

## VIOLENCE AND POLITICAL CHANGE IN PAPUA NEW GUINEA

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Papua New Guinea's government faces challenges to its legitimacy and power over major issues in a number of spheres, including control over mining projects, payments of compensation, and the electoral process itself. This circumstance prompts me to raise a question similar to ones regarding rebellion and revolution posed initially in the very different context of the study of African kingdoms by Max Gluckman (1963): What are the conditions for the political legitimacy of authority in a small-scale multiethnic state such as that of Papua New Guinea? Or, to put it in a less a priori way, what contests over such legitimacy occur? Using cases from the Highlands region of Papua New Guinea I will explore this underlying issue, and in so doing will at the same time examine the place of violence in political life from the point of view of *its* legitimacy or acceptability to different parties as a part of the overall political process (cf. Riches 1986).

At stake here also is the place of "custom" (*kastom*) in contemporary politics. Keesing's study of Kwaio history shows clearly that for the Kwaio, "custom" is a way of marking out their resistance to external control (1992), and violent physical action has a place in such processes of resistance among the Kwaio as well as elsewhere in Melanesia. My argument here is that the insertion of violence into political processes that are now encapsulated within a state framework leads, whether intentionally or not, to a risk of turbulence reaching the state level itself and to the possibility that a democratic form of government may not be

able to sustain itself in future. Conversely, state-level institutions and processes, in their impingement on local communities, may themselves contribute to the growth of turbulence and to the resurgence of transformed versions of "custom." The perspectives of politicians, public servants, local leaders, and ordinary people may be sharply at variance, especially with regard to the place of violence in politics, so "legitimacy," as Riches pointed out (1986:11), is likely to be inherently contested and indeterminate. As an observer, I can only report on the contest, while also attempting to see its wider-scale implications for the future of the state.

One broad point can be made at the outset. By contrast with many African societies, the small-scale societies of Papua New Guinea tended to be politically acephalous, and in the Highlands there were no established centralized chiefdoms that could have been used to graft indigenous politics onto the introduced colonial state. Big-men were leaders of groups, coalitions, and factions in pursuit of competitive ends. When populations of this kind are introduced first to colonial and then to post-colonial power, we should not expect them to invent overnight a respect for hierarchical authority. They obeyed the colonial power out of a combination of fear and self-interest. When fear is no longer there, they will continue to pursue the self-interest part of the equation unless curbed. In short, the national government, inheriting the colonial state apparatus in 1975, was not initially equipped with any automatic legitimacy in the people's eyes. Indeed, many Highlanders had not wanted independence and were skeptical from the outset about what the new government could achieve (see Strathern 1979).

The general context into which the historical processes I am concerned with are set is, then, clear for the Highlands region. This region was first explored only in the early 1930s and effectively pacified only after 1945. Since then it has been subjected to an intense pace of change and development, driven first by cash cropping and a plantation economy and more recently by the effects of a mining boom. State institutions have been fully in place only since 1975, when Papua New Guinea was granted political independence from Australia; provincial governments began operating only at the end of the 1970s. These institutions, as I have noted, carry with them no particular legitimacy of their own at local levels. From the point of view of the people, then, new institutions have to *earn* such legitimacy or acceptance through the benefits they offer, and in practice such benefits are often channeled through personal networks of patronage that take on a local aura of influence quite separate from that of the state itself.

### The Historical Context

The argument of this article is thus historical, and the focus is on the Highlands region, whose problems with violence figure prominently in contemporary debates in and on Papua New Guinea. In the immediate precontact past in the Highlands (that is, up to c. 1930) it is obvious that both violence and peacemaking were equally, and in alternation, legitimate means of raising and settling issues in intergroup contexts. The legitimacy of violence in interpersonal relationships varied by kinship, gender, and status, and breaches of the boundaries of legitimate action were marked by rules of paying compensation for harm done to others or, failing such compensation, by recourse to violent retribution. With pacification such violence at local levels became proscribed. Control over physical force was in theory concentrated into the capacity of the colonial Administration, although the people did not necessarily recognize this as a valid claim. The use of physical force to settle disputes was supposed to be replaced in the life of the Highlanders by "law," meaning the courts and the police, as well as, less explicitly, a benign expansion of indigenous custom in the sphere of making compensation payments for past killings. Indeed, without the latter process pacification could never have succeeded even for the limited period in which it did hold sway.

