PERSON, ASSERTION, AND MARRIAGE: ON THE NATURE OF HOUSEHOLD VIOLENCE IN BUN

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The people of Bun, a small village on the Yuat River in East Sepik Province, Papua New Guinea, are assertive and volatile. Violence is not infrequent: it occurs between men, between women, and between women and men, between generations of adults as well as between adults and children. To understand violence within the household, it is necessary to examine a complex interaction of several factors and not search for any simple cause-and-effect relationship. It is not simply that, for example, frustration generates aggression, or that increasing stress is displaced into the nuclear family, or that warriors must be generally aggressive if the society is to survive. Although all of these may be contributory, searching for one simple cause for a complex phenomenon is inadequate.

Nor is it possible to seek causes on only one analytical level: ideological, social, and affective factors are all relevant. Specifically, the meaning and incidence of household violence[1] cannot be understood without examining the indigenous conception of person (a cultural structuring), ethos and affect (psychological factors), and social process itself (kinship, power, and politics). The first section of this article describes the Bun ethos in general, touching on the precolonial period but stressing contemporary society. Ethos and affect--emotional and psychological predispositions and tendencies that relate directly to worldview and to the production of violence--are treated. The second section describes Bun views of the world with a particular focus on the structuring of the

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person, for the process whereby personhood is achieved is seminal in the generation of violence. In the final section, the incidence of household violence is examined and examples analyzed.

One introductory note is necessary: it is always important to know how cultural constructions and categories help shape and form events as well as how events can be interpreted and given meaning by those cultural structures. It is important, for example, to know how the Bun themselves conceive of violence, what connotations such a concept might have for them, indeed if they have such a category at all. Although I do not subscribe to the excessively relativistic doctrine that we cannot impose our category of violence on another society but must follow the indigenous one, it is essential to be aware of the dangers of subtle ethnocentrism when analyzing any phenomenon, especially an emotion-laden one such as domestic violence. It is too easy to fall back on to our own cultural theories of causality--particularly the old frustration-aggression hypothesis (Dollard et al. 1939) and the like-and not examine what is before us.[2]

On Violence and Ethos

The Yuat River is a swift-flowing tributary of the Sepik that descends from the Jimi region of the Highlands. In its upper and middle reaches, where Bun is located, it flows through tropical rainforest interspersed with sago swamp and marshy grassland. The land is adequate for swidden gardens to yield a variety of crops; the main staples of sago and fish are plentiful. Some hunting is also still successful.

The Bun inhabit a single, small village (Bun) directly upriver from the people Mead (1963) described as the Mundugumor (today known as the Biwat). In many ways the two are very similar. Although the Run traditionally had matrilineal descent while the Mundugumor were patrilineal, descent as a social organizational principle was muted in both places while the process of exchange was prominent (see Mead 1963; McDowell 1976, 1977, 1978a, 1978b, 1984a, 1985, 1987, n.d.). Both peoples practiced brother-sister exchange marriage, vested significant amounts of interest in a special ritual relationship that involved feasting, and incorporated kin into exchange relationships that continued down generations. Many ritual foci were similar, for example, on initiation and on long-yam fertility. Leadership was achieved: men demonstrated their strength through ritual knowledge, successful manipulation of dyadic exchange relations, and fierceness in warfare.

Perhaps the most striking similarity between the Bun and Mundugu-

mor is what Bateson (1936) labeled ethos: the emotional tone and tenor of a society, Mead described both. Mundugumor women and men as assertive, violent, volatile people, quick to anger. She noted that the Mundugumor also had a great capacity for joy and generosity as well as other traits Westerners might interpret as positive, but it was the violence, particularly in the context of childrearing, that she emphasized.[3]

