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Discussion
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GENDER AND SMALL ARMS VIOLENCE IN PAPUA NEW GUINEA

Evidence gleaned from media, anecdotal, and hitherto unpublished sources suggests that violence resulting from small arms and light weapons in PNG is distinctly gendered. While it is important to recognise that conflict and post-conflict situations affect men and women in different ways, it is instructive to go further, and examine the different experiences of men and women in the context of the 'gun culture' that has developed in parts of PNG in recent years. Our research uncovers both important gender differences in perceptions of security and the gendered nature of gun violence. By situating the proliferation of small arms in the context of culture, power, and security in PNG, our contribution is grounded in a social and political history of PNG, with an account of the changing pattern of conflict and violence, gender relations, and in particular, the role of firearms. Our investigation proceeds through a discussion of the three broad and overlapping settings in which the gun culture has emerged. These are *raskolism*, tribal fighting, and election-related violence. The investigation then moves to an overview of the gender of violence in PNG, and concludes with a discussion of the alternative responses of the state and community-based organisations to violence and conflict. A number of policy implications follow.

PAPUA NEW GUINEA

An appreciation of PNG's heterogeneous national setting provides an important background to this discussion paper. With over 850 different languages spoken among a population of just over five million people, PNG is arguably the most socially and linguistically diverse country in the world. There is still little sense of shared identity and, for most people, allegiance to tribes, clans and sub-clans remains significantly stronger than loyalty to abstract concepts of nation and citizenship.

The formal institutions of the modern nation-state were introduced late in the colonial period and little time was available to prepare the human resources and infrastructure necessary for modern statehood. Although some coastal and island communities had over 100 years of contact by the time of independence in 1975, parts of the densely populated highlands region had less than 20 years of external influence. The capacity of the post-colonial state is extremely limited, its presence is unevenly spread and its most significant source of legitimacy is that provided by the 'outside world' (Dinnen 1997: 15). Unsurprisingly, indigenous Melanesian institutions, as these have been adapted, continue to exert a powerful influence in the daily lives of most Papua New Guineans.

**SINCLAIR
DINNEN AND
EDWINA
THOMPSON**

The contribution of AusAID to this series is acknowledged with appreciation.

Traditional societies were essentially 'stateless' insofar as they lacked a centralised political or administrative organisation equivalent to a modern government. Leadership was dominated by men and, while subject to considerable variation, was more usually achieved than inherited. Melanesian *big-men* acquired their standing through prowess in warfare, organising trade, or ceremonial exchanges. Some critics claim that modern politicians pervert traditional politics and redefine cultural traits such as *bigmanship* for personal gain. Chronic political instability and corruption have emerged as significant problems over the past two decades. Financial mismanagement, combined with external economic shocks, has adversely affected the capacity of successive governments to deliver essential services to the rural population.¹ In the absence of a formal welfare state, the extended family and *wantok*² system provides a critical informal safety net for many citizens, again reinforcing the importance of kinship ties.

Rising levels of rural poverty and the pull of 'the bright lights of town' have contributed to migration to the major urban centres. However, less than ten per cent of the total population are employed in the small urban-based formal sector. Approximately 50,000 young people enter the labour market each year and, of these, only 20,000 find employment. The continual build-up of unemployed and underemployed youth, particularly in urban areas, has contributed to the growth of criminal gangs. A 1995 survey found that almost 70 per cent of males in Port Moresby who considered themselves 'unemployed' were earning a living through criminal activities (Levantis 1997). This amounts to almost 19 per cent of the entire male urban workforce and suggests that crime has become the largest occupational category in the informal urban economy.

Although traditional practices and values have inevitably been affected by recent historical change, many older beliefs remain deeply ingrained in contemporary social institutions. Women have long been viewed as subordinate to men and in some areas relations between the sexes continue to be marked by deep-seated antagonism. This is most apparent in highlands' societies where, in the past, women were often viewed as polluting of male power. Much current violence is still predicated on the belief that men have the authority to harm women (Macintyre 2000). The introduction of guns has reinforced and perpetuated both traditions of militarised masculinity and tolerance of gender-based violence.

PNG has many of the characteristics of the world's poorest nations.³ Social and economic

indicators suggest a reversal of earlier advances, including in the areas of health and education. HIV/AIDS is a major challenge. Following sub-Saharan African patterns, the virus has moved beyond high risk groups and now constitutes a generalised epidemic.⁴ High levels of rape, child abuse, domestic violence, poverty and prostitution, have contributed to the epidemic's spread (Bradley 2001).

It is against this background that PNG has been experiencing serious law and order problems (Dinnen 2001). The availability and use of firearms is an integral part of this larger predicament. Its principal manifestations include *raskol* gangs in the urban centres; armed hold-ups and banditry along major highways; land disputes; ethnic tensions; outbreaks of protracted inter-group fighting in parts of the highlands; sexual violence; election-related violence; and the growing incidence of corruption, fraud, and other white-collar crimes. Violence against women is prevalent throughout the country. These phenomena contribute to the depressing images of endemic violence that dominate media accounts. Such a generalised picture can, however, be misleading. Significant differences exist between urban, rural, and different regional contexts, as well as within them. The fact remains, though, that growing levels of inter-personal violence and social conflict present a profound challenge and sustainable solutions are desperately needed.

FIREARMS REGULATION

Legislation

Attempts to strengthen gun control laws have not fared well. The recent *Firearms (Amendment) Act 1998* provides only a 'qualified' ban on pistols and high-powered weapons. Although some members of parliament support more effective gun control, there is insufficient political will to implement stronger legislation.

Under the current legislation existing licence-holders can procure weapons for private sales and transfers. This allows licensed guns to fall into the wrong hands. Proper background checks on gun owners are also lacking, particularly in the renewal of licences. Even when individuals acquire licences for their own self-defence,⁵ there is a risk that the gun-owner is not properly trained to handle a weapon. While the numbers of guns in PNG are relatively low compared to many other parts of the world, the culture of fear and

insecurity generated by the absence of adequate state protection is such that people choose to arm themselves. Accidental shootings in turn contribute to an escalating cycle of violence.

Weapons Trade and Availability

The number of weapons smuggled illegally into PNG is small in relation to the total number of weapons used in criminal incidents or politically-motivated violence, as well as compared to the size of the illegal weapons market in South and Southeast Asia (McFarlane 2001: 18). Trading high quality PNG marijuana for Australian guns through the Torres Strait islands appears to involve relatively low numbers (ibid: 19). There also have been reports of arms crossing the largely unmarked PNG/Papuan (Irian Jaya) border. Again, the numbers involved do not appear to be very large. Despite conflicts in West Papua, Bougainville and the Solomon Islands, recent studies suggest that the illicit arms trade has not made any significant inroads into the Pacific region. McFarlane suggests several reasons for this:

- Without external sponsorship, neither criminal nor insurgent groups have the resources to purchase significant quantities of small arms or light weapons from external sources;
- Given the level of criminality and conflict, there is probably no need for higher calibre weapons for the groups involved to maintain their current activities;
- Shortage of imported weapons is not a serious problem for criminal and insurgent groups due to relatively easy access to police and military firearms, surplus weapons from World War Two, homemade guns, and traditional weapons (ibid: 24).