The colonial Australian Administration set up an array of courts prior to independence in 1975 to provide a means of litigation within the framework of the state. "Custom" was permitted to be influential only at the lowest levels of these courts, which began to be introduced widely only after 1975: the village courts. It was not recognized as a basis for law above the local level and hence could not be applied to acts that were tried in higher-level courts, such as crimes or acts of violence. Peacemaking between individuals or groups was largely left to custom, with passing interest from the formal levels of administration. (*Kiaps*, colonial officials, often introduced revised versions of compensation practices to the people, in the belief that they were following or improving local methods of dispute settlement.)

It is evident that the court system that the postindependence government inherited had a formal legitimacy within its own sphere, backed up with varying degrees of effectiveness by force in the shape of the police. This legitimacy, however, was self-accorded and primarily established in colonial times. Highlanders do not see these courts as separate from the rest of government, as enduring institutions to be

respected in their own right. If government, or the police, lose respect, so do the courts.

Customary procedures for settlement, as I have noted, had an informal legitimacy in the people's eyes, not as backed by the state but as dependent on self-regulatory mechanisms and ultimately on the sanctioning power of intergroup violence. This ultimate sanction, however, was precisely what state control disallowed. From this fundamental problem many others have subsequently stemmed. We can identify a gap here in the overall system of social control, which has grown wider over time. If, for example, compensation procedures are rejected by one party to a dispute, how could the other side claim state assistance if there was no legal framework in which to do so? Government officials tried, and indeed still try, on an ad hoc basis and using their prestige, to push through compensation claims of this sort when it suited their interests. They sponsored ceremonies of peacemaking in which weapons were broken and burned by warring sides. Thus they tried to close the gap in control. However, a conflict had been set up in the intersection between local politics and state or colonial law: Although the former necessitates the readjustment of intergroup relations at the local level, the state authorities saw killings as a matter between the state and the guilty individual (Strathern 1972).

In this situation, both court authorities and the local people saw each other's actions and attitudes as odd and basically irrelevant. Judges were concerned about punishing crimes on an individual basis. Clans were concerned about claiming compensation from each other. Neither side essentially supported the other. The result could be that the state punished criminals, while clansmen still took revenge if they could not, without outside help, obtain compensation in wealth. (For further case histories and more detailed discussion, see Strathern 1974; cf. Gordon and Meggitt 1985 on the Enga region.)

### **The Context of Violence**

The resurgence of overt physical violence at local levels in the Highlands during the 1970s was precipitated by a large number of factors, in particular the dismantling of the powers of government patrol officers and their dissipation into a supposedly rational bureaucratic structure; land shortages in some areas, caused by cash cropping and land alienation; an overall decline in coffee prices since the mid-1970s; the failure of courts adequately to address the underlying issues in disputes; the loss of sanctions associated with the indigenous religions and the inability of

Christian missions to fill the gap; and tensions brought about by uneven development between urban and rural centers and between emergent social classes within the nation (sometimes expressed in hostile behavior stemming from the consumption of alcohol [see Iamo and Ketan 1992]). A crisis of legitimacy is implicated in all of these factors; implicated also are the severe contradictions in social life brought about by processes of change. Highlanders have both avidly sought wealth through cash cropping and business activity, and at the same time quite tenaciously held on to certain indigenous ways of behavior, particularly in the sphere of prestige-seeking and exchange but also in terms of exercising violence to resist, or *per contra* to effect, political changes. Jealousy of another's success in the competitive game of wealth may lead to murder, for example, or sorcery. (In earlier phases of history sorcery accusations and fears kept alive a historical consciousness of conflict between groups and individuals based upon tribal structures.) Criminal gangs have emerged *pari passu* with rich businessmen, either preying on these or living symbiotically with them. In intergroup contexts armed confrontations are frequent, and the deep-seated enmities that go with these can be assuaged only by lengthy and autonomous compensation ceremonies, which remain essentially outside of the sphere of government action. (These events are still occasionally endorsed or even sponsored by government officials in Hagen, but the social pressures behind them have little to do with government policy or influence; however, see Gordon and Meggitt 1985 on the Enga situation.)

So far, I have presented a "layered" picture of political action: as though government was free of violence and violence-plus-exchange operated at local levels. The picture is incomplete. First, the state has itself been faced with an internal secessionist movement in the North Solomons Province, especially on Bougainville island, which has led to bloody engagements and fierce arguments over the legitimacy of state action in these conflicts. Second, the results of this state-level conflict have further affected regions already marked by their own struggles, since the withdrawal of police and resources from these regions to the North Solomons has reduced government presence and capability and hence further diminished its legitimacy and effectiveness. Third, and this is the theme that I will pursue, in this context vertical linkages have occurred between local areas and the state that have led to a perception that local and state issues are interconnected and that matters of state, far from being imposed only from the center, can be altered through local actions.