If one acknowledges the joyful side along with the more aggressive one, then the Bun ethos is very similar to their downriver neighbors. Both women and men tend to be assertive, volatile, and quick to defend themselves.[4] Strength is a major value and virtue, and one of the most obvious ways to demonstrate strength is through physical violence. There are other ways, such as sponsoring large and successful feasts, maintaining order in one's own orbit of influence, provisioning one's family well, demonstrating wisdom, and, traditionally, ritual power. Physical violence, however, plays an important role in self assertion. It is a typical reaction to insult and frustration, an outgrowth of anger; it is a natural response to challenges to one's strength. Although some ritual challenges exist that allow an individual to demonstrate strength, to be called weak or inferior provokes anger, which often escalates from verbal abuse to physical violence. While people expect violence to be controlled when directed at those of one's own community, they perceive anger and violence as natural and normal.[5]

The expression of anger through physical aggression is a theme in Bun socialization. Children learn that violence is frequently the proper response when those in one's environment challenge or frustrate, I witnessed a five-year-old boy steal a cigar from his three-year-old sister, who whacked him over the head with a machete. The parents punished only the boy because he had stolen what did not belong to him. Children's play groups are characterized by squabbling that often escalates to violence, and older siblings hit younger siblings who are in their care with regularity. Parents often punish children by hitting them, throwing things at them, lashing out in various ways, almost always in anger.

What is known about Bun before colonialism indicates that physical violence was pervasive before 1920, especially in the arena of intervillage relations.[6] Warfare was conducted between villages; alliances were unstable and precarious. Treachery and stealth were admired, and the aim of a raid was to kill as many enemy as possible without losing any of one's own people. There was no attempt here to achieve balance, nor does it seem that there were norms, rules, or values that acted as sanctions against excessive violence. A counterbalancing strength on the part of an enemy was perhaps the major braking mechanism that muted vio-

lence. The most daring men, the most astute and courageous and successful in warfare, were also the most admired.

Intervillage warfare ceased long ago at the insistence of pre-World War I colonial administrators, and relations between villages are currently peaceful, Violence between villages today is usually the result of a quarrel between individuals and their associated kin. Only occasionally are disputes between villages phrased as between communities, and because of the threat of externally imposed sanctions, rarely do these disputes today escalate into physical violence.

On Person and Violence

Violence within the community is caused by essentially the same things today as before colonialism: challenges to, and the need to assert, one's strength and autonomy. Autonomy and control are issues faced by people everywhere, but they seem to be especially significant ones in Melanesia.[7] Elsewhere I have described how the need to assert personal autonomy is a central cultural and psychological issue in Bun: one must prove one's autonomy while simultaneously participating in social relations that always impair one's desired freedom (McDowell 1978a, 1980, 1984b). The Bun solve this dilemma by basing all internal relations on balanced and symmetrical exchange. Autonomy is preserved by not allowing another to control or to be superior; one remains equal and unindebted. If one escapes being controlled by another, avenges insults and avoids shame, and responds to challenges with self-assertion, then he or she achieves personhood. The term *barajik,* which I translate as "human being," encompasses these notions. A *barajik* is one who manages to remain equal and relatively uncontrolled while still participating in social relations.[8]

This conception of person is significantly different from the Western one, which stresses individualism and an acting or core and separate self. Several ethnographers note that Melanesian persons are defined far more relationally and less "individualistically" than Western ones (see, for example, Clay 1986; Gewertz 1984; Read 1955; see also Bellah et al. 1985 for a description of the Western perspective and Burridge 1979 for a contrasting view). A *barajik* is one who handles the delicate balance between autonomy and sociability by executing transactions that allow for both a relational and autonomous self. There exists a slight gender difference in the attainment of personhood: although both women and men must strike a balance between autonomy and relatedness, men stress autonomy more than women (McDowell 1984a). Few Bun fail

completely to achieve personhood, but occasionally someone does. These are people who fall into the familiar category of "rubbish person." It is important to note that much of the process is relative--some people clearly achieve fuller personhood than others or are content to rest with questionable achievement.