While the numbers of arms trafficked into the country may be low, the nature of the PNG government and wider society is such that even small numbers of unsophisticated weapons in the wrong hands can shift the balance of power and further destabilise the state. Ample firearms are available for use in criminal incidents and tribal fighting (ibid: 19).

Recent statistics indicate that there is one licensed gun for every 180 people in PNG.⁶ This does not include illegal guns or those held in police and defence armouries. During parliamentary debates on proposed amendments to the Firearms Act in June 1996, it was noted that a total of 69,000 firearms (55,000 shotguns, 10 rifles and 4,000 pistols) were registered for

private protection.⁷ Conservative estimates placed the number of illegal firearms at 10,000. This figure, however, appears to have increased significantly over the past seven years.

Most of the weapons in circulation comprise the following:

- Borrowed, hired, or stolen small arms and light weapons from PNG Defence Force (PNGDF) or Royal Papua New Guinea Police Constabulary (RPNGC) armouries;
- Registered or unregistered firearms procured through robberies;
- Arms from the Bougainville conflict;
- Old weapons recovered and refurbished from World War Two arms dumps; and
- Homemade guns.

Many highlands' villages boast of owning several high-powered weapons, while 'every house has a homemade gun of some sort for their protection'.⁸ John Wakon, a former Police Commissioner, has claimed that 'there are more guns in the highlands than in the PNG Defence Force'.⁹

Leakage from Legal Stocks

While some guns are imported, many weapons come from poorly secured military and police arsenals. A National Court judge, Justice Kirriwom, stated recently:

It is common knowledge that the losses of high-powered weapons from the army, police and prisons through criminal acts committed from within end up in the wrong hands outside and therefore those who supply these deadly weapons that bring much damage, loss and grief must be held accountable for their part in bringing about such disastrous consequences (*Post-Courier*, 16 July 2002).

The Australian Defence Force has committed over AUD\$8m to the construction of new armouries over the past few years. In order to access the armouries, up to seven combinations are now required with an equivalent number of people holding each combination. Despite these measures, guns still go missing. Armouries are, after all, only as secure as those who hold the key. There continues to be a lack of discipline and professionalism in the security forces, which only exacerbates PNG's burgeoning gun culture. Figure One provides some examples of the use of military-issue weapons by criminals.

Figure One: Theft of military-issue weapons and associated crime

Date	Incident	Weaponry Involved
November 1996	Bank robbery at the Westpac Bank, Waigani	M16 assault rifle, grenades, a grenade launcher
May 1999	Armoured vehicle robbery at Gerehu	M16 and A15 rifles, as well as a pump-action shotgun
December 1999	'Millennium' bank raid	Military automatic rifles and hand grenades
31 May 2000	Group of armed men raid the South Pacific bank in Port Moresby	Two pistols and a hand grenade
October 2000	Drunken fight, four killed	Hand grenade
November 2000	Hijackers seize an aircraft carrying gold from the Wau-Bulolo goldfields to Port Moresby	Rifles and a hand grenade
February 2002	Various; not recovered	2 M16 A1 machine guns, a grenade launcher, and 2 carbine machine guns still missing from PNGDF stores
June 2002	3 officers were sentenced to 12 months in prison	3 officers from Igam Barracks in Lae stole and sold an M16 carbine to buyers in Kainantu for K4,500 (US\$1,178.10)
January 2003	Various; not recovered	3 high-powered weapons were stolen at the change of guard duty in a defence barracks. The weapons were simply left unattended in a cage with a padlock.
November 2003	Not recovered	One M16 went missing from the Quarter Store at Murray Barracks.
January 2004	Recovered; these guns were never returned to Murray Barracks on 16 September last year following an Independence Day parade.	6 SLR, a 9mm pistol and 1,800 rounds of ammunition

Note: This table builds on and updates a chart by David Capie (2003). His data covers the period up to 2000.

The involvement of members of the political elite in gun-related incidents is another source of concern. In 2002, former Tourism Minister, Alois King, allegedly threatened a university lecturer at gunpoint at a Port Moresby rugby club. Another former minister, Philemon Embel, was reported to have pulled a gun out at the Holiday Inn, while another governor drew his pistol at the five-star Crowne Plaza. Former governor of Oro Province, Sylvania Siembo, went to court after he allegedly shot a youth who he claimed had tried to rob him. And former Southern Highlands Province governor Anderson Agiru

was ousted by a leadership tribunal after he drew a pistol at the Port Moresby Golf Club. Agiru had also had his photo taken with an automatic weapon inside an airport.¹⁰

At the beginning of 2004, Air Niugini cargo handlers at Port Moresby airport discovered a shipment of six stolen PNGDF guns, a 9mm pistol, and 1,800 round of ammunition addressed to the headmaster of Pangia High School. The following corrective measures were taken at the instigation of the Defence Minister:

- all officers in the Defence Supply System at Murray Barracks have been replaced;

- all armoury combinations have been changed;
- all armoury staff have been replaced;
- a stock take of all weapons and ammunition in all units has been conducted;
- all weapons issued to officers and soldiers were recalled; and
- access to the holding bay and ammunition depot at the Goldie River Barracks outside Port Moresby is now restricted.¹¹

In an effort to reduce potential harm posed by surplus weapons, the Australia—Papua New Guinea Defence Cooperation Program oversaw the successful destruction of roughly 4,000 weapons within the first six months of 2003. These included mainly high-powered weapons and rocket-propelled grenades left over from the Sandline affair in Bougainville,¹² and surplus police and defence stocks. These weapons were disabled, cemented inside 44 gallon drums, and disposed of at sea.¹³ Despite these efforts, Defence Force Commander Brigadier-General Peter Ilau confirmed that at least 300 military weapons, mostly from the Bougainville crisis, were still unaccounted for.¹⁴

Firearms seized from the public and subsequently destroyed included sophisticated weapons such as MAG 58 machine guns. Due to the value placed on gun ownership in PNG, the surrender of such weapons is probably an indication of the difficulty in procuring the requisite ammunition to operate them. The MAG 58 requires 7.62mm cartridges, which are scarce in PNG. Shortages of ammunition for high-powered weapons also influence their use in tribal fighting, which provides one of the main contexts for the use of small arms and light weapons in PNG.

