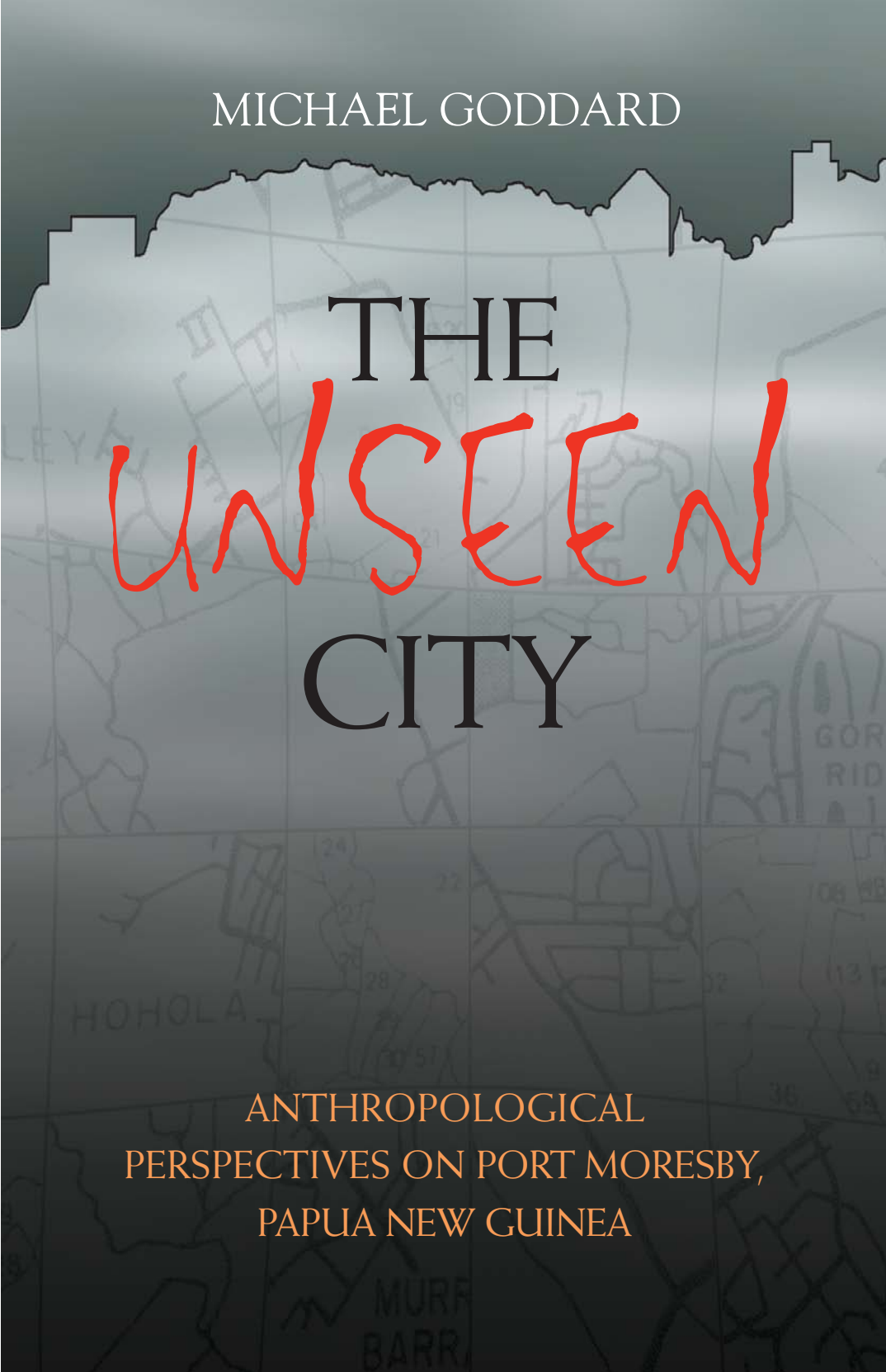MICHAEL GODDARD

THE
UNSEEN
CITY

ANTHROPOLOGICAL
PERSPECTIVES ON PORT MORESBY,
PAPUA NEW GUINEA

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The Unseen City

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Anthropological perspectives on
Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea

MICHAEL GODDARD

To Debbie

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Chapter One from 'From Rolling Thunder to Reggae: Imagining Squatter Settlements in Papua New Guinea' in *The Contemporary Pacific* 13 (1): pp.1–32, 2001.

Michael Goddard

Contents

INTRODUCTION

'You could say it's a town built for trouble …'
— Louis Johnson, 1970

Thus began a short poem simply entitled 'Port Moresby', written five years before the independent nation of Papua New Guinea emerged from a history of British, German and Australian colonial control. Implicit in the imagery of the four verses following this opening line was a simmering tension between apprehensive Australians and resentful, subjugated Melanesians waiting, amid the heat and the fever-bearing mosquitoes, for the drama of an inevitable but as yet undetermined political independence to unfold. Less dramatic was the tone of a book published at about the same time, tracing the history of Port Moresby and its changing population. Written by the then rector of Port Moresby, Ian Stuart, it celebrated the growth of a colonial town, initially established in an unpromising environment with the cooperation of indigenous landholders and given some vitality by a diversity of migrants (Stuart 1970). From the liberal colonial perspective of the author, Port Moresby came of age as discriminatory laws imposed in the early colonial period began to be repealed. The tensions implied in Johnson's poem were minimised in Stuart's book. Instead, contemporary Port Moresby was typified as 'a town not much loved' (1970: 165) by its residents and visitors, but nevertheless a pleasantly civilised small town. The latter part of the book was a guided tour through

the streets of an Australian outpost, which was cautiously welcoming an increasing body of indigenous migrants as nominal social equals.

Six years later, and one year after Papua New Guinea celebrated its independence, another book on Port Moresby appeared. Written by Nigel Oram, an academic with public service experience, it was a dense and rigorous account of the history of a colonial outpost that became a town and was now a city (Oram 1976a). It gave far greater attention than Stuart's book to administrative policy-making and its effect on indigenous people, including not only local landowners but migrant workers. From Oram's critical perspective, Port Moresby was turning from 'an Australian town frayed at the edges' (1976a: 259) into a Melanesian city by the 1970s and its inhabitants were attempting to live with the legacy of the piecemeal urban planning and often reactive decision-making that typified its local postwar Australian administration. Not only did Oram's book present a better-informed image of the rapidly growing Melanesian population of Port Morersby than the poet and the rector, but, importantly, it included some detail of the urban environment they lived in, which remained hidden to the gaze of most Australians.

The hidden urban environment, the unseen city, is the focus of this book. By 'the unseen city', I mean especially that social area of Port Moresby that remains out of sight of most non-Melanesians, who are still inclined to the four-decade-old view reflected in Louis Johnson's opening line. Media imagery and the reportage of local and global political concerns about Papua New Guinea's 'law and order' problems, its struggling 'economy' and its corrupt politicians and public servants ensures that at the beginning of the 21st century Port Moresby remains, in the popular imagination, a town 'built for trouble'. Intending tourists are invariably warned by travel advisors in their home countries to observe extreme caution beyond the precincts of their city hotels. Contrary to this grim picture, my own experience of the unseen city is that beyond the crime and corruption that

preoccupies the media, there is a creative and dynamic 'grassroots' response to the urban aftermath of colonial rule. In this collection of essays based on fieldwork in and around Papua New Guinea's capital city, I show something of the social environment of people in the much-maligned migrant 'settlements', which began to appear at the end of World War II, and in a two-century-old village at the city's edge. The essays reflect the analytic perceptions of an anthropologist moving among Melanesians who are obliged in their day-to-day life to negotiate the urban legacy of the colonial past, when policies reflected 'Western needs and goals, unrelated to the needs and aspirations of the Papua New Guinean population' (Oram 1976a). The cultural diversity among them, and the particular historical form of the encounter between migrants and the traditional landholders of the city area, mediated by almost a century of European colonialism, make Port Moresby unique among Third-World cities.

The unseen city escapes even the purview of maps, which can never keep pace with the physical and social developments of Melanesian urbanisation. The colonial view of Port Moresby's social make-up until World War II can still be inferred, a quarter of a century after the end of colonial rule, from maps made at different times in the city's development. When the town was small, the suburbs (which are nowadays the inner suburbs) were known mostly by the indigenous Motu and Koita language names for the areas of land they grew on. The major roads built on that land under colonial rule bore the names of European dignitaries, politicians, administrators and missionaries. A European ship's captain who explored the area in 1873 named the port after his father, an admiral in the British Navy. Thus European dominance and the recognition of a subordinate indigenous landholding group was inscribed in the nomenclature of colonisation. The social reality was, of course, more complex. The town contained significant numbers of people from Asia and from elsewhere in the Pacific. Of these, a number of early arrivals, more or less excluded from European sociality, had cohabited or intermarried

with Melanesians. Their progeny, referred to (if at all) as 'half-castes', went largely unacknowledged in the accounts of Port Moresby preferred by those who, at the time, saw themselves as the bearers of civilisation.

Later maps, showing the spreading edges of the city and the outer suburbs, which began to appear after World War II, invite a slightly different inference. Outer suburban streets were often given Motu or Koita names, albeit abstracted in some cases from their original contexts, such as *Vanagi* (Motu: a type of canoe) Place and *Bava* (Motu: a variety of crab) Street, both in the inland suburb of Boroko. Among the surburban streets nearer to the downtown area, other names also appeared, such as *Rabia* or *Sabama*, referring to cartographically ill-defined habitats that were later to be called 'settlements'. These were often the homes of people who began to migrate into town after the war, with the lifting of the laws that had sought to prevent voluntary urban migration by Melanesians. The migrants came first from along the Papuan coast to the east and west and later from other parts of the country, to an ambivalent welcome by the colonisers and the traditional landholders. The newcomers from Papuan coastal areas often negotiated their own occupation of land in town with traditional landholders on the basis of traditional trading relationships. Some of them were domiciled in low-cost housing by employers and town authorities.

The flow of migrants portended the eventual transition of the town from a colonial outpost to a Melanesian city, but at the time its effect on the European view of Port Moresby's sociality, as can be inferred from the maps, was the addition of a putative underclass. The dominant group in this three-tier imagery was European, by this time almost exclusively Australian, attempting to develop Port Moresby in the image of an Australian small town. The second imagined tier was composed of the original inhabitants of the area, the Motu-Koita, living in the village cluster known collectively by most Europeans as Hanuabada (Motu: big village) near the Administration headquarters at Konedobu (Motu: deep beach) and in a few smaller villages

within a few kilometres along the coast or inland. From these communities, by virtue of their early encounter with colonial schooling and technical training institutions, were drawn many of the town's clerical and trade workers. The third, and lowest, imagined tier was composed of the newer migrants, finding work where they could in the first instance. This three-tier view mostly ignored a growing and economically important Chinese presence (since the late 1950s), and continued to give little recognition to the significant 'half-caste' population (for whom the preferred term was now 'mixed race').[1]

One of the most convenient indicators of the imagined social order, to Western eyes, was housing. The ordered housing estates of the Australians contrasted with the urban villages of the Motu-Koita, the 'compounds' containing the dormitory accommodation of Melanesians working in the larger stores and offices, and the small 'boy-houses' where domestic servants lived in the back gardens of many of the Australians. The most extreme contrast, though, was with the self-help housing of the so-called settlements. Since Papua New Guinea's emergence as an independent nation, these contrasts in housing have continued to inform outsiders' understanding of the social make-up of the city. Hence, the popular structural image of Port Moresby nowadays among visitors from oversees, and those whose perceptions are guided by television and print media, is of a city divided in simple socioeconomic and spatial terms. On one side of this division, it is commonly assumed, is a working population ranging from elite public servants and businesspeople to tradespeople and workers on modest incomes living in a matching range of legitimate housing. On the other side is an underclass of under-educated, unemployed and criminally inclined migrants living in shanty conditions or worse. Papua New Guinea's capital city is thus represented in terms of a general stereotype of Third-World cities, which lends itself to the superimposition of further binary assumptions. For example, depending on the sympathies of the observer, either the settlement-dwelling ('shanty' is rarely used

locally) underclass are the victims and a corrupt elite class are the contemporary economic villains in this urban divide, or settlements are the nemesis of poor colonial and post-independence socioeconomic planning, a chronic threat to law and order and to the wellbeing of the legitimate citizenry.

It is not surprising that the city's sociopolitical structure invites generalisations commonly found in literature on Third-World urbanisation, for it appears at first sight to reproduce a familiar model of 'developing' nations. Despite monetary and practical assistance from international aid agencies, its education and medical facilities are under-resourced, seemingly as a result of chronic corruption in high places and an uncooperative, unwieldy and inefficient bureaucracy. Rich politicians and business entrepreneurs live in relative luxury and buy real estate overseas, yet a substantial proportion of the urban population lives in what seems to be squalor. The city has no major production industries, but it has a huge service industry, and its infrastructure appears to be in a state of chronic disrepair.

Beyond these stereotypic features, however, is a social environment largely unseen by those who assume that the same broad analytical brushstrokes can be applied to Port Moresby as to cities in South America, on the African continent or in Asia. This is the aspect that I want to disclose: a city whose specifically Melanesian sociality remains resilient to the structural developments, which, from a 'global' perspective, might render it largely indistinguishable from innumerable urban environments elsewhere in the Third World. My aim here is partly to correct common misapprehensions, particularly about the nature of Port Moresby's less formal habitats, the 'urban villages' and 'settlements' (the latter often denigrated as 'squatter' settlements). But I also want to give the reader some sense of the background and contemporary sociality of these urban people, displacing popular generalisations with more detailed accounts that do justice to their vitality, their resiliance and their creative responses to the problems of living in a burgeoning Melanesian city.

To begin with, it needs to be understood that the social organisation of the city is far more complex than is allowed by the popular images to which I have referred above. This is partly because Port Moresby has always been a migrant town. The longest-existent resident groups are the Motu and Koita, and 'Motu-Koita' (or 'Motu-Koitabu', *Koitabu* being the Motu name for the Koita) is now a compound name for the two intermarrying indigenous groups on whose land the city has grown since the arrival of its missionary harbingers in the 1870s. The Motu-Koita villages have mostly survived, transformed but relatively insular, as spreading suburbs encompass them, and their inhabitants are increasingly politically organised to withstand the complete loss of their land — and therewith their traditional sense of identity — to the growing city as the 21st century begins. From the deep historical perspective of the Motu-Koita, the settlements are a recent development in the appropriation of their traditional land by outsiders and, as the settlements grow and spread seemingly faster than the colonial town itself, the Motu-Koita themselves often echo the rhetoric of city authorities about 'lawless', 'migrant' settlement-dwellers. Many of the 'migrants' have, however, lived in Port Moresby longer than the city authorities in formal housing who habitually decry their presence. The first settlements of migrant workers were established at the end of World War II by arrangement with Motu-Koita landholders and often with colonial city authorities who have long since disappeared. The grandchildren of these resilient pioneers regard the city as their home and often speak its local linguae francae (Tokpisin and Hiri Motu) and English far more fluently than their traditional languages.

Further, the history and variety of the so-called settlements since the end of World War II is a complex matter in itself. The early migrants, especially those from the Gulf district to the west and the Hood Lagoon area and beyond to the east, tended to form regional enclaves in town. The settlements they established in the 1940s are, in several cases, still dominated by people who

identify themselves micro-ethnically with these origins, even though members of the younger generations, born and raised in the settlements, may never have been out of Port Moresby. Settlements established later in the postwar colonial period were more regionally mixed, reflecting the increase in migration from the Highland areas, the north coast and the New Guinea islands. And, different again, are the settlements established on the edge of town since the colonial era, often with an even greater mixture of regional groups and, importantly, a significant proportion of people who have moved outward from the inner suburbs of Port Moresby itself. The majority of settlements in Port Moresby are not 'illegal'. On the contrary, they are mostly on leased land and were sometimes developed under officially sanctioned self-help housing schemes, or began as low-cost housing areas. Some of them have been upgraded over time with the aid of city authorities. Many have overflowed from their originally planned boundaries to blend seamlessly into nearby formal housing estates. On the other hand, there are some habitats that could rightly be called 'squatter' settlements. And, finally, as the foregoing should imply, the inhabitants of settlements overall should by no means be typified as 'criminal', 'unemployed' or penurious.

The contents of this book derive from fieldwork conducted in Port Moresby since 1990. At that time, I was employed by the University of Papua New Guinea (UPNG) as a lecturer and lived in Port Moresby. This was not my first acquaintance with the country or the city, since I had encountered the colonial 'Territory' in 1971 as a curious traveller, and had later done anthropological PhD fieldwork (1985–86) in the Western Highlands. In 1990, living and working in Port Moresby, I turned my attention to the urban context. I had friends who lived in settlements and I became acquainted through them with the sociality of those environments. In 1991, my research benefited from two fortuitous developments. First, I was asked by the university's consultancy branch to be part of a team of academic

consultants reviewing the Village Court System, a 'grassroots' justice system that had been set up by legislation at the end of the colonial era. We toured the country visiting rural Village Courts and talking with officials and villagers, and we also visited some 'urban' Village Courts (the system had been extended into urban areas after its initial success and popularity as a grassroots service). I realised that the urban Village Courts could provide a focus for understanding the problems of life in settlement communities, for the petty disputes they adjudicated — accusations of insult, petty theft, sorcery, assault and adultery, among other things — reflected wider social conflicts experienced by city-dwellers. I approached the Village Court Secretariat for permission to monitor some Village Courts for my own research purposes. The secretariat was supportive of the idea, which developed into a continuing program of intermittent research including two intensive four-month studies of three selected Village Courts in 1994 and again in 1999, yielding transcripts of hundreds of individual cases.

The second development, also in 1991, was the opportunity to conduct some interviews with self-defined gang members at Bomana Jail. This was part of a project developed by a colleague at UPNG, criminologist Anou Borrey, to collect systematic data on criminal gangs that would be more reliable than the generalisations (often taken from media and police reports) that commonly informed the portrayal of gang organisation in Port Moresby. The material gained from this formal exercise, and from the systematic monitoring of Village Courts, supplemented my findings from the more informal acquaintance with life in some settlements, which I gained by virtue of friendships and acquaintances developed during five years of living in the city.

At the same time, it was becoming increasingly difficult to remain a relatively disinterested researcher. This was not simply because I had personal friendships with settlement-dwellers, but because my increasing understanding of life in the grassroots

communities, of the concerns and conflicts that were manifest in disputes in the Village Courts, and of the motivations and operations of the so-called rascal gangs, was accompanied by a growing frustration with the popular portrayal of the 'settlements' and their inhabitants. The simplistic linking in the media of crime, unemployment and poverty to 'settlements', often driven by the law-and-order rhetoric of politicians and public servants, not only misrepresented the sociality of settlements, but fuelled police raids and eviction threats. My settlement-dwelling friends and acquaintances lived in a state of chronic apprehension, not only of the rascal gangs (to which they were more vulnerable than people, including myself, who lived in high-security formal housing), but of brutal police raids and the loss of their homes. In this regard, I hope the chapters in this book might serve, beyond any academic value they may have, some advocatory purpose.

In Chapter One, I discuss the development of Port Moresby's settlements and of an accompanying derogatory Western representation of them. The stereotypic portrayal of the settlements is similar to that of squatter settlements and shantytowns in many parts of the world: they are assumed to be the habitats of the unemployed, the penurious and the criminal. Yet Port Moresby's settlements have their own unique histories, shared and individual. Firstly, there is a wide range in types of 'settlement', from officially planned self-help estates to illegal squatter camps, and the informal housing in them ranges from well-constructed dwellings comparable with those in formal housing areas to lean-to shelters. Further, the people who live in them represent a wide socioeconomic spectrum, and there is no hard evidence that they are home to a greater number of 'rascals' than are the formal housing areas. Most settlement-dwellers are employed one way or another and are law abiding. This raises the question of how the derogatory stereotype survives, not only in the overseas press but in the local press and in the popular mind in Port Moresby itself, where everyone knows people, or even has relatives, who are settlement-dwellers. The adaptation of colonial

representations of settlements into present-day Melanesian discourses is an analytical focus in this chapter, approached through a discussion of the paradoxes that emerged in a well-publicised squatter eviction exercise in 1998.

In Chapter Two, I discuss a small discursive phenomenon, which I believe shows something of the other side of the popular stereotyping of settlements: the chronic apprehension of settlement-dwellers that they will become the target of censorious officialdom. My starting point is a minor discovery in official statistics, made as I was about to embark on a project of monitoring all the cases in Konedobu Village Court, near Port Moresby's downtown area, for a few months in 1994. Cases involving 'sorcery' are common in Village Courts, in rural areas and in towns. According to the official statistics, however, no sorcery cases were heard in Konedobu Village Court. This minor oddity became more puzzling as I attended court hearings, for sorcery cases were as common at Konedobu as in most other Village Courts. The circumlocution in court, whereby direct mention of sorcery was avoided, and the disguising of sorcery-related cases in the court's records is the analytic focus of this chapter. I show that the avoidance of the 'S' word is related to the politics of being a settlement-dweller, in this instance in one of the oldest and relatively most law-abiding settlements in Port Moresby.

The next two chapters discuss the phenomenon most popularly linked to settlements in the law-and-order rhetoric of Papua New Guinean politicians and the local and international media. Chapter Three is a discussion of the social organisation of gangs, the so-called *raskols* of Port Moresby. For residents of that city, there is no escape from the regular stories (of varying degrees of horror) of *raskol* attacks, and few people who have lived there in the past decade or so have not known victims, or perhaps been victims themselves, of burglaries, robberies or personal violence perpetrated by gangs. But, as a resident in the 1990s, I was well aware that gang members came from all walks of life. I was aware, for example, that some relatively well-paid employees at the

university, as well as some students, were involved in gang crime in their leisure hours. And I was aware from spending time in the 'settlements' that the gangs who attacked people in formal, high-security housing and business premises were often not settlement-based, and were not motivated by poverty or some kind of moral judgment about social inequalities. Further, settlement-dwellers themselves were as victimised (if not more so, in terms of personal attacks, and female abduction and gang rape) as those in more secure, guard-patrolled housing.

Clearly, explanations of Port Moresby gang membership and behaviour need to move beyond common sociological assumptions that *raskols* are driven by poverty, unemployment, lack of education or moral indignation at social inequalities, past or present. Chapter Three is a move of sorts in this regard, attempting in its earlier sections to establish a better sense of the social organisation of the gangs. Its later sections compare the motivation and behaviour of gangs (focusing mainly on theft and heists) with the economic behaviour of traditional 'big-men', while acknowledging that the 'big-man' is an overworked stereotype in itself. The chapter ends with the suggestion that gangs are a perverse example of the way Melanesians are integrating the capitalist economy into a traditional gift economy. This suggestion is taken up and broadened in Chapter Four to suggest that 'rascalism' can be viewed anthropologically as one alternative among others in attempts by Melanesians to obtain what they understand to be the benefits of what Westerners like to call 'development'. These two chapters are informed partly by material gained from the interviews conducted with self-identifying gang members in Bomana Jail in 1991, which I have mentioned above.

The relationship between the gift and capitalist economies is approached from a different direction in Chapter Five. The operations of small-scale usurers in the settlement environment are the focus here. I became aware of the prevalence of moneylending for profit while investigating dispute settlement in grassroots communities, for usurers took their tardy or recalcitrant

debtors to their local urban Village Court. I also noticed that the prevalence of usury in some settlement areas contrasted with its absence in others. The Village Court cases gave me insights into the way these small-scale usurers conducted their business, the rates they charged and other aspects of usurious interactions. They also helped me to understand local attitudes to usury, which differ from those held in Western societies. But further, usury in the settlement environment invited a question about the so-called *wantok* system.

The reciprocal rights and obligations existing between kin in Melanesian societies have become a touchstone of anthropological writing since Malinowski's 1922 account of the Trobriand Islanders' participation in the *kula* exchange system (Malinowski 1966). The modification of that complex set of reciprocal obligations to fit the exigencies of migrant life on plantations, or in urban situations, has similarly become an aspect of social science research that is taken for granted in Papua New Guinea. The *wantok* ('one-talk', someone who shares the same language) system, the socioeconomic favouring of near or distant kin, is assumed to be an ever-present resource for townsfolk: everybody, it is said, has a *wantok* somewhere in town on whom they can call for financial assistance.

It is tempting to imagine settlements as places where the *wantok* system is particularly fecund. People are constantly 'visiting', sleeping at each others' houses, sharing food, borrowing clothes, borrowing money, crowding into cars with groaning springs whose drivers cannot refuse to give them a ride, because they are *wantoks*. Indeed, while I lived in Port Moresby, a popular local song was *There Goes My Pay*, which tapped the ambivalent popular sentiment about the *wantok* system. In its lyrics, the singer complains of arriving home from work to find his house overrun with kin, some of whom, he comments, '… I've never seen before'.[2] In the midst of this *wantokism*, driven by the resilient Melanesian rationale of kinship, how are we to understand the existence of moneylending for profit? Chapter

Five is an attempt to situate small-scale usury analytically in the urban engagement of the traditional gift economy of Melanesia (which is reflected in *wantokism*), with the capitalist economy.

In Chapter Six, an urban Village Court becomes the context for a different reflection on settlement life. Village Courts are concerned ostensibly with dispute settlement, but they are also a mechanism for males in particular to achieve status in the community through serving as magistrates. A central narrative in this chapter tells the story of the rise and fall of two Village Court magistrates and reveals something of life in a volatile urban settlement. The discussion in this chapter is a response to Joel Migdal's 'State-in-society' view of the relationship between the State and society (Migdal 1994). Migdal's argument, that states cannot be autonomous from social forces and should be viewed analytically in their social contexts, has been received with some enthusiasm by researchers of Melanesia, where the dynamics he describes seem well evidenced. He observes, for example, that the engagement between the State and social forces may be mutually empowering in some instances and a struggle for agency in others, often marked by mutually exclusive goals (Migdal 1994: 24). Village Courts are a handy example. As an 'element of State', they make the justice system accessible to grassroots communities and offer an opportunity for status and the authoritative management of community problems, all to the advantage of the grassroots communities they serve. At the same time, local ideas of justice may be at odds with State law, which is a constant vexation in the administration of the Village Court System. But Migdal's model needs to be applied with care, for we need to be able to take account of the dynamism and creativity of social life and the continuing transformations in the State in all its aspects and the local communities with which it is intimately engaged. The account in this chapter of the power struggles in the Village Court, and the very different motivations and desires of the two magistrates centrally involved, serve as a critique of Migdal's model, as well as an insight into the politics of settlement life.

The final chapter takes us away from the settlements to a village on the edge of Port Moresby, which is intimately engaged with the city yet at the same time attempting to maintain its own separateness. Pari is a Motu-Koita village whose adult generations consider it to be 'traditional' in relation to the modern city adjacent to it. Having absorbed Christianity into thier identity since being missionised in the 1870s, Pari villagers struggle to preserve a 'traditional', yet Christian identity in the face of what they see as a profane city. In order to do this they have to negotiate many contradictions generated by the fact that most of the village's adult members work in the city and benefit from what it has to offer. They also have to deal with the behaviour of young people who prefer the city ways to the 'traditional' values the village elders try to maintain. Again, the Village Court is a significant focus, for Pari villagers have moulded the legislatively introduced Village Court to their own cultural imperatives. They have made it an instrument of reintegration rather than punishment, concerned with reconciling disputants or community offenders with the village as a whole. Through the Village Court, the villagers atone for behaviour that threatens the integrity of the village, and the reintegrative process contributes to the maintenance of the village's 'traditional' identity. This chapter traces the history of the village in relation to the city, and discusses the challenge to its carefully maintained identity posed in recent times by a group of youthful offenders who show little interest in the reintegrative ritual made available to them through the Village Court.

While there have been periodic studies of Port Moresby and its migrant populations from the perspective of human geographers or town planners, surprisingly little has been published about the city by anthropologists, and there has been a significant paucity of ethnography. A notable exception was Rew's (1974) *Social Images and Process in Urban New Guinea*, based on participant observation in a migrant workers' dormitory in the 1960s. Belshaw (1957) wrote an economic anthropological

account of Hanuabada, the Motu village cluster; Ryan (1970, 1993) wrote on Toaripi (Gulf district) migrants; Strathern (1975) discussed the perspectives of migrants from Hagen (Western Highlands) and Chao (1985, 1989) has contributed two small but valuable commentaries on life in a small peri-urban settlement, but these and one or two other publications have been studies of specific regional groups or single settlements. The collection of essays in this book, as a body of work, may add something to the anthropology of Port Moresby as a whole, but it must be understood that what follows here is, at the most, only a glimpse of the unseen city.

ENDNOTES

1   The story of the Chinese and 'mixed race' population remains to be told in depth, and any historiography of Port Moresby will remain inadequate until the contributions of these two groups to the city's unique identity are properly recognised. Dutton (1985) has touched usefully on some aspects of 'mixed-race' history; see also Burton-Bradley (1968) for an idiosyncratic psychiatric perspective on 'mixed-race society' in the 1960s; and Inglis (1982) and Willson (1989) for some comments on the experiences of the Chinese population.

2   *There Goes My Pay*, although performed by Papua New Guinean singer Louie Warupi, was written by a non-Melanesian Port Moresby resident, Richard Dellman.

FROM ROLLING THUNDER TO REGGAE
Imagining 'squatter' settlements

Introduction

Early on the morning of February 4, 1998, police raided the old, abandoned parliament building in downtown Port Moresby. Adjacent to the central business district, where high-rise buildings had mushroomed during the previous decade, the dilapidated building had in recent years been the subject of calls for its preservation as a national monument. Its exterior was crumbling and overgrown with weeds, its interior long since looted of anything indicative of its former dignity. It had become the habitat of squatters, whose presence had provoked complaints from the downtown business community for some time. Now, suddenly, they were evicted, in an operation the police had codenamed 'Enough is Enough', though it was never made clear who gave the order. Senior staff at the National Museum, who had been prominent advocates of the building's preservation, denied rumours that they were behind the eviction (*PNG Post-Courier*, February 4 and 5, 1998).

A few days previously, the police had raided the Baruni dump, a rubbish tip on the 'back road' that connected Port Moresby's north-west suburbs to the downtown area circuitously through a relatively uninhabited stretch of land to the coast west of the city. The back road has long had a reputation as a site for frequent armed hold-ups and the perpetrators were popularly said to come from the ranks of the squatters at the dump, who scoured their habitat constantly for materials to build shelters, to sell at the roadside or to turn to other subsistence purposes. The police found some stolen vehicles hidden behind the dump and, while the raid on the dump community itself disclosed no stolen property, the stolen vehicles were used as justification for the eviction of the dump squatters and the torching of their makeshift shelters in the planned operation that the police had codenamed 'Rolling Thunder' (*PNG Post-Courier*, January 30 and February 6, 1998).

Both raids were conducted in the climate of calls for a solution to the problem of 'squatters' and 'settlements' in general and debate about proposals for the reintroduction of a Vagrancy Act similar to that which had existed during the colonial period (*The National*, February 13 and 19, 1998; *PNG Post-Courier*, February 16 and 19, 1998). The 'settlement' issue has waxed and waned several times in the past two decades in a continuing debate about what to do about unemployment and crime, which are causally linked in popular discourse. In the mid-1990s, the intensity of the debate seemed to have heightened and, for the first time, it was reflected in a noticeable rise in practical action against urban settlements and squatters by police and provincial authorities around the country. Local authorities ordered mass evictions of selected settlements in Rabaul and Lae late in 1994, for example, and while police were evicting the Baruni dump and parliament building squatters, the Madang Provincial Government was preparing to bulldoze a large and long-established settlement whose existence was hampering the development of business premises in the provincial capital.