One must, in order to accomplish personhood, transact in three separate modes. First, sharing with close kin is required (while, of course, expecting that they share back). In this domain, affect, closeness, and relational ties are emphasized. But to be a person, it is also necessary to transact in two more modes of formal exchange. The first is that of *kamain,* a distant kin tie ritually transformed into an exchange relationship of both material and intangible goods. *Kamain* exchanges must be balanced and equal; if one fails to keep up, shame and a denial of personhood are inevitable. Finally, one must participate in marital exchanges of people, that is, of siblings. Ideally all marriages occur by brother-sister exchange, a transaction in which equality and balance are guaranteed, and the vast majority of marriages are conceived as if they were between brother-sister pairs of classificatory cross-cousins, If a man does not have a sister, he is at a distinct disadvantage, but there are ways in which he can marry anyway (McDowell 1978b). A deeper problem confronts the man who has a sister but somehow loses her, either to his male kin (to execute their marriages) or to a husband who does not reciprocate with a wife for him. In these cases, the challenge to equity runs deep indeed.

Almost all of the violence I witnessed or learned about relates to this tension of being embedded yet autonomous. Although most violence pertains to the realm of marriage exchange (described below), there were other instances, but these too had to do with challenges to strength and being human. I noted only one land dispute. It escalated into physical violence because the two sides had a history of marital disputes and because the insults that began it were ones that challenged people's ability to assert themselves. The physical violence that results from a failure to share food, too, has to do with strength. But refusing to share is rare, for it is an assertion of nonhumanity. Theft is complex because its meaning is situationally defined and interpreted. In cases in which the thief is clearly not a person of strength, stealing can be interpreted as an act of weakness, an inability to produce for oneself. But theft can also convey the message that the rightful owner is of little consequence and nothing to fear. Rather than perceiving a thief as a weak producer, or someone who does not reciprocate as a debtor, the Bun sometimes see his or her activities as assertions of strength, as accusations that the victim is not

worthy of reciprocal relations. People are not foolish: no one steals from the strong, only from the weak.

Honor and shame become central themes when disparaging remarks by another about one's self or one's ancestors are really assertions that one has failed to achieve personhood and is therefore deficient. An old man complained that his daughter had been taken in by another kinsman; she stayed with the younger relative, helped him and was helped by him, and the old man felt abandoned. His anger increased as he began to hurl serious insults at the other man. The younger man tried to ignore him and treat him as a comical figure until the insults became too serious to ignore, and he challenged the old man by questioning the strength of his ancestors. The old man attacked, first with a club and later with a canoe paddle, and in the ensuing scuffle was punched and knocked to the ground. Informants agreed that his shame had forced him to attack; he needed to prove his strength to regain his sense of self and expunge the shame of the challenge.

Clearly this, process--of asserting one's self, achieving personhood by remaining at least equal, maintaining one's autonomy, and avoiding control by others (while simultaneously trying to control them)--is a political process that is deeply intertwined with the acquisition of power. It played a significant role in the traditional political system in which individual men achieved status by maintaining their strength and controlling others in exchanging and feasting as well as in warfare and ritual, The arena in which one demonstrated strength was wider in traditional society, including warfare and intervillage raiding; the arena in which it is manifested today has shrunk. One can, indeed must, demonstrate the ability to maintain equity in the context of the *kamain* relationship. Because formality and respect characterize the tie, it is not appropriate to win too much--the ideal is equity, and people who violate that ideal by trying to outdo their *kamain* are accused of trying to shame these relations, a serious breach of manners and violation of appropriate kin behavior. The relationship between cross-cousins allows for somewhat more leeway. These relatives frequently provoke one another into a series of competitive feasts in which the goal is to provide so much that the others cannot possibly reciprocate (see, for example, McDowell 1982). Business is providing a new means of asserting strength: if one proves one's strength by accumulating money to buy things (such as outboard motors), then one demonstrates strength superior to others. But by far the most significant contemporary arena for proving strength, and in which one's strength is most frequently challenged, is that concerning marital exchange.

