

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN OCEANIA: CONCLUSION

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Look, gentlemen, we've all done it. . . . but I will not stand for it any longer. We've got to stop beating our wives.

--Police Commissioner David Tasion to a gathering of provincial police commanders, Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea (quoted in *Victoria Times Colonist* [B.C., Can.], 19 Feb. 1987; see also *Pacific Islands Monthly* 1987:8)

Domestic violence, particularly wife-beating, is prevalent in the South Pacific. In Papua New Guinea, for example, researchers from the Law Reform Commission found that 73 percent of the adult women murdered between 1979 and 1982 were killed by their husbands, while almost all homicides committed by women during that time were murders of their husbands in retaliation for long-term violent mistreatment (LRC 1987:4). The commission also found that a majority of the rural adults sampled (66.5 percent of the men and 56.5 percent of the women) consider beatings to be an acceptable, normal part of married life (Toft and Bonnell 1985:43). The frequency of wife-beating varies from province to province in Papua New Guinea. It is most pervasive in Simbu and Western Highlands, where 97 and 100 percent respectively of surveyed women said they had been beaten by their husbands, and least widespread in Oro and West New Britain, where the figures were 49 and 53 percent respectively (LRC 1987:2). Nevertheless, as the open-

ing quotation demonstrates, people assume that all men--even police officers sworn to uphold the peace--beat their wives.

If domestic violence is an accepted part of family life in many Pacific societies, how can we explain its infrequency in others? One explanation is offered by Heider, who argues that in spite of incessant warfare the Grand Valley Dani of Irian Jaya's central highlands are nonaggressive, noncompetitive people who cope with conflict by withdrawing from it (1979:86-87). According to Heider, Dani pacifism is related to their low level of sexual energy. He finds that the calm, gentle ambience of interpersonal household relationships is consistent with low sexuality (Heider 1979:81).

Another explanation refers to the way children are socialized. People in some Pacific societies discipline their children without force and teach them to be nonviolent. In her study of behavior and consciousness among the Ifaluk of the West Caroline Islands of Micronesia, Lutz observes that while parents highly value obedience,

children are believed to obey *when* and *because* they listen and understand language. . . . It is assumed that correct behavior naturally and inevitably follows from understanding, which should follow from listening. . . . Physical punishment does not play a prominent role, either in the ethnohistory of learning or in practice. Lecturing is preferred to spanking, in line with the important roles given speaking and listening. It is said that children who are hit, rather than spoken to, may 'go crazy'. Physical punishment may be a source of great embarrassment to parents when they engage in it, as gentleness in all matters is highly valued. Children are also said to learn by the examples given through socialization techniques. Those who are hit, and who are not spoken to politely, will grow up to be short-tempered and will not know how to engage in 'good speech', or polite talk. There is also some fear expressed that children who are hit and shouted at may aggress against their parents in return, or possibly even kill themselves. (1985:61)

In this special issue of *Pacific Studies*, Mitchell and Nash describe two Papua New Guinea societies (the Wape of the Sandaun and the Nagovisi of North Solomons Province) where violence is uncommon. Mitchell attributes Wape pacifism to a combination of cultural attributes. Wape ethos prefers conciliation to confrontation and values gentleness and nonaggressiveness in personal interactions; gender differences are not

emphasized and are not a basis for social polarization; men are dependent on their wives for food; women actively participate in selecting their mates, retain close ties with their kin, and form bonds with the other women of their hamlet; alcohol is not available; ancestor spirits are believed to punish acts of aggression; insulted or humiliated women may attempt suicide; the Wape diet is nutritionally deficient and may contribute to their pacific temperament and domestic tranquility; and, finally, missionaries and government officials support traditional Wape values of peaceful interaction.

Like the Wape, the matrilineal and uxorilocal Nagovisi do not condone physical violence between spouses, and other forms of violence such as rape and the corporal punishment of children are rare. Children learn to go home rather than respond aggressively if insulted. Although anger is valued under certain circumstances--it enabled men to perform great feats during warfare in precontact times--those who are unable to control their rage are publicly mocked and are the source of gossipy entertainment. Rather than respond to insults or domestic strife with violence, Nagovisi men either go to court and demand compensation for injury or withdraw from confrontation and return to the homes of their female relatives, where they expect to receive support. A woman is embarrassed by her husband's leaving after an argument and by having to negotiate for his return.

Forms of Violence: Legitimate versus Illegitimate

There is no cross-cultural consensus as to when domestic violence crosses the boundary to become illegitimate, abusive, or deviant. "Abuse" or "battering" are political, not scientific, terms, and there is no agreement on whose definition should be used. Should it be the victim's? The aggressor's? That of some outside agency such as the police or the courts? The offender may argue that a beating, which a victim or a judge might consider brutal, is necessary to discipline a wife or child.

One way to distinguish legitimate from illegitimate violence is offered by sociologists who emphasize the importance of local values in determining what is deviant behavior and define it according to the response it elicits from others (Becker 1966; Lemert 1967). Becker stresses that society creates deviance because it establishes the rules against which behavior is judged. He says "deviance is *not* a quality of the act the person commits, but rather a consequence of the application by others of rules and sanctions to an 'offender' " (Becker 1966:9). If others intervene to stop the violence, or if the victim or the victim's rep-

representatives successfully call on outsiders--police or government officials, kinsmen, bystanders--for support, the violence is deviant. According to this approach, illegitimate violence is defined by the mores of the society and the response of its members, not by the values of another culture.

Identification of abusive violence is a complex problem. The peoples of many Pacific societies consider violence that spills blood, maims, or kills to be unacceptable. The peoples of the East Sepik and of Mount Hagen in Papua New Guinea stress whether blood is spilled in determining if violence against a woman is assault requiring the payment of compensation to her relatives (LRC 1986:149; Strathern 1972:248). The Kove of West New Britain regard stabbing, burning, or mutilation to be excessive violence (Chowning 1985:78). In this volume, Counts reports that the Lusi-Kaliai evaluate each case on its own merits according to a number of criteria, and Korbin notes that in Hawai'i's Ko'u Hoaloha community people do not refer to rigid rules in determining whether the punishment of a child has exceeded acceptable standards but consider the behavior and age of the child and the history of interaction between the parties as well as the severity of the punishment.

