Forty Nine Measures to Upgrade Law and Order Agencies in the Country* (*Post Courier*, 29. 10. 1984). Along with repressive measures against actual and potential criminals this document recommended also various measures to promote youth programmes. Its implementation was entrusted to a Law and Order Task Force chaired by a high ranking public servant. The Task Force was part of the Prime Minister's Department and included a Catholic priest with long-standing experience in youth rehabilitation work as well as a small support staff. Finding the *Forty Nine Measures* too unwieldy and not immediately satisfying, the Task Force decided to take up contact with the rascals in Port Moresby in the hope of getting their views, grievances and aspirations in a direct dialogue. This unorthodox approach by a government body was conceived at a meeting in the Saraga Settlement at Six Mile between local community leaders and the leaders of eleven Port Moresby gangs (*Houghton* 1985: 8). It was announced then that the gangs had agreed to go straight if the government and community leaders could help with small business ventures, youth programmes and city council cleaning contracts. All this was reported under the *Post Courier's* (28. 12. 1984) headline: 'Rascal Gangs' Amazing Turn'.

By mid-January 1985 the initial contacts were established and suggestions were made for an open dialogue with national leaders. The almost stratospheric level of the new initiative, with direct access to the Prime Minister himself, was too much for some gang members. They concluded the whole thing just had to be an elaborate trap that would lead to a horrific purge (*ibid.*: 9). This intuitive distrust of the government was not misplaced, as the events of the second half of 1985 were to prove. But in the meantime the Task Force team proceeded in good faith, and succeeded in planning two events: a 'Christian Crusade' organised by a group of pastors in the suburb of Gerehu, in which gang members from all over Port Moresby participated; and a week long retreat for gang leaders at the Goldie River army training centre outside Port Moresby. In contrast to the crusade, whose sole objective was spiritual renewal, the retreat was aimed at facilitating secular dialogue at a high level, including national politicians. When it started, on Wednesday 17 April 1985, some 75 leaders and frontline members representing fifteen gangs turned up at Goldie barracks. This positive response was due almost entirely to the involvement of a team of church workers who acted as counsellors. They had

all had experience in pastoral and social work among youths, and the gang leaders admitted that they were the only people they trusted. It should be noted also that ideologically the notions of God the Father and Creator, as well as Jesus Christ, Saviour and Friend, have proven to be meaningful symbols for many rascals. For this reason Christianity in Papua New Guinea is in a strong position to offer a common ground, albeit a spiritual one, where rascals and non-rascals can meet.

Politically, however, the churches and the pastors involved in the retreat found themselves wedged in an unfamiliar situation. Used to giving spiritual advice and doing welfare work mainly on a person-to-person basis, they were clearly ill-prepared to deal with the issue of the relationship between the gangs as secret organisations, and the state. Yet this question cropped up as soon as discussions on self-help projects for youth groups got under way. Red tape makes it difficult for these groups to obtain government funds or be given contracts, but rascal gangs with no formal community base and a code of secrecy concerning members' names and other sensitive issues feel that they are automatically excluded from outside aid. This bureaucratic blockage might have killed the retreat at birth if the Task Force chairman had not given assurances and encouraged gang members to make the best use of their efficient gang organisation in carrying out legal activities. (In spite of these assurances, subsequent events showed that the government had no commitment to encouraging the retention of gang organisation; it was merely following a 'dove' policy at the time, but 'hawk' elements were soon to take over.)

As the retreat wore on and cabinet ministers, the Deputy Prime Minister, the Governor-General, press reporters, leading business men and community leaders came to address gang members and discuss the points they raised, it became clear that high level negotiations were taking place between opponents who had provisionally called a truce. The gangs certainly wanted to preserve their distinct identities. Under no condition were they prepared to let themselves be lumped together with other youth groups, and be administered under the umbrella of the National Youth Council. They had committed themselves to the Task Force and to no other official body. The retreat, then, offered gang members an unprecedented opportunity to criticise the government publicly, and also to show their goodwill and eagerness to become integrated into the mainstream of social life. Reading out a written statement addressed to the Deputy Prime Minister one gang leader criticised the education system which he said squeezed them out after Grade 6. Without professional skills and therefore no jobs, they become useless to society and to their parents. Resorting to crime then becomes a necessity but also a vicious circle:

By stealing and breaking the law we take our own back on society. Once set on this course the whole system conspires to make us even worse. When we get caught we are subjected to police brutality. When we are found guilty the gaols subject us to more brutality and sexual

abuse at the hands of warders and other inmates, so that soon we turn into hard-core criminals. Our society is not equal; you either have it or you don't. One is not born a criminal, society makes people into criminals. Get rid of the corrupt and power-hungry in politics.

This sample of sociological analysis is definitely not that of a confused rustic, dazzled by the glitter of modern civilisation, but that of a razor-sharp radical critic. Following on from this, another written statement, a very positive one, was read out at an ecumenical service on the closing day of the retreat. Entitled *A Call to the Nation*, the document concluded with the following commitment:

We lead you to pray that God, by His grace and power, will change our life style, and yours; and we lead you in committing ourselves to an amnesty on crime, together with a resolve to return to the Lord, and return to the best traditions of our Fathers, for God's sake and glory.