On Social and Political Process

Bun ethos, socialization, and personhood help to explain the prevalence of violence, but its pattern must be understood in the sociopolitical context of marriage. Marriage provides the crucible out of which most interpersonal violence between adults emerges. It is within the process of attracting sexual partners and arranging marriages that much of the assertion of self takes place today, and it is within this context that people are frequently frustrated and challenged by others.

Arranging the ideal marriage is enormously complex (see McDowell 1978b for details of some especially complicated cases) and requires detailed planning and a lot of luck. Rarely do plans work smoothly, for the simple reason that seldom are there classificatory cross-cousins of the appropriate age and sex who are *willing* to marry the partner stipulated for them. Although both men and women phrase these exchanges as if brothers exchanged their passive and yielding sisters, the reality is that women rarely marry men they do not like. (Women and men both perceive that, like Collier's [1974] troublemakers, these are idiosyncratic actions of obstreperous women rather than a pattern of resistance to male authority [see McDowell 1984a].) Women assert their autonomy by refusing to marry men to whom their brothers and fathers try to send them and frequently by insisting that they marry men of their own choosing. Men, on the other hand, demonstrate their power when they can by executing what they believe to be appropriate exchanges. The process is made even more complex by the fact that men try to attract hopefully unreciprocated women to them, foiling other men's plans by enticing women who are not appropriate; by so doing they assert their power to attract and control.[9] Maintaining a marriage and maintaining power over one's wife, or maintaining autonomy from one's husband or choosing one's own husband, are serious aspects of marriage that, when individuals' power and autonomy are threatened, can generate interpersonal violence.

Marriage exchanges are then essentially political processes: they involve ways of manifesting and demonstrating personal power. Disputes about these transactions are not located in either a domestic or public sphere because the spheres, although they do exist (see McDowell 1984a), are not clearly differentiated. In fact, it is precisely the process of arranging marriages that provides the most significant overlap of the public and domestic. Marriages are the foundation of domestic life, but their arrangement involves public and very political process.

Violence in Bun, as elsewhere, is not random: it clusters around four

related relationships within which power issues and assertions of self are deeply significant: (1) husband/wife, (2) co-wife/co-wife, (3) sister/brother, and (4) affines or potential affines. The first two relationships are relatively straightforward; understanding the dynamics of the second two is more problematic. Teasing these four out from the larger context in which they occur allows for more careful attention to each, but marriage is a process that involves all of these people, for they are embedded together in a single complex.

Physical violence between husband and wife is commonplace. In just over fourteen months of fieldwork, I recorded thirty incidents of physical violence between spouses, and I am certain many more cases never came to my attention (the total population of the village during this time was approximately 220). Some couples did not fight physically at all during this period, but at least sixteen did. One couple accounted for six of the incidents, two couples fought four times, one couple fought three times, five couples fought twice, and seven couples fought physically only once during this period. The severity of the physical violence varied; in some instances, a person was only struck once and not physically harmed, but in other cases serious physical damage resulted. One woman's ribs were broken, another woman was badly battered, and in one case a man's collarbone was broken. The woman who fought with her husband on at least six separate occasions had obvious cuts and bruises several times.[10]

Although people usually say that a quarrel between husband and wife is their own business, bystanders and kin may interfere for two very different reasons. One is simply that although physical beatings are acceptable, there are limits--excessive damage to another person is not tolerated, and in anger people may go too far. Onlookers usually try to remove weapons to prevent permanent injury or death. The *kamain* relationship can also be relevant here: one should not quarrel with one's spouse in the presence of a *kamain*--to do so induces shame. If the violence is excessive, the *kamain* can take serious action to end it by causing more shame. He or she can throw a net bag between the participants in the quarrel, and they are obligated to cease fighting until they present the *kamain* with a feast.

