BEATEN WIFE, SUICIDAL WOMAN: DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN KALIAI, WEST NEW BRITAIN

Dorothy Ayers Counts
University of Waterloo

> I don't understand women. Three of them have drunk poison in less than three weeks. If anyone says the slightest cross word to a woman or if there is even a trivial disagreement, she may kill herself. Men don't behave in this way. Only women!
>
> --Male informant

> When a man just keeps beating a woman, when he won't let her explain or hear what she has to say, that's the kind of treatment that causes a woman to kill herself.
>
> --Female informant

These statements, recorded during conversations with my Lusi-Kaliai consultants while conducting research in West New Britain between July and October of 1985, illustrate a largely unrecognized phenomenon: the relationship between wife-beating and suicide by women, Little research has been done on the possible connection between the abuse of wives and female suicide either in North American society or cross-culturally, and few analyses have been published on spousal violence in non-Western societies.[1]

Certainly options other than suicide are available to beaten wives, and fortunately women who are beaten do not usually kill themselves, either in West New Britain or in general (Masamura 1979). It does, however, often seem to be the case that female suicides were beaten

Pacific Studies, Vol. 13, No. 3--July 1990

shortly before their deaths and that suicide was their response to the despair, anger, or shame they experienced as a result of the violence, In North America, for instance, researchers working with battered women have found a high incidence of suicide attempts among them (Jacobson and Portuges 1978:223; Back, Post, and Darcy 1982; Pagelow 1984:318; Stephens 1985). A working paper on spouse abuse prepared as a background document for the U.S. Surgeon General reports research findings that between 35 and 40 percent of battered women attempt suicide (Stark and Flitcraft 1985). Their evidence suggests that abuse may be the most important provocation yet identified for female suicide attempts.

This essay has two foci. I look first at ethnographic evidence for Papua New Guinea that suggests women there who attempt or commit suicide often do so after they have been beaten. Then I examine the options that are available to abused Kaliai women and argue that suicide in Kaliai is a strategy that permits a woman to retaliate against violent treatment and the opprobrium concomitant with it, even though her retaliation is necessarily exercised indirectly and requires that others act on her behalf after her death.

Suicide and the Beaten Woman in Papua New Guinea

In Papua New Guinea, domestic violence seems to be an expected aspect of family life, while suicide is accepted in many societies as a solution to personal problems or as a reasonable response to being shamed.[2] Pataki-Schweizer notes that suicide occurs widely in Papua New Guinea, more frequently among females than males, with "interpersonal conflict, often between spouses" being a major precipitant (1985:142).

There are a number of possible responses available to a New Guinean woman who is abused by her husband. She may leave him and seek refuge with family or friends (true in urban areas such as Port Moresby as well as in rural areas like Kove, Lakalai, Molima, Hagen), although Strathern reports that Hagen women may be turned back by their brothers with the injunction, "See what happens; if your husband really draws your blood, then you can come home" (1972:252). Beaten wives may fight back, as Strathern reports for the Hageners (1972) and Chowning reports for the Lakalai, Molima, and Sengseng (1985). The offending husband may be required to pay compensation to his wife (Kove [Chowning 1985]) or to her relatives (Hagen [Strathern 1972]), he may be taken to the village committee (Tolai [Bradley 1985]) or to

court by his wife or her kin (Kainantu [Westermark 1985]; Kove [Chowning 1985]), or he may be publicly reproved by the hamlet big-man (Kove, Lakalai [Chowning 1985]).