The top-down legitimacy of government thus begins to be radically

contested, at least partly through the activities of elected politicians who use ties with local electorates to bring to a head issues that impinge on the national level. Along with government efforts to control violence and restrict its sphere of legitimacy, there is actually a tendency for that sphere to expand upwards from those local levels, where it always held an unspoken legitimacy, into the sphere of national affairs and into issues that affect wider sets of people. The strength of this tendency in fact varies directly, if paradoxically, with the strength of politicians in both their local arenas and on the national scene.

Here we see clearly a major difference between the colonial and the postcolonial state. Government officials chosen and paid by the colonial power represented government interests and concerns to the people but in no way depended on them for continued employment. Postcolonial politicians, by contrast, must try to favor their electors and are intrinsically likely to seek resources at the national level to do so, as well as to use their local base of support as a means to raise issues at the national level. The potential for volatility and instability in the relationship between the state and local populations is thus greatly increased, and the situation is exacerbated when the voting process itself becomes commoditized (see below).

Two contradictory activities of government are taking place. Laws are enacted in Parliament and effected through the courts and by the police that specifically aim at containing violence. Insofar as the agencies that apply such laws at the local level use force themselves to do so, they present a two-edged example to the local people: not just that right is might, but the reverse, that might is right. Politicians, on the other hand, by fostering local factions in pursuit of personal power, may actually stir up conflicts and increase their significance beyond the local level. Tendencies in this direction were already evident in the 1980s when funeral ceremonies for important leaders were sometimes made the occasion for rioting and destruction of property in Mount Hagen town, motivated by political rivalry between candidates for the provincial premiership or for a seat in the national Parliament. One can see a conflict of opinion developing here between the public service and the politicians. Senior public servants largely see their task as the expansion of the sphere of administration and of "law and order." They sometimes are of the opinion that politicians can get in the way of this process both by commoditizing, and so corrupting, politics and by attempting to usurp the spheres of administrative work in favor of their own patronage networks: networks that inevitably conduce to the factionalization of relationships between groups within local electorates since, in favoring close supporters, the politicians deprive others of desired resources.

Adventitiously, the situation has been made much more precarious since the introduction of firearms into fighting and criminal actions in the Highlands (and elsewhere). The ambiguous role of politicians in this situation is made clear by the recurrent suspicion on the part of ordinary people (and some electoral officials also) that certain politicians are among the most important suppliers of guns to their constituents, largely because guns buy votes. Politicians' henchmen distribute guns to their networks and build their own influence on the putative possession of powerful weapons. At the end of 1991 in Mount Hagen (Western Highlands Province) people predicted that warfare would break out shortly after the elections, scheduled for May 1992, precisely because of these preset alignments presided over by local henchmen or bosses.

These henchmen are not outsiders. They are kin to either the politicians or the local people whom they attempt to influence, or they are linked to both. They receive money, vehicles, and business opportunities in return for promoting the politicians for reelection. A major factor in this process has been the access that both national and provincial politicians have had to discretionary ("slush") funds for stimulating local development and services. The henchmen, usually younger than the politician, are seeking avenues to become politicians later or to found businesses such as security and nightwatch services. Although henchmen possess and distribute guns, they are distinguished from the younger warriors who gain prominence by using these weapons. Typically, henchmen move often between local areas and the capital city, Port Moresby, and occupy an ambiguous status of part-influence, part-obscure in both arenas.

The people in fact predicted that as a result of electoral violence the 1992 election would be the last one, implying that the army might take over to save the state from anarchy. If this vision were correct, it would mean the final point of the expansion of the legitimacy of violence proceeding from the local level had been reached, to be met by the counterpoint of repressive rule; and the historical link between point and counterpoint would turn out to be the previously democratically elected politicians themselves.

### **Elections and the Commoditization of the Vote**

People were predicting, then, that the 1992 elections would bring the end of elections as such. It would be a revolution and not just a rebellion against a particular politician or political coalition of the kind that has characterized the volatile events of Papua New Guinea's national politics since 1975. It may be worth while here to trace a history of elections

over the years, showing how politics had reached the point of such a prediction being made by the end of 1991.

Elections for the National House of Assembly were arranged by the colonial Administration as early as 1964. In 1964 aspiring politicians attempted to cultivate an image of representatives who by their "strong talk" (*ik rondokl* in the Hagen language, a prerequisite for big-manship) could extract benefits for their area from the Australians. The idea that politicians are also lawmakers or that political parties might have competing ideologies was at this time entirely absent, and the politician was seen as a glorified local government councillor.