There is a second reason people interfere in a quarrel between wife and husband, one that intensifies and spreads the physical violence rather than curtails it. People use the occasion of their female relatives' being beaten by their husbands to further quarrels with these men. For example, a man might hit his wife because she did not cook, but then her brother--angry at the husband because of the original marriage

exchange or for an entirely different reason--would, under the pretext of helping his sister, attack the husband. In this way, seemingly constrained domestic quarrels ramify and become larger political events. One such incident occurred prior to my fieldwork. A man wanted to acquire a second wife (his deceased son's wife) and his first wife was furious, not only because he wanted another wife, but because he wanted his own daughter-in-law. He beat her but she was aided quickly by her brother and classificatory son, both of whom had old scores to settle with the husband. In another case, again one I did not witness, a man hit his wife because no food was ready. Her brother, who had opposed their marriage, decided to help his sister, joined the fray to protect her, and hit the husband. Later the husband and his brother went into the bush with this wife's brother, and a tree fell on the wife's brother and killed him. No charges were ever brought, but many people speculated that anger had remained and that he had been murdered by his brothers-in-law.

Although women usually end up the physical victims when they quarrel violently with men, in two cases it was the husband who sustained serious injuries. Women do not always passively accept their husbands' beatings--sometimes, especially if they are very angry or feel that they have a chance to come out ahead, they fight back, and sometimes women initiate the physical aspects of a dispute. In one incident, people were pulling a canoe out of the forest to the shore when the rattan broke, and women who were helping all fell down. One husband made fun of his wife. She became angry about being ridiculed and insulted him and would not cook his dinner. When he tried to calm her down, she stuck a machete into his wrist. Another couple had very dramatic confrontations. In one incident, the husband began to beat his wife, but she grabbed an axe; informants believed that she would have killed him if she had not been prevented. On two occasions, this woman initiated the quarrel and hit her husband, even going after him with a spear. The Bun say that men beat their wives with their hands and feet and that women tend to make use of weapons to defend themselves and to harm their husbands. This perception seems to hold true, but in the case of this axe- and spear-wielding woman, the husband once became so exasperated that he grabbed a piece of oil palm and bashed her over the head with it.

The reasons wives and husbands quarrel are diverse, but all have to do with power issues--who controls whom in the relationship. This may be a truism for violence between spouses of all cultures at some level, but it is in the forefront in Bun. Women often resist new mar-

riages by staying away from their husbands and refusing to behave in general as wives should, and men frequently respond by beating them. One man's marriage had been arranged years before my arrival, and his sister was firmly married to his future wife's brother; he was waiting for this marked bride to mature. He did not wait patiently and, before she was old enough to marry, he had an affair with her mother in an on-again, off-again relationship for about two years; it only ended as the bride gained maturity and the marriage seemed imminent. The bride's mother was disgruntled about the end of the affair and wanted to marry the man herself despite the fact that he was a generation younger and her daughter's marked husband. The bride was young, shy, and easily influenced by her mother, who told her that he would not be a good husband for her and she should resist the plans that had been made for her marriage. Soon after I arrived, the news broke that the impending bride had slept with an attractive and unattached young man. In the ensuing argument, she was badly beaten by her brothers and her young lover was slapped around as well. He paid compensation to her intended husband and the affair ended; it was not clear whether the young man was not seriously interested in marriage with her or if she was not strong enough to forcefully resist the marriage road arranged for her. It was clear that she did not want to marry her marked husband. Helped by her mother's urgings, she resisted passively for months. Because she would not behave as a wife--neither as a sexual nor domestic partner--her husband became angry and frustrated. He beat his own mother, who insulted him about the situation, and tried to seduce his wife's sister but was caught and had to pay compensation. He was urged by various people to persist in his bond with the recalcitrant bride and did so, but at a high cost to her: I recorded four separate occasions on which he beat her for not behaving as she should. She had no support from relatives, other than her trouble-making mother, and eventually gave in. (Note here that although I use this case to examine husband-wife violence, it could also serve as an example of brother-sister violence, adultery, and even mother-adult son violence.)

