INTRODUCTION

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Until recently domestic violence was largely invisible to anthropologists, who gave little consideration to it as a problem in other cultures. For instance, it is not a category in the Outline of Cultural Materials for the Human Relations Area Files (Murdock 1982). David Riches's 1986 collection entitled The Anthropology of Violence contains no chapter on domestic or marital violence, nor does the topic appear in the books index. In 1984 G. M. Erchak noted with surprise that cultural anthropologists have said little about wife abuse in the cultures they study (1984:331-332). As he observes, the lack of attention paid to this phenomenon is particularly puzzling considering the number of female anthropologists doing field research and the concern with women's issues.

The first type of domestic violence to be studied cross-culturally was that directed at children (for example, Korbin 1981). Since Erchak made his observation, anthropologists have done cross-cultural studies of general domestic violence (for example, Levinson 1988, 1989; Burgess and Draper 1989) as well as ones focused on wife-beating (Campbell 1985; Gelber 1986), children (Korbin 1987; Gelles and Lancaster 1987; Scheper-Hughes 1987; Finkelhor and Korbin 1988), and the elderly (see Rubinstein 1987 and the other essays in that issue of the *Journal of Cross-cultural Gerontology).* The increasing concern of

Pacific peoples with domestic violence is evidenced by the Pacific region conference on child protection, abuse, and neglect held in Honolulu in February 1989, and by the efforts of Papua New Guinea's Law Reform Commission and Women and Law Committee to educate Papua New Guineans that it is "both wrong and dangerous to use violence at home" (Toft 1985, 1986; Toft and Bonnell 1985; LRC 1986, 1987; also Women and Law Committee 1989, a video produced with the assistance of the Canadian High Commission and CUSO [formerly Canadian University Services Overseas]).

Increasing anthropological awareness of the consequences of domestic violence for the peoples of the Pacific also led to sessions on the subject at the annual meetings of the Association for Social Anthropology in Oceania (ASAO) in 1987, 1988, and 1989. The essays that follow were written for these sessions.

In our discussions we use the terms "domestic violence" and "family violence" in a broad sense to encompass behavior between or directed toward a range of family members including spouses, children, siblings, co-wives, and the elderly, Therefore, although all of the following articles focus on a particular type of domestic violence (specifically between spouses, toward children or the elderly), many of them deal in general terms with strife between other members of the household, domestic unit, or community.

The articles in this volume raise a number of issues that remind us that we must avoid equating behavior in other cultures with apparently similar conduct in our own society. Although events in Port Moresby or Suva may appear similar to incidents occurring in New York, the cultural meanings of those events are likely to be different. If we use the same terms to describe them we must take care that the resulting analysis is not misleading.

For instance, in Oceania domestic violence may not be confined to the domestic domain. As is the case with the Bun (see McDowell's essay), it may occur when spouses compete for public recognition and political or economic power, and it may have broader consequences for relations between social groups (also see Aucoin's essay on Fiji, Nash's on the Nagovisi). Although it takes place between family members, it is not private and does not occur only behind closed doors. Similarly, "violence" may be defined according to particular cultural understandings. Our essays focus on physical maltreatment and in most cases we consider violence to be "an act carried out with the intention, or perceived intention, of physically hurting another person" (Straus, Gelles, and Steinmetz 1980:20). We have, however, not limited our consideration to

physical assault where such limitation would violate the indigenous concept of violence. For example, as Carucci observes in his article, on Ujelang and Enewetak it has a physical form suited to young warriors and a magical form appropriate to elderly women who are powerful members of their clan. Ujelang people insist that magical violence is more dangerous than physical assault.

Violence is ultimately a culturally defined phenomenon and the form that it takes may differ between women and men and change over the life cycle of the individual or the domestic group. We have been flexible in defining violence, for if we are to understand the nature of family violence in other societies, the perceptions of the people we study must take precedence over definitions derived from Western experience.

One theme that runs through these essays--a theme that may disturb some readers--is that many Pacific societies consider a certain level of family violence to be normal and acceptable. Our consultants have been insistent about this. We have taken their statements seriously and recognize this point of view as a cultural fact. It is also a fact that there is a time when violence ceases to be acceptable and becomes illegitimate or abusive. The questions to be asked are: What is this point? How do we know that it has been reached? What happens then? In all our essays we explore alternatives: alternative forms that violence may take, alternatives to violence, and alternatives available to the victims of violence.

Another theme is the attempt to understand why some Pacific societies experience a great deal of domestic violence while others are mostly free of it. The answer lies in the cultural heritage of the society in question. Some of the societies discussed in this volume have a warrior ethos, or define gender roles in terms of male domination and female submission, or emphasize restraint and gentleness in interpersonal relations. In others the notion of control is extremely important. A society may place a premium on self-control or on the ability to control another person's behavior or sexuality. Or, conversely, the society may value personal autonomy demonstrated by one's ability to avoid being controlled by another. Consequently, the following essays variously emphasize social structure, marriage rules, residence patterns, differential access to resources, the availability of social networks, or the changes brought by modernization as important elements in determining the level and frequency of domestic violence.

Finally, although not addressed specifically, the dilemma we face as both anthropologists and humanists haunts any discussion of this topic. On the one hand, other peoples may use standards that are very different from our own to define what constitutes acceptable--or unaccepta-

ble--behavior. By the precepts of some communities, there may be no such category as unacceptable abuse of a wife or child. As anthropologists we must concede this, and most of us have a horror of judging other people by our values or of suggesting that they should conform to social ideals that we preach but are far from practicing ourselves. On the other hand, we are uneasy with analyses that are restricted to describing and explaining--perhaps almost to the point of justifying--violence toward women, children, or old people. We are confronted, uncomfortably so, with our own ethnocentrism and also with the hand-washing implications of extreme cultural relativism. We would like to be agents of social change, but who are we to tell people of another culture how to organize their lives? There is no easy solution to this dilemma, but our readers should be aware that it is a difficult one for those of us who have struggled with the topic of domestic violence and that all of these essays have required much soul searching.

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