Evictions such as these have been a common occurrence in Third-World towns and cities since mass urban migration and the connected phenomenon of squatters and shantytowns became an issue, and State responses on several continents have moved more or less cyclically through attempts to discourage migrants, attempts to upgrade existing settlements and plan self-help and low-cost housing areas (see, eg, Drakakis-Smith 1981: 113–67; Drakakis-Smith 1990: 99–109; Dwyer 1979; Gilbert 1986; Gilbert and Gugler 1987: 97–107) and, as uncontrolled settlements continue to appear and grow, sometimes to intimidation to the point of violence (see, eg, Scheper-Hughes 1992). Common popular perceptions of squatter settlements and shantytowns link themes of uncontrolled migration, unemployment, extreme poverty and crime, characterising settlement populations as maladjusted and undesirable in urban society. The attitudes reflected in the responses of the Papua New Guinean State, through police, the media and local authorities, resonate with those observed, for instance, in Asia (Dwyer 1979: 45 and passim) and Latin America (Drakakis-Smith 1981: 83–4 and passim; Scheper-Hughes 1992). The comment by Nancy Scheper-Hughes, writing of a Brazilian shantytown, that impoverished rural migrants are 'seen as a kind of modern-day plague, an unruly cancerous growth, an infectious epidemic inflicted on the once healthy and sound social body of the community' (Scheper-Hughes 1992: 94), could be extended to Third-World cities in general, as could her perception of 'a hegemonic discourse on criminality/deviance/marginality and on the "appropriateness" of police and state violence in which all segments of the population participate and to which they acquiesce, often contrary to their own class or race interests' (Scheper-Hughes 1992: 225).

Yet some paradoxes emerged during and after the Baruni dump and parliament building evictions, which suggest that stereotypic models of the squatter phenomenon and State responses cannot be visited on Papua New Guinea without qualification. After being evicted with great fanfare by armed

police and ferried to a nearby police station, the parliament
building squatters were, within a few hours, allowed to drift back
to the vicinity of the building. As they milled in the street, the
Prime Minister of the time, Bill Skate, arrived and distributed
food and drinks, promising to look into their plight (*The National*,
February 4, 1998). The next day, they were offered payment to
help museum staff clean the building (*PNG Post-Courier*,
February 5 and 10, 1998). No such pleasantries were offered the
Baruni dump squatters, but by mid-year, they had moved back
onto the dump, and the Salvation Army was publicising its
weekly visits to them to distribute food and drinks (*PNG Post-
Courier*, July 15, 1998). No move was made to re-evict them.
Later in the year, a video clip accompanying *Born to Suffer*, a
reggae song about poverty and hunger in resource-rich Papua
New Guinea by a local band called Bad Mix Souls, showed the
squatters scavenging at the dump.

There is little doubt that the increased demands for action
on 'settlements' had been fuelled by the concerns of the business
community about the detrimental effects of crime and images of
urban squalor on economic development and attempts to attract
overseas interest and investment. The Port Moresby Chamber of
Commerce publicly applauded the old parliamentary building
eviction and commented that local businesses 'could now look
forward to some respite from unruly elements' (*PNG Post-
Courier*, February 5, 1998). Arguably, though, the discursive
linking of settlements, unemployment and crime, a theme
popular with politicians, police spokespeople and the business
community, and monotonously repeated in the daily press, is in
need of critique. The popular notion that settlements are
criminogenic, by virtue of a population said to be largely
unemployed and pauperised, is reinforced by the frequency of
police raids, some of which are well-publicised in the local press
as components of 'crackdowns' on crime (usually with well-
broadcast operation 'codenames') and contextualised in a rhetoric
about the inevitable consequences of urban migration and
poverty. Inventories of stolen goods found and people arrested

(if at all) in the police raids are usually vague, however, compared with the accounts of the raids themselves.

Events in the aftermath of the Baruni dump raid cast some equivocality on the demonising of squatters and urban settlers by civil authorities. In the weeks after the eviction of the dump squatters, intermittent armed hold-ups continued to occur on the back road (eg, *PNG Post-Courier*, March 3, 1998). After a police stake-out, a gang was finally caught (PNG Post-Courier, April 26, 1998). It had been using the area behind the dump as a gathering point and hiding place for stolen vehicles, members then dispersing to their homes in other suburbs. It can be assumed that the dump squatters knew about the gang's operations but had been intimidated or bribed into silence. The use of particular settlements as operational gathering and dispersal points is common among urban gangs, exploiting the criminal imagery of settlements to misdirect the immediate vengeance of their pursuers and victims. The origin and resilience of this generalised imagery of settlements is the main subject of the discussion that follows, which situates it in the particular context of late colonialism in Papua New Guinea and subsequent urban developments when the country gained political independence. While the growth of settlements and responses of authorities in Papua New Guinea share some commonalities with other Third-World countries, there are also important differences, and a consideration of these might contribute to an understanding of the paradoxes manifest in the conciliatory gestures to the old parliament building squatters by the Prime Minister and museum staff and the permitted return of the Baruni dump squatters. Concentrating mostly on Port Moresby, I will begin with a review of the development of urban housing from immediately after World War II, when significant urban migration began, through to Papua New Guinea's transition in the mid-1970s from a colony to an independent nation. This should enable us to contextualise the development of the derogatory imagery of 'squatter settlements' in European discourse in the late colonial era, and I will subsequently discuss the perpetuation of this imagery to the

present time and its relationship with episodes such as 'Rolling Thunder' and 'Enough is Enough'.

Housing after World War II

With the easing of restrictions on the movement of indigenes into urban areas in the aftermath of World War II, migrants began to trickle steadily into Port Moresby. The colonial administration had no general long-term program for housing the newcomers, in what had become in many respects an Australian small town (Oram 1976a: 41). Before the war, indigenous workers recruited from beyond the immediate villages had been accommodated in barrack and dormitory conditions. The only habitats in Port Moresby not fully controlled by European interests in that period were the local villages of the Motu people, the traditional coastal inhabitants of the area who had intermarried to a degree with the Koita, who lived inland. A few of the early postwar migrants managed to establish themselves in these villages, on the basis of old trading relationships and sometimes through intermarriage with the Motu-Koita. Apart from this, migrant housing in the decade after the war was principally of three types: workers' 'compounds', established by government departments and companies such as the traders Burns Philp, Carpenters and Steamships; domestic quarters attached to European residences (commonly referred to by Europeans in kitchen pidgin as 'boy-houses'); and so-called settlements.

The establishment of the first postwar settlements was achieved not by illicit squatting but by arrangement with local traditional landowners, as in the well-documented case of Rabia Camp at Kaugere (Hitchcock and Oram 1967), and occasionally with town authorities (eg, Norwood 1984: passim). The distinction between these two types of liaison was less clear in practice than on paper, since the Motu-Koita regarded the Port Moresby urban area as essentially their land, despite some areas having been acquired by the administration through early transactions classified as purchase by the latter. For example,

a downtown settlement, Ranuguri, which is partially on government land and partially on customary land, began when migrants from the Gulf district were invited to move into buildings vacated by the army at the end of the war. According to some commentators (eg, Rew 1974: 6; Ryan 1970: 19), the arrangement was intended as a temporary measure by the administration while it built proper housing for employees. While this suggests that the administration itself told the settlers to move into the buildings, there is equivocation among the settlers themselves over who issued the invitation. I was told, for instance, by a long-term settler that the customary landowners invited his kin to take over the buildings. This interpretation, which ignores official classification of the piece of ground on which the buildings stood as government land, is predicated on the old trading relationships between Motu and Gulf people, and on the established Motuan practice of inviting individuals from their trading-partner groups to settle on their land.

The settlements grew in size and number as the first-comers were joined by near and distant kin from their places of origin. Their growth caused concern to traditional landholders (Ryan 1968: 61) and to the administration. For the Motu-Koita landholders, it became increasingly difficult to collect the rent-in-kind or continue the personal exchange relationships that had been integral in the negotiations with the first small groups of settlers (Levine and Levine 1979: 18), while the administration feared the prospect of overcrowding and the gradual transformation of small but tidy groups of makeshift houses into large and unruly conglomerates. When the settlements first appeared they were tolerated by the administration, since they provided a solution to the problem of housing workers during postwar reconstruction. But, after a few years, officials became fearful that a migrant underclass would develop. Some settlements were at one point denied water supplies and garbage and sanitary services in an attempt to discourage the migrants, according to Ryan (1993: 222), or to remove the settlers from land required for other purposes, according to Oram (1976a: 196). Other strategies,

such as plans by the Housing Commission (established in 1968) to resettle the occupants in better-organised cheap housing estates, came to only partial fruition (Oram 1976a: 191ff.).

By the 1970s, the administration had accepted the inevitable presence of settlements (Oram 1976a: 185–205; Stuart 1970: 288–90) and had moved from attempts to discourage them to various assistance schemes, a transition that mirrored similar changes in government policies elsewhere in the Third World (see, eg, Dwyer 1979: 78–117, 188–227; Drakakis-Smith 1990: 99–109; Gilbert 1986). In 1973, the flow of people into town was beyond the capacity of the Housing Commission's resettlement scheme and new self-help policies were introduced (Bryant 1977; Rabuni and Norwood 1980). Some existing settlements were provided with paved footpaths and basic services such as water taps, and blocks of land were allocated on selected sites around the town on which people could build their own shelter (theoretically in accordance with building regulations). The scheme was elaborated to include loans to enable tenants to build adequate housing for themselves. One product of the combination of the Housing Commission's resettlement plan and the self-help policies was the development of Morata suburb on the edge of the Port Moresby town area, a planned operation begun in 1971, which involved rental and self-help housing (Bryant 1977). In addition, community welfare groups attempted to assist particular settlement populations in their attempts to get basic services such as water supplies and to develop handcrafts and other income-generating activities (see, eg, Mylius 1971).

In retrospect, the attempts by the colonial administration to deal with the continual arrival of migrants through the development of a variety of habitats in the late colonial period, documented by Oram (1976a: 167–208), can be seen as a process of piecemeal reaction, rather than systematic planning. As Oram has pointed out, the distribution of housing areas in Port Moresby by the end of the colonial period did not conform to any recognisable spatial theory (Oram 1976a: 100). There were 'high-

covenant' housing areas occupied almost exclusively by Europeans, low-covenant planned estates such as the 'partially integrated' (Stuart 1970: 307) suburb of Hohola with a few Europeans but mostly housing Papua New Guineans, cheaper rental housing, self-help ('no-covenant') housing areas, the original settlements, company compounds and domestic quarters. While some cheap indigenous housing areas established by the administration were deliberately sited away from high-covenant European residential areas (Oram 1976a: 101), they were not hidden but lined major roads and were not far distant from European housing, while some workers' compounds and all domestic quarters were integrated into European-dominated areas.

The difference between high-covenant housing for Europeans and low-covenant and other types of housing for Papua New Guineans in the late colonial era is conventionally related in the literature to other racially segregatory practices of the period (eg, Hastings 1973: 99ff.; Kiki 1966: 72; Ward 1970: 60; Wolfers 1975: 119, 154ff.). But, importantly, the variety of indigenous urban housing itself engendered another type of distinction. There was a perceptual dichotomisation by Europeans of migrant Papua New Guinean urban habitats based on a concatenation of the spatial relationship between European and indigenous housing and the degree of orderliness of the latter. The low-covenant houses, company compounds and domestic quarters were reasonably tidy in appearance, and their comparative physical proximity to European housing implied the relative social proximity of their inhabitants, as workmates, subordinates or domestic servants. This was not necessarily manifest in friendly relations; in fact, discriminatory attitudes and cultural misunderstanding were common (Nelson 1972: 168–72; Wolfers 1975: 152ff.) and regular occupational contact and interaction did not guarantee friendly socialising outside working hours. But the image of social proximity, however limited, was in contrast with that engendered for Europeans by the migrant settlements on customary and government land and the self-help

housing areas, a little more removed from the elite European housing estates and rarely entered by whites. The initial small settlements that appeared in the immediate postwar period had been neatly laid out (Oram 1976a: 185), but they took on an increasingly untidy appearance as they grew. Similarly, in the self-help housing areas, an unruly impression was created by the improvised nature of houses made from whatever material settlers could obtain and clustered asymmetrically on land blocks that had originally been surveyor-planned. A social researcher of the period, who bemoaned the 'appalling symmetry' of the rows of neat low-covenant houses, and preferred the creative approach of self-help housing areas, conceded of the latter that 'To European eyes the results may not be as aesthetically pleasing as are the serried ranks of little boxes' (Ward 1970: 60; cf. Levine and Levine 1979: 4).

Literature on Third-World settlements, and slums in general, commonly makes the point that such habitats are unfairly judged by outsiders on their untidy appearance (eg, Drakakis-Smith 1981: 88ff.; Gilbert and Gugler 1987: 128). The aesthetic judgment of settlements in urban Papua New Guinea was not made simply in a comparison with European housing styles, however, but was contextualised in a dualism of the latter and an idealised 'traditional' rural village. In this respect, settlements and architecturally changing urban villages were both seen as aesthetically deviant. For example, in a discussion of the growth of Lae, a city at the mouth of the Bumbu River on Papua New Guinea's north-eastern coast, Willis comments on the five 'traditional' villages immediately across the river mouth:

> Despite their proximity to the city they have not yet been assimilated into it and are still a separate entity. The village houses, often built from reclaimed scraps of timber, iron and fibro-cement, seem dilapidated *even by comparison with the houses in the adjacent 'squatter' camps*. They stand in strong contrast to the neat bungalows of the city and to the other traditional villages to east and

west where houses are still built of native materials and have a neat, post-card picturesqueness. (Willis 1974: 145; my italics)

Under the labels 'settlements' or 'squatter settlements' or sometimes 'shantytowns' (the latter term has now almost disappeared), the customary and government land settlements and the no-covenant housing areas were discursively collapsed together, reinforcing the image of a socially distant population. The connection of a spatial and aesthetic dichotomy of urban indigenous habitats with a relative degree of social distance of their inhabitants from the economically dominant white population was reflected in journalistic literature of the period. For example, Peter Hastings wrote in 1969 of an 'urban proletariat, unskilled, living on the breadline in shanties erected in increasing numbers on the bare brown hills of that disagreeable town … a polyglot force of men without jobs, women or land — the dispossessed of the new dispensation' (Hastings 1973: 90). Osmar White in 1965 similarly sequestered in print those migrants to Port Moresby who 'set up squalid shantytowns on its perimeters, subsisting as best they could on wages for casual, unskilled labour' (White 1972: 200–1).[1]

Sociological research did not in fact support this image: Richard Jackson commented that while there might be a 'grain of truth' in the view of settlements as repositories of ill-adjusted transients, 'a strong case can be made in support of the opposite view: that the settlements are frequently the homes of people less transitory, no more unemployed and just as urbanized as other sectors of the population' (Jackson 1976a: 49). A survey in another town, Popondetta, had shown that nearly two-thirds of the administration's labourers, and many tradesmen, lived in settlements (Jackson 1976a: 49), as did 'business managers, teachers, and two members of the national Parliament' (Jackson 1977: 32). An examination of the 'Six-Mile' settlement in Port Moresby in the 1970s indicated that about 70 per cent of the

adults were employed (Levine and Levine 1979: 37) and in a sample of settlements in several urban centres, it was found that households (built largely around nuclear families) contained an average of between one and two wage-earners (Jackson 1977: 32; Levine and Levine 1979: 42). In this respect, Papua New Guinea's settlement-dwellers were socioeconomically similar to those in many other Third-World settlement and slum communities (see Drakakis-Smith 1990: 94–9; Dwyer 1979:45–9; Gilbert and Gugler 1987: 88-9; Roberts 1982: 376). Yet the image of dispossessed squatters in settlements, contrasting with a more socially proximate working urban indigenous population in other types of housing, prevailed in popular European discourse. While this simple dichotomy misrepresented the complex demography of Port Moresby,[2] it became institutionalised discursively, and has survived the colonial period and a continuing process of change in the nature and variety of habitats in Port Moresby.

In the 1960s, some settlers who could more justifiably be called squatters were appearing in Port Moresby. The earlier settlements were enclaves of people sharing a region of origin, such as the Eastern Gulf people at Ranuguri settlement, or Purari people at Rabia camp. Later migrants from other areas, particularly the Highlands, were naturally excluded from building houses in these existing micro-ethnic enclaves. Lacking traditional exchange links with Motu-Koita landholders, or the wherewithal to obtain no-covenant land blocks from the administration, those who were unable to negotiate some kind of arrangement with customary landholders were often obliged to find a niche on unused government land. An example is Gordons Ridge settlement, where migrants from the Simbu and Goilala districts developed discrete groups of shelters on a hill overlooking one of the most exclusive European housing estates of the period. Their appearance caused concern among the Europeans below, and many of them were persuaded to resettle at Morata, the newly developed suburb containing a mixture of low-covenant and no-covenant housing. Some squatters, however, remained and the

Gordons Ridge settlement gradually developed, with the inhabitants improving their dwellings, planting trees and building an access road (Norwood 1984: 34), consolidating the habitat and gaining legitimacy, if not absolute legality, as it grew in the 1980s.

By the 1970s, a broad range of housing, from unauthorised buildings on government land, through various types of customary or administration-authorised dwellings on unused land, to planned self-help housing on leased blocks, was being referred to in common European discourse as 'the settlements' or 'squatter settlements'. The broad and indiscriminate use of such terms, together with the difficulty of precisely categorising the variety of indigenous housing that had developed in Port Moresby, could have been responsible for the disparity in academic literature of the period (among empirically careful researchers) in representations of the actual numbers of 'settlements' in existence at different points in time from the 1950s until the 1970s.[3] At any rate, in the face of continuing changes in the nature of the town's habitats, the institutionalised notion of settlements (incorporating the notion of squatters), was to prove resilient in the following years.

Housing after independence

When Papua New Guinea became an independent nation in 1975, and the European population began to dwindle, the housing areas it had inhabited were taken over by indigenes. This substitution, in combination with continuing housing projects, increasing urban migration and the demands of the extended kin systems typical of Melanesian societies, began to change the spatial distinction between the housing types discussed above, without significantly altering the institutionalised notion of a dichotomy of 'settlements' and formal (ie, low- and high-covenant) housing. Building projects were extending some of the formal housing estates in the outer suburbs to the point where they began to connect with self-help housing areas that had originally been discrete and with enclaves of squatters who had

established themselves quietly at the periphery of the urban area since the 1960s. At the same time, the inhabitants of these latter areas were building extensions to, or upgrading, their houses, if they were able. Consequently, while some settlements remained demarcated by boundary fencing, the overall visual and spatial distinction between squatter settlements, legitimate settlements and planned low-cost housing estates became less clear in some outer suburbs of Port Moresby after independence. In addition, the untidy development of suburbs with basic infrastructure provided the opportunity for individuals or families to establish illicit dwellings in the interstices of growing communities of migrants from a variety of ethnic backgrounds, where few questions of legitimacy were asked unless serious trouble arose. In this respect, for example, parts of the formerly European-dominated suburb of Boroko and of the low-covenant suburb of Hohola had a significantly different mixture of housing types by the 1990s than they had in the early 1970s.

A further change after independence was that the homologic relationship between two- or three-bedroomed housing and European nuclear families was displaced under Melanesian kinship sensibilities. The exigencies of an unavoidable obligation to provide assistance to members of one's extended kin-group — referred to with ambivalent sentiments as the '*wantok* system' by urban Papua New Guineans (*wantok* is a Tokpisin term used to refer to kin, both near and distant) — meant that the urban house became a locus of the nominal occupants' kindred. It has been argued by Keith Barber that it is analytically useful to regard urban Papua New Guinean households not as physical units of co-residence but more flexibly as sets of changing social relations, acknowledging the social context in which they are embedded (Barber 1993: 26–7). This perspective avoids positing households as fixed sets of people, and more accurately reflects the change in the nature of householding when European residents were replaced by indigenes. Household numbers fluctuated with the movement of relatives from home areas into town and back, and

among *wantoks*' residences in town. This did not escalate into major overcrowding of individual houses, however,[4] although domestic quarters attached to high-covenant houses were now often used as accommodation for migrant kin.

An associated phenomenon was a new kind of squatter, the 'illegal' occupant of formal housing. As industry grew in Papua New Guinea's towns, large-scale employers rented houses, or blocks of houses, for employees. 'Compounds' now included all types of housing, up to relatively luxurious dwellings for the new Papua New Guinean elite as well as for highly paid foreigners. Where colonial employers had enforced the expulsion and exclusion of illicit occupants of compound and rental housing (mostly the *wantoks* of employees) relatively efficiently, Melanesian sensibilities made the task far more difficult for indigenous bosses, even though the policy of evicting such occupants remained. For example, when I lived in the large housing compound of the University of Papua New Guinea in the early 1990s, constant complaints were made by legitimate inhabitants and those employees waiting to be allocated housing about the number of squatters occupying dwellings of various kinds. The latter were often relatives of employees who had gained access to houses through their kinship connections, and sometimes were ex-employees of the university who had simply failed to move out. Despite the occasional flurry of memoranda and threats of forcible eviction, there was little real action against the squatters. Administrative staff (including some who were complainants) were constrained as a body by the dense kinship networks under which the squatters had established themselves in the first place.

Developments such as these indicated a continuing housing problem in the capital city, which was a legacy of the colonial administration's slow response to postwar urban migration, an absence of adequate long-term town planning, and a lack of affordable housing for non-elite workers. By the late 1980s, a new belt of self-help settlements, on leased land blocks, was beginning to establish itself at a few kilometres' remove from

the expanding city's edge in an area where there had previously been only one or two small settlements containing single micro-ethnic groups (see, eg, Vele 1978). As well as containing recent migrants from rural areas, these habitats were the recourse of former city-dwellers seeking refuge from the financial problems of living in town and the increasing limitations on personal freedoms presented by Port Moresby's growth. Moving to locations such as 'Eight-Mile' (the name refers to the distance from downtown Port Moresby[5]) was a strategy to avoid the city's 'law and order' problems, obtain access to gardening land, yet remain close enough to take advantage of employment opportunities in town (Barber 1998).

In contemporary Port Moresby then, while most settlements established during the late colonial period still exist, and illicit housing is still built by squatters, the distinction between different types of urban habitat and the associated socioeconomic status of inhabitants is even less clear than it was by the early 1970s. Squatters can be found in many types of housing, from high-covenant to illicit lean-to shelters, and, while some self-help areas have boundary fencing, there is no clear spatial separation overall between various types of urban 'settlements' and other types of housing. Despite the increasing complexity in the mixture of housing in the contemporary city, however, the discursive dichotomisation of the city's habitats into legitimate housing and 'settlements' has survived from colonial times. I will now turn to this dichotomy and the attendant imagery that links migrants, unemployment and crime to a particular type of urban habitat, and examine its resilience in the face of empirical change.

The resilient imagery of settlements

The generalised European imagery of settlements in the late colonial period was of a spatially separate and disorderly collection of habitats implying the social distance of the people who occupied

them, as we have seen. The dichotomising imagery itself was engendered by the dominant ideology of the colonisers that posited Melanesian societies as essentially rural, traditional and primitive in contrast with urbanising, modern and civilised Western societies. In European-dominated urban settings, the orderliness of habitats — that is, the degree to which they fitted with the overall physical appearance of a range of housing modelled on that of a subtropical Australian small town — served as one putative measure of the degree of civilisation attained by indigenes. The rural-urban dualism itself was also a taken-for-granted component of the body of modernisation theories that informed Western approaches to decolonisation in the 1960s and 1970s, whereby an earlier resource-extraction program and 'civilising' mission was recast as a 'development' program. In the era of decolonisation, development programs were aimed at enabling what was presumed to be an inevitable but problematic evolutionary transition from the 'traditional' to the 'modern', which could be theorised in terms of the sociological, psychological and economic progress of the general population (Larrain 1989: 87–98). As Jorge Larrain has pointed out (1989: 87), terminological substitutions such as 'rural' and 'backward', or 'urban' and 'developed', can be made in respect of the two ideal society types posited in the modernisation model, the 'traditional' and the 'modern'.

In Papua New Guinea, the colonial administration had carefully controlled the movement from rural 'traditional' society to urban 'modern' society before World War II. After the war, modernisation was expected to involve a long and difficult process of broad education. In a 1950 policy statement, the Australian Minister for External Territories, P. C. Spender, said of the prospect of the 'advancement' of Papua New Guineans:

> This will take a very long time but the natives have shown that with the proper guidance and given the opportunity they have the capacity to carry out both manual and mental tasks in accordance with our concepts. (Spender, cited in Jinks et al. 1973: 340–1)

The traditional image of Melanesians, and its problematic nature for the modernisation programs of Europeans, was implicit in diplomatic references to 'native' customs, such as Spender's assurance (in the same policy statement) that in education and technical training activities 'care is taken to preserve the structure of native tribal life and native customs that are not harmful or repugnant to humanity' (Spender, cited in Jinks et al 1973: 342). It was more explicit in assessments such as that of the Assistant Administrator, J. T. Gunther, in 1958:

> Their houses are crudely built and uncomfortable; they have next to no furniture of the kind that gives us some comfort in our living, their cooking methods are crude, their eating utensils practically nil. Compared with ours, their farming methods are almost non-existent. (Gunther 1958: 57)

In commonsense European perceptions, the urban environment was the appropriate habitat of the modernising, rather than the traditional, Papua New Guinean:

> It is the cities, not the villages, which are the centres of civilization, culture, commerce, industry and education in any country. It is in them that new ideas are encountered, new knowledge acquired, new skills learned, new relationships established and new wealth exchanged. A country without cities is doomed to stagnation and backwardness. (Stuart 1970: 289)

In the light of the view that the 'advancement' of the majority of Papua New Guineans, seen as traditional villagers, was going to involve a long process of training, uncontrollable urban migration after World War II signalled a pathological situation for the colonisers: the premature arrival of the primitive into the modern environment. The concept of the 'squatter settlement', the disjunctive urban habitat, neatly encapsulated

this impetuous engagement of the ill-prepared primitive with civilisation. Whatever reason was attributed by observers to the migration of villagers — the attraction of the bright lights, the need for a cash income, the avoidance of village social responsibilities, the drudgery of traditional life or its breakdown (cf. Levine and Levine 1979: 28–32; Clunies Ross 1984: 5–10) — the consequences were assumed to be the same. The migrants arrived in town without funds, jobs, modern work skills or proper accommodation. Institutionalised in a homogenising colonial discourse, the terms 'settlements' and 'squatter settlements' (used interchangeably) had come by the mid-1970s to imply habitats peopled by unemployed migrants living in poverty and various degrees of squalor, socially distant from more legitimate urban-dwellers and inclined to criminal activity. Used in this way, the terms demonstrate some of the qualities Victor Turner attributed to emotionally forceful symbols: a number of meanings ('poverty', 'unemployment', 'crime', etc) are condensed into a single symbolic form ('settlements'), and the term permits therefore an 'economy of reference' (Turner 1972: 29).

But it is important to note that the meanings condensed into the term 'settlements' derived not so much from the immediate urban reality of the later colonial period as from the collective popular imagination of Europeans. We have already seen, for instance, that the imagery of journalists such as Hastings (1973) and White (1965) did not accord with the sociological findings of Jackson (1976a) and others on the socioeconomic status of settlement-dwellers overall. The imagined criminogenic nature of settlements (linked to the assumption that most settlement-dwellers were unemployed) was no better supported by empirical investigation. Social researchers in the late colonial era reported that criminal gangs of the era included employed and unemployed people (Po'o 1975; Utulurea 1981), and that economic deprivation was not a key factor (Young 1976). As late as 1983, an officially commissioned review of crime, law and order, drawing on recent research findings, stated that 'on the face

of it institutional housing compounds, urban villages and migrant settlements have low arrest rates' (Department of Provincial Affairs 1983: 161), that 'formally sub-divided suburbs have high arrest rates' (1983: 163), that 'it has never been shown that migrants in urban settlements are more criminally inclined than the rest of the community' (ibid.) and that 'low crime rates are known to exist in certain urban ethnic groups, or settlements' (ibid.). Yet the ideology of inevitable pathology in urbanisation — unemployed migrants living in squalid housing turning to crime — was impervious to empirical research. An urban geographer lamented, 'The "squatters" are caricatured as unemployed and lawless, and their settlements as disease-ridden communities of ill-adapted drifters, unnecessary blots on the national escutcheon' (Jackson 1977: 27).

Indigenous urban dwellers of the late colonial period had different prejudices. There was resentment at the general segregation, including housing policies, practised by Europeans. A prominent political figure, Albert Maori Kiki, expressed this polemically: 'We are put in settlements such as Hohola and Kaugere, away from white people. Our settlements are places for the white man's sexual outlet' (Kiki 1966: 72). Hohola was actually a low-covenant housing area. Kiki's use of the term 'settlements' appropriated European popular usage to an indigenous viewpoint connoting socially segregated, rather than informal, housing, a point I will return to later. But there were also issues of resentment *between* indigenous groups. In Port Moresby, Motu-Koita concerns about the growth of settlements were subsumed under their general concern about the growth of the colonial town on their traditional land.[6] As most of the earlier postwar settlers had been Papuan and historically familiar by virtue of old trading relations, potential hostility toward their increasing numbers was displaced by a shared antagonism towards a newer problem. Growing numbers of migrants were arriving from the Highlands and coastal New Guinea[7] and were seen as socially distant competitors for housing, jobs and services. Papuans

stereotyped 'New Guineans' negatively, portraying Highlanders in particular as violent and primitive and regarding themselves as peaceful and civilised in contrast (cf. Chatterton 1975: 284, McKillop 1982: 334). In turn, the Highlanders stereotyped Papuans as lazy, and regarded themselves as enterprising and industrious. Papuan stereotyping of New Guineans extended to seeing them as land-grabbers and their settlements as less legitimate than those of Papuan migrants. In the 1970s, the distinction between settlements inhabited by 'Papuans' and those inhabited by 'New Guineans' developed political significance particularly in the campaigns of the Papuan separatist movement, *Papua Besena*, headed by Josephine Abaijah, the first indigenous woman in Parliament. Realising the importance of campaigning in settlements as well as in villages (Abaijah 1991: 188–94; Premdas and Steeves 1983: 54), Abaijah exploited the regional stereotypes to advantage, particularly in the 1977 elections (Premdas and Steeves 1983: 40). An analysis of results showed overwhelming support for Abaijah in the Papuan-dominated settlements (Premdas and Steeves 1983: 55, 59).

Regional distinctions continue to be an issue in urban Papua New Guinea, and tensions manifest themselves in occasional violent confrontations. In formal housing estates, micro-ethnic enclaves rarely develop since individual migrant families move into houses, or are assigned them by employers, where and as they become available around the towns. In contrast, self-help areas and other informal habitats are typified either by single micro-ethnic populations, such as those from the Gulf region in the older settlements in Port Moresby, or by groups from several regions who arrange themselves territorially on the land available for building. The latter situation is found mostly in those self-help areas established since the 1960s, and mutual distrust can result in simmering tension and the possibility of hostilities. At the end of the colonial era, occasional noisy confrontations in some self-help communities, and the resulting police intervention, fuelled popular European views of

settlements as sites of trouble, even though the altercations rarely spread beyond the immediate habitats in which they occurred and were — and still are — exacerbated by friction over shared space and resources rather than by extreme poverty, squalor or criminal proclivities. Among the self-help settlements themselves, those dominated by Papuans are to the present day quick to differentiate between their own allegedly peaceful habitats and those which they regard as giving settlements a bad reputation (see Chapter Two) and which they stereotype, often inaccurately, as Highlander-dominated.