This image prevailed until not long before independence, when it became clear to Highlanders that certain parties, in particular PANGU, aimed at achieving independence, while others, such as the UNITED Party at that time, opposed it and wanted the Australians to stay. Highlands politicians soon learned the perks to be gained from switching their loyalties between factions in coalitions, and their image in the people's eyes began to shift from an idea of them strictly as "servants of the people" to a notion that they were in power chiefly to serve themselves. Notions of policy remained remote from debate. Given, then, that politicians were perceived as being rich and seemed to achieve their riches by virtue of being elected, and also that their promises to assist the people rang increasingly hollow or even ceased altogether, the next step for the electors was to ask, "What's in it for us?" This question no longer referred to collective benefits in the style of the politics of the 1960s.

By the 1980s it was understood that politicians are in power to benefit themselves and their factions, and they concentrate on consolidating their existing power bases. As a result of armed conflicts between groups these bases had become more, rather than less, rigidly defined and a process of neotribalization was well under way (see Strathern 1992). This intensified demarcation of political space coupled with the fragmenting of perception within such spaces was accompanied, then, by a sharp commoditization of the voting process that Hageners, at any rate, seemed to equate with their own ethnoperspective on modernization. One long-term friend of mine, who told me that of course now it was absolutely necessary for rival candidates to outbid each other in offers of bribes to every individual elector, added that the people were sure (from what the candidates themselves had said) that this was "the way of the white man" and had just reached Papua New Guinea. When I contested this view, he appeared shocked and begged me not to spread the point around, for fear that I might be physically attacked and silenced by politicians and their followers alike.



This brief sketch indicates, then, a historical movement from the 1960s, when the idea of the politician as a collective advocate of the people vis-à-vis the colonial power was paramount; to the emergence of party politics and assumption of indigenous control of politics around independence; further to the venalities of factions and coalitions among these parties; and finally to the intensified retribalization of electorates and the full commoditization of individual voting anticipated for 1992 (cf., for a comparable history, Standish 1992).

### **Provincial Politics**

The national political situation is complicated by the existence, since 1970, of a separate level of provincial politics, with an elected provincial assembly and a premier who presides over a loose coalition of followers in a way that mirrors the national level. Provincial politicians make alliances with politicians at the national level and may belong to one of the national political parties. Equally, they can be opposed to parliamentarians, since province-level politicians see themselves largely in the mold of those who demand resources for their province from the national government.

Electoral contests may implicate these shifting and ambiguous relations between politicians at the two different levels. At either level the politicians tend to convert their representative role into one of patronage towards their constituents, and the same model of patronage accordingly operates among politicians themselves at succeeding levels, or is felt by the people to do so. Important, therefore, is what the politicians can offer to their people in between elections as well as at them. National parliamentarians up to 1991 both used personal allowances granted to them through the budgetary process to sponsor local schemes for development (and thus to secure support) separately from budget items funded through the public service and funneled further assistance through candidates seeking election at provincial level. The latter process, and its potential for violence, can be illustrated by a case history situated at Kuk, near Mount Hagen.

#### *Case 1*

Since elections began in 1964, the Kawelka people at Kuk have never had one of their clan members as a representative at either the national or provincial level. From 1972 to 1987 the MP for their electorate (Dei) came from a tribe allied to their own by a traditional pairing and by

historical ties forged in early colonial times by this man's father, an outstanding big-man. The politician himself was a sister's son of the most numerous Kawelka clan, the Membo, and a dense web of ceremonial exchange partnerships had surrounded this individual tie over time. The Kawelka therefore generally gave their votes to this relative and helped him to retain power in face of the opposing bloc within the electorate.

During the 1980s the strength of the alliance between the two tribes began to falter. A less than completely successful occasion when the politician's clansmen repaid a ceremonial gift of pigs and money (*moka*) to the Kawelka heralded this decline, which was hastened by a tragic event in 1989. The newly adult son of a Membo leader was killed in a brawl in the capital city of Port Moresby, struck down by a fellow clansman of the politician (the assailant was himself married to a Kawelka woman of another clan). This untoward event split the alliance, and even after a large compensation payment of hundreds of pigs and K12,000 cash had been made, relations were still shaky. There was suspicion that the death was not an accident but might have been planned.

The Kawelka people at home in Mount Hagen had been involved for some years in bitter fighting with long-established enemies within Dei, and there was a feeling that the MP had not given them support but had rather attempted to gain favor with their more numerous enemies as a part of electoral maneuvering. (All this was unsubstantiated rumor, but it affected people's attitudes.) Guns had been introduced in this war and the enemies held the better weapons (Strathern 1992). It happened that the Membo youth killed in Moresby was one of a new generation of fighters with guns and his removal was regarded as giving an advantage to the Kawelka's prime enemies. Previously, in 1987, the politician had lost the parliamentary election to a rival from the opposing bloc within Dei. Relationships that had held since the 1960s were now being shattered in all directions.