PRINCIPAL CONTEXTS OF FIREARMS USE

Raskolism

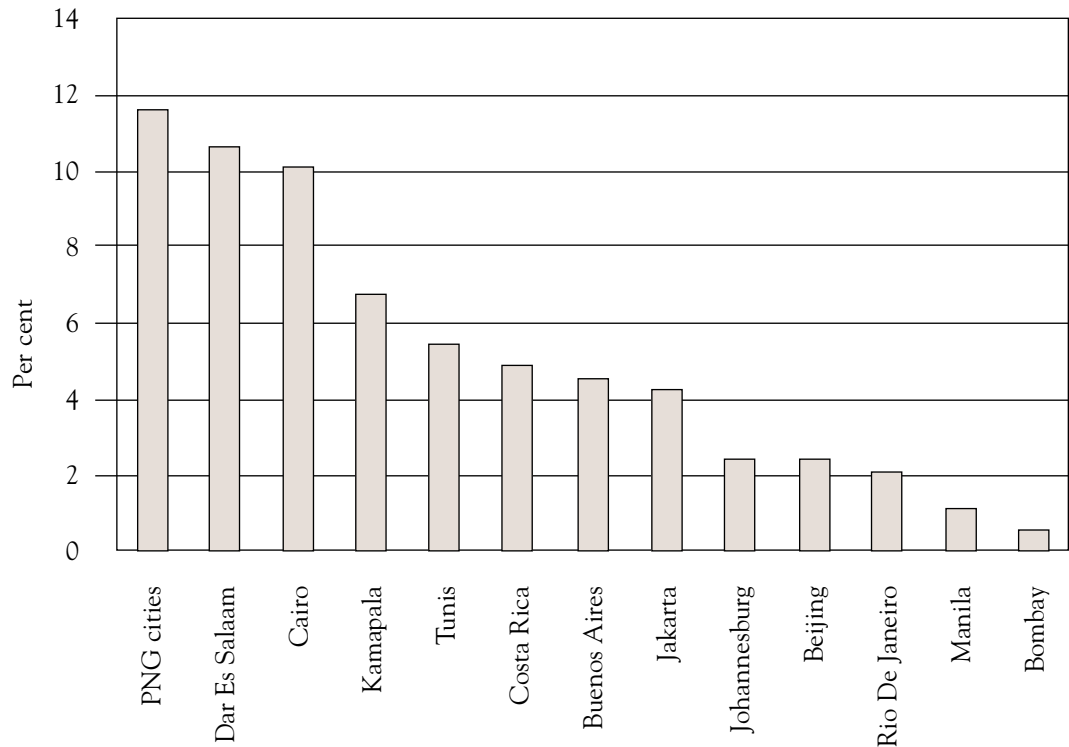
The *raskol* gang is the most potent symbol of PNG's so-called law and order problems. From its relatively benign origins as a vehicle for enhancing self-esteem among young male migrants in Port Moresby in the 1960s (Harris 1988), *raskolism* has evolved into the most menacing face of contemporary lawlessness and

has gradually spread to other towns, as well as to rural districts. Groups of predominantly young males engage in criminal activities ranging from minor assaults, car-jacking, housebreaking, and highway hold-ups, to armed robberies, pack rapes and murder.

Gang networks operate on a nation-wide basis. Larger gangs in Port Moresby have affiliated organisations in other towns and some rural areas. These networks allow criminals who are being pursued by authorities in a particular town or area to move elsewhere. In the process, they also allow the dissemination of criminal knowledge and organisation, and the spread of *raskol* crime. Evidence also exists of a growing nexus between *raskol* elements and political and business figures that employ criminal 'muscle' for electoral, commercial or security reasons. In late 1997, the Australian Broadcasting Corporation screened remarkable footage from a concealed video in which the then PNG Prime Minister, Bill Skate, was heard boasting that he was 'the godfather' of all PNG's gangs and had personally participated in an earlier gang killing. Mr Skate claimed subsequently that he was drunk at the time of the recording (*Post-Courier*, 1 December 1997).

Although *raskols* are by no means the sole, or even the main perpetrators of violence against women, they have become closely associated with the practice of pack-rape involving multiple assailants (Dinnen 1993). Women and girls encountered in the course of a housebreaking, robbery, or carjacking, are routinely subjected to sexual assaults, almost as incidental to the 'main' crime. A crime victimisation survey was undertaken in PNG's urban centres in 1991 as part of an international survey by the United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute (UNICRI) (Zvekic and Alvazzi 1995; Zvekic and Weatherburn 1995). PNG's major towns fared worse among the surveyed cities, a trend that was most marked in the serious crime category. PNG had by far the highest incidence of sexual assault (Table One). Nearly 12 per cent of women aged 16 years and over had been victims of sexual assault at least once in the preceding year and more than 32 per cent had been victims in the preceding five years. Around one-quarter of the sexual assault cases were classified as rape.

Table 1 – International comparison of sexual assaults (1991)



Note: This figure compares victimisation rates among females aged 16 and over.

Source: This table is constructed from survey data in Zvekic and Alvazzi (1995) and has been reproduced from Levantis (2000:132).¹⁵

The organisation and modus operandi of criminal groups varies from place to place. Rural *raskols* are more likely to speak the same local language and will often come from the same village. Banditry is commonplace, typically involving the armed hold-up of vehicles travelling slowly along poorly maintained roads. Rural crime of this kind tends to be episodic and is likely to peak during the harvesting of cash crops, such as coffee. Towns and other areas of concentrated development, such as mining and petroleum projects, provide the most lucrative criminal opportunities. Well-organised urban gangs target payrolls, banks, business premises, private residences, and cash-in-transit. Criminal groups operating in town are more likely to be ethnically heterogeneous, reflecting the composition of the overall urban population. Available criminal justice data suggest a significant growth in crime in recent years, with a 65 per cent increase in the number of serious offences reported to the police during the 1990s alone (World Bank 1999: 108). Port Moresby accounts for the highest proportion of reported serious crimes and is regularly described as one of the most dangerous

cities in the world (Zvekic and Alvazzi 1995).

The use of firearms has added greatly to the menace of *raskolism*. Homemade weapons began to appear in the 1970s. Today, weapons include high-powered automatic and semi-automatic rifles as well as homemade guns and rifles. There have even been reports of *raskol* groups armed with grenades (*Post-Courier*, 22 August 1996). The growing threat of criminal violence has, in turn, encouraged non-criminals to acquire firearms for self-defence. There have been many instances of alleged criminals being shot by their intended victims. In 1995, a foreign businessman shot dead four criminals during the course of a robbery at a Port Moresby restaurant (*The Bulletin*, 21 November 1995).