Finally, women may commit suicide. Although I focus in this essay on women as the victims of spousal violence, men who suffer mistreatment from their wives may also attempt suicide as a result. There are Melanesian societies in which men commit suicide more often than do women--for example, Bimin-Kuskusmin (Poole 1985), Dobu (Fortune 1932), and Lakalai (Chowning 1958; Valentine 1963). These men frequently kill themselves because they have been shamed by verbal abuse. Chowning reports that a Lakalai woman may drive her husband to suicide by verbal abuse (pers. com. 1986), particularly if she exploits male shame about anal functions, a shame that women do not share. I know of only one Kaliai case (discussed below) in which a man attempted to poison himself following an attack by his wife. Everyone with whom I discussed this episode agreed that he was motivated by shame at his public humiliation rather than by the attack itself or injuries suffered as a result of it. The relationship between these phenomena--male suicide and verbal abuse--is a topic that deserves detailed investigation, but I will not attempt to deal with it here.

There are a number of reasons why Papua New Guinea women respond to violent treatment by committing suicide. They kill themselves because of a desire for vengeance, out of shame at being beaten, in reaction to the humiliation of being publicly insulted (see the article by Mitchell elsewhere in this volume), or because they interpret mistreatment by their husbands as indicating loss of affection.

Among the Gainj, for example, only married women kill themselves and in every case recorded "a woman killed herself either after a fight with another woman in which her husband championed the other woman's cause, or after public physical abuse from her husband" (Johnson 1981:326). According to Johnson, a woman's suicide threats may cause her husband to make concessions to her privately. He cannot do so publicly without acknowledging her power over him, a situation that a Gainj man would find intolerable. "Indeed," says Johnson, "the standard public response of men to a woman's threat of suicide is, 'there's a rope nearby' " (1981:333).

According to Healey, among the Maring of Papua New Guinea only the women commit suicide. The major context in which it occurs "is after severe, and physically violent, domestic arguments" (Healey 1979: 95). In three of six cases he analyzed, women killed not only themselves but also their daughters after violent arguments with their husbands:

> Destruction of a child in suicide is particularly vengeful, for not only is the husband deprived of a wife, but also of children who can care for him in his old age, and who will forge new affinal alliances for him. Further, he must provide the customary death-payments for both wife and child to the woman's agnates, and face the anger and possible vengeance of his affines by physical attack or witchcraft. (Healey 1979:96)

According to Chowning, Kove women of West New Britain believe that their husbands may be fond of them despite the fact that they beat them. Therefore, a Kove woman seems likely to kill herself only when she associates an "excessive" beating with her husband's loss of affection for her and his preference for another woman (Chowning 1985:82).

Accusations of adultery were the most frequent cause of suicide among the women of Manam Island, according to Wedgwood, who reported that they were likely to respond by hanging themselves or jumping off a precipice (1937:420). Wedgwood's informants described a suicide this way: "she first decorates herself and then kills herself. Another woman told me that when a man has accused and beaten his wife for adultery, she will leave the imprint of her hand in the ashes of the fire and then go quietly away into the bush and hang herself" (1937: 420-421).

Manam women also commit suicide for reasons other than being accused of adultery. One Manam woman killed herself because she was beaten by her parents-in-law, while another who was beaten and thrown to the ground by her husband suffered "such shame that she [was] led to destroy herself." Wedgwood concludes, "It seems that in Manam suicide is the recognized way whereby a woman (but not a man) can escape from intolerable shame" (1937:420-421).

Wife-beating is a common part of marriage in Kaliai. As I will discuss in detail later, suicide is almost always committed by women and frequently follows an episode of domestic violence in which the woman was beaten by her husband. Before discussing suicide in Kaliai I must first provide context by describing briefly the Kaliai social order, the role women play in Kaliai society, and the attitude expressed by people toward violence in general and wife-beating in particular.

The People of Kaliai

Since 1966, David Counts and I have been conducting anthropological field research among the Lusi-speaking people of the Kaliai electoral

district of West New Britain Province, Papua New Guinea. The Lusi-Kaliai live in five villages, populations 75 to 317, located along the northwest coast of West New Britain. The bulk of our fieldwork has been centered in Kandoka, the largest of these villages. The people are slash-and-burn horticulturists whose systems of descent and residence are normatively patrilineal and virilocal. There is no ranked hierarchy and no formally inherited office among the Lusi-Kaliai, but people are not equal. Power differences exist on the basis of age, sex, and birth order. A firstborn male has a power advantage over women and younger men, and a man ordinarily has authority over his wife, daughters, and other female relatives--especially younger ones. His ability to use this advantage, however, is restricted by a number of conditions, including: idiosyncratic differences in personality and character that, combined with birth order and relative age, may permit a strong-willed woman to issue orders to her younger male siblings; supernatural sanctions against the abuse of power; local and provincial courts that a weaker person may call on in a dispute; the willingness of an abused person's kin to support and defend her; and the possibility of suicide.