In this context the focus of political conflict shifted to the 1990 provincial elections, which were being held between national elections. The sitting provincial-assembly member for the Kawelka was an affine (wife's sister's husband) of the previous MP. The assembly member was now opposed by a Kawelka candidate, and this candidate in turn was sponsored by the new national-level MP who had also managed to secure a ministry for himself in the new government. The Kawelka candidate was popular *qua* Kawelka, and the time seemed ripe for his success. The sitting assembly member, however, was reelected. The Kawelka candidate accused a fellow Kawelka man of defecting to the opposite side and of aiding and abetting many relatives of the previous

MP who had come to live with the Kawelka at Kuk to vote against him. A punitive raid was organized after the election result was announced, in which the supposed traitors lost houses and gardens through arson, women were reportedly raped, and some families were forced to flee.

Relations were only slowly returning to a friendlier footing in 1991. Discussions continued on the cause of the 1989 death in Port Moresby, and attempts were made to interrogate the previous MP on his possible knowledge about the case and his possible role in the provincial elections. The Kawelka candidate subsequently continued to act as a henchman for the new MP, opposed within his own small lineage by a younger man who decided to support for the 1992 national elections the son of the previous MP. Physical fights and brawls following drinking sessions between these two lineage mates now took the place of the wider disputes, but it was expected that conflict would reemerge and escalate during 1992, particularly since the candidates would be divided by party political allegiances and to some extent would have rival party “machines” behind them.<sup>1</sup>

What this case illustrates is the potential for conflict to repeat itself in different modes and at different levels of the political system over time, replicating and intensifying causes of dispute between groups. The political arena involved is not one in which we can separate out “traditional” from “introduced” spheres of activity, but rather one in which there is an enchainment of issues that all feed into the political arena, sometimes explosively, and particularly at the times of elections. Obviously, a close connection has grown up between violence and political change, to the extent that a certain level of violence is *expected* in conjunction with elections (especially after them), whether at the national or provincial level. Such expressions of violence clearly also reveal a disparity between the supposed exercise of state law with its ideal of a peaceful democratic process and the actual views of the local people. In staging attacks of this kind, the local people are not simply protesting against any particular electoral result (although this is what they think they are doing) but are also weakening the peacefulness of the political process itself--an action that has more destructive potential than they perhaps intend. Only the creation of trust between politicians and their electorates as a whole could halt this trend.

### **“Law and Order”: The Impact of “Rascals”**

Locally-based processes threatening the effectiveness and image of the state have also to be set into a general context of increasing law and

order problems in Papua New Guinea as a whole. These problems stem from many sources, of which I will mention two. The first is the rise of criminal gangs of educated or semieducated younger males, who band together either on a local clan basis or through interethnic alliances, gain access to weapons, and embark on car thefts, highway robbery, house and shop break-ins, murder, and rape. These gangs are found in all urban centers of the country, especially in Port Moresby, Lae, and the Highlands region, and some coastal provinces (Sepik, Oro, Gulf). In places they are involved in the cultivation and sale of marijuana; everywhere they trade in weapons. They stage holdups on major highways that link parts of the Highlands together, but they also assist their fellow tribesmen in intergroup fights and are given refuge in tribal areas when hunted by the police. Such gangs of *raskal* are obviously a perturbing factor in the overall processes of change, and the government is forced to expend scarce resources on strengthening police operations against them.

Early in 1991 a "crime summit" was held in Port Moresby. One outcome was an agreement to declare a state of emergency and deploy army troops, including some Australian army personnel, along with police, to bring *raskal* gangs more under control. As long as the army remained and used superior telescopes (*kampas*) and guns to those of the *raskal*, the latter were quiescent. But people predicted that when the curfews ended and the army went away, the gangs would be back. The existence of these gangs, who self-consciously maintain themselves outside of, and opposed to, the forces of the national state, constitutes another blow to the perceived legitimacy of control vested in the state as a whole. Ordinary people, of course, support the government's campaign at both national and provincial levels, except where a relative of theirs is involved, but *raskal* assistance in tribal fighting leads to just enough local support to maintain their hideouts. (The emergence of *raskal* is due to economic changes over time, with loss of revenue from coffee and insufficient job creation in the formal sector of the economy; see Hart Nibbrig 1992.)