The incorporation of settlements into regional antagonisms in the late colonial era meant that among Papua New Guineans they were classified according to the regional identities of their inhabitants instead of being negatively distinguished from other indigenous habitats. In addition, the prevalence of the *wantok* system in the indigenisation of Port Moresby and other urban centres from the late 1970s meant that kinship ties transcended different types of habitat. People living in high-covenant housing estates usually had kin living in 'settlements', and visits between relatives consolidated the social proximity of the variety of urban habitats. Conceivably, these developments contained the potential to effect a replacement of the European concept of 'squatter settlements' with an alternative classification of urban habitats reflecting the indigenous social reality of *wantokism* and ethnic and regional divisions. Yet the popular colonial imagery of squatter settlements survived and, in the 1990s, continued to pervade journalistic portraits of the independent nation. For example, in a popular book on contemporary Papua New Guinea, a veteran journalist gives an account of several pages that juxtaposes urban crime, poverty and 'settlements' (Dorney 1993: 299–309). The suburb of Morata is referred to, inaccurately, as 'one of the largest and longest established' squatter settlements in Port Moresby (1993: 303). The author expresses no judgmental view and the discussion acknowledges that 'squatter settlements' are victimised by police and the settlers resent being labelled

thieves (1993: 302). However, the account's reliance on an influential sociological paper on criminal gangs (Harris 1988) and anecdotal evidence from a former police chief about raids on settlements (Dorney 1993: 303) results in the settlements being discursively positioned as criminogenic habitats.

Far from disappearing with the end of European political domination, the negative condensation of migration, poverty and crime in the image of settlements had by the 1990s become conventionalised to the point where it was also being taken for granted in some academic literature. For example, the substance of contemporary introductory courses on Papua New Guinea history at the University of Papua New Guinea was reproduced in a 1993 publication (by a prominent Papua New Guinean academic), which deployed the ideation of 'settlements' with efficient brevity under the subheading 'Law and Order':

> As village society broke down more and more, villagers moved to the urban areas in the hope of employment and greater access to Western goods. As there was no housing for most of these people, they built shanties out of any available materials and created squatter settlements. As there was very often no employment for them, many turned to crime. (Waiko 1993: 217)

But, importantly, the perpetuation of the imagery of squatter settlements into the 1980s involved a polemical addition to the meanings it contained, based on a popular Papua New Guinean dichotomisation (in PNG English) of the country's population into '*grassroots*' and '*elites*'.[8] This development was prefigured by the previously mentioned resentment of segregation enforced by a European elite, articulated, for example, by Kiki in his remarks (see above) about Papua New Guineans being consigned to 'settlements' (Kiki 1966: 72). Stereotyping indigenous *elites* as rich, greedy, self-serving and appropriating the economic standing and housing of departing Europeans, *grassroots* positioned themselves discursively as the underclass, the unrewarded

backbone of the country. In towns, the term 'settlements' symbolised their putative living conditions and frustrations, but also served hyperbolically to symbolise the habitat of the 'real' people of urban Papua New Guinea.[9] Given the overall socioeconomic complexity of contemporary Papua New Guinea, including the high proportion of self-defined 'unemployed' who are engaged in informal economic activities that often produce more income than conventional wage work (Barber 1993; Levantis 1997), the *elites/grassroots* dichotomy is as reductive and misleading as the popular colonial dichotomy that preceded it (cf. Turner 1990: 68–76). However, the potential of the obverse, positive meaning added to those already contained in the simplistic imagery of settlements appropriated from European usage cannot be overlooked. The former Prime Minister, Bill Skate, used it to advantage in the 1997 elections, campaigning in the city as a 'man of the people', visiting settlement communities and achieving an unprecedented urban legitimacy partially by emphasising his upbringing in a 'squatter settlement' in Port Moresby and his understanding of *grassroots* issues.[10] The *elites/grassroots* dichotomy is also employed in the practised rhetoric of so-called *raskols* (Tokpisin: 'rascals', street-crime gangs), who like to promote themselves to researchers as avengers of the poor against those in power (see Chapters Three and Four; also Morauta 1986: 11; Levantis 1997), and who are usually portrayed in the media as settlement-dwellers.[11]

Arguably, the multi-vocality of the imagery of 'squatter settlements' contributes significantly to its resilience in contemporary times. In popular discourse, it can 'speak' of unemployment, poverty, crime, but also of urban integrity and social injustice. Consequently, the generalised concept of 'settlements' can be brought into discursive play in different and sometimes contrary contexts. In one, benignly, it connotes dispossession as an inevitable burden of urbanisation and economic rapacity, a discursive theme of liberal commentators and welfare agencies urging charitable attitudes towards a

generalised category of penurious settlers (eg, Chao 1989). The publicity given to the Salvation Army's feeding program (*PNG Post-Courier*, July 15, 1998) at the Baruni dump belongs to this discourse, as does the video clip accompanying Bad Mix Souls' song *Born to Suffer*. The song was written to express the socioeconomic conditions that the band members said they shared with many other Papua New Guineans (*PNG Post-Courier*, November 24, 1998). Yet its production had to negotiate some discongruity between the realities of informal housing and the homogenising notion of squatter settlements and attendant poverty. The band members were residents of self-help settlements on Port Moresby's periphery. The most pressing problem for these settlements, like most others around the city since settlements began to develop half a century ago, is not mass unemployment but the lack of services such as piped water, proper access roads and sanitation. In order to effectively illustrate the song's theme of disparities between the rich and the poor (born of the *elites/grassroots* dichotomy discussed earlier), the group used an image not from their own settlements but from the well-publicised Baruni dump, one of the few habitats in Port Moresby, out of all those referred to as 'squatter settlements', which empirically fits the imagery of a truly penurious urban community. An overlapping discursive context in which the concept of squatter settlements is employed is that of the integrity of *grassroots*, the downtrodden toilers of the new nation. The former Prime Minister's self-legitimating references to his settlement upbringing belong in this context, and his urban reputation as an advocate of *grassroots* was maintained by acts such as his arrival to give hand-outs and verbal comfort to the squatters evicted from the old parliament building.

The most powerful discourse, however, since it legitimates the occasional destruction of 'squatter settlements' ranging from dump scavengers to self-help housing areas, is that which collapses together unemployment, poverty and crime. But in contemporary Papua New Guinea, popular media images and

politicians' rhetoric of criminal-infested settlements are no more supported by careful research than they were in the 1970s or 1980s. The National Vice-President of the PNG Social Workers Association commented in 1994 that 'Port Moresby residents are well aware that criminals operate from suburban areas like Hohola, Gerehu or Boroko … which are certainly not settlements' (Wrondimi 1994: 4). He added:

> Mass eviction is definitely not a solution to resolve criminal activities in urban centres; since such activities are also perpetrated … by white collar workers who hold high positions and live in high covenant, tight-security residences … Recent discussions with settlers in Rabaul and Lae indicate that the majority of them, in fear of losing their temporary residence on the land, are not involved in criminal activities. (Wrondimi 1994: 18)

Research in Port Moresby in the early 1990s also indicated that members of so-called *raskol* gangs came from a variety of socioeconomic backgrounds and could not be generalised as the products only of squatter settlements (see Chapters Three and Four). Moreover, its findings did not support the generalisation that unemployment 'causes' crime. Interviews with gang members in 1991 revealed that many found crime more lucrative than waged work, and had either left formal employment for crime or supplemented their legitimate income with it. Some, enticed into *raskolism* at school age, had never seriously considered formal employment. Overall, the interview material suggested that the conditioning relationship between unemployment and *raskolism* could well be the reverse of what is popularly thought. Questionnaire research by Levantis in 1995 appears to support my 1991 findings, with self-defined *raskols*, of whom a high proportion were not seeking formal wage-work, indicating that crime pays better than (at least) average waged work (Levantis 1997).

Successive governments in independent Papua New Guinea have been dogged by the publicity given to the country's

crime problem, and to urban crime in particular. A series of commissioned reports, reaching their zenith with the massive 'Clifford Report' (Clifford, Morauta and Stuart 1984), has revealed the overwhelming complexity of the issue and produced no simple solutions. As Dinnen put it, 'The impression is one of escalating lawlessness, on the one hand, and a progressively ineffectual crime control system, on the other' (Dinnen 1992: 1). The measures mooted have included states of emergency and curfews (both of which have been implemented for short periods) as well as vagrancy laws, ID cards and more draconian punishment of offenders. Nothing has provided a satisfactory solution, and politically expedient State responses to crime have 'increasingly entailed bypassing the normal processes of criminal justice in favour of more visible and direct exercises of state power' (Dinnen 1992: 3). Given that criminological applications of global theories of modernisation or dependency assume crime — and especially 'street' crime — to be a product of urbanisation and rapid social change (Dinnen 1992: 17–18; Goddard 1995: 56–7), it is not surprising that public displays of crime control are directed at those constituencies most easily portrayed as the defaulters of the urbanisation process. Unemployed, under-educated migrants are blamed for crime, and the imagery of squatter settlements is brought into play as politicians and police seek a social site that collectivises such people for the purposes of displays of crime-fighting efficiency.

But while 'squatter settlements' provide a handy focus for political rhetoric and dramatic images of efficient crime fighting (press reporters were present at the parliament house and Baruni dump evictions and are given police publicity statements after some planned raids on settlements), the alternative discursive contexts of 'settlements' weaken the potential of a sustained campaign against informal housing. The 'Rolling Thunder' and 'Enough is Enough' raids were publicised as the beginning of a sustained program of settlement evictions (as the image of rolling thunder suggests), which did not in fact eventuate. Most

residents of Port Moresby, including the *elites*, are migrants or, in
the case of a younger generation, the children of migrants. And
most, if they do not live in informal housing, have *wantoks* who
do. Given the currency of the *elites/grassroots* imagery, the
crosscutting social ties, and the discontinuity between the
realities of informal housing and the homogenising notion of
'settlements', it is possible for people to vacillate between benign
and censorious settlement imagery. A surge in street crime or a
threat to business interests from international media focusing on
the nation's law and order problems can trigger a censorious
polemic against squatter settlements. Conversely, corruption in
high places and chronic rough handling of ordinary people by the
police trigger the rhetoric that *grassroots* are dispossessed and
unfairly consigned to life in settlements. Eviction programs
cannot be sustained for any length of time in the face of such
ambiguity. On a wave of frustration and anger in some sections of
the general urban community early in 1998, two small and
vulnerable communities of squatters, unable to legitimise their
presence through any appeal to customary or other land-use
arrangements, were easily routed, but 'Rolling Thunder' was a
fanciful metaphor. A continued program of evictions and
destruction of 'settlements' would mean engagement with a much
wider range of informal housing, with a significant proportion and
socioeconomic range of the urban population and with the
tortuous *wantok* networks linking the poor to the rich and the
powerless to the powerful, threatening the ideological notion of
'squatter settlements'.

While police raids on settlements and the occasional
destruction of individual settlements can be legitimised by
appeals to the negative imagery of squatter settlements, in some
cases the mobilising of alternative imagery can create the
paradoxes evident in the case of the old parliament building and
Baruni dump evictions. Thus, the police satisfy the business *elites*
and demonstrate their efficient response to the law and order
problem by dramatically evicting the parliament building

squatters, and a Prime Minister satisfies the *grassroots* and demonstrates his populism by commiserating and giving them food hand-outs. The Baruni dump squatters can be used at one moment to demonstrate police commitment to crime control, at another to publicise social welfare initiatives, and at yet another to illustrate a pop song about the division between rich and poor. The alternative imagery is equally bound, of course, to a homogenising notion of 'squatter settlements' and would be as vulnerable as the criminal imagery to exposure as falsification if practical interventionist responses were extended beyond a handful of genuinely penurious habitats.

Conclusion

I have traced the homogenising imagery of 'squatter settlements' in Papua New Guinea, from its origins in the imagination of late colonial Europeans, through its appropriation by Papua New Guineans after independence to its prevalence in contemporary times. I hope to have shown that this imagery did not in the late colonial period, and does not now, accurately reflect the real diversity of urban housing, especially informal housing. I have also tried to show how the imagery, which has gained additional meanings in indigenous usage, is employed in different discursive situations to connote dispossession, unemployment and, in its most censorious use, criminality — the last being a practical threat to those who live in informal housing, as it is used to justify police raids and sometimes eviction. As researchers have occasionally pointed out, 'settlements' ('informal housing' is a better, though still imperfect, descriptive term) are essentially a response to inadequate housing policies since the end of World War II, and provide habitats for a wide socioeconomic range of people. An investigation in 1994 in a Lae 'squatter settlement', for instance, revealed that about three-quarters of the population were in some kind of employment (Kaitilla 1994: 646), and detailed research on the economic activities of migrants from the Southern Highlands Province in three settlements in Port Moresby in the mid-1990s

demonstrated an average weekly household income twice as high as the average income of a public servant (Umezaki and Ohtsuka 2003). Further, social research since the 1970s has not shown informal housing to be a greater breeding ground for criminals than other types of housing (I am not, of course, suggesting that there are no criminals living in informal housing). The categorical demonising of settlements, sustained partially by the frequency of well-publicised police raids rather than by their findings, is certainly undeserved.

In reality, settlements are vulnerable not only to police raids but to the criminals they are alleged to harbour. There used to be a notable contrast between the fortress-like appearance of post-independence formal housing, encased in high fencing and barbed or razor wire, and the absence of fortification within settlements. But in recent years high-security fencing has begun to appear in some self-help settlements as householders attempt to protect themselves against Port Moresby's endemic burglaries and armed attacks. During a vacation visit in 1998, I commented humorously to friends in a self-help settlement that some of their neighbours' houses looked as well fortified at those of the *elites*. The conversation quickly became serious, as people discussed the 'law and order' problem, the rascal gangs and the police raids. Romantic portraits were painted of an idyllic life 'at home' in villages as now-familiar complaints were reiterated about the deteriorating quality of life in the city. 'I am tired of the *raskols*, I am tired of the police, I am tired of trying to sleep with the sound of gunshots. I am afraid for my children,' said Rani, a community worker. 'I am trying to persuade my husband to move to Eight-Mile [one of the new self-help settlements outside the city]. If not, I want to take the children and go back to our *ples* [home village, place of origin].'

There is no easy solution to crime in Papua New Guinea, and there is certainly no clearly definable criminal constituency for the State to engage with. Wrondimi's (1994: 4) comment that Port Moresby's residents are well aware that criminals operate

from suburban areas other than settlements (with which, as a former resident, I concur) raises the question of whether the censorious diatribes about settlements, the frequent police raids and the sporadic evictions of the most vulnerable of squatters serve a wider purpose than a show of governmental and police competence in the struggle to achieve law and order. Given the systemic and insoluble presence of crime throughout urban society and the frustration of the public as a whole, it is tempting to perceive settlements as scapegoats in the strict sense of that term, in that an innocent party is ritually designated the bearer of the sins of the community as a whole and consigned to an extra-civic fate. Sadly, in the absence of improvements in urban housing programs and with no indication of a significant abatement of *raskolism* in the short term, good citizens in informal housing are likely to continue to be the victims of the one-eyed responses of urban authorities.

Epilogue

Since the foregoing discussion was first published (Goddard 2001a), the three discursive representations of settlements I described have been perpetuated, and in December 2003 some settlement-dwellers in the north coast town of Madang were the victims of a heavy-handed, and doomed, eviction exercise. The exercise came after years of official 'concern' about the settlements, coupled with an argument by the Madang Provincial Government that the land was needed for 'development'. Warnings that the Government would embark on an eviction program had been abroad for some time, and the implementation of the threat was driven by the rhetoric that the formerly peaceful town's growing law and order problem was caused by unemployed, criminally inclined migrants. The eviction program's descent into chaos could be followed day by day in the country's two major newspapers (*PNG Post-Courier* 2003, daily in December; *The National* 2003, daily in December), from which the following brief account is drawn.

As the date for the start of the eviction of selected settlements, December 15, drew closer, the Madang Chamber of Commerce began to publicly worry about possible consequences and their effects on the local airport, roads, water, electricity and telecommunications. Townspeople feared violence in general would emanate from the exercise and streets in the town centre were empty on December 15. An agreement had been made that the Provincial Government would distinguish between 'genuine' settlers and illegal squatters (implying a distinction between employed, responsible citizens and unemployed troublemakers). This was ignored by a police force that included mobile squads imported from other parts of the country, who torched houses indiscriminately and destroyed locally owned and operated trade stores and businesses in the settlement areas. The local hospital began to fill with victims of violence during the eviction, and a doctor wrote a concerned letter to the press about the unneccessary injuries sustained. Promised funding for the repatriation of settlers to 'home areas' did not eventuate, and displaced settlers (including town workers) were obliged to camp on roadsides.

The National Court ordered a halt to the eviction on December 17, citing the Provincial Government's failure to honour an agreement that 'genuine' settlers would be identified and resettled. The order had no effect on the police, who continued to torch houses and even prevented the efforts of Red Cross workers to provide humanitarian aid to evicted families. By this time, general outrage was growing, directed mainly at the police, who were being accused of human rights abuses, ignoring a National Court order and contravening the Geneva Convention in their obstruction of the Red Cross. Some politicians were beginning to decry the eviction strategy (while still maintaining that settlements were a problem and their inhabitants should be 'repatriated'). By the end of December, a team of investigators from the Ombudsman Commission had arrived to investigate the shambles and the exercise had stalled in confusion, with the

announcement of a 'temporary' halt to the eviction, by the Provincial Government. At the time of writing, the exercise has not been revived.

ENDNOTES

[1]   It is questionable whether the images used in these journalistic images are based on detailed local observation. They are commonly found in characterisations of 'typical' Third-World shantytowns (see, eg, Dwyer 1979: 45; Yeung and Belisle 1986: 100).

[2]   An ethnography by Alan Rew, who did participant-observation fieldwork in a company compound in Port Moresby in the 1960s, and a discussion by Richard and Mary Salisbury, also based on participant observation during the 1960s, give a good indication of the complex relationship between employment and habitat (Rew 1974; Salisbury and Salisbury 1972).

[3]   For example, Oram, drawing on his own findings and those of government reports, listed in one publication the number of settlements as 14 in 1950, 18 in 1964 and 40 in 1970 (Oram 1976b: 152). Two maps in the same article show 25 and 31 settlements respectively (1976b: 154, 167). A loose map with the same volume (Jackson 1976b) shows 31 settlements, but not all in the same locations as on the second map with Oram's article. An article by Jackson in the same volume gives the number of settlements in 1976 as 'over 40' (Jackson 1976a: 63). Oram repeated his statistics (with the first date as 1956 instead of 1950) in his own book on Port Moresby (Oram 1976a: 99), in which a map shows only 27 settlements in 1974 (1976a: 176). Groves, Hamilton and McArthur (1971: 281) cite a list compiled by the 'Sub-District Office' identifying 22 'squatter shanty settlements' in about 1964. A map in Rew (1974: 14) shows only 19 settlements in 1969 (the time of his fieldwork).

[4]   A household survey by King in 1987 across all housing types, while arguably committing the conceptual error Barber avoided, found an 'average' household of seven (husband, wife, three children, three other relatives), against the popular belief that indigenous urban households were inundated with *wantoks* (King 1992: 6). It should be acknowledged, of course, that 'overcrowding' is a term in need of qualification in respect of differing cultural conceptions of the relationship between numbers of people and adequate domestic resources.

5   Since the colonial period, locations along the main road from downtown
    Port Moresby to the airport and beyond have been referred to locally by
    this method. Thus 'Two-Mile', 'Three-Mile', 'Four-Mile' and so on are
    alternatives to more conventional names found on maps, and in several
    cases are more familiar than the latter to city residents.

6   Similar concerns were felt on the other side of the country by landholders
    in Lae; see Adams (1982) for an account of local responses to perceived
    land loss and settlement growth.

7   'New Guinea' refers to the northern half of the nation, a residual distinction
    from the colonial era. While the Highlands topographically straddled the
    colonial dividing line between Papua and New Guinea, coastal and lowland
    Papuans tend to classify all Highlanders as 'New Guineans'.

8   In PNG English, the plural '*elites*' refers to members of a putative
    socioeconomic group that Europeans would call (collectively) 'the elite'.
    PNG English thus allows for the singular case, whereby an individual can
    be referred to as 'an *elite*'. Similarly, there is a class of '*grassroots*' and an
    individual can be referred to as a '*grassroot*'. These terms have also been
    taken into (urban, mostly) Tokpisin.

9   In the 1980s, a cartoon character called 'Grass Roots', developed by the
    PNG Post-Courier newspaper's cartoonist Bob Browne, enjoyed enormous
    popularity. Grass Roots was a trickster whose income came from dubious
    activities such as black marketeering. It was not made clear exactly where
    he lived, but the popular inference was a Port Moresby settlement,
    probably at 'Six-Mile'.

10 Bill Skate grew up in Sabama settlement, which was first established with
    the aid of town planners in the 1950s on customary land adjacent to, and
    owned by, the Koita urban village of Kila Kila, near the suburb of Badili in
    Port Moresby (see Norwood 1984: 49).

11 Recent examples were two 'features' in *The Australian*, an Australian
    national newspaper, discussing *raskol* claims that they would kill
    Australian police deployed in PNG in 2004 under a new scheme to help
    the country combat its 'law and order problem'. The features were
    accompanied by photos of young men with masked faces carrying bush
    knives and a pistol. It was implied that the gangs operated from 'slums' and
    'shanties' (*The Australian*, September 8, 2004, p.3 and p.15).

OFF THE RECORD
Village Court praxis and the politics of settlement life

Introduction

The provenance of the discussion that follows was a false statistic, a nil entry in the official record of the types of cases heard in an urban Village Court at Konedobu in downtown Port Moresby, which proved to be a misrepresentation. The court did not appear, in the statistics, to hear any cases involving sorcery — yet the micro-ethnic community that the court principally serves represents a part of Papua New Guinea in which sorcery is well recorded as being a prevalent tradition. In this chapter, the complicity of court officials and the community they serve in the maintenance of this official falsity is contextualised in historical issues of urbanisation. I moot an explanation that the avoidance of any mention of sorcery in the court is part of an exercise in self protection, a response to developments in the politics of life in so-called squatter settlements in post-independence urban society. In this respect, Village Court praxis not only manifests the complex integration of introduced law and neo-customary regulatory

procedure, but articulates broader social concerns within the community.

The Village Court System of Papua New Guinea, introduced by legislation at the end of the colonial era, is intended to deliver 'grassroots' justice. At their inception, the Village Courts were enjoined to favour customary regulatory procedure and solutions (provided these were not at odds with the law) in dealing with disputes (Village Court Act 1973). With the passage of time, however, and the unavoidable long-term influence of colonially introduced legal procedures on the expectations of those who use the Village Courts and those chosen to serve in them, Village Court praxis has come to be a complex integration of formal legal procedure and a great variety of contemporary local mores popularly regarded as custom (Goddard 1992a, 1996; Scaglion 1990; Zorn 1990). The Village Court System was quickly extended into urban areas (despite its name), where it serves mostly settlements developed by migrants. Like the rural Village Courts, the urban Village Courts procedurally imitate District Courts and Local Courts against the intentions of the system's instigators.

While the ethnographic content of this chapter concerns a Village Court, it is not intended to be fully contextualised within the anthropology of disputes or of law. In fact, its analytic direction is related negatively to predominant debates in the academic literature on Papua New Guinean Village Courts. The literature about the Village Court System has moved through a debate that began with the proposition that Village Courts suffered from creeping formal legalism (eg, Paliwala 1982). Anthropological observations informed a counter-position that the courts' substantive operations display creativity and flexibility, which perpetuate a significant degree of legal pluralism (eg, Scaglion 1990). More recently, commentators have suggested that a complex integration of law and dynamic, changing custom is making the Village Court System an alternative to traditional dispute settlement and legal formalism (Aleck 1992: 114).

Another, slightly pessimistic, view is that Village Courts are becoming institutionalised at the bottom of the heirarchy of formal courts in Papua New Guinea under the pressure of administrative impositions and the juridical expectations of the communities they serve (Goddard 1992a, 1996).

A Village Court, however, is not simply a legal, or quasi-legal, forum. Its officials are chosen from the community it serves and are intimately bound into the social life of that community. The possibility of bias in court decisions, driven mostly by kin-group loyalty and bribery, was foreseen by legislators who imposed rules that at least three magistrates must be on the bench to hear a case and that disputants should have the right of appeal against decisions. But social influences on Village Courts can encompass more than the relatively obvious politics of adjudication and my regular observation of three urban Village Courts (in Konedobu, Erima and Pari villages) in Port Moresby in 1994 provided an opportunity for insights beyond the dynamics of grassroots dispute settlement into the social life and concerns of their jurisdictional communities. One of these communities is the focus of the discussion that follows.

Konedobu Village Court

The Village Court System was introduced legislatively at the end of the colonial period, under the Village Court Act of 1973. Juridically and rhetorically configured by arguments that the colonially introduced legal system was not accessible to 'villagers' (Curtis and Greenwell 1971; Iramu 1975) and that it had oppressed custom and customary law (Chalmers 1978a: 266ff.), the Village Courts were intended originally to adhere to customary regulatory systems rather than 'the law' in their operations and decisions. Consequently, Village Court officials were not legally trained professionals but were intended under the Act to be people selected by the local community as fair adjudicators with a good knowledge of local customs (Village Court Secretariat 1975: 1). The idealisation of the system as

a neo-customary institution was largely negated from the start by its structural concatenation with the existing legal system. Magistrates were given a handbook listing what kinds of cases they could or could not hear, maximum penalties, paperwork and record-keeping obligations and other bureaucratic responsibilities. Referrals to Local or District Courts were systematically catered for, as were appeals by disputants against Village Court decisions, which went to District Courts.

Not surprisingly, commentators soon noted a drift in the Village Court System towards formal legalism as officials began modelling their procedural style, to a degree, on that of Local and District Courts (Paliwala 1982; Goddard 1992a). Nevertheless, other observers have pointed out that magistrates' strategies in dealing with disputes are relatively creative and free from the strictures of Local and District Court magistrates' decision-making. Richard Scaglion (1990) and George Westermark (1986), among others, have drawn attention to the variation in styles in the operations of Village Courts, and the complex integration of introduced and customary law. The degree to which Village Courts are integrating law and custom is difficult to assess in general terms, given the number and regional variety of them in operation (currently more than 1,100 throughout the country), and considering the difficulty of achieving an analytically useful grasp of what 'custom' might amount to in practice (Goddard 1992a: 84–5). Arguably, under the impetus of structural impositions and the desire of the mostly rural populace for an objective and accessible 'grassroots' legal forum (Goddard 1992a: 90–3), Village Courts are becoming institutionalised juridically at the foot of the hierarchy of colonially introduced courts in Papua New Guinea.

Konedobu Village Court, in downtown Port Moresby, was established in 1977, when the Village Court system was beginning to be extended into urban areas after its operations in some rural locations were seen to be successful. It was officially gazetted in 1979 and principally serves four downtown migrant

settlements: Ranuguri, Vainakomu (sometimes locally called Ginigini[1]), Vanama and Paga. Of these, the first three are populated by micro-ethnic groups originally from the Gulf region, while the other, Paga, contains a micro-ethnically mixed population.[2] At the time of my 1994 research, Konedobu Court had five magistrates, a court clerk and 15 peace officers (the latter are executive assistants to magistrates, responsible for tasks such as delivering summonses, making sure disputants present themselves at court sittings, etc). It was one of the few Village Courts in the country with a female magistrate, and the only one in which the female magistrate was the chairperson (at least three magistrates must be on the bench to formally hear a dispute, though a mediation can be conducted by a single magistrate).

The court sits once a week and, during my fieldwork, proceedings were conducted under the stilt-raised house of the chairperson (from Lese, in the Gulf district, married to a Port Moresby Motuan), who lived with her husband at Konedobu, a few hundred yards from Ranuguri settlement. The area under the house had a table that served as the magistrates' bench and some makeshift benches for disputants and witnesses. On the morning of court days, a cloth was put on the table, two vases of flowers were added, and the Papua New Guinean flag hung behind the magistrates' seats. While Village Courts were originally intended to sit as and where individual disputes developed, without formal structures (Goddard 1992a: 84), the Konedobu Court's fixed site and formal trappings were typical of the drift toward a simulation of Local and District Court structure throughout the Village Court system (Paliwala 1982; Goddard 1992a: 89–93). Proceedings started with a formal announcement that the court was 'in session' and bowing from all participants — a further imitation of formal court procedure. The public was kept outside a wire enclosure marking off the area under the house (though all proceedings were visible and audible to onlookers), and only court officials, disputants and witnesses were allowed inside for each case. When all evidence in a case had been heard, the

disputants went outside while magistrates came to a decision, and were then called back in to hear it. When a decision was made, a magistrate would carefully read out the nature of the offence and the penalty from the Village Court handbook, to make absolutely clear to disputants what the law was in regard to the case. Procedurally, Konedobu Court is a typical Village Court.

The demographic setting

Ranuguri is a Motu word meaning a spring or water well, and the settlement takes its name from a traditional spring at the foot of a local landmark known as Burns Peak, which served until very recently as a local water supply in the dry season. Ranuguri came into existence in 1946 and is the oldest and largest of the four downtown settlements served by Konedobu Village Court, and consequently it is where most of the petty disputes heard in the court arise. It was established when migrant workers from the Gulf district were invited to move into buildings abandoned by the Australian Army at the end of World War II. There is equivocation among long-term residents about who issued the invitation: some say it was local Motuan landholders, extending hospitality in recognition of traditional trading relationships between Motuans and Gulf people. According to Ryan (1970: 19), the arrangement was intended as a temporary measure by the Australian Administration while it built proper housing for employees, but time passed and the settlement grew. By 1994, when I began monitoring Konedobu Village Court proceedings, it had more than 150 houses.

Port Moresby's settlements are commonly represented through the news media and in popular literature as communities of almost exclusively unemployed people (see Chapter One). This is certainly not true of Ranuguri, which exemplifies the more complex socioeconomic profile of most settlement communities with a wide range of occupations, formal and informal, represented in the population. Some residents have long-term skilled and semi-skilled labouring positions on the waterfront and

in stores and business premises in the downtown area, and support extended families. The settlement is home in a real sense to an increasing number of people who identify themselves micro-ethnically as being from the Gulf area, even though they have never been to their parents' or grandparents' place of origin (see Ryan 1993). But bi-locality — moving back and forth between urban and rural residence — is common among these 'migrants' and elements of urban and rural economic activities are integrated. The settlement's population is nominally Christian and the majority are members of the United Church. The centrally sited community church, in a large building preserved from World War II, is a social and architectural focal point. Community leaders and Village Court magistrates (often the same individuals) offered me the explanation that conscientious Christianity and a relative lack of alcohol consumption in the settlement were responsible for its lack of serious crime and a reputation for law abidance, compared with many other settlements in Port Moresby. While the community is neither as religious nor as abstemious as my informants claimed, Ranuguri has a very low profile in terms of crime reportage. It rarely receives a mention in any regard in the daily newspapers (an exception was a drunken brawl in 1991 resulting in a death and five houses being razed in retaliation[3]), whereas a number of other settlements are regularly publicised (often unfairly) as being generally iniquitous.

In contrast with many settlements in Port Moresby that have developed a wide mix of micro-ethnic groups from different parts of the country, Ranuguri has remained overwhelmingly a community of Gulf people, originating almost exclusively from the Malalaua district in the east of the Gulf Province. They often refer to themselves collectively as 'East Keremas', following a common tendency in Port Moresby to identify migrant groups in relation to the larger towns (in this case Kerema) of their home province. They are subdivided into smaller groups, identifying themselves, respectively, as Toaripi, Moveave, Miaru, Karama and Lese.

Toaripi is a 'tribal' grouping of people, and nowadays a council district, situated around the mouth of the Lakekamu River on the Gulf coast, and Moveave people live in the hinterland. Lese and Miaru are names used to refer to village clusters in the Moripi council district south-east of Toaripi. Karama is, likewise, a village name used metonymically to refer to a cluster of villages on the coast west of Toaripi.[4] Outsiders sometimes refer to the Malalauans collectively as 'Toaripi' (as well as 'Keremas'). Ryan has noted a tradition of hostility between Toaripi and Moveave people relating to early land struggles (Ryan 1965: 5), but no significant hostility is evident in Ranuguri settlement. The Moripi people traditionally enjoyed a reasonable relationship with the neighbouring Toaripi, with occasional emnity and apprehension about sorcery between them (Ryan 1965: 5).