Men's stated reason for hitting their wives is frequently that the wife did not prepare food or did not work, the implication being that she was off doing what she wanted to do rather than what her husband thought she should be doing. In the case of the husband with the broken collar-hone, the ostensible reason his wife hit him with a log was that he wanted to play cards while she wanted him to help in the garden. On two occasions, husbands complained that their wives were not adequately caring for children and deserved to be beaten for that reason.

Sexual and other sorts of jealousy, however, are probably the most important causes of violence between spouses. A husband's belief that his wife may be committing adultery often goads him into violence against her. Women get angry and jealous of co-wives and potential co-wives (and their husbands' adulteries). When they do so, they insult their husbands and provoke, if not initiate, the violence. The woman who had broken ribs as the result of a kick from her husband had accused him in obscene and insulting terms of spending all his money on women while he was away working; she knew that such an insult would provoke him--and only regretted that he responded so fast that she did not have a chance to defend herself. When a man indicates that he may be getting a co-wife (especially if he is having an affair with an eligible woman), wives complain, refuse to cooperate, and generally make their displeasure clear. They often initiate or provoke violence and make life so miserable that the men give up on their polygynous plans.

Another significant way in which women fight back against the potential acquisition of additional wives is by taking lovers of their own and eventually causing such disruption that divorce is the only solution. They know that beatings will occur in the process, but some seem willing to pay that price, The root of one complex case was a woman's unwillingness to accept a particular co-wife. She made her displeasure known, and her husband avoided the conflict by signing on as a coastal plantation worker for two years. When he returned, his new wife was still waiting for him, but his first wife was having an affair with another man and seemed fairly committed to him.[11] The husband was furious and demanded that she return to him and that he be paid compensation. During the first of several village moots to discuss the case, the wife was severely beaten by her brothers for her behavior; one of these brothers had used her to execute his own marriage and feared that a divorce would undo it, The adultery-committing couple paid compensation and it appeared that the wife returned to her husband, but she was obviously dissatisfied with the outcome. She continued to meet with her lover despite all attempts to keep them apart. The woman was beaten severely by her husband, while her lover was struck by both her husband and his own mother's brother. After her pregnancy was announced, the husband beat the lover in front of the latter's own relatives, who did nothing to protect him. He also tried to beat the wife again, muttering that he would kill her this time, but was prevented from doing so by bystanders. The participants recognized an impasse and took the case to the colonial court in Angoram.[12]

Women do not like to share husbands and do whatever they can to

prevent their husbands from acquiring additional wives. One man was having an affair with an older woman, and he was clearly thinking about marrying her. His second wife, favored and beautiful, was deeply resentful and expressed her resentment frequently by insulting him, refusing to cook, and being obstinant in various ways (and was beaten by her husband for it; this is the couple who fought at least six times). After one particularly nasty beating, she became enraged and attacked her husband's lover with an axe, nearly fracturing her skull. The husband abandoned thoughts of acquiring a third wife.

Disputes between husband and wife and between co-wives are ethnographically commonplace. The pivotal importance of brother-sister exchange marriage and individuals' attempts to assert themselves within the context of such marriage exchanges generate two additional dyads in which violence is prevalent in Bun: between brother and sister and between affines (or potential affines).

If executed properly, a brother-sister exchange marriage results in two married couples, closely connected to one another. Ideally such affines cooperate and support one another in disputes. When the marriages are executed smoothly and with little acrimony, good relations usually are the rule. However, few marriages are arranged and carried out with no trouble; in fact, despite the public ideology that men arrange marriages for themselves and their sons and their sisters' sons, the reality is that these exchanges are, as often as not, conflict-ridden. And because of these conflicts, the relations among the major participants are acrimonious and sometimes violent.