In general the response of the national government to the *raskal* problem has been serious but episodic. When urban crime rises, the government declares a curfew or an emergency or does both, moves in extra police, and conducts searches for gang members. But the gangs are mobile and move elsewhere just ahead of the authorities. Rumors that gang members have turned up in remote rural locations frighten the local people (as well as visiting anthropologists) and make them acutely aware of the inadequate protection police can offer. Rehabilitation

schemes for *raskal* such as the Self-Help Task Force in Mount Hagen are severely underfunded, in spite of the fact that they offer one of the few genuine pathways for the reform of criminals by granting them the chance to work instead as local entrepreneurs and earn money legally.

Problems from a second source also threaten the effectiveness and image of the state, in a process that resembles a hugely enlarged version of the early political role of representatives in asking for resources from the government. I am referring here to inflated demands for compensation by local landowners and kinsfolk when their land is used for development purposes (Strathern n.d.).

### *Case 2*

During 1991 such demands increasingly came from groups in the Southern Highlands Province, stemming from the discovery of considerable oil and gas fields in remote parts of the province (Lake Kutubu and Tari). One issue related to the construction of an access road for the Kutubu project through the territory of the Poroma people. Aware of how badly the road was needed by the developers, the local people blocked its construction and demanded huge sums of money. Meanwhile, the Kutubu people were asking for *all* royalties on the oil finds to be paid to them, without a share for the provincial government. The government was itself split in a struggle over which construction firm should get the contract to make the road. The struggle centered on the premier and his deputy, locked in competition for the premiership. The immediate issues were finally resolved, after which the incumbent premier hinted that there would be more disruption if the national government did not give his province more resources to combat law and order problems. The national prime minister replied that the premier should not engage in even apparently threatening him on this issue.

From an analytical viewpoint what is significant in this case is the preemptive resistance of people at local levels towards nationally planned development activities. Legitimacy is claimed at the bottom and only reluctantly delegated upwards. The national government does not have this legitimacy *ab initio*; it has to create it as best it can.

The implications of this case history were written even larger in two instances at the end of 1991. In the first the Koiari people, who consider themselves to be the original landowners of Port Moresby city, massed together and cut off the city's water supply, which derives from an artificial lake in their territory (Lake Sirinumu) in the hills above Moresby.

The prime minister, while strongly condemning violence, in effect had to appease the Koiari and promise them development funds as well as a new electorate of their own (a major aim of the Koiari leader). In the second instance, landowners in two different parts of the country threw the whole of Papua New Guinea in confusion in December 1991 by vandalizing and destroying telecommunications repeater stations (at Mount Ialibu and Mount Strong) in pursuit of their demand for millions of kina as compensation for the small areas of land on which the stations are housed. In this case the government acted more firmly; dispatching police to guard the stations, but clearly the landowners had no compunction about making their claims in this violent way.

Clans seem to treat the state, national, and provincial authorities as another clan and to direct their demands against all entities in the outside world in the exact way they do against their immediate neighbors. They appear to know that violent actions can be effective in changing governmental attitudes towards them, whereas more peaceful methods tend to prove futile. From their perspective, then, their behavior is highly rational, while at the same time it is deeply damaging to the fabric of state legitimacy.

My conclusion in this section is thus that government attempts to control the "lawless" activities of *raskal* and of disgruntled landowners both signal deep-seated problems for the legitimacy of government itself. Neither landowners nor *raskal* appear to recognize any superordinate right of the state to control their activities and demands, and the more "democratic" the government response to their challenge is, the more they continue to exercise their challenges and escalate their demands.

### **Local Modifications**

The picture I have drawn here depends heavily on processes and events as seen from the Western Highlands Province, although case 2 also dealt with the Southern Highlands. It is important to note that the processes of what may be called "disintegrative integration" described here occur most strongly in areas that are central rather than peripheral to the development that is taking place in Papua New Guinea. Mount Hagen is the boomtown center both for the tea and much of the coffee industry and for the new business offices through which mining operations are administered in the Southern Highlands and Enga provinces.

In sharp contrast is the situation that holds in a peripheral area, Lake Koperasi District, in the far northwestern part of the Southern Highlands. Koperasi government station is small, staffed by one district man-

ager, one council executive officer, and one policeman, or at most, two. These officials serve a population of up to fifteen thousand people scattered over a wide area. The station is served by Mission Aviation Fellowship flights and is tenuously linked by a very rough road to Tari and thence to the provincial capital, Mendi.