In addition to being traditional trading partners of the Central District Motu people, the Malalauans, and particularly the Toaripi, developed trading relationships with colonial Port Moresby before World War II. This followed a complex history of contact with missionaries, miners and British and Australian Administration agents (Ryan 1965: 30ff.), which resulted in a significant break with traditional ritual life, especially under missionary influence (the missionary, James Chalmers, arrived in the area in 1881, and the London Missionary Society predominated in the early colonial period). Ryan, in the 1960s, noted that the Toaripi showed 'a reluctance to dwell on details of the old way of life' (Ryan 1965: 9). Indicative of this break with 'the old way' was the inauguration in 1950 of the Toaripi Association, an attempt at business development that showed particular local initiative in its early stages, with the community at large contributing to the purchase of a motor vessel to transport goods by sea to and from Port Moresby (Ryan 1963, 1965: 48–51; Ivarature 1993).

The rejection of a significant amount of earlier ritual and ceremonial activity did not, however, signal a complete

capitulation to the epistemology and ontology of the colonisers. Among the beliefs and associated activities that proved resilient to the best efforts of missionaries and the colonial administration, sorcery has remained prevalent in the general Papuan Gulf area, as it has in many other parts of Papua New Guinea, to the present day. The Government Anthropologist, F. E. Williams, testified to the importance of sorcery in the social life of Gulf people before World War II (Williams 1969: 103–9 and passim; see also Inglis 1982: 7–15), and more recently Louise Morauta remarked that the (Toaripi) people of Kukipi village 'are constantly alert to the dangers of sorcery … Their horizons have expanded in this field with their contact with town, and they now both fear sorcery and seek relief from it from people from other cultural groups' (Morauta 1984: 14). An enduring preoccupation with sorcery after World War II, extending beyond village horizons, was exemplified in a demand in 1957 to the Registrar of Cooperative Societies for an official investigation into the death that year of the putative founder of the Toaripi Association, Posu Semesevita, believed by some to have been caused by sorcery (Ivarature 1993: 92).

The official record

Statistics of the numbers and types of cases heard in Village Courts are held by the Village Court Secretariat in Port Moresby and, before beginning fieldwork, I checked the official records of the courts I would be monitoring, including Konedobu Village Court. Sorcery is a crime in modern Papua New Guinea and is included in the range of cases Village Courts are permitted, by legislation, to hear. It is subdivided in the *Handbook for Village Court Officials* (1976) into five offences, covering the performance or threatened performance of sorcery, procuring sorcery, owning tools of sorcery and paying for sorcery (1976: 25–8). In the official statistics, anything to do with sorcery is collated under the single general heading 'Sorcery' (other general headings include 'stealing', 'assault', 'insulting', 'damaged property', etc, many of which represent clusters of offences

detailed more precisely in the *Handbook*). I did not expect the statistics to be accurate: I was already aware from previous research that record-keeping by Village Court clerks was generally poor, and also that many disputes were settled informally after an initial court appearance and adjournment and thus were never officially completed and recorded. I did, however, expect the statistics to serve as a rough guide to the types of cases I would be watching and their greater or lesser comparative occurrence. I was interested, therefore, to see that there were no sorcery cases at all recorded for Konedobu Village Court in the available record, covering 1993 and the first half of 1994.

Considering the prevalence of sorcery in contemporary Papua New Guinea, and among people of the Papuan Gulf area in particular, I had expected it to be reflected to some degree in cases heard by the Village Court. Ryan's account of the growth of Toaripi settlements in town and the strained relationships between local landowners and increasing numbers of settlers implied that in the postwar decades sorcery had survived migration: when landowners asked the settlers to leave, or at least pay rent, the latter 'generally refused and on occasion threatened either physical violence or sorcery' (Ryan 1993: 222). I wondered, as I prepared for fieldwork, whether the absence of sorcery cases in the records meant that issues of sorcery were dealt with through an alternative regulatory procedure. On the other hand, perhaps sorcery among Malalauans was finally disappearing in the urban environment: after all, Ryan had made the point that many of the younger generation of Toaripi are born in Port Moresby and have not been to the district with which they ethnically identify (Ryan 1993).

The 'S' word

The first case heard, on the first day I attended Konedobu Village Court, was about a threat of sorcery. A mother had caught her daughter with a young man she disapproved of and, in her anger, she had threatened to set a sorcerer onto him. She apologised publicly. The case was entered in the record not as a threat of

sorcery, but as threatening language. When I asked the magistrates after the hearing why they had not recorded it as a sorcery threat I was told that as the woman's threat had been an emotional outburst they felt it was more fitting to record it simply as threatening language. As the weeks went by, I found that cases involving some aspect of sorcery were not infrequent, contrary to the impression given by the official statistics. The notable thing about these cases, though, was the avoidance of the words 'sorcery' or 'sorcerer'. In Hiri Motu, the Papuan lingua franca in which cases are mostly conducted, sorcery is referred to as *mea*, or *mea mea*, or *vada*. In earlier times, in the Motu language from which Hiri Motu derives, these terms had different and specific meanings within the general realm covered by English-language terms such as 'sorcery', 'witchcraft' and 'magic', but they have become virtually interchangeable through wider casual use, and are applied mostly to the ability to cause illness or death from a distance using personal items obtained (usually secretly) from the victim. The avoidance of these or derivative terms was achieved so smoothly, while sorcery was so obviously the subject, that I did not notice it until I was going through case transcripts after fieldwork. Local explanations that sorcery was a sensitive issue, or that sorcery threats or accusations were emotive rather than real, did not justify the circumlocutions in court or in the records to my satisfaction, especially when a reference to sorcery was the cause of a matter coming to court in the first place.

An example of the avoidance of direct reference to sorcery is the following case, which was classified by the sitting magistrates as a mediation when it first came to court (July 25, 1994). The classification is noteworthy, as mediations are usually conducted by single magistrates informally with the disputants (in accordance with Village Court regulations) to see if the dispute can be settled without a court hearing. While it was referred to as a mediation, it was heard in open court like a formal Village Court case, and three magistrates sat on the bench. Two of the magistrates were from Ranuguri settlement, as were the

disputants, and one was from nearby Vanama settlement. Both disputants, an elderly man and a young woman, were Moveave.

The elderly man had brought a complaint to court that the young woman had publicly suggested that he was a sorcerer. He had walked past the young woman while she was involved in a domestic dispute at her house in the settlement. He had heard her declare aloud that she wanted to be dead and that he had sorcery powers that she wished he would use to take her life away. The elderly man denied in court that he had any sorcery powers, and wanted to know why she had suggested he was a sorcerer. The young woman explained to the magistrates that she had been upset because of her dispute with her mother and her husband, in the course of which her mother had thrown her belongings out of the house. She had not meant to refer to the elderly man in particular — she had not realised he was there, and had been talking aloud to herself, wishing in her distress that a sorcerer would kill her. After hearing her explanation, one of the magistrates asked the man how he felt about it. He said he still regarded his reputation as having been damaged, and he wanted to pursue the matter further. The magistrates consequently adjourned the matter for a week, for a formal hearing. Despite the case being clearly about sorcery, the words 'sorcery' and 'sorcerer' were never used.

The following is a transcription (free translation) of what was said by the elderly man, the magistrate and the young woman during this first hearing, which was conducted in Hiri Motu.[5] In small communities such as Ranuguri, little is private and magistrates often know the details of disputes before they formally hear them, as some of the dialogue below implies.

Magistrate: What is your story?

Man: I came from the 'village' [Ranuguri settlement], because of this thing, to demand a fine of 100 kina. That is why I came.

Magistrate: For what reason?

Man: Because of false stories. I came to my child for some money. I was going to see my child and, as I was walking past, this young

woman and her husband were having an argument. I did not know what they were arguing about. I went on my way to the house, and then I heard her say, 'I will give you my dirty clothes, I want you to take my life away' — but I did not understand what she was talking about.

Magistrate: [Nodding toward the young woman] This young person?

Man: When she said that to me, I said — when I went to the house I thought to myself — what did she mean by that? I came back and asked, 'What did you mean by that?' It is something I do not know about. I do not do bad things. All I know is we come from the same place and I don't want anything bad to happen. I do not know any bad ways. But what does she know about bad ways? I want the woman to tell me what the meaning of this is.

Magistrate: [Addressing the young woman] What is your name?

Woman: [Gives her first name]

Magistrate: Do you understand Motu? Tell your side of this.

Woman: I was fighting with my mother. My mother threw my things out.

Magistrate: You fought [argued] with your mother?

Woman: Yes. While I was crying, I gathered up my things. I didn't know where he [the man] came from. I was very upset, I picked up the 'kerosene' [container, thrown out by her mother]. I was talking to myself. I didn't know this man was around, and I didn't mean him, I didn't see him. But at that moment I said, 'Here are those people, why don't they come and kill me? They should take my dirty clothes and use them to kill me.' While I was saying that I mentioned his name.

Magistrate: There was a dispute between you and your mother and your husband. This made you upset, and when you were upset you mentioned that man's name. When you were upset, you said 'They should come and kill me', and you mentioned that man's

name. When you did that you were damaging his name. When you say these things in public, people will think, 'Oh, he is that sort of person …'. You understand? That is why you should not accuse him. When you made that statement you spoilt his name. You should not say things like that. Regardless of whether it is true or false, you are giving everyone the impression that this is a certain kind of man. When you fight, there are peace officers and magistrates in the 'village' [settlement], who can solve these sorts of problems. If you want your life to end, you should not involve other people, that is morally wrong. [Now addressing man] Now, you have heard her say what she really meant, she was not referring specifically to you. Her mother and husband were fighting with her, so because of frustration she wanted to die. That is why she mentioned your name. But that is wrong. You heard, that is very wrong. I am turning the question back to you, because you brought the matter to mediation. What do you think about this?

Man: I have heard what she said. I am not satisfied. She has given me a bad name in public.

Magistrate: All right, I will issue a summons [escalating the matter from a mediation to a full court hearing, with the young woman as the defendant].

When the case was heard again (August 1, 1994), only one of the magistrates from the 'mediation' sat on the bench with two different magistrates. The names of the disputants were called, they approached the bench, but no evidence was heard and the magistrate from the previous week's hearing gave a decision. He briefly recapitulated the substance of the dispute hearing before referring to the Village Court Act. He said the woman had breached two laws, fragments of which he read aloud from the *Village Court Handbook*: 'Number five — if somebody says something bad and untrue about somebody … and number six — if someone has spread untrue stories and those stories upset someone

else …'[6] Again, no specific reference to sorcery was made. The woman was ordered to pay a fine of 10 kina, plus compensation of 10 kina to the elderly man, who made no objection to the significant reduction of the fine from his original demand.

The nature of the complaint and its resolution are, I think, fairly straightforward. A reputation as a sorcerer can be a powerful asset. F. E. Williams said of the Orokolo Bay area in the early colonial period that sorcerers constituted '… a highly powerful clique of specialists. They are at once the *élite*, and the most feared and ill-famed, of the magical profession' (Williams 1969: 109). But chronic public fear and suspicion can also be an unbearable burden for someone suspected of being a sorcerer, and the complainant's concern at the woman's imputation, intentional or otherwise, is understandable. While Ranuguri is not a village, it is a small, close-knit and fairly insular community, as the conventional Hiri Motu term *hanua* ('village'), used by its inhabitants, suggests. The man and the woman were both Moveave, one of the long-established micro-ethnic groups of the settlement.

The complainant's principal aim in bringing the matter before the Village Court was most probably to gain a public retraction in a juridical forum. The fine and compensation order were a formality under the circumstances. The magistrates' classification of the first hearing as a mediation (even though it had all the appearance of a formal hearing) offered the opportunity of a public retraction by the woman and a reconciliation, but the man wanted a more official resolution, which he gained by forcing the complaint into a formal hearing. In many of the disputes I heard at Konedobu Village Court, clearing the air or gaining an admission of wrongdoing, or a public apology, appeared more important to complainants than substantial compensation. Initial demands for a high fine or compensation payment served to express anger or distress on a complainant's part. At the end of a hearing, a nominal compensation was usually accepted by the aggrieved party, and a public handshake between disputants was not uncommon. The only aspect of the case

described above that makes it particularly unusual, in the context of dispute settlement in the Village Court System, is the avoidance of any mention of sorcery by name.

Sorcery, while being a secret activity, is not historically a forbidden topic of conversation in Melanesian societies. Indeed, literature of the early colonial era, particularly in reference to Papua, implies that it was a major topic of public discourse among indigenous groups. Williams' description of Orokolo social organisation and the *Hevehe* cycle demonstrated the ritual and discursive integration of sorcery into social life in the area at that time (Williams 1969: 103–9, 186, 214, 423–4). The prevalence of sorcery beliefs encountered by patrolling colonial officials, mostly through interviews with local groups, was such that Administrator Hubert Murray regarded Papuans as living in 'constant terror of witchcraft'[7] (Murray 1925: 67), and he believed that the elimination of sorcery beliefs would minimise serious crime in the territory (Griffin n.d.: 214). In more recent times, Epeli Hau'ofa's ethnography of the Mekeo contained a photograph of Louis Vangeke, Papua New Guinea's first indigenous Roman Catholic Bishop, flanked by his personal sorcerer at a public ceremony (Hau'ofa 1981: 287). At his investiture, Vangeke was reported to have said, 'I am a sorcerer of God' (Hau'ofa 1981: 288). In modern times, sorcery generally remains discursively public in societies throughout Papua New Guinea. Karen Brison's examination of gossip and dispute in a village setting in the East Sepik Province, for example, demonstrates the prevalence of explicit reference to sorcery (Brison 1992). In urban Port Moresby, I have observed explicit discussions of sorcery in public dispute-settlement procedure (Goddard 1996), and reports of sorcery or sorcery accusations are common in Papua New Guinea's daily newspapers.

Circumlocution in a forum such as the Village Court does not, then, appear to be supported by long-standing tradition despite sorcery being a very sensitive issue. On the contrary, more fertile ground for an understanding of the avoidance of explicit

mention of sorcery may be found in modern life, and particularly in the politics of settlement life in Port Moresby. We need here to briefly revisit some issues raised in Chapter One.

Migrant settlements and criminal images

Port Moresby's first few settlements grew quietly in the first decade after World War II, in the absence of an administration department to take responsibility for the 'squatter' phenomenon, which accompanied the lifting of earlier colonial restrictions on indigenous urban migration. The colonial administrative response shifted from tolerance, recognising that settlements solved worker housing problems in the employment boom of postwar reconstruction, to hostility, fearing the growth of a migrant lumpenproletariat. Kerema settlements, according to Ryan (1993: 222), were at one point denied water supplies and garbage and sanitary services in an attempt to discourage the migrants. By the 1970s, however, the administration had come to accept settlements as part of the urban landscape (Oram 1976: 185–205; Stuart 1970: 288–90) and some of them (including Ranuguri) underwent official upgrading programs involving the provision of paved footpaths and other basic infrastructure, under the impetus of new self-help policies that became institutionalised by the late 1970s (see, eg, Rabuni and Norwood 1980). In contemporary Port Moresby, the term 'squatter settlement' is used very loosely to refer to habitats that range from collections of completely illegal makeshift shelters hidden behind industrial buildings to relatively well-planned blocks of houses of varying standards of construction on customary land by arrangement with landowners, or on blocks leased from city authorities (see Chapter One).

While they are officially tolerated, and house a large proportion of Port Moresby's population, employed and unemployed, settlements have become populist targets of blame not only for law and order problems, but for a variety of issues

such as disease scares, visible squalor and the frustration of landowners' schemes for commercial development. They are vulnerable to violent police raids in particular, under a rhetoric that says that unemployed migrants are responsible for street crime of all kinds and that urban *raskol* gangs are a product of squatter settlements (see Chapters One, Three and Four for more extensive discussion of these stereotypes). Periodically, these various complaints coagulate into calls for the destruction of 'squatter settlements' and the repatriation of the inhabitants to their putative home villages. Occasional destruction of squatter settlements has occurred in Papua New Guinea in recent years, most famously in Rabaul, East New Britain, in 1994, when more than 2,000 people were forcibly evicted,[8] and in Madang in 2003, where an attempted settlement eviction exercise was aborted in chaos (see epilogue to Chapter One). But no national policy on squatters has been systematically implemented (Wrondimi 1994) and, in Port Moresby, plans to move specific communities of squatters out of the city area and into satellite areas have had little impact on the settlement phenomenon in general.[9]

The most common complaints about settlements are made in respect of concerns about law and order. Particular settlements have local reputations for violence — often derived from intra-settlement altercations between the different micro-ethnic groups that share a limited habitat — or for housing criminal gangs. The identification of *raskol* gangs with specific settlements is a simplistic interpretation of an extremely complicated and fluid situation (see Chapter Three, also Wrondimi 1994), but it has been perpetuated in the popular media, and the resulting stigma of violent criminality is particularly distressing for settlement-dwellers. This is partly because it invites ill-informed and misdirected police raids to arrest young people (eg, Chao 1989: 94–5). But, in addition, pre-emptive raids on selected settlements before major public events and elections are a common police strategy, confiscating weapons (including guns, but mostly bows and arrows, which are available at tourist shops and from street vendors) and alleged weapons (knives,

lengths of pipe, hammers, etc) and 'stolen property' (usually electrical goods for which no sales receipt can be produced).[10] The damage to dwellings and the rough handling of inhabitants is indiscriminate during these raids and victimises the settlements' occupants as a community: the resulting publicity reinforces the stigma of settlements in general and of a small group of chronically targeted settlements in particular.

The settlements of Gulf district migrants established in the first few years after World War II have remained relatively free of this attention. Street crime and heists in the downtown area are generally attributed (not necessarily correctly) to specific *raskol* gangs from micro-ethnically mixed settlements two or three miles distant. The claims made to me that Ranuguri was a law-abiding community (above) were unsolicited and were intended as a contrast with 'other' settlements. I heard similar claims in several of the less publicised settlements, reflecting a concern by the residents to distance themselves from the reputation that some communities have for lawlessness and for violent crime in particular. The downtown settlements had experienced a degree of administration hostility in an earlier period, but this was based on a simple fear of their unpredictable growth rate and on the economically dominant white community's apprehension of their imagined criminogenic nature. As time passed, Ranuguri, among others, displayed no threatening tendencies. Newer settlements, peopled by more recent and micro-ethnically diverse migrant groups (Oram 1976: 144–5) and growing at a faster rate as movement into towns from many parts of the country increased, became the alternative focus of concern not only for Europeans but for the indigenous inhabitants of the Port Moresby area (see, eg, McKillop 1982: 333–4).

There is little reported crime in Ranuguri, and relatively few cases are heard in the Konedobu Village Court from the downtown settlements it serves. The 'tribal' groupings within the settlement are spatially ordered and cohabit relatively peacefully. As 'Keremas', they present a united front to outsiders. Disputes that come to court are mostly family squabbles or neighbourly

friction and are often settled between the disputants before the case is fully dealt with (that is, cases are adjourned after an initial appearance of the disputants by summons, but never reappear in court proceedings). Many more disputes, classified as threatening or insulting behaviour or slander, are settled by mediation and never arrive in court. The number of cases involving physical violence or injury is low and the violence involved is mostly familial. Ranuguri has no reputation for *raskols* or lawlessness, and does not suffer the police raids that are a fairly regular event in a number of other settlements.

Sorcery, however, is an activity that could conceivably bring notoriety to Ranuguri settlement if it were reported with any frequency. The colonial administration classified sorcery as a crime even though it did not believe in the phenomenon (Murray 1926: 12; Wolfers 1975: 21–2), but sorcery was seen in the colonial era as a problem of rural administration, linked in European perception to ignorance, superstition and primitive sociality. Moreover, the social tensions and potential violence associated with sorcery beliefs were seen to be confined to relations among indigenes. Europeans were impervious to sorcery and in the towns they feared familiar forms of physical violence far more than the vagaries of customary belief systems. Sorcery in postwar urban settlements, such as that alluded to by Ryan (1993: 222), was not troublesome to colonial authorities because whatever violence may have been generated was not visibly disruptive or threatening to the urban community at large. Oram cites a claim by the colonial administration in 1968 that some of its archaic Native Regulations, including those concerning sorcery, were retained through a contemporary period of change 'at the express wish of the indigenous people' (Oram 1976: 158). Considering the range of indigenous groups in Papua New Guinea, this is an ambiguous clause: nevertheless, sorcery remained an important force among Melanesians at the end of the colonial era, while the administration's concern about it was considerably less than it had been in earlier times.

In contemporary Papua New Guinea, cases of sorcery are occasionally reported in newspapers when a death occurs. In the more notorious of Port Moresby's settlements sorcery threats and accusations are not uncommon,[11] but the media reportage that fuels commonsense concerns about crime is preoccupied with more tangible forms of violence. As a result, public discussion of sorcery in these communities attracts little attention, compared with group violence and the implied presence of *raskol* gangs. Ranuguri, however, a settlement of people identified with a region in which sorcery is traditionally seen as especially prevalent, has no reputation for either group violence or criminal gang activity. In the absence of these, a reputation as the dwelling place of sorcerers would have greater potential in the view of the settlers to generate public concern and attract unwanted attention from the media and the police. Another researcher, Katayoun Rad-Hassall, who visited Konedobu Village Court early in 1996, related to me an interaction with the chairperson of the court, who had recently vacated her position due to ill health, which medical authorities were finding difficult to diagnose. In the first instance, the woman described her ailment as 'customary sickness'. Rad-Hassall asked whether she was referring to sorcery. To this explicit reference, the woman replied, 'Yes, sorcery.'[12] Her initial avoidance of the word sorcery might seem insignificant, but it manifests, I think, a conditioned caution in the presence of outsiders. Among themselves, Ranuguri's residents might openly refer to sorcery, but in circumstances where their internal affairs might come under official or public scrutiny, such as Village Court hearings that must be recorded, a veil of discretion is drawn.

Conclusion

I am not, of course, suggesting that Ranuguri is dangerously full of sorcerers, or indeed that sorcery is any more prevalent there than in any other settlement in Port Moresby. But it is threaded into the consciousness of the community and glimpses of its pervasive power emerge unpredictably and sometimes dangerously in

arrythmic moments of settlement life. We have seen here, for instance, that it can emerge in social discourse through a mother's anger, a young woman's distress, a bout of illness. To a significant degree, F. E. Williams' comment in a 1936 report that among the people of the Gulf area 'sorcery, or rather the unspoken threat of it, stands in the background as a formidable defender of all manner of rules and customs' (Williams 1976: 112), still holds true among modern, urbanised Malalauans. Sorcery claims and threats remain matters of dispute and counter-threat within the community and, contrary to the official record, they are among the cases heard in a modern institution, the Village Court.

To their communities, Village Courts represent a readily accessible legal institution where relatively unbiased justice can be obtained and, at the same time, they are a public forum in which the community as a whole can witness the righting of wrongs and the reasonable settlement of disputes. This is one of the major reasons for the success of the Village Court System throughout the country, regardless of whether it has strayed from the original vision of its inaugurators. But, while the people of Ranuguri view the Village Court favourably as a regulatory institution, they are also aware that its links with other institutions make their affairs vulnerable to exposure to a more public gaze. The avoidance of any mention of sorcery in Konedobu Village Court hearings and in the recording of those hearings for other, official parties is not a methodically planned subversion, but represents a tacit, historically conditioned awareness of the possibility of disruptive intrusion by agents of urban authority.

Beyond the relatively trivial observation that official statistics should not be trusted to represent social reality and the more redolent suggestion that court officials and disputants are complicit in the suppression of explicit references to sorcery in the interests of self protection, my intention in this chapter has been simply to reinforce an old-fashioned anthropological point. The Village Court System is a dynamic institution whose complex articulation of colonially introduced law and a wide

variety of fluid, changing 'customs' is analytically fascinating, and it has become a focus for a significant number of scholars in the anthropology of law and in the field of legal pluralism. But Village Courts are more than the sum of their juridical parts, and their praxis is informed by more than the combination of formal legal influences and the customs of the communities they serve. Even though they were introduced legislatively, Village Courts have come to be embedded in the sociality of their communities. Disputants and officials share a habitat and its everyday concerns, thus they are subject to the wider politics of social life, which have the potential to overshadow or even displace the more immediate considerations in the settlement of a dispute.

The Toaripi migrants of Ranuguri settlement have survived as a community in a changing urban environment for half a century. They have experienced a variety of official attitudes including simple tolerance, hostility and pragmatic support and, in more recent years, they have witnessed the growth of negative publicity about settlements in general and periodic calls for their destruction. Hidden from general view behind the remnants of the colonial administration headquarters, and humming with mundane activity, Ranuguri settlement in the 1990s gave the appearance to visitors that it had become an organic part of the urban landscape. Yet its inhabitants lived in a state of unease in the face of unfavourable official and media imagery of settlements and responded with initial reticence to the interest of outsiders such as myself. In the context of the community's sense of vulnerability, the Village Court, subject to supervision and scrutiny by outsiders, becomes a social site where caution has to be exercised even in the settling of relatively innocuous internal disputes. Consequently, as we have seen, there are occasions when judgment of what has been said necessarily involves judgment of what can be said about it.

Epilogue

Towards the end of 1994, the inhabitants of Ranuguri settlement learned that a highway was to be built connecting Port Moresby

International Airport with downtown Port Moresby. Ranuguri settlement was said to be directly in its path. After half a century's survival, and dependent on their proximity to the downtown area and its (relatively unreliable) formal and informal employment opportunities for their urban livelihood, the settlers faced the possibility of eviction, or at best relocation out of town, at the stroke of a town planner's pen. Konedobu Village Court hearings during the last two or three weeks of my fieldwork that year were perfunctory affairs, if they happened at all. The disputants and court officers were preoccupied with fraught discussions about their future and with trying to get definite information about the planned highway.

At the end of 1996, the earthworks for the downtown end of what was to be known as the Poreporeno Highway obliterated a number of buildings surviving from the old colonial administrative complex at Konedobu, but missed the settlement by a matter of metres. Now potentially exposed on one side to the gaze of travellers on the future highway, whatever relief Ranuguri settlers might have felt was quickly displaced when proposals for feeder roads were made public. The fate of Ranuguri continued to be equivocal, as the provision and placement of feeder roads was debated against financial considerations and local (Motu-Koita) landowner concerns. The final position of the feeder roads spared the settlement-dwellers in one respect, as they were not required to move. But the exercise overall created vacant areas of land where there had been none before, and the settlement was now fully visible from the new highway.

New arrivals began to take advantage of the vacant land, and the insular, long-established residents found themselves flanked by strangers from other regions, particularly the Highlands. By 1999, the conflictive outcomes of this were visible in the Village Court. Where previously the case load had consisted mainly of accusations of insults and threatening behaviour, there was now a significant proportion of minor assaults and more serious complaints about threats of violence.

The complainants were overwhelmingly the 'Keremas' and the respondants were from the newer parts of the settlement. It was clear that Ranuguri settlement was undergoing a transformation in its social organisation, and a new set of problems and preoccupations had developed. Whether these will displace older ones, such as that discussed in this chapter, remains to be seen at the time of writing. Sadly, the provision of the highway also destroyed the spring from which the settlement took its name, and which for more than 50 years had been providing the settlers with fresh water, supplementing unreliable town water supplies.

ENDNOTES

1   Ginigini (Motu: thorn) is spelt Kinikini on maps of the area, and is officially marked as the area of land adjacent to Vainakomu (Motu: 'string-bag hiding', referring to a traditional legend about the spot). The history and demography of many of Port Moresby's settlements, including those referred to here, are outlined briefly in Norwood's *Port Moresby Urban Villages and Squatter Areas* (1984): Vanama is listed in that publication as Newtown (1984: 43), the name of the suburb in which it is situated, and Vainakomu is referred to, inaccurately, as Mailakoum (1984: 56).

2   Paga (Motu: shoulder) Point is the end of the finger of land constituting downtown Port Moresby. The early settlers at Paga Point were an ethnic mixture of downtown workers, particularly those employed on the wharves, taking advantage of an unused and relatively hidden niche (although the very first individual slept in a disused World War II gun-turret by arrangement with local authorities to guard stored equipment). In contrast, the first settlers in the other three communities established themselves more overtly by arrangement with traditional Motu-Koita landholders by virtue of traditional trading links between Motuans and Gulf societies.

3   Reported in the PNG *Post-Courier*, October 15, 1991, p. 4.

4   F. E. Williams, the Government Anthropologist in Papua before World War II, employed a similar method of using names of 'main villages' in the Gulf area to refer to 'a number of local and dialectical units which we may call tribes, but for which it is quite impossible to give any generally and consistently recognized names' (Williams 1976: 76).

5   In addition to making handwritten notes, I tape-recorded (with the permission of magistrates) all the cases I heard. My grasp of Hiri Motu is conversational but not authoritative: I am grateful to Janet Jovellanos, of the University of Papua New Guinea, for assistance in translating this case.

6   In the Village Court regulations, these are listed officially as 'making a false statement concerning another person that offends or upsets him' and 'spreading false reports that are liable to cause alarm, fear or discontent in the village community'.

7   The early colonial administrations used terms such as 'magic', 'witchcraft' and 'sorcery' interchangeably. The general gloss when anyone was criminally charged with such activities was mostly 'sorcery'.

8   See, for instance, *PNG Post-Courier*, August 19, 1994, p. 5; August 25, 1994, p. 5; In a public notice in the *Post-Courier* on 26 January 1994, p. 53, the Premier of East New Britain claimed conditions in squatter settlements led to bad health, drug abuse, prostitution, 'law and order' problems and 'inter-tribal' fighting and that settlers were a cheap source of labour easily abused by employers.

9   See, for example, *PNG Post-Courier*, December 30, 1992, p. 2, 'Vadavadas ask Motu-Koitas who is to be cleared off land' and 'People have the right to live anywhere — settler'; *PNG Post-Courier,* March 3, 1994, p. 3, 'Squatter issue raises storm in Parliament'; *The National,* April 27, 1994, p. 3, 'Settlers resist plans to resite them outside capital'; *PNG Post-Courier,* June 29, 1994, p. 2, 'Minister plans squatter action'.

10   A typical reportage of this folk devil around the time of my research was a front-page story in the *PNG Post-Courier*, May 8, 1992, 'NCD police move to clean-up [sic] city: Raid nets flares, guns, tool for making guns'. A picture shows police with confiscated items (mostly bows and arrows, television sets and radios). Only four people were detained for questioning after the raid on two large settlements. It is not stated whether anyone was charged.

11   Accusations of sorcery are common in Erima and nearby settlements, for example, and frequent 'sorcery' cases are heard (without circumlocution) in the local Village Court, which I have monitored extensively.

12   K. Rad-Hassall, personal communication, October 1996. The magistrate subsequently recovered and took up her former position. She later told me in a private conversation — in which similar verbal manoeuvring to that with Rad-Hassall took place — that she thought she had been sorcerised by jealous others.

BIG-MAN, THIEF
The social organisation of gangs

Introduction

In contrast with analyses that contextualise Third-World urban crime in a pathology of modernisation, I suggest in this chapter that crime gangs in Papua New Guinea represent (albeit criminally) an integration of pre-capitalist social behaviour into a cash-economic environment. Central to the argument is a perception that the social organisation of gangs and the distribution of wealth within them follow a familiar Melanesian pre-capitalist pattern — a theme I develop in Chapter Four. The information about gang activities was obtained in part through interviews conducted by criminologist Anou Borrey and myself with prison inmates at Bomana Jail, Port Moresby, who talked voluntarily and with a guarantee of anonymity, which has made it necessary to generalise more than is usually academically desirable in order to avoid local identification.