From its inception, the *raskol* gang has been a predominantly male preserve. Gangs have become an important vehicle for the initiation of young urban men into the ambivalent space of PNG's expanding towns. As well as drawing on older Melanesian models of masculinity, they draw on models provided by global culture. Prominent among these are the macho heroes of the action videos that are watched avidly in settlements,

villages, and private homes. Militaristic clothing is highly valued, as are dreadlocks or shaven heads, and the ubiquitous dark sunglasses. Media images from distant conflicts, including the 'war on terror', are scrutinised with great interest and used selectively to replenish a vibrant street style. In late 2002, Osama Bin Laden t-shirts became the latest accoutrement of young male fashion in Port Moresby (*Post-Courier*, 23 October 2002).

Tribal Fighting

Although common to many Papua New Guinean societies in pre-contact times, tribal warfare was suppressed successfully by colonial authorities, though it reappeared in parts of the highlands in the period preceding independence. Fighting was triggered by both old and new issues, in some places over land and in others over earlier killings or unpaid compensation (Strathern 1977). It was exacerbated by alcohol consumption that often led to brawls and fatal traffic accidents. Its revival prompted the establishment of a committee to investigate tribal fighting. The committee found that the limited availability and effectiveness of government solutions to local disputes had facilitated a reversion among certain groups to older self-help strategies (Paney Report 1973). Over the past two decades, tribal fighting has become a growing and debilitating problem, particularly in Southern Highlands, Enga, Western Highlands and Simbu Provinces.

Fighting results in high numbers of fatalities and injuries, extensive damage to property, and serious disruption to government services and commercial activities. Between 1988 and 1996 fights in the Tsak-Wapenamanda area of Enga Province reportedly claimed more than 300 lives (*National*, 23 January 1997). In 1999, more than thirty-five people were killed in two fights in the Okapa and Kainantu districts of the Eastern Highlands Province (Capie 2003, 92). Fighting between the Unjumap and Wogia tribes in the Southern Highlands in late 2001 and early 2002 was estimated to have killed as many as 120 people. According to a senior police officer, weapons used included M60 light machine guns, M16, SLR (self-loading rifles) and AR15 (modified) assault rifles, L40 and Mark 47 World War Two rifles, pump-action and single-shot shotguns, pistols and homemade guns, as well as bush knives and axes (*Post-Courier* 16 January 2002). The same officer claimed that the illicit gun trade had become a profitable business for those who hire weapons to combatants for substantial sums of money. Nine people were reportedly killed in a tribal fight between two warring clans in Enga in late 2002 (*Post-Courier*, 27 November 2002).

The fight erupted near an international high school following the death of a man from one of the clans. High-powered weapons were used by both sides. In order to evade police, a lot of the fighting took place at night. The estimated death toll from all recent conflicts in the Southern Highlands is believed to be in the hundreds (May 2004). In 2001, it was reported that some 1,000 people had been killed as a result of fighting in Enga Province over the previous four years (*ibid*). There are also many reports of rapes occurring in the context of fights. The destruction of schools, aid-posts, houses, gardens, business premises, has disastrous long-term effects upon development in the areas affected. Government services are likely to be seriously disrupted as teachers, health workers, and other public servants flee for their own safety (Story One).

Story One: School children caught up in a tribal fight

We were just a typical group of Papua New Guinean teenagers who were enjoying a Wednesday afternoon sun, playing an interesting game of soccer and were unsuspecting of the world around us, even though we were aware of the tension that existed. The tribal war that took place right outside the school fence had already taken its toll. Our main building in the school which included five classrooms, a computer lab, a library, and the main office was burnt down while the students were on holidays. That particular Wednesday afternoon is one I will never forget. The grade eleven and twelve class of Highland Lutheran International School were busy playing soccer on the open field when suddenly we heard huge explosions that sounded like grenades. There was pandemonium everywhere. Some students leapt to the lawn and laid flat while others were running but couldn't decide which route to take because the explosions were so loud and sounded so close it felt like guns were being fired from all directions. The tribal fight brought the most smoke I had ever seen or breathed in my entire life. It brought the regretful sound of crying voices, which I put up with every other day. But most of all, it brought a fear that never allowed me to sleep peacefully at night

Irene Reto, Grade 12, Enga Masemana (2003).¹⁶

The likelihood of prolonged cycles of retaliatory violence has been enhanced significantly as warriors blend traditional methods of settling inter-group disputes with modern technology, notably firearms. Traditionally, tribal warfare was conducted at close quarters with bows, arrows, axes and spears. It was often highly ritualised and fatalities generally remained low¹⁷. Shotguns used for hunting were not used in tribal fights. Although the first reported use of a gun in a tribal fight occurred in the 1970s, it is only since the mid-1980s that shotguns have become commonplace (Dorney 2000: 318). High powered rifles, some with telescopic sights, began appearing in the early 1990s and this served to make traditional fighting techniques increasingly redundant (Muke 1993: 255).

Initially homemade shotguns were used. Burton points to the sophistication of homemade guns and the manner in which they transformed tribal fighting. In his view, 'these weapons have swept the bowmen off the battlefield as surely as the Panzers brushed aside the valiant Polish cavalrymen on the North European Plain in September 1939' (Burton 1990: 35-6). They are inexpensive and an experienced gun maker can produce one within a week. According to a villager from Nipa in the Southern Highlands 'there are roughly 5 high-powered weapons in the village, including M16s, SLRs, pump action shot guns', in addition to the large number of homemade shotguns and pistols available. Although each gun reportedly has 2 full magazines, 'if we run out of ammunition in a fight, we travel to the next village and buy more ammunition from them. They are guaranteed to have some, so we can buy'.¹⁸ According to another villager, 'the same fights would not occur without modern weapons' because the young men no longer know how to use bows and arrows.

Guns have become a major topic of everyday discussions in many rural villages and all who are capable are likely to contribute to the purchase of community weapons and ammunition. Money spent on guns diminishes a community's ability to pay school fees and meet medical and other essential costs. Guns acquired in this context are highly valued and often left in the custody of young men for safekeeping and maintenance (Story Two).

Story Two: The Value of Guns

Dora Kegemo is a married mother of two young children. She is a community leader and sits in village court decisions as a mediator and advisor after attending a number of Police run community policing meetings, and conflict resolution training.

Dora recalls the time when guns arrived in her village. All the strong and young men gathered in a house where all the guns were stored. After oiling and decorating the guns these men called in all the village leaders, counsellors, village court magistrates, and church pastors to come and see the guns. Then a speaker among the group addressed the leaders and said, "Your lives are in these things. We will now bury these and will not touch them unless we have a tribal fight". The guns were put in a coffin box and buried. On top of the 'grave' a houseman was built where only men and young boys can enter. No woman is allowed to go anywhere near the house.