It is tempting, though in some ways inaccurate, to see Kopiago as caught in a time warp, reflecting what other parts of the Highlands were like in, say, the late 1960s. The time warp, if it has existed, is on the verge of ending, though, with the advent of more road traffic, taverns for drinking beer, and money from gold mines at Porgera and Mount Kare to the east. But what is striking is the absence of severe, large-scale armed conflicts between clans, such as have been commonplace in Hagen since the early 1970s, and, concomitantly, the lack of any serious challenge to the few representatives of government at the station. It is agreed in government circles that the station is much understaffed and in the event of trouble might simply be overwhelmed. But while there is a fair amount of interpersonal conflict (as revealed in a study of police occurrence books over the last ten years), this has not broadened to include intergroup fighting or the affairs of politicians. Indeed, politicians in Kopiago are looked on as intermediaries with government in the hierarchical way that held previously in Hagen; and they are criticized for their failures in this role, not for any involvement in intrigues beyond it. There is indeed a potential "law and order" problem in Kopiago that centers on the availability of police and firearms, but it does not encompass the politicians as in Hagen.

Reasons for these differences may be hazarded as follows. First, the area is distinctly underdeveloped, and what it needs to begin a course of economic change is government input of the kind given long ago in Hagen. The politicians are accordingly judged in this light and tend to confine their actions to this sphere, as when the sitting national MP gave electoral development funds to help establish a primary school in a neglected part of the district (Hewa, where a language different from the majority language, Duna, is spoken).<sup>2</sup> Second, the people are at a stage where their practices of compensation for deaths and injuries are still viable enough to cope with the resolution of disputes. Inflation in the size of these compensations, however, and the threats of forceful action that at times accompany demands for them, indicate that this phase may be ending. Third, ritualizations of physical conflict in the form of verbal abuse are highly elaborated by the Duna, and they appear less ready to physically attack others (although such attacks definitely occur) than perhaps the Hagen people are. All injuries are held

potentially to result in sickness or death over time and only compensation can heal them (author's field notes, 1991). Injury is thus a very serious matter. In Hagen it is serious, too, because of the threat of physical counteraction; there appears to be a greater readiness in Hagen to inflict blows and to regard such blows as a legitimate counterresponse to annoyance.

For an array of reasons, then, violence is for the time being less a part of social interactions in Kopiago than it is in the more "advanced" parts of the Highlands, and the generalizations that I have made regarding "disintegrative integration" do not yet apply there. Kopiago does, on the other hand, have an incipient *raskal* problem, and holdups of vehicles are common on the highway linking the area to Tari, which has become something of a turbulent frontier town as a result of goldmining at Mount Kare (Ryan 1991).

### **Conclusion**

My overall argument in this article is very simple: that violence is becoming more and more an *expected* part of political activity, the more complex and sophisticated in other respects the political process becomes. As a corollary I note that the most highly developed areas, such as Mount Hagen, are among those that have the greatest problems of violence. By violence I mean physical attacks on others as opposed to verbal haranguing or rhetorics of persuasion. It is necessary to distinguish between different contexts of violence and their different meanings here: for example, between interclan fighting, gang robbery, and attacks on private and government personnel. Yet, in the perceptions of the people at large, all of these processes and contexts become merged in an overall feeling that the government cannot keep control. One important aspect of this whole matter is the commoditization of politics; the idea, that is, that people's minds cannot be persuaded by talk. Short of physical coercion, they can only be bribed with money. Politicians, therefore, in their search for power, no longer depend on platforms or policies but rather on contexts of violence and cash payments.

Another way of looking at the process, I have suggested, is to see it as a decline in the legitimacy of government itself, a denial of a hierarchy of power in the state. The roots of this decline in the Highlands date to at least the time of independence, when many Highlanders were opposed to the departure of the Australian Administration. The indigenous politicians had therefore a hard job to replace their colonial mentors in the first place. But their attempts to set up patronage networks of



their own, mingled with their almost-inevitable embroilment in inter-group conflicts, have now created a situation in which they on the one hand make laws to control violence and crime and on the other hand are implicated in processes that escalate the overall level of violence in their areas. It is in this context that people at Kuk spoke of the possible "end of elections" and linked this in their minds with charismatic messages of Armageddon or the millennium that Christian fundamentalist preachers assured them would take place sometime in the year A.D. 2000. The loss of legitimacy by the government and the rising tide of violence were seen in this light as somehow fated, a part of a wider historical process about to produce a more catastrophic denouement in the elections of June 1992.<sup>3</sup>

The external forces behind this history are clear, and the conjuncture between these forces and millenarian images is also clear. One further feature may be pointed to here. At the beginning of the article I remarked on Max Gluckman's work, including his original distinction between rebellion and revolution. Such a distinction depends on a clear differentiation between an incumbent and the office occupied by the incumbent. It is precisely this distinction that is blurred in Papua New Guinea politics and to a lesser extent in the bureaucracy as well. Politicians are admired or accepted by the people as personal leaders in the style of the leaders of small-scale polities in the past. They are not judged in terms of their adherence to laws but purely in terms of what they do for their people, however they manage this. In a sense, their legitimacy in the people's eyes depends solely on this aspect of their role. But actions that are legitimate in this sense may in other ways harm the longer-term stability and legitimacy of the government. A cycle of patronage and the unmasking of patronage (and exploitation) is thus set up that makes the political future uncertain.