Popular theories of gangs

The development of the sociology of youth gangs and delinquency in industrial society has been to a large extent the development of

theories to explain why young people become 'deviant'. The growth of this branch of sociology occurred mostly in North America, where a preoccupation early in the century with communities that were urban, lower class and ethnically diverse generated theories stressing social disintegration, anomie, alienation and other symptoms of adaptive inadequacy (cf. Brake 1987: 34–57, passim; Taylor et al. 1975: 91–171 and passim). A substantial and influential account of Port Moresby gangs published in the late 1980s used a number of these theories eclectically to explain the rise of gangs (Harris 1988: 5–10). This is to be expected in an urban environment with a preponderance of migrants, where visible inequalities are growing among an indigenous population that a few decades ago was relatively egalitarian. The situation lends itself at first sight to the application of models paradigmatically linked to social dislocation and relative poverty, and indeed, psycho-social factors such as alienation from rural community sanctions and authority structures deserve investigation. I am concerned here, however, with looking at some broadly sociological aspects of gang recruitment and organisation, and to address some common misconceptions about them.

The gang phenomenon in Papua New Guinea tends to be contextualised by observers in the high rate of unemployment and relative poverty that has accompanied urbanisation (Clinard 1976: 51–8; Clifford 1976: 12ff. and passim).[1] Such a view, which articulates with modernisation theory (Sumner 1982: 12ff.; Boehringer 1976: 219ff.), implies that better employment opportunities would be an antidote, and that gang crime would largely disappear with the advent of full employment. This idea has been polemically reinforced by gang spokesmen in Port Moresby through demands for work schemes, loans to start businesses and so on in meetings with politicians to discuss the 'law and order' situation.[2] It has also become common for youth groups (who represent themselves as being formed from the ranks of the unemployed) to threaten to 'turn to crime' out of frustration if they are not given due attention by administrative

authorities.[3] Further reinforcement has been provided by periodic attempts to 'crack down' on crime, which have manifested themselves mostly in police sweeps of Port Moresby's many squatter settlements, where the majority of residents are popularly stereotyped as being unemployed or underemployed.[4] Harris saw unemployment as a major factor in the early formation of rascal gangs in Port Moresby in the 1960s (Harris 1988: 5–6), though he noted that in the 1970s youths from better-off families were joining gangs (1988: 12).[5]

Other local commentators have given less emphasis to unemployment in their accounts of gang history, yet their prescriptions appeal, despite a lack of precedents in their own findings, to unemployment and underprivilege as contributing to the future growth of gang activity. For example, Po'o (1975: 5) and Utulurea (1981: 112) claimed early gangs included employed and unemployed adults and school attenders as well as school drop-outs. Utulurea,[6] though, in a prognostic statement, linked underprivilege to likely future gang problems (1981: 116). In a 1976 report on juvenile crime in Port Moresby, Young noted that the parents of offenders were usually employed and 'it appeared that in direct relative terms economic deprivation was not a key factor' (Young 1976: 2). Nevertheless, he predicted that increasing unemployment and 'frustration' were likely to contribute to an increase in crime in the future (1976: 13–15). Thus the unemployment theme persists, even when research evidence does not particularly support it.

Recruitment and social organisation

While it is true that some unemployed people have turned to crime, evidence from my own interviews suggests that to correlate gang crime and unemployment is reductive (see Chapter Four for a fuller discussion of this theme). Recidivist inmates, especially, commonly told me that they had been employed when they became involved in crime and had given up regular employment,

after a while, in favour of crime. Further, a number of young inmates said they began 'playing crime' (a common phrase among chronic offenders) when they were still at school and did not seriously consider regular employment when they left school. The popular understanding that unemployment leads to crime has been fed officially to some extent by statistics compiled from criminal charge sheets and similar police sources. Most gang members are (formally) 'unemployed' when apprehended, but this may be by preference, and to assume that their unemployment leads to their criminal activity might not only be incorrect, it might in many cases present the progression the wrong way around.

Those gang members who were once employed did, however, express dissatisfaction with their jobs. Significantly, while the majority of gang members are reasonably literate, they do not have high educational qualifications, usually leaving school before grade 12 (that is, in early teenage years). Consequently, the jobs for which they are qualified do not carry high prestige, and they involve mundane work. In discussion, the boring nature of their jobs (cf M. Strathern 1975: 311) featured prominently in reasons given by inmates for getting into crime and leaving employment. The work was dull and the pay was 'not enough'. The move into crime often began with opportunistic theft, which proved lucrative and relatively easy, with a low risk of being caught. The low success rate of police in apprehending petty thieves and burglars in Papua New Guinea is well documented (Clifford et al. 1984a: 188–201). Also, theft and burglary provided excitement that was lacking in the workplace and in the limited leisure activities of lower wage earners.

Another significant factor in the decision to turn to crime as a source of income is the communal ethos that typifies Papua New Guinean societies. In urban situations, its pervasiveness is such that becoming employed can often generate financial problems for the worker, rather than financial stability. In a country where kinship obligations are regarded as paramount and

a relatively small proportion of the population is fully involved in the cash economy, a modest cash income often gives rise to kin-group expectations that can never be fully satisfied. The employed person becomes the channel for the flow of cash and commodities into the group and, being an urban-dweller, cannot participate fully in the customary activities that would bring reciprocal benefits from others in the group (see Strathern 1975: 348ff.). Thus he or she soon comes to feel that it is impossible to earn enough to satisfy the cash and commodity demands of dependant kin. Under these circumstances, theft and burglary in particular are attractive supplementary activities.

In the discourse of my informants, the entry into criminal activity such as theft, burglary or 'street crime' (as opposed to embezzlement, forgery, misappropriation, etc) was mostly glossed as 'joining a gang'. From this point, depending on the subsequent regularity and severity of his criminal activity, the individual sometimes developed into what the news media refer to as a hard-core gang member. The apparent ease of 'joining' a gang can be understood through an examination of the social organisation of gangs throughout Papua New Guinea, which can be exemplified by a general description of the situation in Port Moresby. Harris's account of the development of gangs and their territory in the Port Moresby area presents a process typified by segmentation, takeovers and, finally, a degree of cooperation (1988: 35–43). He offered a schema listing six operative gangs in 1963, growing to 20 by the late 1970s, and dropping to 11 by 1987 (1988: 43). Earlier sources, however, suggested a larger number of gangs operating in the capital during the 1970s and early 1980s: Oram (1976a: 154) cites police estimates that 50 gangs were operating in 1971; Po'o claimed in 1975 that 50 gangs were in operation (1975: 34), while Utulurea in 1981 suggested 30 (1981: 111). The counts refer to gang names linked to particular suburbs, but unfortunately do not distinguish gang sizes or stability. Whether particular names represent a handful of people or a substantial group is not clear.

Whatever the situation was when Po'o and Utulurea wrote, by 1991, when I began research on the subject, Port Moresby was divided up territorially between four major entities referred to as 'gangs' — 'Bomai', 'Mafia', 'Koboni' and '585' — which coexisted without significant conflict. All my interviewees agreed with this 'four big gangs' model.[7] The territorial boundaries were not established through inter-gang aggression, but were delineated by natural or infrastructural features (for example, a row of low hills separated two territories, and the town's two most-major roads also acted as dividers). Within the four major gangs were a number of subgroups[8] (hereinafter referred to as 'sub-gangs'), with their own names, operating in small suburban territories and also coexisting without conflict. Consequently, a gang member was likely to identify with a sub-gang 'inside' one of the four major gangs, as well as with the major gang itself. These small sub-gangs usually developed out of specific micro-ethnic groups in the city's suburbs and settlements, though it should not be assumed that the settlements are criminogenic environments. The settlements were developed originally by migrants (see Chapter One), and post-independence Port Moresby is still thought of as a city of migrants (overwhelming the traditional, Motu-Koita inhabitants of the land on which the city has grown), but many of the younger people who populate it today were born and raised in Port Moresby and are largely alienated from their 'home' areas and customs. Thus, while they maintain the micro-ethnic sensibility that characterizes Papua New Guinean society in general, they share a transcendant urban lifestyle and world view, which in activity such as the commission of urban street crime overrides the tensions that commonly exist between micro-ethnic groups. The sub-gangs could represent a single micro-ethnic group, or a combination of two or three. The clustering of these sub-gangs within the four major gangs meant that the gangs as a whole were multi-ethnic — an unusual phenomenon. As Harris pointed out (1988: 47), in Papua New Guinea the urban gang is 'one of the

few structures in which tribal lines are blurred in favour of larger social groupings'.

Gang recruitment was casual, according to my informants. It might simply take the form of an invitation to a friend or kinsperson to join in a house burglary, or a request to an 'insider' for information for a planned robbery on a business premises or bank. A schoolboy might be asked if there was anything worth taking at his school and then be invited to be involved in the crime. Cooperation meant identification with the major gang or sub-gang (logically both) in the area. The casualness of this process, and the ability to spontaneously develop a sub-gang within a major gang territory, throws doubt on the usefulness of positivist attempts to define gang structures and boundaries. Harris saw the gangs as having a hard core of leaders and lieutenants, beyond which was a group of fully initiated but slightly less frequently active members, which he called 'full members', beyond which was a further group that he called 'supporters', who identified themselves with the gang for reasons of prestige and self-protection without having been 'formally' admitted to membership (1988: 28). The 'supporters', he said, were often involved in small-scale criminal activities away from the gang, and their relative lack of expertise contributed to their likely capture by the police. When captured, they 'somewhat proudly and arrogantly' identified themselves as gang members with the consequence, Harris said, that gangs were wrongly 'credited' with some activities and police and media reports consequently distorted public perception of the nature of the gangs (1988: 28–9). A slightly less complex delineation was implied by the report 12 years earlier that 'The subgroups consist of four to six hard-core members often criminally inclined, around whom are peripheral "hangers-on" without permanent membership' (Young 1976: 6).

While there is no doubt that the crime gangs have a hard core of leaders and lieutenants (of which more later) and some less active people, the tidy distinction between real members and

'supporters' who pretend membership is questionable. Young, while talking of a hard core and periphery, commented on the loose structure of gangs and the lack of ethnic, religious or geographical requirements for gang membership and concluded that 'Gang membership is neither rigid [nor] final' (Young 1976: 5–6). In contrast, a contingency of Harris's distinction is that membership is formal and involves initiation and vows of secrecy and obedience (1988: 28). Obedience and secrecy as conditions of hard-core gang membership also appear in earlier literature (Utulurea 1981: 113). The 1976 report by Young mentioned one gang as requiring the successful planning and execution of a break-and-entry crime, conviction and incarceration, and escape from a law enforcement agency for hard-core membership (Young 1976: 8). These formulations in the literature are arguably tautological, since they describe criminal activity as a requirement for classification as a criminal, and whether such 'entry requirements' are rigid rules, unspoken expectations or simply an unreflective component of criminal praxis in general, is debatable.

In contrast to the inference above, that there might be formal ritualistic requirements for entry into a gang's hard core, when I described the stringent initiation requirements of ethnic gangs in some other countries for my interviewees (who represented gangs and sub-gangs in Port Moresby and elsewhere in the country), I was told they did not apply in Papua New Guinea. Rather, the process was a matter of escalated involvement and success in the commission of serious crime. Similarly, leaving a gang was not particularly difficult and was effected simply through cessation of crime and resistance to invitations from gang associates to participate in further activities. Gang 'membership' was delineated territorially — a person who did not live in Bomai territory, for instance, could not be a member of Bomai — and gangs were supposed to respect each other's territory and give notice if they needed to come into another gang's area. The main sanction that applied among gangs was against betrayal when police were investigating a crime. The punishment was severe

assault. I was given an example of a young gang member who, after being beaten up by the police (which inmates said was the most common form of interrogation), gave the name of a gang leader involved in a robbery. He was later beaten up by fellow gang members, repeatedly stabbed and (this may have been an embellishment in the story for my benefit …) had one testicle cut off. Prison inmates who identified themselves to me as gang leaders (I will return later to the problem of identification) were unable to estimate the number of members in Mafia, 585, Bomai or Koboni, the major gangs. When I asked for an estimate, an appeal was always made to the size of the gang territory and the impossibility of determining how many people were engaged in criminal activity. In addition, leaders saw themselves as 'looking after' anybody in their territory engaged in street crime, as well as their own kin.

Without a formal entry procedure (beyond complicity in a crime), the idea of membership, in a strict sense, becomes less clearly applicable — and, by extension, the concept 'gang', implying a finite group, becomes a problem in itself. The line between Harris's 'members' and 'supporters' disappears and leaves an untidy network connecting gang leaders and a range of major and minor law-breakers variably committed to crime as a lifestyle. Thus a criminal 'gang' in the Papua New Guinea context is not the same thing as a criminal 'gang' (usually, a finite group with strict and binding membership criteria) in industrial societies. The term 'gang', however, has become a familiar part of 'law and order' discourse in Papua New Guinea in reference to any group engaged in crime regardless of size or composition, and little can be gained in this discussion by refusing to use it. In qualification, I suggest, in contrast with Harris, that the nature of the gangs can be understood best in terms of relationships of support and reciprocation between certain individuals who are perceived as 'leaders' and a range of people engaged in theft, burglary and street crime to a greater or lesser degree in a given territory.

Big-man, thief

Harris draws on the concept of the Melanesian big-man to explain the role of the gang leader (1988: 26–7). I think the notion of the big-man has more importance still; it is central to an understanding of the gang crime phenomenon, though it would be unwise to suggest that the gang leader represents simply an urban reproduction of the archetypal big-man. Some qualification is necessary nowadays in discussions of the 'big-man', for the term has become problematic in itself, at least in the literature. The generalised notion of the big-man, as sketched for instance by Sahlins (1966: 165–70), in contrast with the chief, has become less clear with each study, particularly in the Highlands (whence the archetype in the literature), and further complicated with Godelier's big-man/great-man distinction (Godelier 1986: 162–88 passim). Possibly the term is beginning to suffer from overuse, in academic literature and in popular discourse (it has become part of everyday language throughout Papua New Guinea). We can, however, still make some fairly innocuous generalisations about the pre-capitalist big-man. One basic contrast between the chief and the big-man that remains distinct is that while both chief and big-man are involved in a complex system of obligation and reciprocation with their own and other kin-groups, the prominence of the chief is inherited, while that of the big-man is usually achieved through his own efforts, though we should note that there has been some debate generated by suggestions that the son of a big-man is often in the best position to emulate his father's achievements (see, eg, A. Strathern 1971: 208–13; cf Warry 1987: 55–63).

The essential characteristics of the Highlands big-man (given the typological variation expressed in the literature), are a dynamic combination of industry, generosity, grandiloquence and cunning. The incipient big-man must be able to accumulate personal wealth, which is difficult in a society founded on group ownership of material resources. This wealth is not for keeping; in fact, the owner of it might quickly impoverish himself. He has to

be generous to an extent that will engender the indebtedness of enough of his kin-group to be assured of the cooperation of the group as a whole when he needs it. Such occasions, in the Highlands, often occurred in the past in the form of grand distributions of pigs, shells and other items to neighbouring groups, in which the big-man demonstrated his group's wealth and his own ability to get the group to part with it at a particular time. This distribution, of course, put other groups in his group's debt and thus, in principle at least, guaranteed a return to his own group at some future time. The return would often be greater than what was given, meaning his own group would then be indebted, and so the process would continue. In this climate of delayed exchange, grand gesture and manipulation of group resources, the big-man had to be an astute entrepreneur, able to pick his time correctly, able to mobilise his group, able to guarantee it some advantage. The established big-man, in addition, reaped social rewards for himself. Not only did he have a 'name' and support from the group because it gained prestige through his skills, but he received favours from members of the group hoping to gain benefits for themselves.

In its generality, the above sketch emphasises the big-man as entrepreneur, rather than as warrior or fight leader, since the legitimacy of classifying fight leaders as big-men is equivocable. A logical point can be made that while an entrepreneurial big-man may also be a fight leader, fight leadership in itself does not involve the kind of continuing entrepreneural activities that classically qualify as big-man behaviour. In the present discussion, the most pertinent aspects of the archetypal big-man are his entrepreneurism and his relationship with his kin-group.

Pre-capitalist societies in Papua New Guinea practised (and to a large extent still do) a communal mode of production in which a system of reciprocity was central. This effectively prevented individuals from accumulating personal material wealth on any more than a short-term basis. The group, rather than the individual, was the source of material wealth. Any

wealth the big-man achieved was soon dispersed. The author of one of the earliest studies of Highlands big-men as commercial businessmen suggested that the people he observed possessed, a priori, the spirit of capitalism 'and needed only linkage with the cash economy to express it' (Finney 1973: 122). But archetypal big-men were not, in the historically precise sense of the term, capitalists. They were clever manipulators, great orators and perhaps great warriors, but their interests were governed by those of their kin-group, and of the groups with which they interacted (cf. Gregory 1982: 51–5). Despite his Weberian allusion, Finney drew attention to the relationship between Gorokan businessmen's endeavours and the requirements of their kin-groups (Finney 1973: 107ff.). The degree to which group interests determined individual enterprise by big-men in Papua New Guinea contrasts with the conditions of the rise of capitalist entrepreneurs in the West at the end of the feudal era, when an important contributing factor was the breakdown of extended kin-group organisation as a contingency of the transformation of the social relations of production.

The relationship between gang leaders and gang 'members' is very similar to the relationship between the archetypal big-man and his kin-group. And this is the real significance of the model of the big-man, for it is not just that the gang leader is a big-man (as distinct from a chief), but the model of distribution of wealth in which the gang leader plays an entrepreneurial role follows a similar pattern to that of Melanesian societies in general. True gang leaders are at least in their late twenties, and more often in their thirties. They are, of course, veteran criminals with prison experience and have reputations for toughness. Older gang leaders, though, are sometimes less active in burglary and robbery than is popularly thought, and act more as organisers. They have accumulated a reliable cohort from whom a suitable team can be drawn to carry out, for instance, a major bank robbery. They boast a pool of 'drivers', 'gunmen', 'knifemen' and often a 'mastermind'. They have contacts inside businesses and formal organisations

who feed them information on payrolls, the movement of goods, etc. The leader himself might or might not take part in the commission of the crime, but will get part of the proceeds in some way or another. The leader has built up this network through initiative, proving himself to be a successful criminal, and through generosity, dispersing his gains to others.

It is rare for stolen goods to be kept or for stolen money to be accumulated as personal wealth. Few gang members to whom I spoke had bank accounts, even though some of them had been involved in thefts of thousands of kina.[9] A simple explanation that could be offered for the lack of accumulation is that gang members seen to become rich, or to have material wealth, immediately attract the attention of the police. There is some truth in this. One gang leader told me of a time in his career when he decided to give up crime. He got a legitimate money loan and opened up a small disco club. Astute and enterprising, he soon had a flourishing business and paid off the loan. His success attracted the attention of the police, who knew him only as a criminal. They harrassed him chronically and the club's patrons, demanding to know where he got the money to run the club so successfully, convinced that crime was involved in the venture. Eventually, with the police attention taking its toll on his business, he gave it up and returned to crime. Utulurea, describing gang behaviour in 1981, discussed the distribution of goods also in terms of fear of being caught:

> stolen goods and money are equally distributed among the people involved in stealing them. Expensive things like radios and amplifiers are not kept. They are sold to other people for money. Often they are sold to public servants and other workers who support the gangs. The reason that they are sold is that they have no value for the gang members. They want them, but they are too dangerous for them to keep as the police may find them. (Utulurea 1981: 115)

Fear of being caught with the goods, however, or of being seen to be rich without legitimate reason, does not adequately explain the disposal of stolen items or money, or the manner of their disposal. Money is preferred to other items by gangs. One gang leader told me that he urged his followers to take only money when engaged in burglary or hold-ups since anything else had to be fenced, and this involved the effort of setting up fencing arrangements. In most cases, however, thieves took anything they thought they could sell (that is, convert into money). In a study of Highlands migrants in Port Moresby in 1982, Wanek observed that those who became involved in criminal activity such as theft spoke of it using the Tokpisin term *wok*, by which they meant ritual or goal-oriented activity rather than wage labour (Wanek 1982: 41–2). Wanek argued that the Highlanders he studied used crime and urban warfare to establish reputations and status, which in their home areas would have been achieved through warfare or economic competition (1982: 52). The term *wok* was used similarly by a gang member who told my research colleague that the activities he indulged in were not regarded by himself or his fellows as stealing, but as an occupation.[10] Goods were sold as quickly as possible (exceptions being very small 'pocket' items and the smaller types of radio/cassette players) and the money was spent or dispersed through the community of greater and lesser criminals and among the kin of those involved in the crime. The most common way to spend money was to buy huge supplies of beer, which were consumed immediately and orgiastically — a practice that reproduces common bonding behaviour throughout Papua New Guinea now that alcohol has been absorbed, along with cash, into the substance of customary exchange systems (see M. Strathern 1975: 225–40). Thus, in a very short time the proceeds of crime, sometimes thousands of kina in the event of a payroll heist or bank robbery, were consumed one way or another. The gang leader and his fellows in crime not only split the takings among them, but made gifts to lesser criminals. In return, the gang leader would periodically receive money from gang members (that is, criminals operating in his major gang territory).

A number of fairly successful gang leaders in any of the four major nominal territories of Port Moresby aspired, though not too publicly, to be the overall leader of the major gang. In interviews, a number of sub-gang leaders attempted to represent themselves to me as having more influence than they really did (and this phenomenon will be familiar to ethnographers of Papua New Guinea Highlands groups). One man managed to more or less convince me for a while that he was the overall leader of one of the four major gangs. I found out indirectly that he was not, although he was fairly powerful. Crosschecking interviews usually revealed the true state of affairs. The individuals being referred to as overall leaders of the major gangs would be more correctly described as those who had the most influence in their major gang territory — that is, in Bomai, 585, Mafia or Koboni areas. They became recognisable to the outsider only after a period of observation and with confirmation from a reasonable proportion of insiders. The biggest 'gang leader' could mobilise, or gain support from, more people than his fellow 'leaders'. He organised the biggest and best crimes, and did not involve himself in petty crime such as bag-snatching or individual knife-point hold-ups. As he did not necessarily participate directly in major crime (especially after he had established himself as the major 'leader'), and often took a managerial, rather than directly active role, he could maintain his influence from inside jail.

The dispersal of gains through the community of criminals and through the families of criminals, as described above, is a process that involves a familiar Melanesian pattern of distribution and consumption, and a pursuit of prestige. It also means that those involved in crime are bound into the community to a degree that frustrates attempts to 'break up' gangs. While the gangs were not actively 'protected' by the community at large, they were integrated to the extent that police attempts to involve the community in crime prevention were met largely with apathy. This should not be interpreted as evidence of philanthropic attitudes by gangs. Reay has given the Highlands gang leader a

Robin Hood aspect — 'When he sleeps in somebody's house for the night he gives K60 or K70 in tariff. To anyone he meets on the road who seems thirsty or hungry he gives food and drink or money' (Reay 1982: 626). But it would be wrong to regard the current big-men of crime as Robin Hood figures (interviewees sometimes tried to represent themselves to me as such), although they do share their gains with family members to a degree that guarantees loyalty from their own kin-group. Interviewees told me their parents and families knew they were involved in crime but were not censorious. Po'o (1975: 36) and Utulurea (1981: 116) similarly reported tolerance among families of criminal youths.

Conclusion

Contrasting the foregoing account of gang organisation with previous accounts, I suggest that the application of a notion of gangs as finite groups waxing and waning in specific territories over time errs insofar as it reproduces familiar images of criminal gangs from industrialised countries. The focal entities in the Papua New Guinea gang phenomenon are in fact not the 'gangs', but the so-called 'gang leaders', criminal entrepreneurs who have gained prestige by their successful manipulation of relationships of reciprocity, using theft as a means of obtaining gifts (mostly in the form of money) to develop and maintain the relationships. The 'gangs' are the networks of people involved to various degrees in crime with whom the 'leaders' interact. But while the relationship between the leader and the gang is similar to that between the archetypal big-man and his kin-group, the gangs should not be thought of as urban clans and (since I have referred to the 'big-man' concept) certainly not as urban transpositions of Highlands social organisation.

The material exigencies that drive the activities of the crime gangs are those of a generalised gift economy, which transcends the differences between different types of kinship organisation in Papua New Guinea. The evolution of the gangs

can in fact be interpreted as the evolution of an urban gift economy fed by theft and burglary, involving social relations that are typical of pre-capitalist Melanesian societies in general. In a discussion of the transformation of commodities into gifts, Gregory (1982: 166–209) has exemplified the gift economy as 'efflorescing'[11] in Papua New Guinea in two main forms: balanced exchange (associated with elder-led societies) and incremental exchange (associated with big-man societies). The crime-fed urban gift economy does not fit tidily into either category; rather, it reflects the multi-ethnic character of Papua New Guinea's large towns, and the growth of inter-ethnic relationships that crosscut traditional relationships based on kin ties. In its partial incorporation of the commodity economy and its sustenance of inter-ethnic social relations, the criminal gift economy is perversely integrative. Like more orthodox instances of the transformation of commodities into gifts[12] (Strathern 1979; Gregory 1982), it raises the question of whether a successful adaptation of the cash economy in Melanesian terms is possible. The persistant notion among some commentators that customary behaviour and attitudes hinder economic development in Papua New Guinea seems to be based largely on a belief in the necessity of adopting central components of capitalist ideology, such as the appreciation of the value of regimented work routines, a division of social life into work and leisure categories and individual capital accumulation (eg, McGavin 1991). Clearly, though, the gift economy, ostensibly indifferent to capitalist ideology, is compatible with the commodity economy. A more pertinent issue — pursued in Chapter Four — is whether the 'efflorescence' of the gift economy demonstrates the resilience of pre-capitalist social relations of production, or whether, as Schwimmer inquires (Schwimmer 1987: 85–6), the apparently comfortable cohabitation of capitalist and gift economies represents an intensification of capitalist control through the incorporation of the gift economy.

ENDNOTES

1   The implicit definitions of crime in these approaches tend to exclude white-collar crime, political corruption, etc, and they are thus liable to the criticism that they are criminologically reductive.

2   An example is the 'retreat' held at Mirigeda Youth Camp, near Port Moresby, on June 5 and 6, 1991 (reported in the *PNG Post-Courier*, June 8, 1991, pp. 1 and 3). Meetings of this kind have had mixed success in facilitating communication between criminals and politicians. Jailed interviewees expressed cynicism about them and have come to regard them as public-relations exercises for politicians.

3   See, eg, *PNG Post-Courier*, June 26, 1991, p. 30, and cf. editorial comment *PNG Post-Courier*, September 12, 1991, p. 10.

4   As I have noted in Chapter One, however, a significant number of settlement-dwellers do have regular employment — settlement habitation is often a result of legitimate housing problems, rather than poverty.

5   While Harris gives the impression that urban rascal gangs appeared in the 1960s, a newspaper report cited by Oram (1976a: 153) indicates self-defined rascal gangs were operative in the 1950s.

6   Utulurea described himself as a gang member (1981: 109).

7   At the time of writing, some years on, I am less able to monitor developments on the ground and cannot guarantee that the nomenclature given would fit with the current situation.

8   Young uses the term 'subgroups' in his discussion of gangs (1976: 6), but his use is not altogether clear to me. I do not think it is the same as mine.

9   An interesting exception in PNG's 'crime world' is the case of individual entrepreneurs who deal exclusively in marijuana. Mediating between hinterland growers (usually their own kin) and an urban and export market, they bank profits with the idea of accumulating capital towards legitimate business ventures.

10 A. Borrey, personal communication November 18, 1991.

11 This redolent term is borrowed from A. Strathern (1979: 530), who introduced it in a discussion of male/female relations in the context of the cash economy's impact on production and exchange in the Highlands.

12 For instance, through wage labour or cash cropping.

THE RASCAL ROAD
Crime, prestige and development

Introduction

In the previous chapter, I discussed the social organisation of Port Moresby gangs and their structural difference from the Western archetype of a criminal gang. I suggested also that they perversely integrated pre-capitalist social behaviour into a cash-economic environment. In this respect, I suggested that the concept of the Melanesian big-man, incorporating the qualities of industry, generosity, grandiloquence and cunning, is central to an understanding of the gang crime phenomenon. At the same time, I expressed caution about representing gang leaders simply as an urban reproduction of the archetypal big-man. I broaden that theme in this chapter, with an economic anthropological discussion providing a perspective on the distribution and consumption of stolen goods, which may aid the understanding of alleged motivations to crime, and I hope to show that some prior commentaries, applying analytic models developed in the context of Western industrialism, have to some extent misapprehended a popular rhetoric of disadvantage.

As we saw in Chapter Three, the most prevalent assumptions continuing to inform popular and academic discussions of 'gang' activities in Papua New Guinea are that gang members are predominantly from an uneducated and unemployed lumpenproletariat and in urban areas are products of 'squatter' settlements peopled by migrants. Assumptions such as this significantly influence populist debate, for instance, on the value of sending settlement-dwellers 'back to their villages' as a solution to crime (see Chapter One). The same assumptions guide highly publicised preventive strategies by police, such as periodic mass raids on settlement communities.[1] They also affect administrative policy such as the August 1993 Internal Security Act, with its contingent emphasis on the carrying of identity cards and repatriation of errant migrants. Some derivative assumptions in academic commentaries are that gang crime is motivated by poverty or relative material deprivation (eg, Thompson and MacWilliam 1992: 172), or a degree of moral discontent (eg, Hart Nibbrig 1992).

The activities of criminal gangs in Papua New Guinea have been a sub-focus of debate about the country's law and order problem, in the popular press and in academic literature, for more than two decades. Research literature on law and order has been motivated partially by the formal requirements of a chronic governmental search for a workable 'solution', reaching its zenith in an exhaustive two-volume publication by the Institute of National Affairs in 1984 (Clifford et al. 1984a and 1984b). The analytic premises of law-and-order discourse inevitably over-determine those of discussions of gang crime. The latter are consequently preoccupied with the effects of urbanisation, unemployment and social inequality. Interestingly, while there is now a large resource of academic (eg, Biles 1976; Morauta 1986a; Dinnen 2001) and policy-oriented (for example, Morgan 1983; Clifford et al. 1984a and 1984b) literature on law and order, the component category of gang crime has received relatively little detailed analytic attention, and little critique of the conventional

analytic premises. Descriptive accounts have been short and have tended towards generalities from a minimum of presented data (Po'o 1975; Young 1976; Utulurea 1981), unless the criminal activity is approached in the context of an analytically prior research focus (for example, Wanek 1982), in which case the data has been selective. The most substantial study has been that by Harris, who attempted a historical account of the rise of gangs and some predictions about their future (Harris 1988). Harris's discussion paper was based on his own interaction with gangs over a two-year period, but presented a minimum of research data. Perhaps this was due to ethical aspects of research among people liable to prosecution and to the need to establish trust through some guarantee of anonymity and confidentiality.

It is significant, I think, that in the literature on gang crime in Papua New Guinea, theories of delinquency that evolved specifically in the era of advanced capitalism in industrialised countries are under-represented. I am not proposing that these theories, which include, for instance, drift theory (Matza 1964), labelling theory (Schur 1973), and a body of theory focused on subcultural style (Hall and Jefferson 1977), are any more appropriate for analytical purposes in Papua New Guinea. What distinguishes them, in terms of the present discussion, is that they move away (to varying degrees) from a traditional emphasis on factors such as social disintegration, anomie and relative poverty linked to urbanisation. The prevalence of the older theoretical formulations in discussions of gang crime in Papua New Guinea suggest an implicit subscription to either of two general and contrary models of the nature of capitalist penetration in Third-World countries. One of these is development theory, from the viewpoint of which Papua New Guinea could be seen to be going through a specific phase of capitalist development typified by particular social problems already experienced in the industrialised West. Generalist theories of this kind imply a more or less inevitable pattern of 'development' following a postulated Western archetype (see, eg, Rostow 1960) and attended by

unavoidable deviance and delinquency during a period of socially disruptive urbanisation accompanying industrialisation. The traditional opponents of development theory focus similarly on poverty as an overriding factor in the rise of street crime. Underdevelopment or dependency theories posit Third-World countries as relatively passive victims of capitalist exploitation, which is seen as destroying traditional economies and creating social inequalities, which drive the poor to survive by any means available, including criminal activity (see, eg, Baran 1970).