Sarah Garap, 'Highlands Gun Culture' (2003)

Another alarming development is the emergence of gunmen who hire their services as 'hitmen', personal security to political leaders, or as mercenaries in tribal fights. These 'guns for hire' have added a new tier of leadership in many highlands communities. They have accentuated already high levels of social dislocation in many villages by undermining the role of older, traditional male leaders. Young men with access to guns are also a constant threat to women and are blamed for rising levels of rape and other forms of violent assault.

Story Three: 'Many others are in a box with grass growing over them'

Maria Tombename lives in the Tsak valley in the Enga province of Papua New Guinea. Fifteen years ago, much of the valley was reduced to ugly ashes due to devastating tribal warfare in which over a hundred people died.

Women are seldom targets in Eastern Enga tribal warfare, so Maria would go close to the fighting in order to harvest food from her garden. While talking to a young man near the parish church a shot rang out and the young man fell mortally wounded. She then heard someone from the enemy clan identify her as the wife of a fight leader. Another shot rang out. She didn't feel anything at first and reached down into her pocket to find her rosary beads. Instead of her beads she felt blood. She tried to run away but couldn't as the shot had shattered her leg bone. So, dragging her injured leg behind her, she crawled to where she could hide until sunset. With nightfall she was able to attract attention and her clan rescued her and took her to hospital where her leg was amputated at the hip. Maria does not bear a grudge against her assailants. She says that she can get around as well as women with two legs and she is glad to be alive. "Many others are in a box with grass growing over them."

Fr. Phillip Gibbs, Faith and Destruction (2003/04)

Young women have become a form of currency for paying mercenaries and purchasing guns. One man from the Berepka tribe in the Western Highlands claimed that his sisters had been traded for guns in 1995-1996.¹⁹ Towards the end of a fight between groups in Akom and Pina in Enga Province in 2003, a girl was designated to 'pay the hand' of one of the mercenaries (the hand being that which wielded the gun and that by which the man will marry). She was decorated in the traditional attire and placed on the back of a car. As she stood, people from the enemy group shot her in the back and she died instantly.²⁰ Those responsible for the shooting wanted to ensure that the mercenary's payment could not be delivered. Traditionally, there were codes of conduct followed during warfare. In many places it was unacceptable to kill women and children. Today, however, such constraints have largely disappeared and women and children often find themselves in grave danger. Women can also

become the victims of tribal 'payback' killings. In 2003, a young Engan woman, Dorothy Ambo, was fatally shot while waiting for a bus. Her assassins mistakenly thought she was from Sirunki and killed her in retaliation for a murder committed by a Sirunki man on a member of their tribe.²¹

Not only have guns greatly increased the casualty rate but they also require financial resources beyond the normal capacity of most local communities (Strathern 1993: 190-217; Young 1995). In addition, they allow non-combatants to play a lethal role by supplying guns and ammunition without having to participate in the actual fight. Gun ownership generates prestige, as well as fuelling competition between communities to acquire more. Rumours that a particular community possesses a certain number of weapons are likely to induce anxieties among neighbouring villages and prompt efforts to match these numbers. This has contributed to a mini arms-race in parts of the highlands founded on growing levels of insecurity and local efforts to build defensive capacities.

Some church leaders speak of a growing phenomenon that resonates with the Cold War notion of 'mutual assured destruction'. On 31 January 2004, Bishop Douglas Young was involved in a peace and reconciliation ceremony in Mt Hagen, where the two sides wanted peace because they believed they were both too heavily armed and feared 'mutual destruction'. Although there was no surrendering of arms in the process, it was their growing stockpiles of arms, and the potential threat they posed, that brought the tribes together in an effort to settle their differences. These kinds of ceremonies are a positive step towards peaceful resolution of conflict. According to Bishop Young, 'small acts of reconciliation are much more important than simply giving arms back' because they feed into a more enduring process of peace-making between warring communities.²²

Election-related violence

National elections, held every five years, increasingly involve the threat and use of firearms. They are often the catalyst for the revival of dormant tribal disputes and generation of new ones. In the highlands, modern electoral contests have been grafted onto highly competitive and unstable local political cultures and almost inevitably exacerbate existing tensions.

As early as 1977 (two years after independence), election observer Bill Standish recalls that firearms were being used to impress voters and intimidate rival candidates and their supporters in Simbu Province. Twenty years later,

Standish notes that gun violence during the 1997 elections resulted in the deaths of 35 Simbu people and displaced 1,000 others (Standish 2002). Guns also played a significant role in Simbu in the 2002 elections.²³ Politicians and the security services continue to be implicated in the supply of illicit weapons to areas where they aim to solicit support.²⁴ Guns are also used in acts of retributive violence directed against individuals and communities believed to have voted for rival candidates. Sir Mekere Morauta, sitting Prime Minister during the 2002 elections, conceded that members of his own People's Democratic Movement (PDM) were involved in some smuggling operations.²⁵

It is widely recognised that candidates stockpile weapons and use them to intimidate voters. Four Southern Highlands MPs allegedly organised a helicopter shipment of 20 semi-automatic rifles and machine guns. On the eve of the 2002 elections, Southern Highlands leaders called for the deployment of the PNGDF to maintain order in the troubled province, which a former PNGDF commander described as 'totally out of control' (May 2004: 1). The district administrator for Koroba/Kopiago in Southern Highlands released a warning to various airline companies in the country that any aircraft flying into his area were at serious risk of being shot down. This was because 19 local candidates had stockpiled high-powered firearms, from AK47s and M16s to 303s, which they intended to use during the election period.²⁶ The extraordinary levels of violence and disruption experienced in the Southern Highlands in 2002 led to 'failed elections' being declared in six of the province's nine electorates.

By mid-2002, the election fuelled arms race had resulted in at least 20 killings.²⁷ By early August this figure had risen to over 30 deaths (May 2004: 2). In the single most spectacular incident of election-related violence in 2002, an armed gang of about 30 men took control of Enga's provincial police headquarters in Wabag and, using drums of aviation fuel, blew up two shipping containers, destroying at least 30,000 ballot papers.²⁸

THE GENDER OF VIOLENCE

The prevalence of domestic violence in PNG has been documented by the Law Reform Commission (LRC) in a series of studies carried out in the 1980s (Toft 1985, Toft and Bonnell 1985; Toft 1986a, Toft 1986b). This research

found that on average, two-thirds of wives have been hit by their husbands. The frequency and severity of violence is greater in the urban environment. Considerable variation exists across the country, with figures of close to 100 per cent in some highlands villages, and half that level in some Oro and New Ireland villages. In rural areas, perceived causes of domestic violence were listed as sexual jealousy, the wife's failure to fulfil her duties, and dislike of the spouse. In urban areas, the main perceived causes were alcohol, sexual jealousy, and money problems. An underlying cause is the widespread acceptance of domestic violence, particularly wife-beating, as a part of normal life.