As a token of our good intent we will accept some project of community service, initiated and administered by a combination of service clubs working in unity . . . and in co-operation with the Law and Order Task Force.

We challenge your good intent by asking every income earner in the land to place one Kina in a 'Relief Fund' to be administered by the Task Force . . . to cover the needs and security of ourselves and any gangs in the Nation who commit themselves to this document, until the longer term proposals we have made receive attention and take effect to rehabilitate us into our own Nation.

The gang leaders present then signed the document and handed it over to the Governor-General. For all those present it was a highly moving finale to a five-day encounter with some of Port Moresby's top criminals. "Will the rascals live up to their commitment?" was the question on everyone's lips. Yet the question that did not occur to many except, perhaps, to the rascals, was: Will the government and the public also commit themselves to the plea of the gangs?

The success of the Goldie retreat experiment seemed to the participants to point to the road the government should follow in order to solve the country's law and order crisis. Many national and provincial politicians responded enthusiastically to glowing reports and in no time plans were under way to organise similar events in other cities with similar problems such as Lae, Wewak and Madang. Meanwhile in Port Moresby, the Task Force set up a Project Implementation Committee to help gangs find contracts with the City Council and other agencies. And in order to follow up the dialogue initiated at the retreat, the pastors of the Assemblies of God mission in Gordons organised monthly barbecue evenings for gang members.

Despite these initiatives there was no indication that the crime rate in Port Moresby was going down. On the contrary, every day the newspapers continued to provide extensive coverage of the most heinous crimes. Eventually the lid blew off when there was a new public outcry, and newspaper editorials openly criticised the government for the deteriorating state of affairs: 'Enough is enough ...' wrote the *Post Courier's* editor on 12 June 1985. This was shortly after a report of how a gang near Six Mile had publicly announced its decision to go straight and start a business in second-hand clothing. Yet a day later the same gang was alleged to have indulged in a night of terror. After breaking into a house and pack raping two women, they staged an armed hold-up at a taxi company, followed shortly afterwards by a similar raid on a recreation club. Meanwhile more violent crimes were reported in other parts of Port Moresby, and on 12 June there was once again a mass break-out of prisoners from Bomana penitentiary.

The level of moral panic had by then reached such a peak that the government decided to flex its muscles by declaring a State of Emergency in Port Moresby. At a press conference on 13 June, the Prime Minister explained his decision:

In the last few weeks crimes of despicable violence and cruelty have been committed... Robbery, murder and rape have become almost commonplace events. The crime wave is of a nature and extent that it threatens the security of every resident (*Post Courier*, 13.6.1985).

While Parliament overwhelmingly endorsed the decision for a State of Emergency which was to last for two months, the Employers' Federation also pledged its immediate support. At the same time, the government's decision to give full powers to the Police meant that the approach of dialogue and mutual co-operation initiated by the Task Force was neutralised.

The effects of the State of Emergency were immediately noticeable to everybody in Port Moresby. Only a few minor burglaries were reported in the first two weeks, and, most importantly, no incidents of violence and rape. The Police, aided by Defence Force personnel, carried out a number of surprise raids on settlements in order to round up wanted criminals and recover stolen property. One of these raids also led to the arrest of an expatriate dealer in second-hand cars who was alleged to have been laundering stolen cars and spare parts for the rascal gangs for many years.¹⁰ While the media kept feeding these daily developments to the public, the Police Commissioner and his law enforcers have steadily been gaining in popularity with the majority of politicians and Port Moresby residents. The moral panic subsided, and many people commented that for the first time in many years they no longer lived on tenterhooks, and slept peacefully during the night.

Conclusion

In this paper rascalism has been analysed primarily as a gang phenomenon. This approach focussed on the groups of rascals, rather than on individual law

breakers, and provided a clearer perspective of the kind of power wielded by them. While this power expresses itself in violent confrontations between knife-brandishing or gun-toting youths and their traumatised victims, its exercise is predicated on efficient gang organisation. Thus although school drop-outs and unemployed youths are politically among the most powerless, yet through gang organisation rascals have developed into a political force that now threatens the sovereignty of the state of Papua New Guinea.

However, as individuals rascals are in a double bind. While within the communities where they live with their *wantoks* and fellow rascals they are legally and politically citizens, when they go on the rampage with their gangs they transform themselves into enemies of the state. Looking back, then, at how the government has tried to neutralise the threat of rascalism in recent times, two apparently incompatible approaches stand out: the Task Force's and the Port Moresby State of Emergency. While the leaders of the Task Force have made a positive commitment to gang organisation with a view to channelling it into income-earning, legal projects, the police authorities have vowed to break up the gangs in order to clean up crime in the nation's capital. However, irrespective of the merits and demerits of each of these government initiatives it should be noted that neither is capable of resolving the dilemma rascalism poses to the state. Basically, the Task Force has addressed itself to the economic nexus of rascalism, namely youth unemployment. But as far as criminality is concerned, the Force has chosen to dodge any direct confrontation of the issue. Positively, it has relied heavily on the Christian message of spiritual renewal which aims at individual conversion. Negatively, it has taken the stand that investigating or sanctioning crime is not part of its brief. Nevertheless, the Task Force's commitment to recognise gangs as youth groups in their own right (as distinct from other youth groups which come under the National Youth Council), and to act as a broker between them and both the government and private sectors, is a gamble. This recognition of the gangs is based on the claim that they are efficiently organised. The point to note, however, is that this efficiency is predicated on the pursuit of illegal activities. In order to operate successfully on the wrong side of the law, loyalty to leaders must be absolute and vows of secrecy ruthlessly sanctioned. If, therefore, gangs were to give up their illegal activities, they would no longer need to safeguard secrecy and thus the basis of their efficiency would vanish. Stated differently, if gangs were to deploy their efficient organisation in legitimate activities they would also feel the need to maintain one foot in illegal activities, and thus retain their ability to offer political challenges to the state.