There is a wide range of violent behavior that Pacific peoples consider to be acceptable between family members. In Papua New Guinea, for instance, children may be disciplined by methods that vary from verbal correction in Morobe Province (LRC 1986:124) to the Enga practice of suspending a "really nasty" child from the ceiling and building a strong fire under him (LRC 1986:74).¹ It is unclear whether any adult Enga consider such punishment to be excessively severe or abusive.

This lack of clarity highlights the difficulty of defining abuse. In a patrilineal society, where a man is ultimately responsible for his wife and children and has final authority over them, outsiders might well be reluctant to interfere in a man's punishment of his family, even if it is potentially maiming or life-threatening. If our definition of abuse requires that the victim seek assistance or that outsiders intervene, we may conclude that, although stronger family members injure or kill weaker ones, there is by definition no illegitimate or abusive family violence because no one interferes.

In this volume both Korbin and Scaglione emphasize the culturally specific nature of abuse. Korbin notes that Ko'u Hoalohans consider some childrearing practices accepted as normal by most North Americans to be abusive, while Scaglione argues that North American and Abelam notions of mistreatment are reversed.² Abelam do not often

strike their children and condemn adults who do, but condone a man's occasionally disciplining his wife by slapping her with his open hand or by striking her over the head with a piece of firewood. Marital violence that is abusive results in "trouble cases," which disrupt village harmony and are sometimes taken to court.

Holmes also emphasizes the relative nature of abuse when he asserts that the live burial of the old, as it was practiced in precolonial Samoa, "was an honor and not an act of cruelty, allowing an old and ailing chief an honorable way out of life, amid the acclaim of his family and community." He argues, "Matters of custom and their relationship to the valuation and treatment of the aged are complex and can easily be misunderstood by those who have a different value system" (Holmes 1983:100).

Identifying the Victim

Gelles identifies at least three types of family violence: volcanic violence that arises out of stress and frustration, protective-reactive violence committed in self-defense or in defense of others such as children, and alcohol-related violence (1974). He finds a relationship between the type of violence and the gender of the violent person, and suggests that protective-reactive violence is most often committed by females while alcohol-related violence is mostly male initiated.

There may be a problem identifying who is likely to be the aggressor and who the victim of family violence. Pagelow argues that all types of family violence have one common feature: the bigger, stronger persons with the most access to resources are the ones who impose their wills on the smaller, weaker ones without resources (1984:75). "The common patterns are not merely for the more powerful to abuse the less powerful but for the most powerful to abuse the least. . . . Abuse tends to gravitate to the relationships of *greatest power differential*," Finkelhor comments (1983:17-18). These generalizations may be too simple though, for, as Scaglione persuasively argues in this volume, when the power imbalance between two people is profound the stronger party may have no need to resort to violence. Thus Abelam adults do not beat their children, because there is no doubt that parents are in control; force is unnecessary. When the balance of power is less salient, as between husbands and wives, then people use violence to maintain their advantage.

We turn now to the question of who is likely to be the victim of violence in Pacific families.

Husbands as Victims

In both North America and Oceania, women hit their husbands. Violence is done to men, but does this mean that they are victims of abuse? In a personal communication, Korbin observes that there is a debate between (1) those who maintain that wives and husbands are equally violent to each other and that although women are usually the ones who are injured, research should address the issue of "mutual combat" (see Straus, Gelles, and Steinmetz 1980; Steinmetz and Lucca 1988) and (2) those who argue that since women are usually the ones to be seriously hurt, a mutual-combat perspective draws attention away from the crucial issue that women are the ones who are victimized (see Walker 1984). Researchers focusing on female potential for violence note that women are most likely to abuse children and to commit infanticide (Straus, Gelles, and Steinmetz 1980; Steinmetz and Lucca 1988), but also recognize that fathers may abuse their children more severely than do mothers in similar situations (Steinmetz and Lucca 1988:241). In her essay here, Lateef stresses that Indo-Fijian girls are more fearful of physical violence from their fathers, even though their mothers also beat them.

In the United States about the same number of wives kill their husbands as husbands kill wives, but the *type* of violence involved is different: the wife is seven times more likely to kill her spouse in self-defense (Gelles 1979:139). Similarly, in Papua New Guinea, the grounds given by both sexes for a wife's hitting her husband is self-defense (Toft and Bonnell 1985:86; LRC 1987:2). Gelles's distinction between types of violence is useful here, for when Pacific women attack their husbands their violence is usually a protective-reactive response to physical aggression initiated by the man. In Papua New Guinea, "the main victims of domestic violence are women, often with their children. In other words, most domestic violence is 'wife-beating' " (LRC 1987:2).

Children as Victims

Pacific peoples consider a wide range of punishment to be legitimate in training children, but they also identify behavior that exceeds permissible discipline and that is, therefore, abusive (see Korbin 1987).

In her article in this volume on child abuse among the Ko'u Hoalohans of Hawai'i, Korbin reports that their appraisal of whether a child has been mistreated depends on a combination of factors including the severity of the punishment in light of the child's misbehavior, where on

the body the child is struck (for example, any blow to the top of the head is unacceptable), and the age of the child. She suggests that child abuse may be uncontrolled parental *rage* rather than parental *discipline* out of control, a suggestion that is supported by Aucoin's study of indigenous Fijians, reported herein. They consider the use of physical violence against children to be acceptable if it is a reprimand rather than a display of uncontrolled anger. For Fijians abusive violence is "without cause or need and beyond restraint" (p. 33) and justifies the use of force by others who intervene to protect the victim.