Although Lusi-Kaliai norms stress the authority and dominance of men, women are not oppressed. They are not isolated from the rest of society, even during menstruation or after childbirth when their body fluids are considered to be contaminating and dangerous to health, their own included. Women (even unmarried girls) own property and have control over the pandanus mats they weave and the money they earn from copra they prepare from their palms. Mixed-sex groups of children play and attend school together and live together in a household with their parents until boys undergo a ceremony of penile superincision and move into the men's house, where they live until marriage.

Marriage

Bride-wealth is given at marriage. Marriages are ideally arranged by parents, but this is done successfully only with the approval of the young couple. I know of a few cases in which a girl's father unsuccessfully attempted to force her to marry against her will, but it is much more common for a couple's parents to negotiate the details of marriage payment after the bride and groom have already made their choice and often after the woman is pregnant.

After marriage a Lusi-Kaliai woman is in an ambiguous situation, She remains a member of her own kin group with all the duties and

obligations of kin-group membership if she resides nearby. She expects, for example, to be called on by her kinsmen to contribute wealth on their behalf at ceremonial exchanges. Postmarital residence, however, is ideally virilocal and a woman may move many hours'--or even days'--journey from her relatives. In this case she may contribute little to the needs of her kinsmen, prompting some people to argue that the fruit of a married woman's labor will inevitably benefit only her husband's kin group where her interests and those of her children lie, For this reason, they say, a family is foolish to spend its resources to educate girls past the elementary level. People also use this rationale to support the contention that married women should not have inheritance rights in the property of their patrikin group--specifically, that married women should not have the right to inherit and make copra from the coconut palms planted by their parents. This issue--an important one because copra is the major cash crop and, therefore, the most important source of money in Kaliai--has been the subject of public dispute and is one on which people divide according to their interest in each particular case rather than their gender. In the one case I know of, in which a married woman whose inheritance rights were challenged threatened to take the dispute to government officials for settlement, the matter was settled informally in her favor without her going to court (David Counts and Dorothy Counts 1974).

If a couple is married only by custom and not by Roman Catholic ceremony, divorce by mutual consent is not difficult. The couple stop living together and the woman returns to her home community if she has been residing away. If the couple has no children, then the groom's family attempts to negotiate for a return of some of the bride-wealth gifts. If, however, there are children they remain with their father after they are weaned.

There seems to be no circumstance under either custom or provincial law in which a divorced woman can claim custody of her children. If, for instance, a married man takes a lover or brings home a second wife, his actions do not constitute grounds whereby his first wife may divorce him and maintain custody of their children. Conversely, if she has an affair, moves in with another man, or leaves her husband because he has taken a second wife, he has the right both to divorce her and to keep their children. This fact--that a woman who leaves her husband also loses rights over her children--limits the option of a mother of dependent children to end a violent marriage, especially if her natal home is a long distance from her husband's residence.