The brother-sister tie is supposed to be a close one, and in general it is.[13] The tie is especially close with the sibling with whom one participated in a marriage exchange, A woman gives food to such a brother regularly and without question; a man provides meat to his marked sister, often over the protests of his wife. But brother-sister pairs often clash violently about arranging marriages. Most typically, the brother (with his senior male kin) works out a marriage road for himself and his sister without consulting her; when she hears of the plans and learns the identity of her intended husband, she balks and refuses to marry accordingly. She can make her intentions known simply by announcing her refusal. If her relatives ignore her wishes and go ahead with the marriages, she simply refuses to behave like a wife. Not infrequently she already has a lover she prefers to marry; if so, she makes this affair known publicly and by so doing forces her relatives to deal with her desires in the public arena of a village moot. If she is strong enough--accepting the beatings given to her primarily by her brothers--then her

will usually prevails.[14] Some women, however, are not strong enough and acquiesce to the demands of their relatives.

Brothers beat their sisters for other reasons, but most have to do with marriage. Violence associated with adultery is best interpreted in this context because adultery indicates a desire for divorce and the threat to the earlier arranged marriages, not just a violation or theft of rights of sexual access. Thus some women who commit adultery are beaten by their brothers as well as their husbands. Of the six cases of brother-sister violence that occurred during the period of my fieldwork, four were concerned with arranging initial marriages and two with the threat of adultery to already-existing marriages. Moots are held ostensibly to settle such disputes, but anger flares and violence erupts. I never saw a woman try to fight back in this context, but informants told me of other cases in which women did defend themselves. Men assert their desires and attempt to control their sisters; women resist control and assert their autonomy in choosing a spouse or terminating a marriage.

Men try to assert themselves in the marriage context in an additional way: they attempt to attract women without laying the necessary groundwork for an exchange. They engage in sexual affairs in the hope that they can acquire a wife (or additional wives), and sometimes they are successful. But their attempted seductions of women have a price: the woman's brothers resent what they perceive to be theft of their rights to the woman, and their resentment erupts in physical violence. Even if marriages are eventually arranged, conflict and animosity remain because seductions are interpreted as sister stealing. Sisters are beaten, but so also are their lovers despite the fact that lovers transform into affines with some regularity. It seems appropriate, then, to include certain kinds of violence between affines or potential affines here as well.

Most such violence occurs between men, as in cases of brothers beating their sisters' lovers. But not all is between men--sometimes women get involved in attempts to protect what they perceive to be their siblings' rights. Two brothers from another village married in Bun and brought sisters to exchange for their wives. One of these sisters ended up in an incorrect marriage, and, what was even worse, when her husband died she married her deceased husband's father. Her brothers were furious with her and especially with her second husband, but they were unable to do anything about it. They brought another sister to the village to replace the one who had gone astray, and her intended husband waited for her to mature. When it was discovered that she was having an affair with the son of the man who had stolen their other sister, the

brothers were again furious. They beat the young man, but he was defended by his brothers; the conflict ramified through a larger network as others joined the fray to support a relative. Women participated in this fight as well: both of the wives of the in-married brothers, who were in fact sisters, feared that their brother was going to be done out of a wife by the same people who had cheated him before. One of the wives attacked the young man's mother for hiding him and his actions from public view; the other attacked the young woman, their brother's potential wife.

Summary

Violence among kin in Bun must be understood as a part of the process by which the Bun define themselves and achieve personhood. When personhood is threatened, when autonomy is in jeopardy, or when accusations of inferiority and therefore inhumanity are made, then one must assert oneself and thereby demonstrate humanity. Establishing and situating the self as a person is culturally meaningful, but it is also the foundation of political process and the generation of power over others. Physical violence is directed at those who frustrate, who challenge, who evade, who attempt to control, and as such it is an inherent part of the political process as well. Because arranging and maintaining marriages are the central ways in which autonomy is achieved but also threatened, more violence occurs in this context than in any other contemporary arena.

NOTES

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1. I use the phrase "household violence" here to avoid the more common expression "domestic violence." In Bun, the domestic and public realms are not clearly delineated, and in fact this kind of violence straddles the line between these two potential domains. See the discussion below about arranging marriages for examples.