Other underlying causes of domestic violence identified in the LRC research related to the stress caused by rapid socio-economic change; lack of communication between husbands and wives; and the high background level of violence and aggression in many of the traditional cultures, as reinforced by the media, tribal fighting, and civil war. Growing poverty was an important aspect of the 'stress caused by rapid socio-economic change' factor. The decline in the value of the local currency over the past decade has dramatically affected purchasing power and the effects of this are most apparent in the highly monetised urban centres. However, even in rural areas people need money for school fees, clothing, transport, kerosene, medical treatment, soap, and other basic household items. Growing levels of poverty are increasing the vulnerability of women to violence and crime. As one recent report puts it:

Poverty pushes people past the limits of their patience. The effects of this are seen not only in the climbing crime statistics (and the flourishing security industry) but also in the high levels of violence against the most vulnerable, and the rising numbers of women and girls turning to prostitution for a living (Bradley 2001: 11).

Much of the sexual violence against women and girls is perpetrated by men known to the victims, including family members and the women's own husbands.

Another study concluded that "The pervasiveness of gang rape as a form of criminal activity has become a major threat to social and the security of women and families throughout Papua New Guinea" (GoPNG and UNICEF 1998: 144). According to National Crime Summaries compiled by the police for 2000, an average of 5.6 rapes is reported daily throughout the country (RPNGC 2000). Within a seven-day

sample period, 22 rapes were accounted for, and 18 pack rapes were reported, involving up to as many as 20 assailants per case.

Armed conflict and emergency situations increase women's risk of rape and sexual assault. Sister Gaudentia Meier reported that in January 2001 alone she had examined 17 young girls and older women for rape during tribal fighting in Mendi (Meier 2003). A common theme linking past and present patterns of sexual violence in PNG is women's low socio-economic status, which makes them vulnerable to coercion, along with attitudes which support men's sense of entitlement over women and their bodies. High rates of sexual violence, contribute to growing STD rates and the spread of HIV/AIDS. The latter, in particular, is likely to have a major impact on the growth of poverty. Frank Kasahya, the pathologist to Tari Hospital, disclosed at the time of writing that he receives at least two new HIV patients each week.²⁹

Another universal theme linking patterns of violence against women and children in PNG is polygamy. When a man marries for the second or third time, his first wife and children are frequently neglected. School teachers at Tari Primary School note that their most disruptive students come from broken homes, particularly where the children belong to families abandoned by the father who is in a polygamous relationship.³⁰ The first wife occasionally receives visits from her husband when he demands sex. If or when she refuses, she is customarily beaten.³¹ Polygamy places enormous strain on women who are fighting to maintain their dignity at the same time as providing for their children. Polygamy also provides the main context of violence *between* women in PNG. Nurses in hospitals from Port Moresby to Mt Hagen identified many of their female patients suffering from stab wounds to be victims of other women in domestic disputes.³² A female prison officer in Ialibu confirmed that the majority of women are imprisoned for violence against their husbands' other wives, or against the husbands themselves.³³ When a first wife is sent to prison, her children are often left abandoned, as was the case with one woman in Mendi, whose children were rescued from starving to death by a group of Franciscan sisters.³⁴ Men are rarely imprisoned for sexual abuse and murder of their wives. In the rare cases that they are brought to the courts, their sentences are often light. When a woman is raped or killed, it is usually one of the woman's male blood-relatives who demands 'compensation' from the assailant's tribe, and the crime is effectively absolved (Story Four).

Story Four: Domestic abuse

One husband came home, beating and kicking his young wife with the three children looking on. The unconscious woman was then brought to the Health Centre. The woman died on the way to the Base Hospital in Mendi of a ruptured spleen. We continued to Mendi as I wanted a post mortem done to bring justice to the case. Nothing was done. The body came back and was quietly buried within a day. Compensation was paid there was no court case and the husband was free.

Sister Gaudentia Meier, Report on Family and Sexual Violence (2003)

In addition to the rising number of women imprisoned for crimes committed due to polygamy, there is evidence of growing levels of child abuse. The GoPNG/UNICEF Report cited above concluded that 'the increasing incidence of child abuse can be viewed as a direct consequence of the rapidly changing conditions that characterize PNG's transitional society' (1998: 140). Tari Hospital Admissions records document rape cases involving children as young as two years old,³⁵ whilst in 2003, the Hagen Hospital Surgical Admissions book recorded five cases of scrotal lacerations to young boys, and a number of deep penetrating wounds to the vaginas of five-year-old girls.³⁶ Child prostitution is a growing phenomenon in towns, as well as in rural areas in the vicinity of mines and other large-scale resource development projects. In towns, rising levels of poverty, crowding and isolation, render children more vulnerable to violence, sexual exploitation and neglect. More mothers are forced to look for any kind of work or way of earning money outside of the home, often because their husbands have abandoned them. Children have to look after themselves or are left in the questionable care of under-employed youth or relatives.

STATE RESPONSES TO VIOLENCE AND CONFLICT

Papua New Guinea's formal criminal justice system has been increasingly overwhelmed by the growth of violent crime and tribal conflict. It remains an urban-based system and has a limited presence in many parts of the country. For the 85 per cent of the PNG population who live in rural areas, crimes and disputes are more likely to be dealt with informally. Even in the towns, lack of confidence in state policing is demonstrated in the massive growth in private security.

Lack of adequate government support for state police has been a major constraint. The current number of police, approximately 5,500 officers, has not increased significantly since independence in 1975 despite the population having more than doubled and the exponential growth in serious crime and conflict. Most of the police budget is spent on wages. Funds for petrol, airfares, office equipment and other necessities are scarce and officers-in-charge are forced to seek external assistance, often from local businesses. Police stations and accommodation are regularly condemned as unfit for human habitation by health authorities. These conditions, including extremely low wages, have contributed to low morale and growing levels of corruption. In the field, police are often outgunned by better-armed criminals and tribal warriors. This has sometimes led to individual political leaders donating firearms to local police in acts of questionable legality. For example, on the eve of the 1992 elections, the premier of Simbu Province presented his police commander with 24 weapons (shotguns and pistols) and ammunition after learning that the police only had two shotguns (Standish 1994: 70).

Reactive policing strategies have not only failed to stem existing levels of crime but, in many cases, have contributed to further disorder. Fear and distrust of police are the prevailing sentiments in many communities. Speaking of the impact of police on tribal fights, Mapusia claims that 'police interventions have been counter-productive. They have prolonged fights, increased fatalities, and obstructed negotiations and settlements. Essentially the police have made matters worse' (Mapusia 1986: 65). The excessive use of force has contributed to increasing levels of litigation in recent years. Claims cover matters such as illegal police raids, false imprisonment, wrongful arrest, assault, and police killings. Over 50 per cent of all litigation against the state arises from actions against the police (PNG Department of Attorney General 1999: 26).