The State of Emergency, on the other hand, has taken the criminality nexus of rascalism head-on by confronting rascal violence with police violence. Yet the objective of breaking up the gangs, even when successful from the point of view of police operations, falls short of dealing with the social and economic forces that propel young people into forming gangs. In fact, repressive police action can only fuel the feelings of antagonism among rascals and thus heighten their *esprit de corps*. By extension, this antagonism tends to spread amongst their non-rascal peers and low income earning neighbours as they also

become increasingly subject to police harassment. Hence stepping up police action gives rise to more overt class conflict.

My aim in documenting these contrasting government approaches was above all methodological. Earlier I argued that there are two dimensions to rascalism: one hierarchical, the other equalising. In the light of this it was possible, in the first place, to identify where the forces of tradition and modernity intersect, and how they articulate in the chequered careers of rascals and their gangs. In the second place, it enabled me to show how government policies tend to deal single-mindedly with one dimension only, misrecognising the momentum of the other. (The Task Force latched on to the equalising dimension, while the Police Force swung the pendulum towards the hierarchical one.) In conclusion, this paper does not claim to offer new solutions to the law and order crisis; but perhaps as far as rascalism is concerned, and especially its disconcerting propensity to use physical violence, it has explored an analytic base for further research and inspired action.

Notes

- ¹ Research on rascalism was conducted in 1984-85 while I was teaching at the University of Papua New Guinea in Port Moresby. My thanks to the many people on both sides of the law who kindly responded to my queries. For permission to participate in the Goldie River retreat I owe special thanks to the Task Force's Chairman, Mr Kerepia, as well as to other participants. For this analysis I have drawn extensively on newspaper reports. Unacknowledged quotations are from my own field data.
- ² Formerly it was common to show gang membership by sporting distinctive tattoo marks. This custom is now abandoned as it exposes rascals to police harassment.
- ³ Within Chimbu province, Bomoi also denotes a person who scorns fineries and new sophisticated life styles.
- ⁴ There is scant information on female delinquency in Papua New Guinea. We know little about the place girls occupy in the lives of young rascals in existing gangs. Informants mentioned only two Port Moresby gangs who have female members, and they were described as playing supportive roles for the dominant males. They were said to be active at disco venues, where they may offer patrons sex and get them drunk, rendering them easy targets for robbery by their male 'bodyguards'. Other rascals, however, insisted that their gangs had no room for girl-friends. Nevertheless, sexual exploits appeared to be an integral part of rascal life.
- ⁵ Gang leadership shows many striking similarities with traditional big-manship. With reference to the Kewa of the Southern Highlands, Josephides points out that in order to become an accepted leader a big-man must have viable solutions to the problems of the group, and be able to merge his interests with group ones in the community's eyes (1985:169). But whereas traditionally the functions of civilian and war leader were often held by different men, fighting spirit and fearlessness during raids were always mentioned as prerequisites for becoming a gang leader. Moreover, some gang leaders also struck me as cult figures among urban youths.

- ⁶ Rascals' quest for the good things of modern life stands in sharp contrast to similar quests by cargo cultists of earlier generations (Lawrence 1964). Unlike rascals who violently grab wealth, the cultists searched for the correct rituals in the belief that this would compel God to bestow the cargo on them. However, now as in the past, the real link between labour and its products tends to remain socially misrecognised.
- ⁷ Much has been written on renewed inter-clan fighting in some of these Highland areas (e.g. Scaglione 1981). Recent accounts have pointed out how rascal activities tend to become mixed up in these fights. This question is as yet under-researched.
- ⁸ A moral panic arises when a condition, episode, person, or group of persons emerges (in this case the rascals) and is identified as a threat to societal values and interests (see Cohen 1980).
- ⁹ What this informant failed to mention is that among gang members raping women is often seen as an act of bravado which adds to a rascal's standing. As societal payback, many people are now calling for violent sanctions, ranging from the death penalty to castration and public flogging. Such public shaming, they argue, is the best deterrent for rape.
- ¹⁰ Allegations that rascal gangs are being used to do the dirty work for people high up in business and government are not uncommon. One young man told me how a few years ago he was commissioned by a cabinet minister's wife to beat up her husband's mistress, for which he and two friends received K300 (approximately U.S. \$300, 1985).

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