In some Pacific societies the physical punishment of children by parents is an obligation of parenthood. Failure to provide this punishment may be interpreted as evidence of indifference. For example, Gerber says that in Samoa when a father beats his child the punishment is understood as a sign of his love and is not considered to be abuse. This reasoning was explained to her as follows:

Fathers and children are closely identified, and the behavior of children reflects almost directly on the reputation of the parent. . . . Because of this close identification, fathers stand to be shamed if their children misbehave. They must therefore teach them right from wrong, but children, especially young children, learn only with the incentive of pain. Concerned fathers, who worry about their children's capacity to shame them and wish to make their children good people, therefore beat them. This logic is so compelling that several informants told me that if their fathers failed to beat them, they would be sad, since it would be a proof of paternal indifference. (Gerber 1985:131)

In traditional rural Polynesian society, according to the Ritchies, child abuse was "virtually absent" (1981:193). They attribute this to the open and democratic political system in which gossip and mutual surveillance were important social sanctions, to gender roles that ensured that men engaged in child care and thereby doubled the chance of good nurturance for children, and to the status system. "Child abuse," say the Ritchies, "is unlikely in any social system that requires one to give respect to people of high status who are continually present" (1981:193). These people intervene if they judge that parental punishment is likely to become abuse, and they also require parents to administer discipline when it is needed.

The situation is different in the modern urban context. The Ritchies cite a 1972 New Zealand Department of Social Welfare document that

says reported incidents of abuse of Maori children are six times that of children of European ancestry, while the reported abuse of children of other Pacific Island peoples resident in New Zealand is nine times greater (1981:194).³ What has happened to change the Polynesian profile from one of no child maltreatment to one of high abuse? The answer, the Ritchies believe, is that traditional Polynesian patterns of stress management, multiple parenting, and public responsibility break down in an urban environment. In the city a lonely and isolated mother is shut up in an overcrowded house with too many children who have no place to escape. In contrast, in the village many people were on hand to provide attention, comfort, and individual treatment. It is, the Ritchies note, "a different matter when one person has to give a lot and give it all the time" (1981:197). These circumstances plus "large families, poor living conditions, an intolerable degree of isolation, marital instability, strain, and alcohol--all compound in a generation to create the preconditions of child abuse" (Ritchie and Ritchie 1981:200).

Langness argues that although practices such as infanticide, mutilation of children, forced homosexuality, the sale of infants for both sacrifice and marriage, and the strenuous initiation of children were widespread in aboriginal New Guinea, "child abuse, from the natives' point of view, was probably no more common than is cannibalism, from our point of view" (1981: 14). While North Americans would consider initiation practices to be abusive, they are not idiosyncratic maltreatment and New Guineans do not consider them to be cruel or excessive. Indeed, they may believe the practices to be essential if children are to grow up as healthy and normal adults (Langness 1981:21). On the rare occasions when parents are brutal to children, others intervene and frequently shame the abusive adult. Because "traditional New Guineans were known to be exceptionally violence-prone," Langness considers the infrequency of child abuse to be remarkable and worthy of explanation (1981:26). The cultural and social factors he regards as significant include the following:

1. Infanticide, abortion, and adoption of children are commonly accepted, so there are no unwanted children.
2. Because child raising is a public activity, no adult is left to care for children alone and without help.
3. Many New Guineans consider children younger than seven or eight years old to be unable to reason. Attempts to impose formal discipline on them are pointless and beneath an adult's dignity.
4. Because New Guineans believe in the sanctity of the person, "no one in New Guinea would presume to order anyone else about or

assume that even if he did so the other would obey" (Langness 1981:27). (Although Langness says that this respect for individuality extends to relations between adults and children, the evidence amassed by the Papua New Guinea Law Reform Commission suggests that it is often not accorded to women.)

5. The slower pace of life plus cultural outlets (such as initiation ceremonies) for pent-up resentment toward disobedient children lessen the possibility that frustration, rage, and hostility will erupt in brutal individual abuse of the young.

Langness notes that although initiation ceremonies may have "elements of sadism and revenge" even by local standards, they are not necessarily illegitimate. He distinguishes between socially approved punishment and idiosyncratic brutality, saying:

Yet to be "abused" by your own group acting collectively in accordance with all past tradition, and to hear that tradition and the necessity for it explained to you simultaneously, are quite different from being idiosyncratically abused by a disturbed and frustrated parent or stepparent. . . . The ability to endure the pain and degradation of abuse within the context of New Guinea initiations is a necessity if one is to become an accepted, knowledgeable, and valued member of the adult community. (Langness 1981:29)

Langness's observations are relevant to the problem of formulating a cross-culturally valid definition of child abuse. Finkelhor and Korbins argue that traditional practices involving pain and suffering should be separated from idiosyncratic types of maltreatment and propose a definition of child abuse that stresses harm resulting "from human action that is proscribed, proximate, and preventable" (1988:4).

The pain suffered by rural Pacific children as a result of traditional, group-approved ceremonies is not abusive by these terms. However, children living in urban areas and caught in rapid social and cultural change do suffer idiosyncratic maltreatment, as the Ritchies note for New Zealand and the Law Reform Commission of Papua New Guinea observes for the urban environment of Port Moresby. There, attitudes that encourage violence against adult women lead to the mistreatment of children as well. The Community Medicine Department of the Faculty of Medicine, University of Papua New Guinea, found that the victims in 47 percent of sexual assault and rape cases in urban Papua New Guinea were girls fifteen years old or less (Wohlfart and Riley 1985,

cited in LRC 1987:6). Also, according to the commission, children are often injured or killed as a consequence of violence between their parents (LRC 1987:5).

The Elderly as Victims

Another category of people who are often the victims of family violence are the elderly, especially frail old people with a physical or mental disability who are powerless and dependent on others (Pagelow 1984:360). In the Pacific there are two types of behavior toward the elderly that may be abusive: gerontocide and the mistreatment (including neglect) of the childless elderly.