Liberal populist commentary in Papua New Guinea synthesises these themes in broad terms, with journalists and representatives of youth groups blaming the crime wave on a lack of employment opportunities for migrant youth, and an inappropriate education system perpetuating colonially introduced ideas about schooling and preparing young people for types of jobs that do not exist (Kolma 1993; Nangoi 1993). Resonant with this is a point of view that sees crime as a reaction to perceived social inequalities in the country. For example, Hart Nibbrig, while acknowledging that criminals are not all from the ranks of the poor (1992: 119), argues that rascals are driven by a sense of moral indignation at inequalities introduced by colonialism and structurally institutionalised in its aftermath (Hart Nibbrig 1992: 122–4). A folk version of the same view held by rural villagers in Papua New Guinea is reported by Kulick, who has documented representations of rascals in the discourse of villagers with no direct experience of them. The villagers believed that rascals were fighting 'a kind of protracted guerilla war against corrupt politicians, greedy businessmen and obstructionist missionaries' (Kulick 1993: 9). Through discussions of rascals, villagers were able to express dissatisfaction with 'post-colonial, capitalist and Christian influences that are causing increasing disruption in their lives' (Kulick 1993: 9–10).

Finally, the notion that rascalism is driven by a kind of moral imperative generated by social injustice is reinforced in the rhetoric of some of the rascals themselves. Criminals I spoke with

in the course of research commonly invoked a polemic that politicians and the elite in general were the 'real' criminals and that gang activities served the needs of the poor and dispossessed. Gang activity was implicitly heroic banditry and thus largely justified, and a sojourn in prison was seen as demonstrating the injustice of society. In Chapter Three, we encountered an academic precedent for Robin Hood imagery provided by Reay (1982: 626), who portrayed Highlands gang leaders as philanthropists, paying a tariff if they slept in someone's house, giving handouts to unfortunates met on the road, and so on. Morauta (1986b: 11) has commented acutely, however, that 'Criminals have learned that academics, bureaucrats and politicians find poverty and unemployment partly acceptable excuses for crime'.

These academic, journalistic and folk images of street criminals integrate compellingly into an impressionistic whole. The conglomerate picture, however, of rascals as organic heroes of the lumpenproletariat, or delinquent avengers battling sociopolitical injustice, reflects neither the wide variety of crimes incorporated by current local usage of terms such as 'gangs' or 'rascals' nor the socioeconomic position of most of the victims of crime. Rascalism during the late colonial era was identified mostly in terms of the concerns of the colonisers. In the white-dominated urban areas, rascals were indigenes who committed petty offences such as minor burglaries that could retrospectively be interpreted liberally as underclass crimes (see, for example, Oram 1976: 153). In contrast, the designations 'rascal' or 'gang member' in contemporary Papua New Guinea embrace juvenile pickpockets and street-corner thugs along with recidivist murderers and well-organised groups carrying out meticulously planned major heists.[2] The majority of victims of crime — most of it unreported (Clifford et al. 1984a: 15, 30) — are poor, victims of muggings for the sake of a modest pay packet (the price of a few beers for attackers), female victims of roadside abduction and rape who do not have the luxury of travelling relatively safely in a car,

victims of theft from their relatively unprotected homes. And while there is no doubt that some people are driven to crime by extreme material deprivation, there are no hard data to suggest that they are proportionately represented in rascalism to the extent suggested by the foregoing interpretations. Rascals are found in settlements, to be sure, but they also come from formal housing areas, and the majority of people living in settlements and in formal housing are law abiding. More importantly, rascals come from a wide range of socioeconomic backgrounds, and many of those engaged in the more spectacular forms of crime have graduated through a range of minor criminal activities, which victimise the poor.

Six brief case studies

A selection of six short sketches from interviews with prison inmates (I have changed their names) incarcerated for 'major' crimes illustrates the variety of origins and expressed motives of people engaged in rascalism in Papua New Guinea. The sketches are from the interviews referred to in Chapter Three, conducted by criminologist Anou Borrey and myself at Bomana Jail, the country's largest prison, just outside the capital city, Port Moresby, over a period of several weeks in 1991. Through the jail's administrators, we extended an invitation to any inmates to speak informally with us, under guarantee of anonymity, emphasising that we wanted to interview 'gang members'. Bomana Jail has a high-security section, but generally conforms to Westerners' ideas of a prison farm, with high wire rather than brick walls, and prisoners spending most of their time in the open air. We sat at a shaded table a little distant from the main administration block, which ensured confidentiality. The interviews were open-ended conversations that did not follow a strict questionnaire format, and interviewees were invited to talk about themselves and their crimes as they wished. Because self-identifying 'gang members' were keen to be interviewed, a small queue formed and we had a steady stream of interviewees. In all, we interviewed 50 people.

Recidivist and hardened criminals, regarding themselves as 'big-men' (see Chapter Three) or would-be big-men tended to present themselves boldly and cooperatively, ahead of 'minor' criminals, for interviews.

Sylvester

Sylvester was married with two children, and was in his mid-twenties. He was supporting his parents and his wife's parents. He told me he was educated to grade 6, but prison records gave grade 10. At the time of the interview, he was serving a six-year sentence (reduced under appeal from an initial 12 years) on charges of armed robbery and attempted murder. Prison records recorded him as a high-risk inmate, and he had been put in the high-security block in a jail in another province after it was discovered he was planning an escape. Sylvester began his involvement in crime as a child, picking pockets in the streets of a provincial town, to get easy money. He graduated to more serious crimes, and was associated with the provincial 'branch' of one of the major gangs that grew in Port Moresby. He continued with crime activities after getting a skilled-labour job and marrying. His aim was to make money and 'enjoy' the excitement of crime. He did not, however, save stolen money, but spent it on a good time. Arms were easy to obtain, usually through theft. Sylvester graduated to well-planned armed robberies. Some of these were 'contracted', he said — that is, someone would ask him to get a commodity item, for which he would be paid. He showed no remorse for his lifestyle and referred to it at one point as 'just a living'. He regarded prison as part of the criminal lifestyle. Prisoners were beaten up when first caught and, once in prison, learned to become better criminals from other inmates. He boasted that he could escape if he wanted to[3] and would do so if he received word of a particularly lucrative robbery being planned. Sylvester felt he had achieved status through his crimes and incarceration and said he would return to crime on his release. He said if he gave up crime, 'People will think I am scared'. The death penalty was being mooted in Parliament

when Sylvester was interviewed; he commented that if it were implemented it would make the law and order situation worse. Gangs would be obliged to kill potential witnesses, he said. He also felt it would escalate the violent potential in criminals such as himself: 'They'll get me in the end, but I'll kill innocent people first.'

Alphonse

Alphonse was aged about 30, according to himself, or 22, according to prison records. He was married but separated and was trying to organise a divorce. He told me he had no children, but prison records stated that he had two.[4] He was educated to grade 6. At the time of the interview, he was involved in an appeal against a lengthy sentence on robbery and kidnapping charges. He had a long list of convictions and a lengthy record of escapes from jail and incarceration in maximum security as a 'high-risk' prisoner and 'mastermind' who had considerable influence over other inmates. Alphonse began his involvement in crime with petty theft at the age of 13, and graduated through car theft and breaking and entering to major robberies and drug dealing. He regarded himself as a hard-core criminal and had taken part in amnesty-style conferences with police and politicians trying to solve the law and order problem. He expressed a commitment to a life of crime, which he regarded as lucrative. Being in jail did not bother him; he saw it as part of the lifestyle, along with the beatings from police when he was captured and the bullet scars he carried from shoot-outs and police pursuits. Alphonse claimed that being in prison did not exclude him from criminal activity, as crimes could be planned from inside jail. He had an extensive network of contacts and boasted that he could escape more or less at will if he wanted to take part in a crime. Money he obtained from crime was not saved, but used immediately and shared with other people. The proposed death penalty did not bother him, or deter him from further crime. He now considered he had no other lifestyle and

would continue with crime into the forseeable future. His separation from his wife was instigated by himself on the grounds that he could not be both a successful criminal and a family man.

Chuck

Chuck was 22 or 23, and married with one child. He was serving a substantial sentence for armed robbery, with time added for escaping. Chuck was brought up in a Port Moresby suburb and did not know the language of his natal group. He did not, however classify himself ethnically as a Port Moresby or 'Central District' person, because of his parentage. He began stealing as a child — a chocolate bar from a supermarket. He was thrown out of school at grade 6 for bad behaviour. He could give no particular reason for becoming involved in crime at such an early age. His crimes progressed to breaking and entering and robbery and he had, in his own estimation, been in jail nearly a dozen times. He enjoyed crime as a lifestyle and had only been legitimately employed once, for a short period as a storekeeper. Like a number of other interviewees, he referred to his activities as 'playing crime' and adopted a 'macho' attitude when talking about the inevitable beating at the hands of police whenever he was caught, using the locally popular quasi-aphoristic phrase 'one-day pain' in dismissing the discomfort. He used guns in the commission of crimes and said he would have no hesitation in shooting someone who did not cooperate with his demands in a hold-up. Although still relatively young, Chuck had successfully organised a number of fairly major robberies and ran his own small criminal group. Having escaped from police custody and from jail and having spent time in maximum security, he regarded himself as a tough, hard-core criminal, and saw no change in his lifestyle in the forseeable future.

Nat

Nat was 26 or 27 years old. He was educated to grade 9, and had several wives. He was serving a long sentence for robbery with

violence. Prison documents listed him as a high-risk detainee — a 'mastermind' with considerable influence over other prisoners. Nat began his involvement in crime in his late teens, with car theft and burglary, and worked his way up to armed robbery. In his early career, he obtained guns through theft and used them to hold up stores. He said he did not like the idea of killing people and regarded his use of guns as a way of frightening people (Nat's attitude contrasted with most of the other people interviewed, who said they would not hesitate to fire if their victims did not immediately cooperate). He gave up crime a couple of times and got legitimate work as a salesman, storekeeper and small-time business entrepreneur, but found he was not satisfied with the money he was earning, so returned to a criminal lifestyle. He did not save money from his crimes, but spent it on a good time. He preferred stealing money to stealing goods, because money could be used for immediate gratification. Unlike many other inmates spoken to, Nat expressed an aversion to rape as a gang activity. He said that in his criminal behaviour he kept a narrow focus on getting cash. He was happy with gang life and would continue with it.

Lou

Lou was a single man in his mid-thirties, who was serving a long sentence for armed robbery. He had some university-level education, having flunked a bachelor's degree. He obtained clerical employment in Moresby and found himself under considerable pressure from kin who became dependent on him for financial support. He could not save money and could not find a job that was highly enough paid to satisfy the financial demands of his kin. He eventually attempted to go back to university as a self-funding student. At this point, in an effort to get quick money to pay his way through university, he became involved in crime. He was caught taking part in a robbery and sentenced. Although the robbery was a gang job, and Lou had a reasonably close association with his fellow criminals, he did not express the same commitment to a life of crime as most of his fellow

interviewees. He still had hopes of going back to university at the end of his prison term, but said there would be financial problems, which might propel him into crime again. (Despite his rationalisation of his criminal activity as an almost regrettable necessity in the face of financial hardship, it should be said that Lou was one of the most expansive of interviewees, discussing criminal techniques at length, in great detail, and with relish.)

Bud

Bud was 24 years old, single, an adopted child, with a formal education to grade 8. He was serving a three-year sentence for rape and had a previous conviction for armed robbery. He was listed as a high-risk detainee in prison records, 'inciting' other prisoners in previous incarcerations. Bud said in interviews that he had a 'bad attitude' at school and dropped out in his early teens. His adopted mother was angry with him and threw him out of the house. He joined a group of young troublemakers and became involved in petty theft, which led to his first recorded offence, for illegal use of a motor vehicle. He was employed as a shop assistant and warehouse worker, but said his commitment to crime developed from finding a role model for himself in the local gang leader. Bud compared himself in this respect with young people finding role models in sports personalities or celebrities. Despite this declaration and his own testimony that he dropped out of school, and had been employed, Bud blamed the education system, politicians, social inequality, lack of opportunities and lack of rehabilitation programs in prison for his lifestyle. Bud said he would continue his criminal lifestyle after his release and saw no alternative open to him. He said he would like to become a better organised criminal and learn some accounting and management so he could operate a more business-like criminal gang.

The purpose of the above selection is to disrupt the image of criminals as proletarian avengers (or, contrarily, as a proletarian menace) by demonstrating a variety in the types of people engaged in crime as a lifestyle. But there are also some thematic

links among the examples. By their own accounts, five of the
above began 'playing crime' as children and graduated through
more serious offences. Minor shoplifting, picking pockets and the
like seem to have been matters of opportunity rather than
socioeconomic necessity. Most of the interviewees spoke as if they
had committed themselves to a life of crime, which they regarded
as lucrative, even though they had the opportunity of
conventional employment. Further, although the spoils of crime
were sometimes large, they were consumed, one way or another,
very quickly (usually in group binges), rather than saved or
invested in relatively durable symbols of wealth (fancy cars,
clothing, etc). These observations, in concert, bring into question
the contention that material poverty is a predominant
motivational factor. But this revision needs to be reconciled with
the common rhetoric referred to earlier and exemplified by Bud,
which at first sight seems to appeal to an uncomplicated
perception of socioeconomic disparities between rich and poor.

Two significant ideational factors need to be considered
analytically at this point. One is Papua New Guinean
conceptions of the relationship that ought to prevail between
individuals with desirable resources and those with whom they
customarily interact through kin-group or exchange ties. The
other is the way in which the majority of Papua New Guineans
conceive the phenomenon of 'development', which is manifest
partially in the disparities they perceive and which has passed
into the country's linguae francae (Tokpisin and Hiri Motu)
virtually unchanged from its English-language representation.
These two factors can be brought together in the context of crime
through a discussion based on the observation (made in Chapter
Three) that gang behaviour integrates pre-capitalist social
relations into a cash-economic environment.

Gift economy

A number of observers have written about the similarity between
gang leaders and Melanesian 'big-men' (eg, Harris 1988: 26–7,

Hart Nibbrig 1992: 117). In her critique of the romanticising of criminals, Morauta observes that where Robin Hood (in legend at least) gave his gifts to the poor as a class, the Papua New Guinean criminal gives to particular individuals, marking personal rather than class relationships (1986b: 11). I have argued (Chapter Three) that gang leaders are entrepreneurs who gain status and support through escalating success in crime and the redistribution of stolen goods (usually money) in gestures of largesse to family members and lesser criminals — in return, they are able to mobilise support in criminal activity from those people who are indebted to them. In other words, they are 'big-men' in a crime-fed gift economy that involves social relations typical of pre-capitalist Melanesian societies in general (while, of course, the criminal activity itself is not typical of pre-capitalist societies). Most of the more successful criminals I have spoken with (not only inside the jail) have been proud of their influence and status among their peers, and have perceived themselves as big-men of crime. Some of them have appropriate nicknames associated with terms of address customarily used for clan leaders and respected elder kin.

This behaviour invokes a familiar complex of interaction based on kin and exchange ties, which has been an analytic preoccupation of anthropologists since Malinowski's *kula* observations and his attempt to typologise relationships of obligation (Malinowski 1961: 166–94 and passim). It prevails in the face of 'Westernisation' and transcends ethnographic distinctions between highland and lowland or chiefly and non-chiefly societies, and recent comparative studies demonstrate its variations rather than its relative absence or presence (Feil 1987; Godelier 1986; Knauft 1993: 67–85). In Port Moresby, where people from a huge diversity of micro-ethnic groups find themselves thrown together, the competition for jobs, promotion, accommodation and other needs is fraught with accusations (often very well founded) of '*wantokism*' — the favouring of near and distant kin.[5]

The gift is a fundamental component of this complex, a vehicle of obligation and, often simultaneously, prestige. Even Malinowski's example of a 'free gift' from Trobriand father to son was paradoxically 'a repayment for the man's relationship to the son's mother' (Malinowski 1966: 179). Gregory contrasted alienable rights over property in commodity-producing societies with the inalienability of things produced in 'clan-based' societies, and, following Mauss (1954), described gift exchange as 'an exchange of inalienable things between persons who are in a state of reciprocal dependence' (Gregory 1982: 19). Further, the gift economy is a debt economy, in which the acquisition of gift-debtors, rather than the maximisation of profit, is the principal aim. 'What a gift transactor desires is the personal relationships that the exchange of gifts creates, and not the things themselves' (Gregory 1982: 19). On ceremonial pig exchanges in the Highlands, Feil has commented, 'Highlanders themselves continually allude to the social and political dimensions of the *act* of exchange … The production of valuables, on the other hand, holds no real interest … Production is mundane, compared to the ceremonial presentations to which some societies are forever geared' (Feil 1987: 269). In Hau'ofa's lowland Mekeo ethnography, after a presentation of food to an exchange partner at a formal ceremony, the giver commented, 'Now I have given him a burden' (Hau'ofa 1981: 155).

In competitive (incremental) gift exchange, such as the ceremonial *tee* and *moka* of the western Highlands, the function of the gift in maintaining and enhancing prestige is writ large: magnanimity denotes clan wealth and the big-man's ability to persuade his kin to entrust him with its dispersal, and immediately challenges the prestige of the receiving party. In balanced (non-incremental) gift exchange — typically found in elder-led societies (see Gregory 1982: 53–5) — prestige is often dealt with more circumspectly (see, eg, Hau'ofa 1981: 154ff.). In either case, the burden of obligation is clear and ceremonial gifts in particular articulate the two forms of obligation — between

kin, whose cooperation makes the gift possible, and between exchange partners.

In the formal political sphere of contemporary Papua New Guinea, this complex of obligations is a dominant factor in electioneering. Despite the legal prohibitions packaged into the Westminster system, which the country has inherited, favours are publicly and extensively dispensed by candidates and expected by voters (see, eg, Mailau 1989: 91; Standish 1983: 108–9) and are glossed in Tokpisin as *gris* (blandishments, bribery, persuasion); and kin ties are an important factor in the manipulation of support. Standish encapsulates the process and its problems aptly in his notes on the Highland politician, Iambakey Okuk, who (among many things) blatantly gave allies and former opponents posts in government organisations and his own 'development' corporation and

> complained that his constituents were draining him of funds with their constant requests for contributions towards death payments, bride wealth and so on, a traditional aspect of the big-man's role. In all this, he was creating obligations that must, by custom, be repaid; but he did so amongst those who were unable to reciprocate in kind, which creates a sense of unease amongst Melanesians. At once obligated and grateful, they were thus drawn into his camp, and many eventually became active members of his faction. This process occurs in all political arenas at all times: there are no free lunches. (Standish 1983: 88)

Later, when Okuk lost an election, despite a notorious distribution of 4,000 cartons of beer (96,000 bottles) to all comers on the Kundiawa airstrip in Simbu Province just before an election liquor ban came into force, Standish suggested that a lapse in gift-debt strategy may have partly contributed to the loss:

> Gifts which are so large and undirected are unrepayable
> and hence do not incur an obligation, so that the
> recipient can take without feeling obliged to make a
> return … Perhaps, to coin a new term, a 'mega bigman'
> is no longer a bigman. (1989: 203)

According to Gregory (1982: 116–17), the endurance of the
gift economy in the face of capitalism is based materially on the
persistence of clan ownership of land, which has prevented the
emergence on a large scale of a landless proletariat and has
preserved clan-based social organisation.[6] Colonial and neo-
colonial intervention has resulted not in the destruction of a
traditional economy but in the development of an 'ambiguous'
economy, where 'things are now gifts, now commodities, depending
on the social context' (Gregory 1982: 117). The transformation of
commodities into gifts, that is, the appropriation of products of
capitalism for prestige through distribution and display, is, of course,
not confined to such instances as the incorporation of cash, beer
and other 'Western' items into ceremonial exchanges and election
campaigns. It is evident through a spectrum of social behaviour,
including crime, where the proceeds are consumed or shared (often
at the same time, as orgiastic beer drinking is a popular sequel to a
successful operation[7]) to enhance prestige, repay previous gift-
giving and engender future obligation. Moreover, the appropriation
of the paraphernalia of capitalism into the gift economy extends to
the incorporation of material symbols of 'development' in general.

'Development'

Despite its familiarity, the concept of development is opaque,
even to its entrepreneurs, since its referents, such as economic
growth and quality of life, are themselves stipulatively elusive.
Definition of the concept is difficult (Muingnepe 1987; Tapari
1988: 4) and, among its discussants in the Papua New Guinean
context, tends to be by ostension (see, eg, Hughes and Thirlwall

1988). To most Papua New Guineans, in contrast, the concept presents itself simply and tangibly. Particularly in rural areas, the Tokpisin transliteration *divelopmen* connotes cash, infrastructure and services such as schools and medical centres. Their acquisition, however, is often influenced by complexities of prestige and obligation that are rarely anticipated by development planners. As 'development' is central to State policy and development 'projects' on a large and small scale are prolific, there is a great deal of literature devoted to the progress of all kinds of ventures, and much of it records instances of projects involving local communities or individuals, which appear to survive without evolving from an embryonic state, or which collapse after promising beginnings (King 1990; Tapari 1988).

Local communities' perceptions of success or failure, however, are often based on criteria considerably removed from those of development agents and their consultants. An apt illustration from the late colonial era is provided by Lawson's account of Kyaka Enga community efforts to establish a school in 1970. The sum of $1,000 (Australian currency was still being used) was collected; the building of the school used $300. While the school needed books, pencils and other equipment, the remaining $700 was spent on lavish feasting. The Kyaka did not regard this as waste. 'They claim that the whole venture is valuable as an investment in prestige. The feast itself was of great significance, and the permanent structure remains as a lasting reminder of their achievement' (Lawson 1971: 10). Lawson also commented on local enterprises in trading and transport, which did not appear to be successful in terms of profit. 'The interesting thing is that these enterprises do not seem to be regarded as failures by the people concerned … Trade stores carry an extremely limited range of items and have an absurdly slow turnover. Despite this, at my field site there are three separate trade stores, all sharing the same building' (1971: 10).

In his study of Gorokan involvement in business enterprises in the late 1960s, Finney argued that three motives

were evident: profit, service (to the local community) and prestige.

> The quest for the prestige gained by owning and operating a store, a trucking venture, or some other enterprise is probably the most important investment motive to consider in understanding the Gorokan propensity to invest … the bigger and more visible the capital asset, such as a five-ton truck or a modern road-side store, the more attractive and prestigious is the investment to the Gorokans … Then, when the truck is purchased, the very act of buying is made dramatic. For example, a man with a truck bank account will withdraw all his funds in cash and then triumphantly plunk the notes down on the truck dealer's desk. (Finney 1973: 80–1)

Finney, like Lawson, also drew attention to the phenomenon of pursuit of profit being neglected in favour of the prestige of simply owning a business (Finney 1973: 146–71 passim).

Monsell-Davis, discussing small business among the Papuan Roro, commented on motives for business ventures that 'If the profit sought from the enterprise is primarily prestige … then once the owner has achieved his political ends he may not be too particular about what happens to his venture' (Monsell-Davis 1981: 330). He also noted the tension between individual profit and community obligations: 'The individual village business-man may only expand his ventures to the position where he and his fellows all recognise some mutual gain — although this may not be a conscious process' (Monsell-Davis 1981: 326). This is the complement of prestige: the individual is obliged to share the benefits of achievement with the community, which is likely to have contributed to the initial capital accumulation in the first place. Finney provided an archetypical scene: the newly acquired passenger truck, carrying clansmen of the proprietary group rather

than paying passengers (Finney 1973: 82). The obverse is the obligation of the community toward the individual who has brought services and prestige to it. Mangi gave an example of reprisal in the negative case: supporters of losing election candidates in the Highlands destroying government outstations and schools, which they claimed their candidate had been responsible for constructing or improving (Mangi 1992: 112).

The tangle of prestige, obligation, entrepreneurship and State services is Gordian. Development projects, especially those with community input, whether they be small businesses or infrastructure, become enmeshed in local variants of the general gift economy whose permutations are impenetrable from the point of view of 'economic growth'. Stephenson (1987) gave an excellent example of a rural youth group engaged in development projects that served as vehicles for power and prestige struggles in the village community; the group was intimately linked to a particular individual attempting to establish himself as a potential community leader (Stephenson 1987: 58–64 and passim). If there is one distinct articulating factor in this dense phenomenon, it is cash. Borrey, in a discussion of rural Highlands attitudes to 'development', echoed an observation by Strathern that the populist desire for development amounts to a desire for 'money in their hands' (Strathern 1976: 1, cited in Borrey 1993: 10). She observed that a preoccupation among young people is finding money to buy beer (Borrey 1993: 7) and comments of males, 'The common aspirational model seems to be the public servant who is characterised in the community as the person with a fortnightly income, who has a car, at least one woman, and money to buy beer. Through handing out beer to other community members he is able to buy popularity and respect' (Borrey 1993: 10). The desire for cash in hand, to be consumed immediately through group activities such as alcohol binges, reflects the expectation that items will be shared one way or another, that the group as a whole should share in the prestige of the individual, that businessmen, politicians, public servants or anyone else with

access to prestige items will behave like traditional leaders, big-men or chiefs, repaying old debts and creating new ones with their generosity. The State, its development projects, national politics, are all drawn into this system, in which individual entrepreneurs mediate with varying success between commodity and gift economies.

Borrey has suggested that the Highlands communities in which she has conducted criminological research have given the State a 'big-man role' (Borrey 1993: 9–10); that is, the State is regarded as a manipulator and distributor of wealth in the ideational context of familiar systems of exchange and obligation. A consequence of this situation is frustration when the State and its agents do not fulfil customary expectations of the way socioeconomic relations should be conducted. As cash (the most versatile, therefore the most useful, item of 'development') and material symbols of prestige are the tangible goals in most communities in Papua New Guinea in respect of development, it should surprise no one that a major preoccupation is exploring ways of acquiring these things through initiating relationships with a seemingly recalcitrant State. In the Papua New Guinean idiom, finding a 'road to development' is a common expression (see, eg, Filer 1990: 85n, 87), and communities and individuals try various strategies, including *rot bilong bisnis* (Tokpisin: the business way), *rot bilong lotu* (the religious way, ie, involvement in fundraising church activities) and *rot bilong raskol* (the criminal way).[8] For example, a recent strategy that has met with mixed success has been youth group 'walkathons'. These groups contrive to get by various means from their home areas to Port Moresby (arduous trips of hundreds of kilometres), hoping for wide press coverage and meetings with politicians, whom they then ask for funds for 'projects' in their villages. The first publicised effort of this nature earned the group involved K5,000, and a government-chartered flight back across the country to the group's home area in the Simbu Province, where they were welcomed as celebrities. While the novelty and newsworthiness of the trip contributed to its success, it did not prove

to be a usable strategy in the long run and subsequent efforts by other youth groups met with disappointment. The prospect of a flood of youth groups arriving in the capital expecting to be feted, accommodated and given money caused a backlash in the media.[9]

In the absence of adherence to the ideology of capitalism, these different strategies are regarded as having equal legitimacy in terms of the desired goal. The term *wok* in Tokpisin, though obviously a transliteration of *work*, means any goal-oriented activity and does not recognise distinctions in this regard between, for instance, crime, manipulation of kin ties, business entrepreneurship or manual labour. Further, as noted above, clan-based social organisation persists in Papua New Guinea and landholding social groups are still the dominant form of community. Consequently, the impact of ideologies associated with the commitment of labour predominantly to commodity production is relatively weak. Meillassoux contended that in agricultural societies where the social relations of production are kin-ordered, labour has no exchange value, since its products are not immediately alienated from the producer into a generalised sphere of exchange where goods can be measured in terms of one another (Meillassoux 1978: 144–6). It follows (in contrast with capitalist ideology) that labour alone cannot enhance status, since in such societies labour-power cannot be a commodity (Meillassoux 1978: 144–6). While Meillassoux's formulation (based on African fieldwork) requires qualification in respect of pre-capitalist Papua New Guinea,[10] it is relevant to the general case that status is not achieved through increased individual production, but through the skilled manipulation of resources and social relationships, as we have seen.

Crime as *wok*

I have attempted to demonstrate here the tendency in Papua New Guinea for the paraphernalia of capitalism, from simple commodities to 'development', to be appropriated into a gift economy in which issues of prestige and obligation prevail over

profit and individual accumulation of wealth. Returning to gang activity, we can see that a criminal lifestyle constitutes one option or expedient among many through which aspects of the cash economy can be incorporated into the pursuit of prestige and relationships of obligation — an alternative option of 'legitimate' employment was foregone or discarded in most of the six examples given earlier in this chapter. Crime is *wok* like other goal-oriented activity. Among the peers of the criminal, prestige can be gained and obligation engendered by skilful gifting and manipulation, no less than in the case of the business entrepreneur or successful politician.

Applying this perspective on motivations to criminal lifestyles, we can also make some sense of a phenomenon that many commentaries on crime do not address: the group conversion of 'committed' criminals.[11] A common occurrence in Papua New Guinea is the sudden mass 'surrender' of large groups of criminals to authorities. It usually entails a public conversion to (charismatic or fundamentalist) Christianity, the handing over of guns and ammunition to the police, a public apology for past crimes and often (despite the criminals' history of serious offences including violence and occasionally killings) a waiving of any prosecutions.[12] These conversions are highly charged affairs surrounded by publicity and acclaim for the converts, who subsequently form themselves into 'ex-criminal groups', with coordinators or leaders who preach peace and harmony through the media and seek funds for various projects.[13] In effect, one strategy to achieve prestige is abandoned in favour of another.

If commitment to a criminal lifestyle is engendered (for, strictly speaking, we can no longer regard this as a matter of 'motivation') by the factors described here, rather than resulting from material poverty or indignation at institutionalised social inequality, the rhetoric of disadvantage commonly iterated by criminals themselves cannot be accepted at face value. I am in agreement with Morauta's observation (1986) that it courts sympathy, but I also consider that it borrows from a simplistic

class-based polemic to express indignation of a different order. It is not the comparative wealth of an elite, or the structural inequalities perpetuated by the State, that so many Papua New Guineans (the rhetoric is not confined to criminals) find offensive: it is the occasional tendency of such parties to default on the system of obligations that underscores social relationships in Melanesia. The relative personal success and wealth of individuals is acceptable if they are seen to operate within this system, gifting, repaying or engendering debts, enabling kin and prospective exchange partners to maintain customary relationships, which can be exploited one way or another. The posthumous status of Iambakey Okuk as a folk hero throughout the Highlands is to a large extent due to his ability for most of his career to remain a part of the gift-economic system while achieving national prominence. Parties who remove themselves from this system, or who refuse to become part of it, are hindrances to a dynamic social process and induce frustration and resentment. The real import of the rhetoric of disadvantage is, I think, encapsulated in a cynical comment to me by a jailed criminal who had once done a 'job' for a prominent citizen: 'So now I am in jail. Where is he?'

Conclusion

At the beginning of this discussion I said that the analytic premises of law-and-order discourse in Papua New Guinea generally over-determine those of discussions of gang crime. The analysis offered above contributes very little to a search for solutions to the country's law and order problems, the investigators of which are conventionally preoccupied with finding criminogenic factors in developmental problems such as urbanisation[14] and unemployment. The suggestion that criminal lifestyles represent not a response to unemployment, miseducation or material poverty, but a strategy in pursuit of prestige and an appropriation of commodities into a gift economy represents a paradigm shift. Models developed initially in

response to criminological issues, which arise from the transformation of social relations of production accompanying the growth and spread of industrial capitalism, are inadequate in a situation where peripheral capitalism engages a pre-capitalist mode of production whose social relations prove comparatively resilient in the encounter.