Female Production

Although the Lusi-Kaliai assign tasks on the basis of gender, sexual specialization of labor in daily subsistence activities is a pragmatic organizing principle and not a matter of doctrine. Very few jobs that the people of one gender do could not, in an emergency, be done by the other. For example, the single task that is definitive of Lusi-Kaliai womanhood is the cooking of food. A woman's primary responsibility is to feed the men and children who are dependent on her; this is so important that people maintain that a woman's tie to her children is created by her nurturance of them rather than by her sharing vital substance with them or bearing them. Persons wishing to adopt a child must first feed that child by bringing preferred foods to its pregnant mother. Later, after it is weaned, its birth mother gently encourages the child to move into its adoptive household by instructing it to "Go ask your mother for food" when it is hungry (Dorothy Counts and David Counts 1983; Counts 1985). A woman's failure to cook for husband or children is legitimate cause for her husband to beat her. Nevertheless, men know how to prepare food and some are ready and willing to do so, As one woman explained, "If I'm working in the garden and he knows I'll come home late and tired, he has the meal ready when I return."

Women also play a vital role in producing the wealth items that are essential both in the internal system of distribution and exchange and in the external system of trade. Although they receive no public recognition for their contributions, and men often deny any knowledge of their activities, the work of women is critical for the conduct of any ceremony. Three items--pigs, shell money, and pandanas mats--are required for distribution at marriage, when a father affiliates his children to his patrikin group, and for mortuary distributions, as well as for external trade. Women are primarily responsible for raising pigs, they do most of the manufacture of the fine shell beads that are strung and distributed as shell currency, and they are the sole producers of pandanas mats. Without the cooperation of women there would be no wealth to distribute.

Violence in the Society

I do not want to give the erroneous impression that domestic violence is an everyday occurrence for most Lusi-Kaliai families, or that the village resembles a battleground. Laughter and cooperation are more charac-

teristic of village life than are anger and strife, Nevertheless, family violence is not an uncommon aspect of community life: parents strike children, co-wives fight, and wives and husbands hit one another. These episodes do not often result in physical injury or bloodshed, for others usually intervene to prevent serious harm. While rare, occasionally a woman attacks her husband, and in some circumstances a women's violent behavior is considered to be legitimate. She is justified in physically attacking her husband if he violates her marital rights by having an adulterous affair or if he brings home a second wife. In this situation women usually attack with weapons--axes, bush knives, or boards. An angry wife brandishing a weapon may knock her husband unconscious or cause him to flee the village in fear for his life. When this occurs, the sympathy of both men and women seems to be with the wife while the man is an object of ridicule. Such men are said to have asked for, and to roundly deserve, the treatment they receive. The one attempted suicide by a male for which I have data followed an episode in which his wife chased him out of the village with an axe after he announced his intention to take as a second wife a woman with whom he had been conducting an affair and who was pregnant with his child. Friends found him weeping and preparing fish poison to drink and escorted him back to the village. He did not marry the second woman.

It is much more common for husbands to strike their wives. My consultants generalize that "some" husbands beat their wives frequently while "all" men hit their wives occasionally. This is a normative rather than a statistical statement, for in fact some men are not violent. Women married to these gentle men say their husbands are exceptional and consider themselves to be fortunate that their men do not strike them even when they have reason to do so.

Just as public opinion supports violent anger (but not desertion) by a woman whose husband has taken a new sexual partner, both women and men uphold the right of a husband to hit his wife for cause. The justifications are similar to those discussed by the Law Reform Commission of Papua New Guinea (Toft 1985). He has the right (even the duty) to hit her if she flirts with other men or commits adultery; if she fails to meet her domestic obligations; if she draws blood in punishing his children; if she behaves in a way that publicly shames or insults him or his kin; if she fails to assist him in meeting his ceremonial obligations; if she fights with her co-wives. I have heard women comment that a man who failed to punish his wife for carelessness in her domestic chores was himself responsible for the disheveled state of their household because he did not strike her for neglecting her duties.