Pacific peoples sometimes define the senescent to be, in fact, dying and either hasten death or bury them alive. The Marind-anim sometimes bury alive helpless and senile parents (Van Baal 1966), while the Asmat occasionally leave old, infirm people who are near death untended in a corner of the hut until death occurs (Van Arsdale 1981:116). Holmes reports that in precolonial Samoa an old, infirm chief who thought he was dying might request to be buried alive (1983:100). His burial, carried out as part of his funeral ceremony, was accompanied by feasting and was an honorable death. Glascock comments that a common pattern in Third World societies is for the decrepit elderly to be supported until they become a burden, at which time they are defined as socially dead and consequently forsaken, abandoned, or killed (1982:53). In research into the motives for gerontocide Maxwell, Silverman, and Maxwell find a correlation between it and "contempt," which they define as "the sum of complaints made against the elderly as explanations for treating them poorly" (1982:70). The extent to which actual physical violence is a part of gerontocide is unclear, as is whether the people who practice it consider it abusive. Gerontocide may well be a cultural practice that, although considered by Western standards to be abusive, is legitimate in the societies where it is found.

The plight of the childless elderly is reported to be especially grim. Nydegger says of them: "Without personal resources and in the absence of institutionalized aid, their position is generally wretched, even in societies professing reverence for the aged" (1983:28). Rubinstein (1987) confirms that Nydegger's statement seems to be accurate for premodern as well as modern societies, but notes that almost nothing has been reported about the treatment and needs of the childless elderly in developing countries. In her study of the Gende, Zimmer does provide a

detailed account of the treatment of the childless elderly in a Pacific society. Zimmer says:

Childless elderly who are only minimally involved in the affairs of their community are particularly vulnerable to the degradations and insults accompanying the status of "rubbish person." Judged by others to be selfish and/or worthless persons, childless elderly may suffer isolation and shame, and in some cases outright physical abuse. Objects of suspicion and dislike, they may be shunned by others as being greedy, inhuman monsters and sorcerers who plot their neighbors' destruction. . . . As the years take their toll or they are struck by illness, few if any persons feel obligated to care for them or to sacrifice pigs in order to restore their strength. When they die, their death is unimportant and unattended. (1987:66)

As Zimmer documents in her essay in this volume, stress arising from the demands of the exchange system is a source of intergenerational conflict and may contribute to abuse of the elderly. Old men reproach their sons whom they perceive as being indifferent to their needs, and young men quarrel with their fathers-in-law over the size and terms of payment of bride-wealth and child-wealth. These conflicts may lead to violence and ultimately to physical abuse or neglect of the elderly.

Why Does Domestic Violence Occur?

The primary causes of wife-beating in Oceania seem to be sexual jealousy-including disputes over adultery and polygyny--followed by failure to meet obligations--specifically the wife's failure to perform her marital or domestic duties to the satisfaction of her husband. Arguments about money and a wife's failure to respect her husband follow as causes of marital strife (Toft and Bonnell 1985:50, 84-86; Toft 1986:13).

There are no simple reasons why domestic violence is common in some societies and not others, but there are a number of perspectives that attempt to explain the causes. I will now consider how the following four general approaches apply to the presence or absence of domestic violence in Pacific societies.

1. People are socialized to consider violence as an appropriate (or inappropriate) response to stress, anger, or frustration.
2. Domestic violence is associated with the position of women. In

assessing the status of women in a society we must consider male attitudes toward women, whether men exercise control over women, and whether women have political equality with men.

3. A society's patterns of social organization--particularly marriage rules and postmarital residence--may bear on whether domestic violence is common there.

4. Modernization and rapid social change may be responsible for change in the frequency of domestic violence.

The Culture of Violence

One explanation is that domestic violence is a response to frustration and stress that is learned in a cyclical culture of violence. Straus, Gelles, and Steinmetz observe that violence begets violence; in any given year, one-fourth of Americans who grew up in homes where they were beaten and where parents hit each other use physical force on their own mates or seriously injure their children (1980:122). One-tenth of those men seriously assault their wives. Children growing up in this environment learn three lessons: (1) the people who love you are the people who hit you and you hit the people you love, (2) it is morally right to hit other members of your family, and (3) violence is permissible if you are frustrated and under stress (Straus, Gelles, and Steinmetz 1980:102-104).

Some recent research has challenged the idea that violent behavior is transmitted from one generation to the next (Starr 1982; O'Leary and Curley 1986; O'Leary 1988), and one scholar argues that adults who are abused children may grow up to work to eliminate violence (McGuire 1983, cited in Starr 1988: 129).

The findings of the Papua New Guinea Law Reform Commission support the hypothesis that the formative experience of violence for most people is in the home. A commission report says "violent homes tend to breed violent adults, and these help to create a violent society in which people (particularly men) turn to violence as a way of solving their problems instead of using peaceful and lawful means" (LRC 1987:5).

The data presented in this volume further support that hypothesis. Societies where conciliation, gentleness, and self-control are valued--such as the Wape and the Nagovisi--have little or no family violence. In contrast, in societies where warfare was prevalent and violence is an acceptable expression of anger, domestic violence also seems to be common. For example, Ujelang children are socialized to express anger through violence, factional warfare was endemic among the Tungaru of

the Gilbert Islands, while Palauans, who are known as an aggressive people, have a high level of community violence. Among the Bun of East Sepik Province, Papua New Guinea, physical violence was pervasive before colonialism. In her essay, McDowell reports that the Bun value assertiveness and strength; physical violence is an important aspect of self-assertion; anger is considered to be a natural and appropriate response to insult, frustration, or challenge; and children are socialized to express anger through physical aggression. Family violence is commonplace among the Bun, and domestic quarrels often ramify into political events involving many members of the community.

The Status of Women: Male Control of Females

As Lateef discusses at length in her essay, male control of females may be maintained by ideology as well as by violence. She argues that traditional Indo-Fijian values demand that women submit to male control, stress female inequality in both public and domestic domains, and emphasize that women require male protection from their sexual impulsiveness and vulnerability. This ethos is so powerful that often force is not required to control women. When it is, it may be imposed by women (mothers or mothers-in-law) who act as agents of male relatives. In spite of the combination of ideology and violence, however, Lateef stresses that young Indo-Fijian women are not “pathetic” victims. They are quick to articulate their grievances, express discontent, secretly break rules or engage in behavior that they know will result in beatings if they are caught, and even risk further violence by fighting back in defiance of male authority.