Rascalism in Papua New Guinea is undoubtedly a 'law and order' problem: it is disruptive, often very violent and victimises innocent people. Rascals I have spoken to show little concern for the people (rich or, more often, relatively poor) they steal from, mug, rape or kill. To interpret their behaviour, however, as part of the pathology of development, or underdevelopment, is to underestimate the dynamic and creative nature of social responses to capitalism. The dispersal of goods, and mostly cash, by interviewed gang members in pursuit of status or prestige, their choice to pursue a career in crime when other more 'orthodox' economic options are available to them, the clamour of Bomana prison inmates to relate their exploits and present themselves as 'big-men', evoke ethnographically familiar Melanesian socioeconomic behaviour, rather than desperate underclass responses to problems of development. It can be seen from the briefly sketched careers and attitudes of the six criminals presented earlier that the 'gang' phenomenon in Papua New Guinea cannot be explained adequately in terms of general motivational themes such as poverty, social disintegration or moral imperatives generated by perceptions of social inequalities. I suggest, instead, that rascalism is an issue of a problematic encounter between a cash economy and a generalised gift economy shared by a constellation of communities whose social relations remain stubbornly rooted in kin-ordered modes of production.

ENDNOTES

1 This strategy is also supported by the superficial observation that pursued criminals flee into settlements. The assumption that they all live there habitually is mistaken. It is easier to shake off pursuers through these labyrinthine areas than through well-ordered and high-fenced suburban housing.

2 The Tokpisin word *raskol* originally had the same connotations as the English-language word from which it derived, but it came to be used of anyone regularly engaged in crime, excluding white-collar crime. While 'raskol' (and variant spellings) is still popular with foreign media reporting on PNG, and I have used it here, it has in recent times started to be replaced in local popular use by more specific descriptive terms, and local media have been promoting the English term 'criminal' as a more appropriate generalisation.

3 This is not an idle boast; individual and mass escapes are common from Papua New Guinea's jails, which have poor security in general.

4 It is impossible to know which is correct, as prison records are generally inadequate, apart from descriptions of charges, length of sentence, etc. I should add that the information presented in these sketches is extremely condensed and follows much rechecking and crosschecking of the stories volunteered by prisoners who were often keen to impress.

5 The Tokpisin term *wantok* originally referred to shared language (more than 700 different languages are spoken in PNG), but has become an elastic term denoting anything from shared kin-group membership to shared provincial or regional origins, depending on geopolitical circumstances. A handy discussion of the origins and modern extension of *wantokism* and of its burdens for people in urban employment has been provided by Monsell-Davis (1993).

6 While this connotes kin-ordered production, I do not want to suggest that labour in such communities has always been exclusively communal or a group activity (a romantic contrast, in other words, with Western 'individualism') — nor, I am sure, would Gregory.

7 Commodities stolen are mostly converted into cash by selling them very quickly, often at prices that are a fraction of their real value (which is usually known to the thieves). Even money from major heists, involving thousands of kina, is drunk away in a bewilderingly short period of time.

8 Filer, who suggests this be called 'road theory', moots *rot bilong kastom* (custom), *rot bilong kaunsil* (councils) and *rot bilong kago* (cargo, ie,

material goods) as other possibilities (Filer 1990: 85–6n). This phraseology, of course, evokes Lawrence's (1964) publication, *Road Belong Cargo*, but should not be taken to imply that I subscribe to Lawrence's explanation of 'cargo cults'.

9   See, for examples of the 'walkathons' and the response, *PNG Post-Courier*, Wednesday, October 13, 1993, p. 20, 'Journey for help ends, no sign of any as yet'; *PNG Post-Courier*, Tuesday, November 9, 1993, p. 3, 'It's a long way to Moresby, with nothing to show for it'; *PNG Post-Courier*, Tuesday, November 9, 1993, p. 10, editorial, "Stop these 'walkathons'".

10 I am thinking, for example, of gender-based divisions of labour and the analytic problem of the value of women's labour in gardening and child-bearing in the context of interclan exchange relations.

11 The lacuna in the literature was addressed around the time an original version of the current chapter was published as a journal article (Goddard 1995): see Dinnen (1995) and a corresponding section in his subsequent book (Dinnen 2001: 80–93).

12 See, for example, *PNG Post-Courier*, Friday, October 8, 1993, p. 13, 'Gangsters vow to change their old ways'; *PNG Post-Courier*, Thursday, October 28, 1993, p. 15, 'Sixty-five young men surrender to police'.

13 In 1986, while doing fieldwork in the Highlands (not on rascalism), I encountered a group of young men on the Highlands Highway wearing T-shirts bearing slogans announcing them to be ex-criminals for Christ. More recent examples can be found in *PNG Post-Courier*, Tuesday, October 5, 1993, p. 17 'Ex-rascals share joy of independence', and *PNG Post-Courier*, Tuesday, October 19, 1993, '"Bad guy" vows to help in fight against crime'.

14 Statistics regarding urbanisation in PNG are no more reliable than those on crime, but there is some evidence that the rate of urbanisation is not as great as many people assume, and may therefore be a criminological straw man. Hayes has pointed out that even using a 'generous definition' of 'urban' — minimum population of 500 people and density of about 200 people per sq km — 85 per cent of PNG's population still classify as 'rural' (Hayes 1992: 2–3). He also argued that the rate of urbanisation had in fact slowed down in the late 1980s and early 1990s, and suggested that a review of the role of urbanisation in PNG's development was urgently needed (Hayes 1992: 4–11).

EXPRESSIONS OF INTEREST
Informal usury

Introduction

Usury is illegal in Papua New Guinea, and it is difficult to gauge exactly how long it has been practised to any significant extent. It is prevalent at all socioeconomic levels and has become pervasive enough to be included in popular symptomatologies of an alleged moral decline brought about by increasing poverty in the country. A commentary in a national daily newspaper in 2003, for instance, catalogued it with prostitution, baby-selling and the parental encouragement of children into theft as evidence of the destruction of the country's social fabric, portraying moneylenders as extorting interest rates of 50 per cent from individuals who risked hospitalisation or death if they defaulted on payment (Kolma 2003). In contrast with this sensationalist imagery, my own discussion in this chapter will concentrate on moneylending in urban settlement environments among people with limited financial resources, where the moneylenders are barely richer than their clients and the latter are often self-employed in informal occupations earning variable incomes and living in circumstances ranging from (urban) subsistence to modest comfort.

There is very little academic literature on usury in Papua New Guinea, but one short publication (Fernando 1991) is worth noting because it catalogues moneylending among informal savings and loan activities, reflecting specifically indigenous alternatives to a formal financial system, rather than classifying it (as a casual reader might expect) as an example of the development of petty capitalism in the country. With this in mind, I examine here the nature of moneylending in urban grassroots communities through the use of examples collected during research in one of Port Moresby's Village Courts where I observed a number of cases in which moneylenders sought redress against defaulting debtors. There are significant differences between local attitudes to moneylending and those prevalent in Euro-American societies, which my examples and a review of the history of usury later in the chapter will indicate. Finally, I will attempt to situate moneylending for profit in Port Moresby in the complex integration of the so-called gift economy and cash economy in Papua New Guinea.

Moneylenders in court

I became aware of the prevalence of moneylending while monitoring Village Court cases in urban settlements in Port Moresby during the 1990s. Of the three Village Courts I have monitored methodically since 1994, I have encountered disputes involving usurers in only one, Erima Village Court, which serves informal housing communities, or settlements, containing a great mixture of micro-ethnic groups in the city's north-east suburbs. One of the other Village Courts, Konedobu, serves downtown informal housing communities, whose residents are over-whelmingly of eastern Gulf district origin (see Chapter Two), and the other, Pari, serves a peri-urban village inhabited by Motu-Koita, the traditional people of the land on which the city has grown (see Chapter Six). The absence of usury cases in the latter two courts, compared with their common occurrence in Erima Court, is important to note and I will return to this contrast later.

As I noted in Chapter Two, the system of courts known as Village Courts was introduced by legislation at the end of the colonial era. Initially intended to serve rural communities, their official function was to settle low-level intra-community disputes, drawing on customary law in preference to the system of law introduced during colonialism. After a sprinkling of Village Courts had come into operation by the late 1970s, the system proved very popular and was quickly extended into urban areas, to serve settlements and other 'grassroots' communities. Village Court magistrates are relatively untrained in law and legislation provides that they be selected by their local community on the criteria of their adjudicatory integrity and good knowledge of local customs (Village Court Secretariat 1975: 1). Lawyers are not allowed to attend Village Court hearings, and disputants are apt to use tactics and arguments commonly encountered in informal moots rather than in a formal courtroom. The legally unschooled and unconditioned magistrates, for their part, are creative in their dispute management and decision making much of the time, and do not bind themselves to legal precedents. There is a great variation in operational style among the more than 1,000 Village Courts now established all over the country, due to their blend of legal formality and informality. Each court reflects the sociality of the particular local community it serves, and the findings of researchers in different parts of Papua New Guinea reveal a complex integration of introduced law and a variety of local customary and neo-customary dispute-management procedures (cf. Brison 1992; Garap 2000; Goddard 2000b, 2002; Scaglion 1979, 1990; Westermark 1986; Young 1992; Zorn 1990).

While Village Courts are obliged to keep records and are in theory overseen by District Court officials, their intimate relationship with their local community results in a great deal of flexibility in the way the law is applied. For example, as members of the grassroots communities they serve, magistrates are often well aware of local social issues manifest in what appear superficially to be disputes between two individuals, and they make their

judgments accordingly (see Goddard 1996, and Chapter Six of this volume). This makes the courts a popular forum for local intra-community dispute settlement and complaints about petty personal offences. The alternative, taking small disputes to Local and District Courts, involves a risk of legal complications, unforeseen costs and technicalities that threaten the degree of control local communities have over their own affairs. This is particularly true of urban settlement-dwellers, who collectively serve (undeservedly) as scapegoats for law and order problems in towns and who live in apprehension of interference and even eviction by officialdom, as we saw in Chapter One.

Usurers in Port Moresby are unable to take recalcitrant debtors to the kinds of courts creditors normally have recourse to, as they would risk prosecution themselves for illegal profiteering. Yet they seek some form of coercive reinforcement to claim unpaid and mounting debts. A number of factors prevent them from using physical intimidation or violence. Firstly, in the urban settlement environment, the lender and borrower are usually already socially acquainted, and the lender is barely richer (and sometimes only briefly so) than the borrower. Thus the borrower is not approaching a rich and powerful stranger or organisation with impersonal coercive powers, but a known individual whose socioeconomic status and potential intimidatory resources are roughly equivalent to his or her own. Secondly, in the modern urban environment, the traditional Melanesian ethic of retribution manifests itself in the understanding that physical injury must be compensated for by the payment of money.[1] Moneylenders recognise the disadvantage in resorting to violence against a recalcitrant debtor and the risk of having to pay perhaps more in compensation than they are owed in the debt. Thirdly, the borrowers have no other property of significant monetary value for the lender to take, or threaten to take, in the case of default. These factors limit the coercive strategies available to moneylenders.

Consequently, they appeal to their local Village Court. Urban Village Court magistrates are cognisant of the large

numbers of people involved in informal income-generating activities and are generally unconcerned about the illegality of many of their projects. Most magistrates are not wage-earners and are invariably involved in the so-called informal economy themselves, one way or another, and urban Village Courts usually show tolerance of moneylending. They are obliged to keep records of the cases they hear, for external official scrutiny, and usury cases are entered under a legally innocuous heading such as 'unpaid debt' or 'compensation' without mentioning the 'interest rate' involved or the informal occupation of the creditors.[2] At the same time, however, they are able to enforce their ruling with threats of referral to higher courts if disputants fail to comply with a court order to pay compensation, debts or fines.

Typical cases in urban Village Courts involve accusations of petty theft, sorcery threats, insults, malicious gossip and failure to pay debts. They are introduced by a simply worded 'summons' read out by the court clerk, which includes a brief sentence or two about why the 'complainant' has brought the 'defendant'[3] to court. These statements are commonly unclear, and require a number of exchanges between the magistrates and the complainant to tease out a sense of the 'complaint' for procedural purposes. Often the complainant's summons describes, in the first instance, not the 'offence' but the details of a confrontation between the complainant and the other party, which moved the former to bring the case to the court. Clarifying the nature of an offence for official records can be a convoluted process in a Village Court. Debt accusations reveal themselves one way or another when the complainant declares at some point that the defendant owes him or her money. Sometimes this turns out to be compensation for injury or insult, or something of the kind. But sometimes it is more specifically a debt for services rendered or things given. Even then, the nature of the debt relationship often becomes clearer only as the hearing continues. Sometimes it is a simple (non-interest earning) debt, where someone has tired of waiting for a loan to be repaid and takes the matter to the Village

Court. The following two examples recorded at Erima during my 1994 monitoring should serve to show how a Village Court deals with such debt cases.

The first involved a debt of 400 kina (K1 was equivalent at the time to about $1US), which the creditor claimed had not been repaid though more than a year had passed. The creditor had brought the matter to court previously, and the court had ordered the debtor to pay, but he had not yet complied. He claimed in this latest appearance that he had given the borrowed money to another person who had subsequently died, so he could not get the money back. The Village Court told him he had been the borrower, so it was his responsibility to settle. It was ordered that over the next five paydays, the debtor (who had regular employment) should pay his creditor at least K60 per fortnight. The debtor complained that he could not accumulate that much in a fortnight, but the court said the debt had been outstanding for a long time and reiterated that it was the debtor's responsibility to find the money. The second case involved a woman who had borrowed K120 and, over a period of five months, had paid back only K50. The court gave her two weeks to pay the other K70. Two weeks later the money had still not been paid, so the court issued a warrant for her arrest (Village Courts are authorised to do this if their orders are ignored). The woman consequently went to the chairing magistrate's house in the settlement with the outstanding money, which was forwarded to the creditor, and the warrant was annulled.

These two are typical of the constant stream of 'debt' disputes that I heard, many of which involved no claims for interest. But cases involving usury distinguished themselves at some point when the creditor told magistrates that the amount they were demanding included 'profit'.

Profit

The English word 'profit' has been adopted into urban Tokpisin and is used to refer not only to the profit gained from business

transactions including loans but to moneylending as a business. Taking their cue from observed banking and formal business transaction practice, moneylenders enter their transactions in a book (usually a cheap school exercise book), a practice generating Tokpisin neologisms such as *bukim mani* (to record money transactions), *bukim dinau* (to record a loan) and *bukim profit*. Beyond entering the transaction itself, however, they do not keep a continuing, calendric written account of payments received. As record-keeping is a sign of *bisnis* (business, enterprise) employed among formally constituted groups, from large corporations to small church fellowships, a simple entry in a notebook can signal for Melanesians that something other than customary balanced or incremental reciprocity[4] is involved in the interaction. In grassroots communities, then, recording details is one of the basic distinguishing features between simple lending and a *profit* matter.

In the *profit* interactions that eventuated in Village Court cases, the smallest amount lent, during my observations, was K20 and the lowest interest rate charged was 10 per cent per *fotnait* (Tokpisin: literally 'fortnight', but also 'payday', reflecting the two-week pay period in formal employment). *Fotnait* is a common reference point in marking periods of time in urban grassroots communities. The loans were rarely much more than K100 and the interest rate rarely approached 40 per cent, the average rate being 20 per cent. The moneylenders took their debtors to court after a few *fotnait*, indicating that these were intended to be very short-term loans. It would therefore be inappropriate to translate the interest rates in annual terms (ie, from 10–30 per cent per *fotnait* to 250–750 per cent p.a.). The relatively low amounts lent reflect the limited resources of the lenders. *Profit*, at this urban grassroots level, is one of many alternative strategies used by people who do not have waged or regular jobs to raise their income above a subsistence level. Other low-income activities include selling betel nut, flavoured ice blocks, cigarettes (sold singly), small garden produce and cooked snack foods, and running small gambling projects such as communal dart-board games and bingo.[5]

Anybody can turn to *profit* as a source of income in this socioeconomic context if they have K20 or more to lend, and some, I learned, enter only into one or two transactions of this kind. Others use it as an ad hoc way of earning a tiny income. It is rare for anyone in grassroots communities to attempt to build their *profit* activities into a major (though illegal) business enterprise. For those who do, a degree of caution is needed. Settlement-based 'career' moneylenders impatient to increase their profits quickly by lending larger and larger amounts risk the inability of their clients to repay the initial loan, let alone the mounting interest, as we shall see in the discussion of Village Court cases below. The wiser moneylenders lend very small amounts and satisfy themselves with a small profit.

Negotiating debt

The simple nature of the loans, their intended short duration, and hence the relatively short passage of time before a moneylender takes debtors to the Village Court, can be shown with the following short examples, recorded in Erima Village Court. In one case a moneylender had lent the debtor K110. After some weeks, interest of K99 had accrued and a total of K209 was now owed. As noted earlier, the *profit* aspect distinguishing any case from a simple debt dispute tended to reveal itself by degrees during the course of a hearing. It was also rare for moneylenders to introduce precise details of the agreed rate of interest and the time that had passed. Magistrates, however, familiar with moneylending practices in their community, had no difficulty working out interest rates from the figures given in cases where only a few weeks or months had elapsed. They were already aware that interest rates were calculated on a *fotnait*-by-*fotnait* basis and were commonly set at 10 per cent, 20 per cent, or 30 per cent. Experience sharpened their mental arithmetic. This particular loan was recognised to have been at an interest rate of 30 per cent, with three *fotnait* having passed.[6] The debtor told the court he intended to pay, but was waiting for a monthly commission

payment from his employer. The magistrates made an order that he pay the existing debt in one month, effectively freezing the accumulation of interest.

In a second case, the moneylender had lent K120. After five weeks the debtor had repaid only K50, and owed K70 plus interest of K30 (ie, 10 per cent interest per *fotnait*). The debtor told the court he was tangled up in the debt of another man who had died at his place of work. He produced a letter from his place of work confirming he was carrying someone else's debts, and was due to receive recompense from his employers. He informed the court that when he received this money he would be able to pay the moneylender. This satisfied the magistrates, who froze the interest, and the moneylender agreed to wait for the employer's payout before claiming the K100 thus owing. In a third case, the moneylender had lent K20 and was now owed K28 (ie, 10% interest; four *fotnait* had passed). The debtor told the court he was simply unable to pay currently. The court gave him one week to pay a total of K28.

In a fourth case, a woman had lent K50 and K30 interest had now accrued over three months (ie, 10 per cent interest per *fotnait*). The debtor had paid only K40 back on the loan. As in the previous case, the debtor pleaded a current lack of funds and was given one week to pay K40. In a fifth case, a woman had lent K20 at 20 per cent interest per *fotnait*, and was now owed a total of K32. She considered that the debtor could have paid the debt off without difficulty as he was working and she had already given him two *fotnait*'s grace (the implication was that the original arrangement had been that this loan was to be paid back within a month). The debtor for his part apologised to the court and gave a guarantee that he would pay the woman K32 on the coming payday.

As the variations in the above cases imply, there is no institutionalised procedure for the conduct of the loan relationship, since beyond the recording of the original loan in a book the interaction between creditor and debtor is informal.

Correspondingly, Village Court decisions are not determined by
the calculation of how much is actually owed, but display some
accommodation of the informality of the debt relation. For
example, a man who had borrowed K40 and was now being taken
to court by the moneylender over an accumulated interest of K20,
claimed that he had already paid part of the money in the form of
beer. The magistrates considered this a contention worth
discussing, but decided that a beer-drinking session paid for by the
debtor could not be counted as repayment. As money was lent,
money had to be repaid. This invited the inference that the court
would order the payment of K60. The magistrates, however,
ordered the payment of only K40, a decision effectively
cancelling the owed interest of K20 (which might or might not
have been the equivalent of what the man spent on beer). In
another case, a woman had lent K10 to a man and was now
demanding K50 *profit*. The man said he had been away from the
city for a period after getting the loan, so had not been able to pay
it back. Meanwhile, he said, the *profit* had become so great that
he could not afford to pay. Unusually, the magistrates had
difficulty working out what the agreed interest rate had been, and
asked the woman directly. She said it was K6 per *fotnait*. The
debtor claimed in contrast that the rate was K2 (the woman's
claim is equivalent to 60 per cent, which is unusually high — the
man's 20 per cent is a more common rate). The chairing
magistrate admonished both parties, saying the rate should have
been made clear from the beginning. The court finally ordered
the man to pay a total of $24.

  While most moneylenders take unpaid debts to the Village
Court within a few *fotnait*, there are occasionally cases involving
debts of longer duration. The inconsistencies in the presentation of
these by disputants indicate that loans outstanding for more than a
few months generate confusion for debtor and creditor. For the
majority of settlement-dwellers, living day to day, the longest
practical measure of the passage of time is a *fotnait*, as it represents
the cycle of urban wages (a legacy of Australian colonialism)

around which their economic activities are planned. As noted above, despite *profit* loans being recorded in a book, no written calendric record of the accumulation of interest is kept. For a few *fotnait*, a moneylender can rely on his or her memory to keep track of the accumulating interest on a loan. In the longer term, however, inaccuracies in calculations are inevitable. Notably, in the cases I saw, if the time alleged to have elapsed since a loan was more than four or five months (usually counted in *fotnait*), it was likely to be claimed to have been a matter of years. Moreover, the amount of interest claimed, given the alleged time passed, failed to accord with calculations made on the basis of the rates given above.

For example, a woman told the court that she had lent a man (to whom she was affinally related) K530 a 'year' previously. She was claiming the original amount back plus interest of K600, giving a total of K1,130. The debtor told the court there was a misunderstanding over the interest. He would pay, he said, but was experiencing some financial difficulties. He did not think he should be paying that much interest. The magistrates cut the amount of interest payable to K30, and gave the debtor three weeks to pay a total of K560. As I commented earlier, the magistrates frequently knew the social background to the cases they heard. They told me after this case that the man had rashly informed the woman, when asking for the loan in the first place, that if she gave him K500 he would give her K1,000 back, which may have accounted for the woman's claim. No attempt to calculate a rate of interest was made by the magistrates, who later told me that too much time had passed for the court to consider a *profit*.

In another case, a woman claimed profit of K150 on an original loan which she told the court she made to a man (affinally related) 'three years' previously. He was, she said, arrogantly refusing to admit he owed her anything. The debtor for his part told the court he had not actually asked for the money (ie, it was not solicited and therefore could not be considered 'book' money); she had simply given it to him when they met at a

bus stop and he did not see why he should repay. The woman responded to his testimony by rhetorically asking the court why she would have given him unrequested money. It had been a loan, she insisted — he had asked her for K20. The court decided the man was to pay K50 within two weeks. This appeared to be a compromise between a simple repayment of K20 and the woman's demanded *profit*. The woman seemed satisfied with this, but the man expressed his unhappiness with the decision, still claiming that the original K20 had not been a solicited loan (this argument plays on the fact that he was affinally related to the woman, and thus the loan could be interpreted as a kind of 'gift' — an important consideration revisited later in this paper).

A final example is revealing not only of the mechanics of moneylending and the relatively tolerant attitude of the Village Court towards it, but of the problem of grassroots *profit* that I mentioned earlier: the moneylender who lends more than a few kina risks not being able to collect the interest on the loan. As the cases cited above indicate, the loans are intended to be short-term only (hence the fortnightly, rather than yearly, interest arrangement) and if not repaid in a very few weeks are likely to be beyond the capabilities of the borrower. Successful moneylenders take small profits in a period of a fortnight or two. The dangers of larger loans are shown in the following case, which began as a claim about an unpaid debt of K308. Questioning by the magistrates elicited details from the moneylender that the original loan had been K120. Some of this had been repaid, but K80 was still owing and, in addition, *profit* of K228 had accumulated (20 per cent per *fotnait*, over more than four months), so the moneylender was currently owed K308. The moneylender said he had now lost patience, since the debtor had been given plenty of opportunity to pay the money.

The debtor, for his part, challenged the assertion that he had paid only K40. He had paid K304 so far, he said, and he produced for the magistrates a handwritten list of monthly payments he claimed to have made. The moneylender accused him of falsifying

the list, precipitating a shouting match between the two men. The debtor threw his *bilum* (string bag) to the ground in a fury and brandished his fists at the usurer. An eruption of physical violence (not uncommon in Erima Village Court) seemed imminent, prompting 'peace officers' — executive assistants to the magistrates — to step between them, and the magistrates calmly fined each man K10 for 'disturbing the court'. This ended the confrontation and, having heard both sides of the debate, the magistrates conferred briefly before giving a decision. In this, the claim for *profit* was ignored completely. The debtor was ordered to pay the K80 owing on the original loan, and was given two weeks to pay. It was clear the magistrates (who were no fools) did not believe the debtor's claim that he had already paid K304, and he accepted their decision complacently. The chairing magistrate then made a formal request of the creditor that he stop his moneylending activities and find another *bisnis* (ie, income-generating activity), because there had been several court cases now in which he had charged people with not paying up, and his moneylending always led to complications with repayments and *profit*.

The active discouragement of usury was not common in the Village Court, but this moneylender was lending relatively large amounts, which was poor strategy because it created too large a debt too quickly. The risk attached to *profit* as an enterprise is shown in the extreme here. In this case, the Village Court had recognised that the repayments were beyond the capabilities of the debtor and simply cancelled the interest. This explains partly the lack of explicit statements of interest rates in court, which we have noted above. In going to the Village Court, the moneylender is effectively cutting his or her losses and the interest rate loses its relevance, since the court's decision involves a practical assessment of how much the debtor is capable of paying. When more than a few kina is involved, the best a creditor can expect is a recovery of the original loan and perhaps a little extra if the court can be persuaded to penalise the debtor slightly for tardiness.

We have seen in these examples the relatively small amounts involved in usury in grassroots communities, the intended short-term nature of the loans, the relative informality of the loan relationship (beyond the entry of the initial loan in a book) and the tolerance shown towards usury by Village Courts. Certainly usury in grassroots communities does not fit the sinister image given in the above-cited newspaper article cataloguing the iniquities brought about by poverty in Papua New Guinea. Before attempting to contextualise usury in local socioeconomic processes, I will reinforce some comparative aspects of the usury I have outlined with a brief review of relevant aspects of Western economic history.

Usury in the history of Western economy

In discussions of economic history in Western societies, usury is sometimes traced back to lending practices in ancient agriculture-based societies (eg, Finley 1985; Hyde 1983). Mandel, with reference to Hesiod's reportage that needy peasants of ancient Greece repaid borrowed wheat with something added, finds 'the origin of usurer's capital in loans in kind' (Mandel 1977: 100). Embedded in the definition of usury in antiquity was a moral judgment that has survived to the present, though its focus has shifted over time. Aristotle drew on the imagery of reproduction ('interest' and 'offspring' are glossed by the Greek *Tokos*) and growth in the natural world in his representation of moneylending as unnatural, commenting that disapproval of charging interest 'is fully justified, for interest is a yield arising out of money itself, not a product of that for which money was provided' (Aristotle 1969 [c.350BC]: 46). Cicero, in the first century BC, displayed an ambiguous attitude towards the profession of moneylending, which was 'as indispensable in his world (and for him personally) as shopkeepers, craftsmen, perfumers and doctors' (Finley 1985: 54). Usury was not uncommon among the nobility of his time and Cicero himself borrowed from professional moneylenders 'cheerfully and heavily' (Cowell 1963: 53). Yet, at the same time, he commented that

moneylending, along with the collection of harbour taxes, was condemnable as it incurred ill will (Finley 1985: 53).

With the advent of Christianity, the focus of censorious attitudes completed a shift from the unnatural fecundity of money (qua Aristotle) and the less-than-savoury necessity of usury (qua Cicero), to the usurers themselves, who were increasingly viewed as economic parasites. This attitude reached its extreme in fulminations such as those of the young Martin Luther, who regarded moneylenders as starvers of their fellow men, worse than thieves and murderers,[7] and declared, 'Therefore is there, on this earth, no greater enemy of man (after the devil) than a gripe-money, and usurer, for he wants to be God over all men' (cited in Marx 1988: 740n). The condemnation of usurers lessened somewhat with the ensuing separation of Church and State and the emergence of a secular, systematised approach to economics under which matters of usury were increasingly legislatively subsumed (Tawney 1990: 205–27; Hyde 1983: 133ff.; Gregory 1997: 227). Yet a moral judgment remained integral to terms such as 'moneylender'.[8] In modern times, while Aristotelian imagery is no longer applied in discussions of economics, the process of unmediated surplus extraction itself has continued to be seen as immoral, as evidenced even in economic phraseology such as that of Mandel, who comments that from its first appearance in antiquity, usurer's capital has retreated, in the light of the development of a money economy dominated by trade, to 'the dark corners of society, where it survives for centuries at the expense of the small man' (Mandel 1977: 102). And Braudel, discussing the economy of 12th-14th-century Venice — where valuable city sites were sometimes acquired by usurers via possession of the pledges of defaulting borrowers — commented that 'usury was perhaps a necessary evil everywhere before the coming of modern banking' (Braudel 1984: 129). In modern usage of the word 'usury', extortion is always implied, whereas in Roman times the term from which it derives, *usura* (use, interest: thus *usurarius*, 'usurer') was morally neutral.

Marx called the usurer 'that old-fashioned but ever-renewed specimen of the capitalist' (Marx 1988: 740n). Marx, in fact, saw usurers and merchants as two types of 'capitalists' predating the development of capitalism as a mode of production (Marx 1988: 914). This categorisation brings to the foreground the specific economic feature of usury that (from a Marxian perspective) has ensured its practical survival through a number of epochs. Usury exploited the productivity of individuals *independently* of normal relations of production (such as those between master and slave, or landlord and peasant, in which a surplus was systemically extracted from the subordinate class in a relationship of interdependency). Insofar as whatever was borrowed (whether wheat or money) had to be returned with more added, the interest manifested unpaid productivity on the part of the borrower. In other words, usury transformed money into capital by extorting unpaid labour (surplus labour) from the producer in a traditional (ie, pre-capitalist) mode of production (Marx 1988: 1023).

Since usury in pre-capitalist times was independent of particular social relations of production, it was able to survive transitions from one mode of production to the next, while other forms of surplus extraction withered away with the relations of production to which they belonged. In the case of the capitalist mode of production, where he saw human labour — now capable of being bought and sold — as having been reduced to a commodity among all others, Marx offered the formula $M\text{-}C\text{-}M^1$ (M = money, C = commodity), to represent the process of buying in order to sell dearer, a form that he considered was 'at its purest in genuine merchants' capital' (Marx 1988: 266). Against this, usurer's capital was represented by the formula $M\text{-}M1$. The disappearance of the mediating commodity in this exchange process gives the transaction a particularly attenuated character within capitalism, which Marx pointed out with neo-Aristotelian phraseology: 'Money … is exchanged for more money, a form incompatible with the nature of money and therefore inexplicable from the

standpoint of the exchange of commodities' (Marx 1988: 267). The continued pejorative social attitude towards moneylenders as people, regardless of whether their rates are in fact higher than those of other lending agencies, is probably sustained in part by this characteristic. Consumer loans from banks have a similar form, but it is less apparent to the moral gaze by virtue of the impersonal nature and systematic quality of the transactions.

In this brief account of usury in the history of Western economy, two aspects are important in comparison with the advent of usury in Papua New Guinea: the existence of usury long before the advent of capitalism, and the development of a moral condemnation of usurers. Despite the condemnatory tone of the newspaper article cited at the beginning of this paper, my own findings do not reveal any stigmatisation of usury at a community level in PNG. Neither do Melanesians appear to subscribe to an Aristotelian judgment of the fecundity of money of the kind, for example, that Taussig (1980) ascribes to South American peasants. In PNG, usury is not an ancient practice predating modern banking and finally retreating to Mandel's 'dark corners' of society. On the contrary, it emerged not only after the arrival of capitalism, but after the introduction of consumer loans by banks internationally and locally in the late 20th century. Further, it is an urban development, appropriating a rationality of bank-lending practice not only in the formal workplace, but, as we have seen, into informal exchange relationships beyond it. Academic literature has customarily rendered the latter relationships as representing a traditional sociality circumscribed by the pre-capitalist rationality of kinship. We need, then, to examine the advent of usury in this local historical context.