Although both women and men accept wife-beating in principle and feel strongly that others should not interfere in marital conflict, there is a point beyond which the violence ceases to be acceptable and becomes abusive. No absolute "rule of thumb" defines abuse. Rather, it is contextually defined in each case according to the perceived offense of the wife, the severity of punishment imposed by the husband, and the willingness of her kin to provide support. Response to a beating provides the best indication of when punishment has become abuse. Abuse has occurred when the wife's kin support her effort to take the matter outside the domestic realm for redress or when others (usually, but not always, her relatives) interfere on her behalf. A woman's relatives will likely intervene if her husband publicly exposes her genitals, kicks her as though she were a dog, draws blood, strikes her with a weapon larger than a small stick, or prolongs the beating. Others, even his kin, may try to stop a beating if they fear it is potentially maiming or life-threatening. Regardless of the severity of the punishment, however, a major factor in their decision to interfere is whether others consider the wife to be guilty of the offense for which she is beaten. In one case, for instance, the relatives of a woman whose husband attempted to kill her with an axe for suspected adultery agreed with his assessment of her behavior. Consequently, they not only failed to intervene on her behalf but refused her requests for help in leaving the community.

Alternatives Available to Beaten Women

A number of strategies are available to a woman who considers herself to have been unjustly or excessively beaten. Many require the support of her family; all have serious limitations.

She may fight back. This option is rarely chosen: by responding with violence a woman risks losing the support of her own relatives and, consequently, she may receive more severe punishment or public shaming in return. One woman who struck back at her husband was knocked unconscious by him and later was publicly enjoined by masked spirit-beings from retaliating in the future. Her husband explained that he had called for the ceremony because he feared that the next time he would lose control and kill her. She responded by attempting suicide following her next beating. Her action apparently influenced her husbands behavior: although she continued fighting with her co-wife, her husband did not again publicly shame her and herefrained from beating her again for more than a year.

A woman who is severely or unjustly beaten may passively accept the

punishment. Her kin may then feel anger or pity for her plight and physically attack her husband, shame him, or demand compensation. If her relatives do not intervene, she may leave her husband and either return to her own kin or, as a last resort, take a lover or second husband. This option has two shortcomings. First, her relatives may not be willing to accept her back because they are reluctant to return the brideprice or because they fear retribution by her husband. Second, if she takes a lover she will likely lose her family's support and she will lose custody of her children, a cost that many women are unwilling to bear.

She may take the dispute to the public arena and charge her husband before court officials. While a few women take this option, it is an alternative that has limited chance of success. As Chowning observes, "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" (1985:88). Bradley's observation that Tolai women "do not usually attempt court action unless they have sympathetic support from their fathers or male relatives'" (1985:55) is also true for the Lusi-Kaliai. If the woman's action is successful the man will be fined, jailed, or both. This costs his family scarce cash resources and deprives them of his labor. If a wife lacks her kinsmen's support, she and her children may thus suffer real hardship. Also, she faces reprisal from an angry husband and, perhaps, criticism from her family and neighbors as well.

A woman may expose her husband to menstrual blood contamination in order to cause respiratory illness or death, or she may collect his hair, cigarette butts, or other "dirty" for use in sorcery. Although women attributed a number of illnesses and deaths to either menstrual contamination or sorcery, and they assured me that these are options if a woman cannot tolerate further beatings, none admitted to using either alternative herself.

She may commit suicide. My study found a high proportion of the completed suicides (five of twelve) occurred shortly after the woman had been beaten by her husband (Counts 1987, 1988). Fortunately, most beaten wives do not commit suicide and a woman's decision to kill herself is a complex one in which the beating is only one component, The second quotation beginning this essay was made by my consultant when we were discussing a severe beating that we had both witnessed. In my informant's opinion, the way in which a woman is beaten can result in her suicide. A woman who is beaten unjustly and who is struck repeatedly when she attempts to speak has *ailolo sasi* (literally, "a bad stomach"; self-pity), a condition that is a mixture of anger, shame, and

despair. This condition, if it is not relieved either by more gentle treatment from her husband or support by her relatives, may result in a woman's suicide,

Although the two attempted Kaliai suicides already described were preceded by spousal violence, they were apparently not motivated by the severity of the abuse. Rather they were said to be precipitated by feelings of shame, anger, frustration, and a determination to change the spouse's unacceptable behavior.