The custom of giving bride-wealth may contribute to wife-beating. In societies where bride-wealth legitimizes men’s control over women or promotes the attitude that they are the property of their husbands, male dominance in family relationships is more likely to lead to wife-bashing. Both women and men condone this violence, considering it an aspect of marital sexual relations (see Bradley 1985:36-37; Strathern 1985:4-5; LRC 1987:13).

In the Highlands, Gelber observes, women are controlled by physical violence:

Brutality toward women can be extreme and is not a rare occurrence. Rape and gang rape, undertaken either in a spirit of “fun” or of retaliation and control, or sometimes gratuitously, are commonplaces in the Highlands. An angry man

may focus his attack on a woman by cutting, burning, or otherwise mutilating her genital and reproductive organs: often these attacks result in the woman's death. These acts occur with such frequency as to indicate a cultural pattern, not simply the isolated excesses of a psychotic, as perhaps in our own society. (1986:25)

According to the Law Reform Commission of Papua New Guinea, the major obstacle to providing protection for women is a set of cultural attitudes--"prejudices and misconceptions"--about the role of women in marriage. These attitudes--shared by women and men alike, including the officials who have the responsibility of offering support and assistance to abused women--are as follows:

- (i) that bride-price gives a man the right to bash his wife;
- (ii) that men are superior to women, and women must therefore obey them;
- (iii) that no-one can interfere between husband and wife;
- (iv) that wife-beating is customary in many parts of Papua New Guinea, and therefore it must be legal;
- (v) that a man can do whatever he likes inside his own home;
- (vi) that if a woman is bashed, she must have done something to deserve it;
- (vii) that if a woman really minded about being bashed, she would leave the man or prosecute him,

(LRC 1987:13-14)

Strathern observes that the cultural acceptance of male aggressive violence is based on a tautological set of assumptions, for, as she observes, New Guineans often assume that male dominance is a fact, that men will express domination through violence and, therefore, that male violence is legitimated by the domination of men over women (1985:4).

A Question of Gender Equality

In some Pacific societies a condition of political near-equality exists between women and men. In this volume the Bun (McDowell), the Palauans (Nero), the Nagovisi (Nash), and the Wape (Mitchell) are examples of these societies. Note that in two of them (the Wape and the Nagovisi) domestic violence is minimal while in the others it may be

severe. McDowell argues that family violence is the result, at least in part, of the struggle by Bun women to retain their autonomy and to resist efforts by their brothers and husbands to control them. The focus of Nero's article is to explain why severe wife-beating occurs in Palau despite the high status of women and the complementary roles of women and men in economic, social, and political life.

Josephides argues that among the Kewa of Papua New Guinea the marital situation is inherently violent because it is founded on an unequal relationship between husband and wife that is sustained by physical force and by the threat of violence or "symbolic violence" (1985:102). The threat of violence is implicit in references Kewa men make to the politically weak and dependent position of women and in grisly tales of the results of female disobedience. The cultural practices that define symbolic violence support the inferiority of women because they undermine the control Kewa women have over the products of their own labor and reproductive activity and limit their ability to achieve any advantage in the political arena.

Other scholars have argued that the political inequality of Pacific women is highlighted by the practice of men communicating with other men by their treatment of women (Gelber 1986:86). Strathern reports that a man who is ashamed to express his anger to his in-laws directly may berate his wife instead (1972:130), while Koch notes that the relatives of a woman who is beaten by her husband for no obvious reason may interpret the beating as his request for a pig (1968: 104). In the Central Highlands of Papua New Guinea a young man who violates the rules of female avoidance in effect during his betrothal is considered to have offended his age-mates, who may retaliate by killing the girl he expects to marry (Read 1954:23).

In some Papua New Guinea societies female political and economic inequality is accompanied by male fear of and antagonism toward women. These emotions are rooted in the widespread belief that copulation is harmful to a man's physical and mental well-being and that any contact with a menstruating woman will "sicken a man and cause persistent vomiting, turn his blood black, corrupt his vital juices so that his skin darkens as his flesh wastes, permanently dull his wits, and eventually lead to a slow decline and death" (Meggitt 1964:207). The consequences for women of this fear is described by Jigede in her discussion of marriage in the Eastern Highlands. She notes that customarily there were taboos on sexual relations during pregnancy, after birth, through the period of breast-feeding, and during menstruation. If these restrictions were violated as a result of a woman's carelessness, her husband would be "embarrassed" and would, consequently, "spear his wife to

death" (Jigede 1986:106). In this society women are still required to obey their husbands and "any disobedience by the women in doing required tasks would lead to them being beaten" (Jigede 1986:113).

Social Factors

Patterns of social organization may have a bearing on whether family violence is common in a particular society. Modjeska observes that the extent of male authority over women may be related to marriage rules. Where rules of local exogamy are weak, as among the Telefolmin, women own their own crops and widows may become wealthy and respected (Modjeska 1982:66). In contrast, in societies where local endogamy and child betrothal occur, these practices assure male control and undermine female independence, while the custom of bride-wealth payments may separate women from rights in their children. For example, the Tungaru practiced both child betrothal and arranged marriage and had, as well, a bias toward male control and pleasure.

As Aucoin's essay illustrates, marriage rules may serve to control the level of marital violence. This is the case among indigenous Fijians, whose ideal marriage is between cross-cousins--who are structurally equal. If a husband beats his cross-cousin wife, she will likely seek refuge with her brothers. Her husband must then initiate reconciliation and abase himself before his affines by publicly apologizing and giving wealth items to them as well as to her before she will return to his home. The support of the wife's relatives and the shame suffered by the husband in this encounter help control family violence.