2. Not being careful can result in erroneous analyses. For example, in a recent article the historian Denoon notes the rise of domestic violence in contemporary Papua New Guinea,

and he ponders on its cause(s): "it seems permissible to speculate that there is a knot of problems inherited from the past, exacerbated during the twentieth century, constituting the most diffuse social tension confronting Papua New Guinea society. How might we account for reluctance or rebelliousness against household authority on such a scale as to provoke such persistent violence?" (1987:59). One cannot disagree with the speculation that there may be "a knot of problems" from the past made worse by contemporary events or that domestic violence may be the most "diffuse social tension" in this polity today. But the second sentence implies that to understand domestic violence, one should look to see what makes the *victims* do such things! Why indeed do women rebel and force their husbands to beat them? (Denoon has some suggestions, all of which relate to excessive stress on, and the lack of alternative outlets for, women in contemporary Papua New Guinea [1987:59-60].) Blaming the victim is a Western ideological twist that only excuses analysts from looking at more difficult and complex relationships and directs attention away from too many contributing factors. Although blaming women and children for rebelling may also be an indigenous male perspective, a far more encompassing and comprehensive understanding (in other societies as well as our own) is needed.

3. For a discussion of Mead's work on the Mundugumor and an evaluation of it, see McDowell n.d.

4. That there is little or no contrast in gender ethos or, to use Mead's (1963) old terminology, "temperament," does not mean that there are no contrasts in gender ideology, nor does it imply that male and female roles are the same. See McDowell 1984a for a discussion of gender in Bun that relates directly to some of the issues discussed here.

5. Angry adults frequently displace their anger onto material objects, smashing an object rather than a person. One man enraged by his wife, for example, destroyed his own canoe, one she had used to cross the river. When asked why people destroy their own possessions, informants reply simply that they were angry. Anger was the reason, not someone else's behavior (see Schieffelin 1976:135 for similarities among the Kaluli).

6. Much excellent work is currently being done about Melanesian violence in general. See especially Knauft 1985, but also Hallpike 1977.

7. For an excellent discussion of how autonomy and interdependence relate in a New Ireland society, see Clay 1986; for a now-classic ethnography concerning these issues, see Reay 1959.

8. Unfortunately, I failed to understand the entire process of achieving personhood while in the field and cannot answer some significant questions about it. For example, when does a growing child begin the process? Are children nonpersons or does another category, perhaps yet-to-be person, exist? Parents begin exchanges in the names of their children . . . what if they fail to do so? Many such questions remain.

9. See Weiner 1988 for a contrasting way in which power and sexuality can be related.

10. On one occasion, I feared so much for this woman that I interfered in the quarrel. It should also be noted here that these diagnoses are mine, not informed medical opinions.

11. This case was enormously complicated by the fact that the woman's husband was a classificatory father to her lover.

12. What happened in court surprised even close participants. When asked what he wanted to do, the husband replied that he did not want his first wife back--he only

wanted compensation. His first and second wives, recognizing that they had a common goal in facilitating the first's divorce (the new co-wife did not want to be a co-wife to anyone), formed an alliance and together shamed him in front of a variety of people by asking him, "Why have you made all of this necessary? You're just sexually excited all the time--you only think of female genitals." The ensuing shame, the knowledge that he had little chance in the face of an alliance between the two, and the fear that in reality the colonial court usually favored the woman made him back down and relinquish his claims on his first wife. The divorce was executed and compensation paid to the husband, and the lovers were free to marry.

13. The brother-sister relationship seems to assume central significance in a variety of Pacific contexts. See, for example, Marshall 1983, particularly the chapters in that volume by Smith and Goodale.

14. Fathers are also participants in these beatings; father-daughter violence, however, seems less common and perhaps should be conceived as a subset here. Fathers bluster and shout more than they seem to beat their daughters.

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