The vignettes below are brief accounts of suicides that followed episodes of wife-beating. Once again, violence was only one in a complex of factors that led to the death.

Sharon

In 1979 Sharon, the pregnant mother of eight children, drank a bottle of household bleach after a violent: quarrel with Paul, her husband. Sharon's death was sudden and did not follow the Kaliai rules of suicide (see below, p. 164). She gave no warning, made no advance preparations, and made no accusations of culpability as she died. As a result her death was anomalous and a subject of controversy. Most villagers concluded that her suicide was precipitated by her feelings of guilt and shame over her ongoing affair with her husband's classificatory brother, a relationship that, in Kaliai, is analogous to incest.[3] The people who interpreted her death in this way thought Sharon's husband was justified in beating her and did not consider him to be responsible for her suicide. Others, however, held him to be culpable, and a few even suspected him of forcing her to drink the bleach and argued that he was guilty of homicide. Although Paul paid compensation to her parents, Sharon's grieving father was convinced of her husband's culpability and reportedly engaged a sorcerer to kill him. Shortly after Paul died in 1984, his kinsmen convened a public moot where the sorcerer admitted responsibility for the death.

Tomas

Sometimes the person to commit suicide following an episode of wife-beating is not the woman. The death of Tomas occurred many years ago and was related to me in 1966 by his then-elderly son. The suicide was precipitated by an episode of domestic violence in which Tomas beat one of his wives for fighting with the other. The male relatives of the beaten wife publicly rebuked Tomas for the beating, thereby shaming

him. Tomas distributed pigs to them and then drank rotenone fish poison in the presence of his wives and children. The abused wife's kin were held culpable for Tomas's suicide and paid compensation to his relatives. Tomas's descendants attribute his death to a combination of shame at being publicly berated by his in-laws and sorcery that results in suicidal depression.

Galiki

Galiki, a woman from a distant village, married Akono and bore him several children. Akono was absent from the village for long periods, and although Galiki's behavior was reported to be irreproachable, he nevertheless believed that she was conducting an affair during his absence. The weekend before her death the two fought constantly. On Monday, after a trip to the gardens to gather food, Galiki was sitting in her cookhouse preparing sweet potatoes for her children's supper. Suddenly she left the house crying, "Help me! I'm dying." She staggered into the village and fell unconscious. People attempted to force her to drink sweetened milk and tossed her in a hunting net, hoping to cause her to vomit the poison she was believed to have taken, but she never regained consciousness and was soon dead. The nurse from the Kaliai Health Centre examined Galiki's body and listed her death as suicide. All my consultants agree to the above outline of events. Other circumstances surrounding her death are, however, controversial and a matter of interpretation. The various explanations are as follows:

1. Akono's close relatives and affines, including witnesses to Galiki's last words, either did not comment on the beatings or maintained that the conflict between the two was mutual and that neither party was blameless. They stressed that Galiki's death was a suicide and that her dying words were that she had consumed poison--either rotenone fish poison or household bleach mixed with rotenone. They said that she had made statements the previous day indicating she was planning to kill herself, but that no one had realized the significance of her remarks until too late. They attributed no culpability for her death but rather suggested it demonstrated the instability and unpredictability of women. The first quotation with which I began this essay is from a statement made by one of these informants.

2. Persons distantly related to Akono agreed that Galiki had taken poison, but they disagreed whether she had taken rotenone, bleach, an overdose of chloroquine phosphate tablets, or a mixture of the chemicals. Some people emphasized the brutality of the beatings Galiki suf-