Other possible explanations for the persistence of family violence focus on social structure and residence patterns. It is less common, for example, to find abused children where people reside together in extended families. The presence of many caretakers and respected elders controls parental rage. In contrast, where families are isolated in single family units, neither parents nor children have alternatives when tempers flare. All of the cases of wife-battering among the Palauan couples analyzed in Nero's essay were between couples who lived in their own nuclear households rather than in an extended-family situation.

Those who focus on residence patterns suggest that women are more likely to be in a subordinate position, and therefore more vulnerable to violent aggression, in patrilineal societies with virilocal residence than in matrilineal societies where women reside with or near their own kin and thus have a haven to escape male wrath (Brown 1997). It is especially important to ask how far a woman in a patrilineal and virilocal society moves from her natal home, for, as Scaglione observes, an Abe-

lam woman who lives only a couple of hours' walk from her father and brothers has ready access to support should her husband abuse her. In contrast, as illustrated in the article by Counts, a woman whose kin are several days distant may be without help even when abuse becomes life-threatening.

Uxorilocal residence may benefit husbands as well as wives in marital conflicts. It may, for instance, enable a man to deal with a domestic dispute nonviolently by moving back to his natal village. Nash's essay describes the embarrassment of a Nagovisi woman who must negotiate with her husband's kin and perhaps pay valuables to them before he will return to her home.

The Nagovisi contrast with virilocal Fijians, who insist that a man negotiate with his wife's kin if he abuses her. In both cases the spouse who lives near his or her relatives is shamed by the mate's desertion, the dispute is escalated by the partner who goes home, and the resident spouse must apologize and pay compensation before the offended mate is willing to return.

The emphasis on residence is critical, for rules of descent are not in themselves predictive of women's status, family relations, or cultural ethos. Women in matrilineal societies do not necessarily fare better than women in patrilineal ones. Consider, for instance, that in earlier days women among the matrilineal Tolai of East New Britain who discovered male secrets or came too near to the male cult's ceremonial places were killed (Bradley 1985:34). Wife-beating is reported among the Tolai (Bradley 1985) and among the matrilineal people of Milne Bay Province as well (Simulabai 1986), while it is rare among the patrilineal Dani (Heider 1979) and Wape (Mitchell, in this volume) as well as among the matrilineal Nagovisi. While social structure and residence rules may provide part of the explanation for why domestic violence is common in some societies and rare in others, we should recall Bradley's warning that it "must be remembered that matrilineality is a method for reckoning descent, not a system for giving power or status to women. Motherhood was respected but women were nevertheless second-class citizens" (1985:34).

Modernization and Rapid Social Change

Finally, one effect of modernization and urbanization may be an increase in domestic violence. In this volume, Scaglione's data forecast that modernization may bring this change. In 18 percent of the "trouble cases" of spousal violence among the Abelam of Papua New Guinea, the wife attacked her husband because of sexual jealousy. Scaglione argues

that there is an increase in spousal violence because educated, mobile young Abelam women are less tolerant of abuse, adultery, gambling, and neglect on the part of their husbands and more willing to fight back or even to strike the first blow than were women a generation ago. Similarly, Lateef finds that modern working Indo-Fijian women may refuse to accept male control unconditionally and may assert their right to argue with their husbands.

The relationship between change and wife-beating has also been pointed out by Au Doko, a Papua New Guinea woman who is active in women's organizations there. In an interview on 18 June 1989 she observed:

Women now have been educated and take up jobs with the government or with the private sector and that gives them an independence. As well they can think for themselves and speak for themselves. This conflicts with our traditions, Our traditional way has been that men are always the head of the family and are supposed to make decisions. Publicly women never spoke. Women now find that they can speak. . . . But wife beating really is a problem of the educated woman. She is being constantly beaten by her husband, especially in the city. This again shows that as women become educated they know themselves and they know what is their right in the family and they also earn their own living and this gives the men a lot of insecurity. (SPPF 1989:3-5)

In their study of child abuse among urban Maoris, the Ritchies note a number of factors that may result in increased violence toward children and the elderly (1981). These include isolation of the nuclear family, emigration of people in their prime from rural villages to urban centers in search of wage labor, increased need for cash and the associated loss of economic self-sufficiency, and emphasis on personal acquisition and achievement rather than on social accountability and community responsibility for dependent children and old people.

Papua New Guinea citizens themselves hold modernization responsible for a perceived increase in domestic violence. They focus on factors such as gambling, the introduction of money, alcohol consumption, unstable marriages resulting from young people's selecting their own mates rather than following the custom of arranged marriages, and tensions related to modern politics, especially during elections (LRC 1986). One PNG student researcher concentrated on the cash economy as a source of marital problems:

Another effect of the cash economy on marriage is that men are over-working their wives, using them as a means of production in the economic life of the family. It is always the women who work in the garden and produce surplus food for selling at local markets. It is always the women who work in coffee gardens and harvest the coffee beans and it is always the women who care for pigs, feed them, take them around to the pasturing grounds and bring them back in the afternoon. The fortune and the benefits for all this hard work go to the men. The men get the cash from the women and either spend it on beer, gamble with it or spend it on worthless items like cigarettes and betel nut. (Jigede 1986:108)

We should give special attention to the consumption of alcohol. Pacific people perceive it to be a major cause of domestic violence. In urban Papua New Guinea over 70 percent of low-income women rate it first, while among the elite both men and women place it at the top of the list (Toft 1986:12-13). Au Doko also considers alcohol to be a prime factor in wife-beating:

The use of alcohol . . . is a social problem because . . . the men drink and sometimes the women have less money given to them. When the women ask questions about where the money goes, and why does he spend his time drinking, the women are bashed just to shut them up. The result is a lot of financial abuse and emotional abuse when women speak up for their rights. Women find it very hard to tolerate this situation. (SPPF 1989:4)

Although alcohol is seen as only a secondary source of family strife in rural Papua New Guinea, researchers attribute its minor role there to its scarcity outside of the towns and predict that “with improved access, primarily through the introduction of village taverns, alcohol will become a greater factor in marriage problems and domestic violence” (Toft and Bonnell 1985:87). Students participating in the Law Reform Commission’s study of marriage and domestic violence report that the consumption of alcohol is seen as one reason for the increase in domestic violence in Milne Bay, Western Highlands, Simbu, Eastern Highlands, Madang, Manus, West New Britain, and North Solomons provinces (LRC 1986:18 82, 94, 113, 137, 173, 184, 194).