Violent encounters with police provide a recurring theme in the legitimating rhetoric of *raskols* and constitute an important aspect of induction into urban gang life. Police violence in the course of arrest or questioning is depicted as routine by criminal informants. There have been numerous reports of suspects being shot 'while committing an offence', 'while resisting arrest', or 'while trying to escape'. Police killings contribute to an escalating cycle of retributive violence between police and criminals, fuelled by the abundant supply of sophisticated weapons. Relatively few cases are followed up with coronial inquiries.

The Bougainville war reinforced the militarisation of state responses to conflict. Heavy-handed policing contributed significantly to the initial escalation of that conflict. In addition, mobile squads returning to the mainland brought back many of the techniques and attitudes derived from their experience in war-torn Bougainville and applied them in daily policing practice. Special equipment issued for the Bougainville context, including black uniforms and face camouflage, continued to be used by some of these units upon their redeployment (Standish 1994: 80). The working culture of the mobile squads, particularly in the highlands, entails an unbridled machismo and inclination toward Rambo-like solutions. Intimidation and violence, including high levels of sexual violence, are a regular response to localised outbreaks of disorder.

The institutional culture of the RPNGC is singularly masculine. Women officers comprise a mere 5.4 per cent of uniformed personnel. Interviews with women police confirm the masculinity of police culture with a strong emphasis on the use of physical force as the appropriate remedy for resolving problems (McLeod 2003). They also confirm that male officers rarely treat seriously complaints of domestic violence from members of the public and that, moreover, domestic violence is pervasive in police barracks.

COMMUNITY-BASED INITIATIVES DIRECTED AGAINST TRIBAL FIGHTING AND GUN CULTURE

In light of limited government capacity, a number of local communities have taken steps to address the growing problem of guns and violence in their areas. These initiatives reflect the absence or inadequacy of existing state responses to violence and demonstrate a willingness on the part of some local groups to take back responsibility for maintaining security in their own communities. The methods employed vary but often entail strategies that draw on local knowledge and cultural resources.

Women's and church groups have been particularly active in the area of peacemaking and conflict resolution. Local 'success stories' in different parts of the country are often not well known beyond the immediate vicinity. They tend to take place in rural areas far from the eyes of the urban-based media and policy community. Alan Rumsey tells the remarkable story of the Kulka Women's Group and their successful intervention

to end a longstanding tribal conflict in the Nebilyer Valley of Western Highlands Province (Rumsey 2000). Like other interventions, the Kulka Women's Group developed a strategy that appealed to both modern conceptions of state law and development, as well as more traditional notions of peacemaking. The women concerned, wearing t-shirts bearing PNG's national emblem, marched in between the rival groups of warriors and exhorted them to lay down their arms and go home. After planting the national flag in the middle of the battlefield, they distributed food and other gifts to the warriors who accepted and subsequently disbanded. There are also many examples of innovative and courageous peacemaking initiatives led by women's groups in war-torn Bougainville (Garasu 2002; Saovana-Spriggs 2003). These have been integral to the success of the reconciliation processes occurring at the grassroots in that troubled island. The Simbu-based NGO, Kup Women for Peace (KWP), has made significant inroads in restoring peace to a formerly conflict-ridden area (Garap 2004).

Story 5: Kup Women for Peace

Kup sub-district comprises approximately 25,000 people divided into 12 distinct tribal groupings living in a relatively undeveloped part of rural Simbu. Intermittent fighting between different tribal groups has occurred since the early 1970s. Fights have often been triggered by relatively minor disputes including adultery and drunken brawls but also by rapes, murders and election-related disputes. The use of high-powered firearms has resulted in many deaths and injuries. There has also been extensive criminal activity unrelated to the fighting but also involving guns.

KWP was established by a group of local activists in March 2000 with the aim of restoring peace and promoting sustainable livelihoods. KWP have received support from local leaders and others tired of living with constant fear, insecurity, violence, and lack of development. Educated leaders have formed the Kup Restoration and Development Authority to help direct the rebuilding work and ensure a sustainable peace. People are now able to move around beyond their own tribal land without fear of attack. Communities have reconciled and are slowly beginning to regenerate. Displaced families are beginning to return. Government officials have been re-visiting the area after many years of absence to prepare for the restoration of services. As the larger community has begun to organize, KWP has continued to work with women on health issues, food production, education, and human rights. In August 2003, KWP organized the first of a planned series of surrender ceremonies where local criminals surrender themselves and their weapons before a large audience including representatives from the provincial government, police, and magistracy. There has been no major resurgence of fighting since KWP began their campaign.

Summarised from Sarah Garap, 2003a

There are also community-based initiatives that aim to assist *raskol* gang members to renounce crime and reintegrate back into the community. Criminal gang surrenders have occurred regularly in different parts of PNG over the years (Dinnen 1995). Unusually, they offer a potential resolution to crime that is initiated by the criminals themselves. Community and church groups often act as brokers, engaging in protracted negotiations with leaders of local criminal gangs. Gang leaders negotiate the conditions of their surrender and abandonment of crime. These are likely to include a plea for leniency in the event of subsequent prosecutions, as well as access to legitimate income-generating opportunities. A formal agreement will be drawn up and signed by gang members, community representatives, local government officials and, often, by the police. The gang will surrender formally at a public ceremony and hand their weapons over to the police as a demonstration of their abandonment of crime.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS & CONCLUSIONS

Efforts to improve the formal justice sector are currently in place, particularly in security sector reform. For instance, weaknesses in the police force are now the subject of the Australian-supported Enhanced Cooperation Program that, among other things, will entail the deployment of over 200 Australian Federal Police into PNG. Likewise the Australia/Papua New Guinea Defence Cooperation Program has been working to improve the management of security force armouries. It is no small task to persuade police and military personnel to forsake the lucrative and illegal trade in arms and ammunition given their appalling working and living conditions.

The most promising prospect for change lies in the informal sector. Formal systems of governance have less reach than the existing alternative forms of governance due in part to their relative late arrival into the country. As a consequence, there are many opportunities to tap into the energy and innovation that exists at the community level, which is largely invisible from the centre, and yet manages many of the outstanding problems untouched by the state. Community-based groups are dealing with problems associated with tribal fighting and gun culture in a holistic way. Outside efforts should therefore aim to build on the local knowledge and cultural resources available to the groups so that lasting solutions can be reached.