Finally, I return to a concept I have mentioned briefly, that of "disintegrative integration." By integration here I refer to the incorporation of local areas into district, provincial, and national political structures and processes. By disintegration I mean that the very processes that link local clans to the state also produce within and between clans a heightened potential for conflict through competition for resources and political offices. If policy is to be devised to modify the dialectics involved in this two-way traffic between the state and local groups, the approach must be to recognize from the beginning that the problems are produced through many interactions of politicians, public servants, and local leaders that have consequences beyond those intended by the individuals concerned. In this regard, reducing the immediate power of

politicians and increasing the power of public servants to direct the processes of development might have a salutary effect.

### NOTES

A version of this article was delivered in M. Godelier's seminar at the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales in Paris, May 1992, and I am grateful to Professor Godelier for his invitation, as also to him, Pierre Lemonnier, and others for their comments. Fieldwork in the Western and Southern Highlands provinces of Papua New Guinea in 1991 was conducted with national and provincial permission and financial support from the National Science Foundation (NSF grant no. BNF900600), the Harry Frank Guggenheim Foundation (research assistant Gabriele Stürzenhofecker), and the Wenner-Gren Foundation. I gratefully thank all of these institutions for their generosity. All opinions expressed in this article, however, are my own.

I am also grateful for the extensive comments and queries of the three reviewers of this article, two anonymous and one who named himself, Dr. W. Standish of the Australian National University. To respond to all of their suggestions would have caused me to double the length of the paper, but I have tried to make alterations that pay heed to their various criticisms. I wish to thank Dr. Standish in particular for supplying me with materials by which to update the account.

Regarding the two case studies: Recent experience in the Hagen area has shown me that it is prudent to omit the names of groups and individuals today as a protection both for the individuals and for myself as the anthropological observer.

1. In the actual election the sitting MP in the Dei electorate won narrowly against his chief challenger, a favored son of the earlier MP. However, he later faced charges of corruption and was forced to resign and in the by-election his challenger won.

J. Ketan (n.d.) has reported in some detail on episodes of violence that accompanied polling and postpolling events in the Hagen area generally. Postpolling violence was severe. Ketan reports one serious case, which resulted in "three brutal deaths, several hospitalized with serious injuries and massive destruction of property." A Simbu security worker for a business group based on the Welyi-Kuta tribal alliance was shot dead at the place Yan; some suspected he was murdered by Kentpi tribesmen upset that he and his coethnics at Yan may have voted for the Welyi-Kuta candidate rather than for the candidate from the Kentpi, on whose land the Simbu people were settled. While the army controlled the actual elections successfully, postpolling violence has fed intergroup warfare (see also Dinnen n.d.).

2. In the 1992 election this MP lost his seat to a rival from his own ethnic area. The Hewa people are not numerous, and so their votes would be able to swing an election result only if the contest were a close one, which it was not. The nearest rival to the winner was not the sitting MP but a recently graduated lawyer from the Kopiago area, son of a previous president of the local government council. He proceeded to file a lawsuit against the winning candidate.

3. In the event, a Mount Hagen politician, Paias Wingti, was elected by the new Parliament as prime minister, with the narrow majority of one vote, cast by the new Speaker of the Parliament--himself elected only by the same margin! The example shows how evenly matched major factions tend to become in a competitive arena where no side holds a

monopoly over resources, whether material or ideological; and also how such an extreme form of democracy may prove very difficult to translate into effective government, thus conducing to further long-term instability. But such predictions cannot be made with any certainty. Economic factors will also have an effect, for example, the viability and revenue from mining projects. Cultural factors also have to be assessed, for example, the influence of the churches in promoting "Christian" patterns of nonviolent behavior or otherwise. Earlier phases of missionization, with the destruction of local practices, have contributed to the overall situation of confusion regarding authority and power today. It is also interesting in this context to note that one of the new prime minister's actions during 1992 has been to suspend the Southern Highlands provincial government and also to propose the abolition of the provincial government structure altogether. This plan can be seen both as a cost-saving exercise and as an attempt to refocus legitimacy within the state at the national-government level by dissociating himself from corruption and inefficiency, at provincial levels. For overviews of the aftermath of the election results, see Ketan n.d. and Standish 1993. Standish (pers. com., 1992) points out to me that in some provinces the provincial governments see themselves as stronger than the national government and are prepared to demand secession rather than submit to being abolished.

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