Nero emphasizes that alcohol use is associated with *all* the contemporary cases of Palauan wife-beating for which she has data. Palauans

perceive that wife-battering is more common today than in the past and attribute its increase to drinking. While drunkenness does not, in Nero's opinion, *cause* domestic violence, it is an important factor in its occurrence. She argues that increased stress resulting from rapid change, the culturally perceived disinhibitory function of alcohol, plus sexual jealousy and the sexual double standard combine to create a matrix in which wife-battering increases as men attempt to establish power over their wives through physical domination.

Although the influence of alcohol is frequently mentioned as a cause of domestic violence, the relationship between alcohol consumption and domestic violence is complex. Gelles cites North American research supporting the existence of an association between alcohol and violence and concluding that people who drink tend to abuse weaker family members. "However," he observes, "the causal relationship implied here between drink and violence tends to disappear when you investigate whether people believe they will or will not be held responsible for their actions when drunk" (Gelles 1979:173).

Gelles's point is supported by MacAndrew and Edgerton, who conclude that drunken comportment is learned behavior determined by the society's expectation of the state of drunkenness (1969:165). In the same vein, Marshall observes that while a state of inebriation may give aggressive young Trukese men a wider latitude of permitted behavior, the rules that govern social performance do not disappear entirely and people who break them may expect swift and violent retaliation (1979:122). There are, for example, limits on whom a drunk may attack. "Children and the elderly are absolutely off limits," says Marshall, and although drunks may attack women, they seldom do so. "Drunks may chase women, say bad things to them, threaten and frighten them, but they may not beat them up with impunity. Any drunk who violates this proscription may expect swift retaliation from the woman's male kinsmen" (Marshall 1979:122). Chowning also expresses reservations about the effect of alcohol use on domestic violence and notes that sober Kove men hit their wives with such frequency that it is unclear that drinking makes their behavior worse (1982:373).

Options for Victims of Domestic Violence

Alternatives are available for the victims of domestic violence. Abused wives and children who live near their kin or in multiparent societies can call on co-resident family and friends for help. Or they can leave home and find refuge with sympathetic kinsmen if they have relatives willing to shelter them. As the essays by Nash and Aucoin demonstrate,

the option of returning to one's natal home may provide an extremely effective, nonviolent strategy for an offended or abused spouse--either wife or husband. However, the option of seeking refuge away from home may not be available to the decrepit elderly.

Another alternative is defensive violence. Women and older children can fight back in "protective-reactive violence" (Gelles 1974; Hauser 1982), and sometimes they do. The malevolent magic practiced by Ujelang women can be considered an alternative form of defensive violence for, as Carucci argues in this volume, the Ujelang fear of sorcery serves to control physical abuse.

Victims can bring the aggressor to court. Most of the solutions recommended by the Law Reform Commission of Papua New Guinea focus on legal changes intended to extend the protection of the law to women, and in some situations court protection does seem effective, particularly for abused wives. In a study of family disputes and village courts in the Agarabi area of the Eastern Highlands, Westermark reports that marital problems, including assault, are the most frequent family issue in Agarabi courts and that the most frequent complainants are women (1985). Magistrates have been severe with male defendants in marital violence cases and no longer tolerate husbands' use of physical abuse to punish their wives.

Some observers reason that a woman who takes a domestic dispute to court may have little chance of success. It is not just the police who beat their wives. 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). Reay goes further in her criticism of the usefulness of the court system for women of the Highlands:

The Village Court . . . is an all-male institution run by and for men. Women are constant casualties. Pathologically brutal husbands keep their victims trapped by getting them dragged before the Village Magistrates. The women's agnates refuse to take them back for fear of losing the bride-price that has been promised or already given. The situation of the bride-price is crucial for the magistrates. They do not recognize chronic brutality as pathological and they simply recommend that a woman so treated should not return to her agnates but should go to the Village Magistrate or Peace Officer of her husband's community and seek a little compensation. This is cold comfort for a woman whose husband beats her up every time he comes home drunk and sometimes holds a gun to her head or a

bushknife to her throat. . . . Men, who are often so careful to spare one another's feelings, treat women as if they were not sentient beings at all. (1987:77)

Another difficulty that Pacific women face in attempting to take a grievance into the public arena is that incidents of family violence are often considered to be domestic disputes appropriate for public consideration only if they are redefined as conflicts between men.

In spite of the success of introduced courts and other agents for affording a forum in which women can air their grievances, it seems that *men* do not see the public forum of courts as appropriate for their own 'domestic' problems. Whereas men may litigate with a range of male social others, they are likely to get into conflict only with women with whom they have some specific tie, so that conflicts with women may be subsumed under relationships of kinship or affinity. . . . When men are faced with such difficulties in their relations with wives or female kin they tend to do one of two things: (a) They may turn it into a 'political' conflict, that is, interpret the relationship with the woman . . . in terms of relationships with other men . . . or (b) they may try to solve the matter in an immediate way by asserting their 'control' over the woman, so that their perspective 'wins'. Violence is a means to this end. (Strathern 1985:12)

Scaglione and Whittingham offer a different perspective on this same phenomenon. They observe that a court dispute between husband and wife may appear to be a conflict between two men because a man may plead before the court on behalf of his female relative or because marital disputes often engage the kin of both spouses. Therefore, a domestic squabble can escalate into an assault case between male in-laws (Scaglione and Whittingham 1985:124). They note that by removing their grievances from the male-dominated village milieu and taking them to other arenas, Papua New Guinea women seem to be achieving "some measure of legal equality" (Scaglione and Whittingham 1985:132).