At some level, there needs to be coordination between the state and community in order to bring together all the stakeholders involved in the process. Below are some brief recommendations for both the formal and informal sectors:

- *Destruction of seized weapons*: Some weapons confiscated, seized, or collected by the police remain in poor storage facilities. Police should aim to destroy these firearms to eliminate the risk of recycling them in the wrong hands.
- *National legislation reform*: Stricter weapons control should be enforced through legislation to regulate the production and proliferation of small arms. Conditions for possessing a licence should be reviewed, and high-powered weapons should be prohibited.
- *Ammunition controls*: Firearm owners should only be permitted to buy ammunition for the type of firearm attached to the licence. The amount of ammunition should not exceed the established legal limit per year.
- *Imported weapons restriction*: Imports should require a licence, while exports or shipments within or through the country should require the written authority of the Police Commissioner.
- *Regional cooperation*: Cooperative enforcement within the Pacific is necessary for the successful reduction in illegal arms trading. Various initiatives have been offered to curb the small arms problem, such as the *Nadi Framework* (2000) and the *Honiara Initiative* (1998). These options should be explored thoroughly.
- *Alternatives to a buy-back scheme*: It is widely known that ex-combatants choose to cache their best arms for future use, while simultaneously benefiting from the peace dividend. The money can be used to replace their inferior weapons with better quality guns. Alternative methods of disarmament should be explored, such as an exchange of weapons for a community development project, or the creation of niche industries in the community which can engage young men on return to their villages.
- *Improved public awareness and information*: Both the state and community-based organisations should raise public awareness of small arms-related problems, and of any

voluntary weapons surrender programmes that may be available to communities.

Success at this stage in Papua New Guinea cannot be measured by actual numbers of weapons collected in any kind of state-sponsored disarmament programme. It is essential to appreciate the complexity of PNG's gun culture first in order to develop effective strategies which reduce the impact of gun violence. A Peace Monitoring Group commander in Bougainville recently commented that 'weapons disposal is not so much about collecting guns, but about building trust' (cited in *Small Arms Survey* 2003: 100). Disarmament efforts must therefore be considered as part of a broader commitment to peace and reconciliation, which takes time and patience, such 'as in untangling or mending a fishing net' (Pirie 2000: 57). For all their destructiveness, people will continue to resort to the use of arms as long as they are made to feel insecure in the absence of adequate state protection.

AUTHOR NOTE

Sinclair Dinnen is a Fellow in the State Society and Governance in Melanesia Project and the Department of Political and Social Change in the Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies at the Australian National University. He has conducted extensive research on issues of conflict, peacemaking, and law and justice reform in the Melanesian countries.

Edwina Thompson is a PhD scholar in the Department of International Relations in the Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies at the Australian National University. She has research interests in small arms and the political economy of ethnic conflict. She has worked previously as a refugee caseworker and campaign coordinator at Amnesty International.

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ENDNOTES

- ¹ Approximately 85 per cent of PNG's population continues to live in rural villages, surviving on a combination of subsistence agriculture and cash cropping.
- ² The pidgin term wantok connotes one who speaks the same language (literally, 'one talk') and, in popular usage, describes the relations of obligations binding together relatives, and members of the same clan or tribal grouping.
- ³ PNG has the lowest human development index and highest human poverty index of 12 Pacific island countries reviewed by UNDP in 1999 (UNDP 1999). In the most recent global Human Development Report, PNG is ranked towards the bottom of the 'medium development' category at 133 out of a total of 177 countries (UNDP 2004).
- ⁴ Over 6,200 cases of AIDS have been officially reported, although the World Bank estimates that the true figure is closer to 50,000 and above (Radio New Zealand International 12/07/04).
- ⁵ PNG and the French territories are the only Pacific states that explicitly recognise self-defence as a genuine reason for gun ownership (Small Arms Survey, 2003).
- ⁶ 'One Gun for 180', Post-Courier, 23 June 2003.
- ⁷ 'Policy Information Paper on Gun Control', addressed to Mr Robert Igara, Chief Secretary, 15 August 2000.
- ⁸ Interview with Philip Moya, Provincial Administrator, Southern Highlands, 9 February 2004.
- ⁹ Time Pacific 14, 9 April 2001.
- ¹⁰ 'PNG 'cowers' while MPs brandish guns', Sydney Morning Herald, 4 December 2002; 'Calls to disarm PNG politicians', 18 February 2004, <http://www.news.com.au/common/story_page/0,4057,5606613%25E401,00.html>.
- ¹¹ 'Army Weapons sold to public, says Yarka', The National, 12 February 2004.
- ¹² For details about the Sandline Affair, see Dinnen, May and Regan (1997).
- ¹³ We are grateful to Colonel Dougal McMillan, Australian Defence Force, and John ToGuata, former Assistant Commissioner of Police, Chief of Operations in the Ombudsman's Office for these details.
- ¹⁴ 'One Gun for 180', Post Courier, 23 June 2003.
- ¹⁵ The results of the UNICRI international victimisation survey also found that rates of assaults and robberies were higher in PNG's urban centres than in other surveyed cities.
- ¹⁶ Extract from 'The Law and Order problem in the Enga Province', Irene Reto. Paper presented at the Enga Law and Order Summit, September 2003.
- ¹⁷ Evidence from genealogies suggests that casualty rates were considerably higher where the purpose was to drive people off their land.

- ¹⁸ Interview with man from Suma village, Nipa, Southern Highlands Province, February 2004.
- ¹⁹ Private communication with an anonymous source.
- ²⁰ Interview with Father Phillip Gibbs, Melanesian Institute, Goroka.
- ²¹ Interview with Father Phillip Gibbs, Melanesian Institute, Goroka.
- ²² Interview with Bishop Douglas Young, Catholic Church, Mount Hagen, February 2004.
- ²³ Standish (2002) and 'Gun Terror in Chimbu', *Post-Courier*, 22 July 2002.
- ²⁴ 'Skate: thugs, guns threaten democracy', *Post-Courier*, 25 July 2002.
- ²⁵ 'Premier appeals for halt to PNG arms smuggling', *The National*, 28 February 2002.
- ²⁶ 'Aircraft warned of no-go area', *Post-Courier*, 14 June 2002.
- ²⁷ Mark Forbes, 'PNG politicians smuggle guns', *The Age*, 20 July 2002.
- ²⁸ *ibid.*
- ²⁹ Interview with Frank Kasahya, Tari Hospital, 11 February 2004.
- ³⁰ Interview with school teacher, Tari Primary School, February 2004.
- ³¹ Personal accounts of women in the Southern Highlands and Port Moresby, February 2004.
- ³² Various interviews conducted at hospitals in February 2004.
- ³³ Interview with Prison Officer, Ialibu Prison, Southern Highlands, February 2004.
- ³⁴ Interview with Sister Gaudentia Meier, Mendi, February 2004.
- ³⁵ Thanks to David Kane, Senior Medical Clerk at Tari Hospital, for access to these records (February 2004).
- ³⁶ Thanks to Dr James Kintwa, CEO, Hagen Hospital, for access to these records (February 2004).

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