fered before her death; among other things Akono dragged her through their compound exposing her genitals to her male affines, threw her down the steps of their house to the ground, and tried to drown her. These people recounted that Akono's abuse of Galiki was so severe and humiliating that a number of people--including neighbors, Akono's own relatives, and village officials--attempted to intervene on Galiki's behalf, even though they were not her kin. Akono rejected their efforts and drove them away either with threats or by shaming them--suggesting, for example, that his brothers wished to interfere because they lusted after Galiki. One woman commented that she and other women had gone to mourn Galiki only briefly because they were offended by Akono's display of grief: " 'Why are you crying?' we asked ourselves. 'You killed her!' " This same woman also related that shortly after Galiki's death her ghost was seen in another village asking for paper so she could write a letter to Akono and his new wife. When I asked if Akono was intending to marry again, my informant responded that she did not know (implying that Galiki's ghost did), and added that Akono must be planning to remarry or he would not have abused Galiki so. My consultants interpreted the ghost's message as an unambiguous statement by Galiki that Akono was culpable for her suicide.

3. Persons not related to Akono disagreed with the interpretation of suicide. In their opinion, Galiki died as a result of the beatings. They emphasized the brutality of Akono's abuse of her and noted that the odor of neither bleach nor fish poison (both strong and unmistakable smells) was on Galiki's breath at the time of her death. They recounted that as she was tossed in the net Galiki bled profusely from her nose and mouth, and observed that her skin was black all over. Further, when the village women dressed her body for burial they found that it was covered with welts, bruises, and open cuts. These physical manifestations, they concluded, were inconsistent with the instances of death by poison that they had previously witnessed but were those of a person who had been beaten until she suffered fatal injuries. They charged that no one but Akono's close relatives had actually heard Galiki say that she had drunk poison; others had reported that after her initial cry, "Help me! I'm dying," she was unable to speak and that she could only point to her abdomen before losing consciousness. They suspected that Akono's kin conspired to say that Galiki died of drinking poison to protect him from legal prosecution.

Two points must be clarified here. First, Akono accepted culpability for Galiki's suicide and began making reparation payments to her relatives shortly after her death. Second, although traditional norms do not

make a significant distinction between physical homicide and the culpable death that occurs when a person is driven to kill herself (being "killed with talk" is the way it is often expressed), the Papua New Guinea legal code does. Culpability for suicide is not recognized as a criminal offense by national law. Homicide is. Although he accepted responsibility for his wife's suicide and made compensation to her kin for it, Akono was not charged in the courts with homicide and he did not face the penalty of long imprisonment that the state would exact if he were found guilty. Villagers certainly recognize that Akono has suffered the lesser of the two penalties and many of those who are not his close relatives are not satisfied that he has been held culpable for the correct offense.

Suicide and Revenge

Why do some Kaliai respond to abuse by inflicting fatal violence on themselves? The answer is complex, but the decision to kill oneself seems to be triggered by a number of factors that include the violence suffered, intolerable shame that results either from the violence or from the controversy of which the violence is a part, and a desire for revenge that the sufferer is unable to exact in any other way.

In my earlier research on suicide among the Lusi-Kaliai, I have interpreted it as a culturally recognized act that permits politically powerless persons to affect the behavior of the more powerful members of their society, or at least allows them revenge on those who have made their lives intolerable (Counts 1980, 1984, 1987, 1988; Dorothy Counts and David Counts 1983, 1984). Suicide provides an abused wife with a means for vengeance because she knows that if she follows the rules for committing suicide, she can expect her surviving kin to seek revenge, the payment of compensation from the persons who drove her to her death, or both. The rules governing a meaningful suicide are implicit in the myths, legends, and folk tales of Kaliai and are communicated at story-telling and gossip sessions, where people discuss past suicides and evaluate the consequences. These rules are as follows:

1. A person who intends to kill herself should warn others of her intent (by destroying her personal possessions, for example) rather than performing the act impulsively or in secret.
2. She should dress herself in her finest clothing.
3. She should kill herself in the presence of others or where they will be certain to find her body.
4. She should communicate to others the identity of the individual(s)

responsible for her death. She may, for instance, address a letter to the guilty party telling him of her death or she may call his name as she drinks poison. This message is so important for a meaningful suicide that, as we have seen in the case study of Galiki, it may even be communicated by the suicide's ghost.