One shortcoming of the court option in Papua New Guinea is that it usually requires the sympathetic backing of a woman's male relatives (Bradley 1985:55). This support is essential for several reasons. First, if a woman's action is successful her husband will be fined or jailed or both. This punishment costs his family scarce cash resources and

deprives them of his labor. If she lacks her kinsmen's support, she and her children may suffer real hardship. Second, as Tua (1986) notes, even if she is successful the woman faces retribution from an angry husband and, perhaps, criticism from her family and neighbors as well.

Before 1985 Papua New Guinea women rarely used either local or district courts, and when they did their success rate was not high. This situation is apparently changing. In a 1989 personal communication Bradley reports that as a result of leaflets distributed by the Women and Law Committee giving step-by-step instructions for how a woman can take her own case through the courts, more women seem to be using local and district courts and doing so more successfully. Bradley feels that this is because magistrates are more confident about what to do in wife-assault cases and when wives apply for "good behaviour bonds" against abusive husbands. The Village Courts Secretariat also sends leaflets to village court magistrates, who tend to move away from custom and render judgments more in line with government law as they become more familiar with it. Although there is no mechanism for enforcing these noncustomary judgments, it does appear that the court system in Papua New Guinea is becoming more receptive to the needs of women. As Scaglione and Whittingham observe, the village courts may provide the best forum for dispute management available to abused women (1985:132).

A final option for the victim of brutal domestic violence is to commit suicide. There is evidence from North America, South America, Africa, and the Pacific that domestic violence and suicide are related in a complex and significant way (Counts 1987). Indeed, one group of researchers has concluded that abuse may be the single most important motivation for North American female suicide attempts yet identified (Stark and Flitcraft 1985:22). In this volume, Mitchell notes that Wape women who are deeply offended by their husbands may attempt suicide and Counts focuses on the circumstances under which abused Lusi-Kaliai women choose the option of suicide.

Why Has Domestic Violence Been Ignored by Anthropologists?

Why, as noted in the introduction to this volume, have so many anthropologists either ignored domestic violence entirely or given it only summary treatment--perhaps a few sentences or paragraphs embedded in a discussion of some other subject?

There are several reasons. One is that we have only recently become

aware of domestic violence as a problem in Western society. Furthermore, we have become aware of different aspects of the problem at different times. As Pagelow notes, child abuse was "discovered" in the 1960s, wife-beating in the 1970s, and abuse of the aged or "granny bashing" in the 1980s (1984:363). Clearly we anthropologists are not ahead of our time.

Another explanation derives from the anthropologist's dilemma discussed in the introduction. We respect the right of Pacific peoples to hold values different from our own and are reluctant to point out in our hosts behavior that is unacceptable and embarrassing in ourselves. Expressions of this reluctance range from an unwillingness to "exploit" our hosts' hospitality by exposing their dark side to a concern that publication on the topic will result in denial of permission to return for further field research. These are certainly legitimate concerns, but it is appropriate to respond that while we must not apply our own values and pass judgment on behavior that is not seen as deviant or abusive by the majority of the people of a community, many Pacific people do perceive domestic violence to be a problem. As Nero discovered when she took her essay back to her Palauan community for discussion, our hosts may welcome the opportunity to acknowledge publicly that a problem exists so the search to find a solution can begin.

The recognition that domestic violence is a problem occurs at all levels in the Pacific, from the individual to the national government. For example, on the national level the Papua New Guinea Law Reform Commission's *Interim Report on Domestic Violence* includes several pages pointing out reasons why domestic violence is a cause for public concern (LRC 1987:4-7). At the level of individual awareness, consider a few lines from a poem entitled "Belting-belting" by Hilda Arova, published in *The Times of Papua New Guinea* (31 July 1981, 17).⁴

Belting! Belting.
Why belting me all the time,
What have I done wrong to you?
I have done no wrong to you.
I'm innocent.
I have got nothing to do with you,
drunken bastard!

Beltings! Beltings.
All the time beltings.

When will I be happy?
I deserve it.
I married the wrong man!

There are good reasons why anthropologists should discuss and write about domestic violence. In-depth research in a variety of societies can illuminate similarities and differences in the causes of and responses to domestic violence. It can provide information about societies such as the Wape, the Dani, and the Nagovisi where family disputes are settled nonviolently and intimate interpersonal relations are not marked by aggression or the forcible control of the weak by the more powerful. And research can inform us how other people have attempted to cope with the problems of anger, frustration, stress, and inequality. Perhaps, for example, there are societies where women or the elderly have united to resist abuse; if so, the courts and family-service workers in North America and South Pacific nations alike might be better able to help victims of violence if they knew how this response was organized and whether it worked. Possibly some countries have found a way to make their court systems more responsive to and protective of powerless people who are abused by the stronger members of their families. If so, this information could be extremely valuable to those seeking to bring about legal reform. If, through research, we know the variety of ways societies have developed of coping with stress and the effects of rapid modernization and urbanization, perhaps this information will suggest alternatives for those societies that consider the pattern of domestic violence a problem and desire to change.

NOTES

1. Although many methodological problems mar the research on which this book on marriage in Papua New Guinea is based, and it often raises more tantalizing questions than it answers, it does contain much of value. Research was conducted in assigned villages for a period of four weeks by male and female students from the Diploma of Social Development program of the Administrative College of Papua New Guinea (LRC 1986:1). The reports are based on eyewitness accounts, interviews, court records, case studies, and on the impressions of the students, providing insight into their attitudes and expectations as well as some information about the villages they studied.
2. Other researchers observe that North Americans have a high tolerance for physical aggression against *both* children and spouses (see, for instance, Starr 1988; Margolin, Sibner, and Gleberman 1988; Steinmetz and Lucca 1988; as well as other chapters in Van Hasselt et al. 1988)

3. The key here may be that abuse is *reported* among Maori and other Pacific Islanders by social workers who are more likely to look for it among these people than among the Pakeha.

4. My thanks to Mac Marshall for sending me a copy of this poem.

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