Galiki's death was an ambiguous one, for she did not follow these rules for suicide." Specifically, she did not prepare for her death by destroying her property and dressing in her finery. Instead she was apparently engaged in an ordinary household task when she, impulsively, quit her work and drank poison. Also, she left no clear message assigning culpability for her death. There were reportedly aspects of her behavior that are consistent with a culturally patterned and meaningful suicide. These include her (ignored) statement indicating her intent to kill herself made the day before her death, her words that she had consumed poison, and the appearance of her ghost to give a message to Akono, thereby pointing to his guilt. Unfortunately, these acts were not widely witnessed and their reality is controversial. Because the manner of Galiki's death was ambiguous, people could not agree on how to interpret it and remain divided as to whether she killed herself or died as a result of the beatings.

If a suicidal person follows the rules, she can reasonably expect her kin and friends to consider her to be the victim of homicide and, even if they were indifferent to her suffering before her death, to quickly coalesce into a grieving group anxious to see justice done. If they do not avenge her death, her survivors expect to see her ghost wandering near the edge of the village at dusk, reminding them that they have not done their duty. Following a suicide, the person held culpable for the death is potentially in physical danger, for the suicide's kin may either physically attack him or engage a sorcerer to kill him. At the very least he must expect to pay a large compensation to the survivors, and even then he lives in fear that the angry, grieving relatives may contract for his death by sorcery. As Paul's fate demonstrates, that fear is not an unreasonable one.

Conclusion

While wife-beating is part of family life in Kaliai, a fine line separates acceptable punishment from abusive violence that either maims or kills or that causes the woman intolerable shame. A woman who suffers abuse of this sort may respond in one of a number of ways. She may engage in self-help and reciprocate either with violence of her own or

by placing menstrual blood in her husband's food in the hope of making him fatally ill, Both these options carry considerable risk for the woman. If she can expect sympathy and support from her relatives and if they live nearby, she may ask for their intervention, go home to her family, or take her husband to court. Or she may kill herself. For the Lusi-Kaliai of West New Britain, suicide is an institutionalized and culturally recognized alternative for those who are abused, shamed and powerless, permitting them to shift the burden of humiliation from themselves to their tormentors and enjoy some measure of vengeance against those who drove them to the act.

As Levinson has observed, growing evidence indicates that family violence may directly cause other types of violence (1989:50-51). Specifically, data cited in this article show that wife-beating may be followed by suicide, which in turn may be followed by retribution against those held culpable for the death--thereby extending domestic conflict into the public domain where it must be dealt with by the society as a whole.

NOTES

The research on which this essay is based was supported in 1966-1967 by predoctoral research grants from the U.S. National Science Foundation and by Southern Illinois University, Research support was provided in 1971 by the University of Waterloo and the Wenner-Gren Foundation, in 1975-1976 by the Canada Council and the University of Waterloo, and in 1981 and 1985 by the University of Waterloo and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. I wish to thank Drs. Judith Brown, Ann Chowning, and David Counts for critical comments on drafts of this article. An earlier version was delivered at the April 1986 meeting of the American Association of Suicidology in Atlanta.

1. There are brief notes on this topic by Erchak (1984) and Gibbs (1984) in *Current Anthropology;* a cross-cultural analysis of wife-beating, using data from ethnographies by women who used women as primary informants, is also available (Campbell 1986); comparative articles by Masamura (1979), Lester (1980), and Levinson (1983,1988); and most recently a volume by Levinson (1989), who uses data on ninety societies from the Human Relations Area Files to test theories of domestic violence.

2. See Epstein 1984 for an insightful discussion of the effects of shame in Melanesia.

3. This death and the sexual tabu broken by Sharon are described more fully in David Counts and Dorothy Counts 1983-1984, Dorothy Counts and David Counts 1984, and in Counts 1988.

4. Galiki was an outsider in her husbands village, being from a distant village and a different language group. It may be that her failure to follow the Kaliai rules of suicide was due to ignorance or because the rules of her culture were different.

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