Kinship and urban living

It has become more or less axiomatic in academic discussions of urban living in Papua New Guinea that migrants to towns bring the rationale of kin-ordered society with them, including the sense of obligation and reciprocity that pertains among people

who regard themselves as kin-related. In urban situations, this rationale often embraces networks beyond the immediate clan or affinal relations experienced by an individual in a rural community. Comparatively lacking familial or clan relatives in town, migrants are obliged to seek socioeconomic support from more distantly related migrants from their home region. This can even include people with whom uneasy or occasionally hostile relations may have been experienced traditionally. The expanded support network is reinforced by the attitudes of other townspeople, who define strangers according to linguistic or even regional criteria. These criteria embrace people who would not otherwise consider themselves especially related, but who now find themselves thrown into coalition regardless of their own preferences, as they compete with other established groups for housing and jobs. The most common generalisation used among Papua New Guineans for this support network in towns is 'the *wantok* system' (see Chapters One and Four). According to the popular stereotype, an individual can call on people he or she classifies as *wantoks* for socioeconomic support without fear of rejection or, conversely a person with resources in town is obliged to share them with *wantoks*.

Popular generalisations about the *wantok* system oversimplify its nature and facility since, for example, obligations in fact vary between different types of urban 'kin' and reciprocal understandings are not as clear in town as they are among small-scale rural communities (see, eg, Chao 1985; Monsell-Davis 1993; Rew 1974; Strathern 1975). Nevertheless, *wantokism* has been important to the economic survival of Papua New Guineans in towns since at least the end of World War II, when significant urban migration began. The *wantok* system is supplemented by various types of informal associations that have been observed by social scientists since at least the 1960s (eg, Rew 1974), including what are commonly called rotating credit associations (eg, Ardener 1964). The latter are referred to in Tokpisin as *kampani* or *sande*,[9] and involve small groups of kin or quasi-kin who pool a

proportion of their fortnightly earnings, to be used by each member in turn. As the migrant workers of the late colonial period were employed in low-paying jobs and were enmeshed in reciprocal relationships with kin and workmates, the recipient of the pool each pay fortnight used the money largely to pay off debts, rather than on self-indulgence (Rew 1974: 121ff.; Strathern 1975: 329ff.; Skeldon 1980: 252).

While 'rotating credit system' is an accurate enough term for *kampani* and *sande* groups, observers have pointed out that they are important socially inasmuch as they reinforce existing ties between *wantoks* (Strathern 1975: 329), and establish quasi-*wantok* ties among regionally unrelated people (Rew 1974: 121ff.; Skeldon 1980: 252ff.), particularly among coworkers. This was certainly true in the late colonial period, when *sande* and *kampani* groups developed among workers who found themselves thrown together in situations structured by non-Melanesian workplace logic and administratively controlled by Europeans. In the early 1970s, a group of Highlanders of my acquaintance working as domestic servants and gardeners cooperated in a *kampani*, which was as concerned with discussing and negotiating the problems of working for unpredictable Europeans as it was with distributing credit. The *sande* system has continued to the present day to be a means of social coalescence, and not only among workers in low-status employment. For example, in the late 1990s, a small group of staff at the University of Papua New Guinea began to *sande*, and included a European coworker in their arrangements. The European tried to demur on the grounds that he earned more than they (Europeans are on a different pay scale and get extra benefits) and therefore was not really entitled to the support of their credit system.[10] His coworkers insisted, however, and it was clear that he was being included in a quasi-*wantok* group for other than purely financial reasons.

As Skeldon pointed out in one of the first studies of Papua New Guinean regional associations, the distinction between 'traditional' groups, in which membership is largely ascribed, and

sande groups, in which a large degree of choice is exercised in recruitment, is blurred (Skeldon 1980: 248). Sharing and mutual support are central characteristics of *sande* groups, and beyond an initial agreement on roughly how much people should contribute, there is no explicit policing of the size of each person's fortnightly contribution, recognising that people might give more or less each fortnight, depending on personal fortunes. Nevertheless, as is characteristic of the gift economy of kin-ordered societies in Papua New Guinea, members have some sense of what each person should give, and animosity can develop if a member is suspected of deliberately giving less than he or she is able.

The pervasion of kinship sensibilities and the gift economy are linked themes that provide premises for studies of rural and urban responses to the cash economy in Papua New Guinea. Indeed, the complex articulation of gift exchange and commodity exchange has been a topical focus of anthropologists in recent decades. In comparative discussions, it has been common to represent gifts as remaining unalienated from their producers in the process of exchange and therefore particularly congruent with kin-ordered sociality. Commodities, in contrast, are represented as becoming alienated from their producers in the process of exchange, and therefore particularly congruent with the sociality of capitalist societies (Gregory 1982: 12, 41ff.). The contrast is easier to discern when talking about ideal types, and more difficult to clarify at the historical and social conjunctures of capitalist and non-capitalist modes of production, but few anthropologists have been moved to suggest that it does not exist in Melanesia. In fact, assertions — driven by the impact of globalisation discourse — that gifts are just a type of commodity (eg, Appadurai 1988: 11–13), have met significant resistance, implicitly and explicitly, from anthropologists working in Melanesian societies (eg, Carrier 1992, 1998; Weiner 1992; Goddard 2000a; Godelier 1999; Strathern 1990).

The latter prefer to problematise the relationship between gifts and commodities and to examine the way Melanesians have

appropriated commodity exchange into their own sociality. The articulation of the gift and commodity economies in Melanesia was examined at length in Gregory's (1982) critique of neoclassical economic development theory. His discussion explicitly addressed the relationship between kinship and capitalist economy and argued that the gift economy had 'effloresced' (1982: 166) in the face of colonialism. Gregory detailed the various ways in which commodities were transformed into gifts, all of them underscored by the resilience of attitudes grounded in kin-ordered sociality, which was itself reinforced by the fact that land in Papua New Guinea continued to be owned mostly by descent groups (1982 :162–5). The latter point is an important constituent in arguments that Melanesians, by virtue of their membership of extended kin-groups with access to land and its resources, have not been individualised — and thus alienated from each other — by capitalist production to the degree that Westerners have. This argument fits handily with the previous observations about the prevalence of *wantokism* in towns.

In Port Moresby and other urban centres in Papua New Guinea, however, the unqualified assumption that all 'migrant' communities are dominated by *wantok* sensibilities can no longer be made. Where researchers such as Hitchcock and Oram (1967), Rew (1974), Ryan (1970) and Strathern (1975) in the late colonial period found relatively homologous associations between regional groups and particular settlements, sections of low-covenant estates, or company compounds, more recent research in conditions of continuing migration and population growth indicates a complex variety in the population of so-called settlements. For example, there is a notable contrast between Erima and the settlement discussed in Chapter Two, the downtown self-help housing area known as Ranuguri. Ranuguri, established at the end of World War II, is dominated by people of eastern Gulf district origin. First-generation migrants arranged themselves on the available land in groups corresponding to village clusters in their home place. The settlement thus fits the

'regional' model of settlements — which is still found in some more recently established settlements where space permits it (see, eg, Barber 2003).

Hidden behind old colonial administration buildings at Konedobu (near the downtown area) and with steep hills at the rear, Ranuguri was a spatially restricted environment (Forbes and Jackson 1975), encouraging the development of a tight-knit community as successive urban-born generations improved their habitat with the help of town authorities (see Norwood 1984: 99–101). This relative exclusivity persisted through more than four decades until major earthworks in the mid-1990s connected with a new major road in the vicinity exposed a flank of the settlement to public view. It also created additional space into which people of other regional origins moved (see Chapter Two). Time will tell whether the eastern Gulf people will find themselves enclaved in a larger, sprawling, self-help housing area. Until recently, then, Ranuguri has conformed to the image of settlement communities developed in the academic literature of the colonial period, and is pervaded by the ideation of extended kin-group relations and obligations. This is reflected in the disputes brought to its local Village Court at Konedobu, generated almost exclusively by complaints of insults, malicious gossip and occasional sorcery threats (see Chapter Two and Goddard 2000b: 244–6) resulting from incidental lapses, or accusations of lapses, in the obligations and decorum customary among people related, closely or distantly, by kinship.

Erima settlement, in comparison, is a post-independence development, a fast-growing habitat on the edge of town into which people of many regional backgrounds have filtered. The development of regional enclaves within Erima has remained minimal compared with Ranuguri, as settlers' entrepreneurial subdivision of their leased plots of land is common and urban marriages among migrants of diverse regionality creates a heterogeneity that would have been unthinkable in a Port Moresby settlement half a century ago. Erima and other settlements in its vicinity are marked by a volatility not found in

Ranuguri, as mixed populations compete for housing and jobs and are forced to share restricted space. Violent confrontations, exacerbated by alcohol consumption, are common and there is chronic friction among diverse and mutually suspicious micro-ethnic groups. A comparative lack of kinship sensibilities is evident as migrants are cut off from the bulk of their extended kin-groups. Single adult migrants are likely to enter into hastily arranged marriages with people from micro-ethnic groups other than their own. Lacking the customary resources and sanctions on which marriage partners would draw in a habitat typified by extensive kin networks (not only in rural areas but in urban settlements such as Ranuguri), these marriages can be comparatively fragile. Discord can develop quickly, and manifests itself in accusations such as neglect, adultery and personal violence between the marriage partners, and confrontations and accusations among affines or quasi-affines as the latter's putative alliance turns into hostile estrangement.

When a new marriage breaks down gifts and small promissary payments that have been substituted for properly negotiated bride prices become the subject of accusations of unpaid debts. Often, cash that served as a nominal brideprice is demanded back by the husband; material things taken under the aegis of affinal rights become the focus of accusations of theft. As I have written elsewhere (Goddard 2000b: 249ff.), examination of the evidential content of cases brought to the Erima Village Court revealed that a common thread in the majority of them was marital problems or marital breakdown. Indeed, what seemed initially to be unrelated cases were revealed on further research to involve sets of individuals whose diverse disputes were linked by a problematic or failed marriage. This, combined with the diversity of regional groups, creates a marked contrast with the close-knit, kinship-driven sociality of Ranuguri. Not surprisingly, Erima Village Court has a very large case load, covering a wide range of disputes and complaints, including insults and malicious gossip and sorcery accusations, but also personal and property violence,

debts and financial defaults, adultery and petty theft. Compared with the atmosphere of Konedobu Village Court (serving Ranuguri), I noted overall a relative estrangement of disputants from each other in Erima Court, perhaps signifying the lack of an underlying sense of kinship or its accompanying need for the integrity of social relationships to be maintained in the long term (cf. Chao 1985: 194ff.).

The existence of usury, and of Village Court cases connected to usury, in this social climate is significant when compared with the absence of usury cases in two other courts I have monitored in the National Capital District: Konedobu Village Court and Pari Village Court. Pari is a village inhabited by Motu-Koita, the traditional people of the area on which Port Moresby is built (see Chapter Six). It is close-knit and insular, its inhabitants maintain strong 'clan' and 'subclan' ties and it contains few people with origins in other regions, apart from an enclave of people from the Gulf district who originally negotiated entry to the village many decades ago through traditional trading ties and are now intermarried with Motu-Koita inhabitants. Usury is not practised there. I saw no evidence of usury in Ranuguri and inquiries drew the response that there was none in the settlement, although some people who worked in offices in town reported that usury was practised at their workplace. The 'borrowing' of money in Pari is subsumed under extended kinship relations and in Ranuguri is conducted through *wantok* relationships. In Erima and nearby settlements, however, recourse to small-scale usurers is stimulated by the lack of extensive local kinship networks or *wantok* relationships. Even marriages, often hastily arranged, and mostly lacking the support and encouragement of the couples' kin-groups, do not create the complex affinal relationships of obligation and reciprocation that would ensue in traditional circumstances. It should be noted, for example, that in two of the usury cases cited above the parties involved were relatively close affines,[11] whereas it would be very unusual for someone to borrow under a *profit* arrangement from

an affine by customary marriage where full bride price (along with ritual pre- and post-marital payments of various kinds) had been paid.

Conclusions

When people in grassroots communities in Port Moresby are entering into usurious transactions with people to whom they might even be affinally related, we must re-examine the assumptions we have made about the prevalence of *wantokism*. In respect of conventional forms of lending and borrowing in urban grassroots communities such as Erima, usury is a significant development because it is not driven by the same rationale as the *wantok* system or 'rotating credit associations'. In fact, it appears to be utilised by borrowers when these supportive and reciprocal institutions are either not available or are so limited that their resources are quickly personally exhausted. At any rate, it seems that we can no longer apply the generalisation that PNG's urban grassroots support systems are based entirely on the rationale of kin-ordered societies. They now include a practice that is informed by local experience of the introduced bank-loan system, which is itself a product of capitalist economy, in which commodity relationships between people are structured by a rationale that construes participants as unrelated individuals rather than as related according to principles of kinship.

At the same time, we cannot place usury comfortably in the category of petty capitalism, because usurers themselves are not usually 'professional' moneylenders, nor do they systematically transform their gains into capital. Rather, they are people engaged in flexible informal money-earning activities such as those I described above in the section on *profit*. Most of them turn to usury only occasionally and briefly, among other enterprises in which they selectively engage as opportunity (or imagined opportunity) presents itself. These sorts of activities are popularly called the 'informal economy', which implies a dualism of formal and informal sectors within a capitalist economy. Critics

of this dualism (on the grounds that it does not exist in practice[12]) prefer the term 'petty commodity production', and accentuate the interaction of differing types of social relations in commodity production (Moser 1978; Littlefield and Gates 1991). The term 'petty commodity production' is applied particularly when commodities are produced using non-capitalist relations of production such as family, kin-group or other networks (Binford and Cook 1991: 70ff.; Barber 1993: 5). Income-earning activities outside of wage labour in PNG towns are largely of this type, involving household-based units[13] creatively shifting among a variety of activities to earn a small living. In recent years, usury has become part of this flexible response to a lack of wage-earning opportunities in town. Along with many other informal income-generating activities, it is in fact innovative in that it appropriates elements of the introduced economy creatively to serve indigenous ends. Like the shoe repairers and polishers who appeared suddenly on Port Moresby's footpaths a decade ago, usurers cannily respond to a perceived need by offering a localised and informal alternative to a service that would otherwise necessitate engagement with an impersonal agency some distance from home. In the case of financial services, usury is also serving a demand for loans that are so small that formal financial services would hardly be persuaded to make them.

The sinister portrayal of moneylenders in the newspaper article cited at the beginning of this chapter borrows its stereotypes from the West, collapsing together poverty and moral decline and parading some of the usual suspects, including prostitution, child exploitation (both concepts in need of qualification at the local level) and usury. But we have seen that there is in fact no stigma attached to usury or usurers in the communities I have researched, and usury in PNG does not have the pre-capitalist history that fuels its reputation as a parasitic practice in the West. Cataloguing usury, as Fernando (1991) does, among informal savings and loans activities reflecting indigenous alternatives to a formal financial system is reasonably accurate.

But, as we have seen here, usury represents a different sentiment to that which is implied in the *wantok* system, *kampani* and *sande* groups, and their like, which also operate at the conjuncture of the gift and capitalist economies, where the distinction between the sentiment of kinship relations and capitalist relations can be equivocal. Perhaps this equivocation was at the root of the dispute cited earlier in which the creditor argued that the money involved was *profit* and her affinal debtor argued that it was not. The inference is invited here that where the *wantok* system and its adjuncts appropriate an aspect of the capitalist economy (wages) into the gift economy, *profit* necessarily positions even classificatory kin as unrelated individuals. This relatively innocuous informal occupation, then, may be portentous. Contextualised not in a moral decline connected to poverty but, instead, analytically in the complex articulation of gift and capitalist economies in Papua New Guinea, it suggests that we can no longer take as axiomatic the impermeability of kin-ordered sociality in every contemporary grassroots community.

ENDNOTES

1 This generalisation is true at least for the purposes of the present discussion, in which the physical result of violence would not go beyond physical injury requiring medical attention.

2 The manipulation of official 'categories' when recording cases is one reason why official statistics of the kinds of cases heard in Village Courts are not to be trusted. While monitoring cases, I commonly noted significant differences between the substance of disputes (on which my own categorisation of them was based) and the headings under which they were recorded by court clerks (cf. Goddard 1996, 1998).

3 Terms such as 'summons', 'complainant' and 'defendant' have been pidginised in Papua New Guinea and are used commonly in Village Courts.

4 I refer here to conventional anthropological distinctions applied to gift giving in Melanesia. I concur with the summary of the forms of gift giving provided by C. A. Gregory (1982: 53–5).

5   For a handy catalogue and discussion of informal occupations in Port
    Moresby, see Barber (1993).

6   I lacked the magistrates' acuity in instantly estimating interest rates and
    elapsed time in respect of the amounts claimed in tortuous responses to
    their interrogations of claimants. At an early stage in my research, I had to
    ask them for this information after cases were dealt with, since they never
    made it explicit during the course of the case. After they realised that
    I wanted these details, they adopted the practice of telling me in asides
    during the hearings.

7   Luther's views became more ambivalent later in life, negotiating the
    relationship between civil law (approving usury) and moral law (See
    Tawney 1990: 84–103; cf. Hyde 1983: 120–30).

8   The extensive discussion of the condemnation of usury in the religious
    climate of 16th-century Europe in Tawney's classic text, *Religion and The
    Rise of Capitalism* (Tawney 1990 [1926]) remains a touchstone (albeit
    sometimes unacknowledged) for most accounts of the subject. In relation
    to doctrinal attitudes to economic activity, it should be noted that there
    have been challenges to Weber's argument that Christian attitudes to
    thrift, interest and profit immediately related to the rise of capitalism were
    Protestant rather than Catholic (see, eg, Samuelsson 1993).

9   '*Kampani*' from the English 'company', and '*sande*' from 'Sunday'. The
    latter is thought by some to refer to a payday (eg, Strathern 1975: 329fn),
    though Thursday was the common payday in Port Moresby in late colonial
    times. I am inclined to see *sande* as connoting the leisure and relief from
    work associated with Sundays during colonial rule.

10 Pers. comm.

11 Close enough, in both cases, to be considered '*tambu*' (ie, one party would
    classify the other as a sibling of his or her own sibling's spouse and
    therefore be obliged not to address the other by personal name).

12 That is to say, there is no clear distinction in a capitalist economy between
    a group of people whose economic life is contextualised exclusively in
    waged and salaried work and another, socially discrete group whose work is
    neither waged nor salaried. Individuals move between, or even work
    simultaneously in, the two putative 'sectors'.

13 In respect of this household-based unit, Barber has proposed a more
    specific analytic procedure for use in urban PNG research, based on the
    concept of 'household reproduction' (Barber 1993: 24–33).

RETO'S CHANCE
State and status in a settlement

Introduction

Discussion of the engagement of the State and society in Melanesia has drawn recently on what has been called the 'state-in-society' model developed by Joel Migdal (Migdal, Kohli & Shue 1994). Where conventional references to 'the state' might invite the inference that it is an entity above and beyond the society it seeks to govern, some constituent themes of Migdal's model are that states are almost never autonomous from social forces and have to be viewed in their social contexts (Migdal, Kohli and Shue 1994: 2–3). Further, he argues that the overall role of the State in society 'hinges on the numerous junctures between its diffuse parts and other social organizations' (1994: 3). He adds that the relative position of a social group within the overall social structure is not a simple determinant of the power of that group (1994: 3–4), and that 'states and other social forces may be mutually empowering' (1994: 4). Migdal's overall approach challenges monolithic

conceptions of 'the State' and thereby has thematic similarities with recent independently developed representations of Melanesian States. These see the State as fragmentary or diffuse and socially contextualised (eg Filer 1992; Gordon and Meggitt 1985; Standish 1981[1]), sometimes in relation to nationhood (eg, Hirsch 1997; Wanek 1996). In this respect, Migdal's representation of his model as intended to correct 'an unfortunate tendency in social science to treat the state as an organic, undifferentiated actor' (Migdal 1994: 17) might overstate the tendency. Perhaps the pertinent function of Migdal's model, as far as Melanesia is concerned, is that it tidily encapsulates the kinds of indeterminacies explored by social scientists in particular local settings where the weakness of the State is a political given. The compactness of the model has made it a handy resource in a number of recent discussions of governance and, especially, social control in Melanesia (eg, Claxton 2000; Dinnen 2001; Dauverne 1998).

It should be acknowledged, though, that institutions and ideas introduced by their colonisers have been creatively appropriated into Melanesian praxis since the beginnings of colonial intrusion and that these appropriations are as transformative of the institutions and ideas as they are of the lives of the indigenes. Thus, the late colonial State of the 1970s is reproduced in the contemporary Papua New Guinea State only partially, and in its ostensible structure rather than its substantive functions. In this respect, its organs appear to a conventional European gaze to be only nominally equivalent to those of a Western State. My query about Migdal's model, then, is whether its application in the Papua New Guinean context will allow a recognition of the appropriation of colonially and neo-colonially introduced institutions into the praxis[2] of local communities, and will thus preserve a sense of the transformations of the institutions and the social life of those communities. The particular focus of my interest here is

Migdal's observation that the engagement between the State and social forces may be mutually empowering in some instances and a struggle for agency in others, often marked by mutually exclusive goals (Migdal 1994: 24). To this we could append the anthropological observation that the outcomes of these kinds of engagement in specific local communities are often reflective of the social permeability of localised elements of State, whose employees are likely to come from the communities they serve. This is an important contributing factor in the mutually transformative relationship between State institutions in Melanesia and local groups whose praxis is informed by exigencies of kinship and community. My concern is to maintain a dialectical view of the relationship that Migdal's model addresses. Ethnographically, this chapter is a story of the quest for prestige and a measure of power among urban so-called 'grassroots' males — little big-men, so to speak. It provides an opportunity to explore the way a small element of the State has been absorbed into group and individual praxis in a settlement in Port Moresby.

The relevant element of State in my discussion (conceptualising the socially embedded State according to Migdal's model) is the Village Court System of Papua New Guinea (described briefly in Chapter Two and Chapter Five), which had its ideational beginnings in the 1940s in the imagination of well-intentioned colonisers. It was legislatively planned in the twilight of colonialism, and finally came into operation as Melanesian leaders publicly anticipated a post-colonial legitimation of long-suppressed 'custom'. But while political representations of the Village Court System invite an interpretation that it is a grassroots justice system blending custom and law, historical investigation lends weight to a more political understanding that it is a State institution whose planners intended it to serve the parochial judicial needs of villagers and rural homesteaders (eg, Chalmers 1978b; Gordon

and Meggitt 1985: 210–36). As such, anthropological examination of it affords insights into the efforts of small-scale communities to incorporate elements of State into local and sometimes individual strategies.

I will begin with a brief account of the historical background of the Village Court System and its practical operations, and then describe the particular social context of my ethnography: an urban settlement. This will set the scene for a narrative of the rise and fall of magistrates in an urban Village Court, illustrating the dialectical relationship between group and individual praxis and an element of State.

The development of the Village Court System

The negative attitude of colonial officials towards the idea of indigenous juridical officers began to change after World War II, when, for administrative purposes, Papua and New Guinea became a single entity known as the Territory of Papua and New Guinea. The governing Labor Party in Australia began to implement a 'New Deal' policy with a view to eventual independence for the territory (Wolfers 1975: 119–23). The Administrator, J. K. Murray, mooted the idea of 'Native Village Courts', and Section 63 of the Papua and New Guinea Act 1949 provided for the establishment of native village courts and other tribunals run by Papua New Guineans. However, Murray's proposal — 'Native courts … with jurisdiction in minor civil and criminal matters, especially but not exclusively in those relating to native custom' (Murray 1949: 61) — was not implemented, partly as a result of a change of Australian government in 1949. The idea of native, or village, courts was fielded several times during the 1950s (Lynch 1978: 114–16; Fenbury 1978: 25) without finding favour with the Australian Minister for Territories, Paul Hasluck (Hasluck 1976: 187), or with an influential conservative section of the judiciary in Papua New Guinea.

There was, however, a growing concern on the part of the administration that the majority of the population was not using the formal system of justice, and unofficial courts over which the administration had no systematic control were flourishing (Fitzpatrick 1980: 139–40; Strathern 1972: 2–6). Discussion among administration planners began explicitly to bring together issues of legal services, indigenous participation and custom in a configuration that forcefully reintroduced proposals for a Village Court System. In 1965, the legislative draftsman of the time, C. J. Lynch, proposed a reform of the legal system involving 'native courts' using 'minimally trained native magistrates of the "village elder" type', and administering 'custom' or 'customary law', arguing that it would provide speedy justice at a low financial cost and would be physically close to the people (Lynch 1965: 27–8).

Other factors were also providing impetus towards a new justice delivery strategy. From the 1950s, there had been increasing pressure from the United Nations on Australia to prepare Papua New Guinea for political independence, resulting in, among other things, a program of 'localisation' of positions traditionally held by Australians. In the 1960s, a growing number of Papua New Guineans were moving into positions of authority in a variety of spheres, including Parliament.[3] Among indigenous parliamentarians and academics in particular, a developing anti-colonial rhetoric included calls for the favouring of custom and customary law as more appropriate regulatory instruments for an emerging Melanesian nation than the imposed legal system. This body of opinion complemented a contemporary influx of Papua New Guineans into the judiciary, and added considerable weight to the resurgent notion that some form of 'native courts' might be advantageous. In particular, there was concern about the inadequacies of Local Courts, such as over-formalised procedures and language difficulties, which alienated local communities, particularly in rural areas, and a procedural emphasis on producing a winning litigant, in contrast with traditional

Melanesian concern with the maintenance of community stability (Chalmers 1978b: 57ff.).

A review of the lower court system (Curtis and Greenwell 1971) and a subsequent inquiry into the need for Village Courts (Desailly and Iramu 1972) led to a White Paper being tabled in the House of Assembly and debated late in 1972. By this time, the majority of parliamentarians were Melanesian and 'custom' was becoming a rhetorical component of the debate about Papua New Guinea's political independence (Gordon and Meggitt 1985: 192). The Melanesian parliamentarians were mostly in favour of Village Courts. Among the themes traversed in the course of discussion were nationalism and criticism of the colonial legal system (Chalmers 1978a: 266ff.). In September 1973, the Village Courts Bill was introduced for parliamentary debate[4] by the then Minister for Justice, John Kaputin, who stressed its potential efficacy in giving indigenous communities control over their own affairs. The issue of returning power to local communities was persuasive in the climate of the demise of colonial rule, along with the issue of the rural shortcomings of the current legal system, and a perceived need for an emphasis on rural 'law and order' (Curtis and Greenwell 1971; Chalmers 1978b: 71–2). The Village Courts Act 1973 came into force on November 28, 1974. Overall, mediation and the pursuit of peace and harmony in the settlement of low-level intra-community disputes were its principal aims. The commentaries of legal specialists of the time suggest that there were some expectations that Village Courts would gather existing unofficial dispute-settlement procedures into the centralised legal system (eg, Bayne 1975: 33).

When the first Village Courts began operating, in a rhetorical climate anticipating a post-colonial revival of custom, John Kaputin enthused that 'customary law will from now on be a real part of the national law … Village Court magistrates who will be appointed because of their knowledge of customary law

will be a vital source of information and, indeed, a catalyst for reform' (Kaputin 1975: 12). To this end, the legislation provided for Village Court magistrates, untrained in law, to be selected by the local community on the criteria of their adjudicatory integrity and good knowledge of local customs (Village Court Secretariat 1975: 1).

Within a short time, however, constraints presaged in the legislation and manifest in bureaucracy shifted the practical operations of Village Courts away from the idealised realm of 'custom', as I noted in Chapters Two and Five. Under the weight of official rules and regulations stipulating judicial limits and demanding the keeping of written records, Village Court officers found themselves structurally integrated with the existing legal system. Their activities could be overseen by members of the formal judiciary and certain types of cases were to be referred to Local or District Courts, which could also hear appeals by disputants against Village Court decisions. Community expectations, driven by experience of the colonial court system rather than by neo-customary political rhetoric, provided further impetus for Village Courts to be modelled partially on Local and District Courts, procedurally and architecturally. Villagers built bush-material village courthouses and wanted regular court sitting days (Goddard 1992a; Paliwala 1982; Scaglion 1979). The general principle of disinterested adjudication represented by the colonial legal system was also attractive to them, after experiencing customary dispute settlement as a process beset by bias and manipulation under the exigencies of kin-ordered social organisation (Goddard 1996, 2000b).

At the same time, lawyers are not allowed to attend Village Court hearings and, while disputants may have expectations that their court will operate like a District Court, they commonly use tactics more suited to the traditional moots and arenas whose spirit the Village Court System was originally intended to express. The legally unschooled and unconditioned

magistrates demonstrate creativity in their dispute management and decision making. Overall, these factors have resulted in a great variation in operational style among the more than 1,000 Village Courts in general. Individual courts reflect the sociality of the particular local community they serve, and their praxis is a complex integration of introduced law and a variety of local customary dispute-management procedure (cf. Garap 2000; Goddard 2000b; Scaglion 1979, 1990; Westermark 1986; Young 1992; Zorn 1990). Notwithstanding occasional criticism alleging miscarriages of justice, particularly in respect of women in some parts of the Highlands (Doherty 1992; Garap 2000; Jessep 1992; Young 1992), the Village Court System has proved popular with the local communities that it was intended to serve, has spread in urban areas (see Chapter Two) and has become institutionalised in practice, if not by its inaugurators' intent, somewhere between autochthonous dispute-settlement procedures and Local and District Courts.

Nevertheless, as the foregoing history shows, the contemporary Village Court System is an element of the State, by virtue not only of its origins in colonial State planning but of its continuing administrative connection to the hierarchy of formal courts, and this status is consolidated by its financial circumstances. In this respect it demonstrates similar dysfunctional tendencies to most other elements of State in Papua New Guinea. Despite its spread and popular support, the Village Court System has been beset by administrative and financial problems since its beginnings. Positioned in a formal legal structure, Village Courts are under considerable pressure to perform to standards of efficiency determined by bureaucratic and judicial overseers, rather than by the flexible and customary criteria of the communities they serve. Periodic reviews of the system have been attempted, and calls for better 'training' for Village Court officers are common, and often come from the

officers themselves, who aspire to the imagined knowledge and efficiency of officers of Local and District Courts.

There has never, however, been sufficient funding or administrative organisation to achieve more than a few workshops in regional centres for limited numbers of officers. Financial problems are exacerbated by a division between the executive administration of the system, vested in the Village Court Secretariat, and its financial administration. The remuneration of Village Court officers is not by salary but by ex gratia payment, and responsibility for provision of payments has shifted over time between different State organs. Most recently, in 1996, an organic law transferred financial responsibility to provincial governments. The Village Court Secretariat has subsequently attempted to implement this decision, but has found that a number of provincial governments are recalcitrant, and money received by them for Village Court remuneration is being used for other purposes.[5] In the National Capital District, financial responsibility is taken by the National Capital District Commission (NCDC), but payment is inefficient and funds frequently go missing.[6] The consequences are that Village Court officials often go for months without remuneration. Lack of payment is a constant source of frustration and anger for the officials, who (understandably) expect that it should be a simple matter to redistribute to them a proportion of the money they collect in Village Courts in the form of fines and which they deliver to authorities such as the NCDC or provincial governments.

Having introduced the Village Court System as an element of State, I will now turn to a description of the urban context of one Village Court, Erima, which the reader has already encountered in Chapter Five. The Village Court takes its name from a settlement roughly in the centre of the populous suburbs it serves. It is the busiest Village Court in Port Moresby and serves an area of more than 18 square kilometres.

The urban context: Erima settlement

The disputants who come to Erima Village Court reside in four densely populated suburbs, which have expanded in the northern part of the city since the late 1950s. In addition to several large high-covenant and low-covenant housing estates, the area contains a number of settlements. Erima itself is a legitimate self-help settlement area of rental plots on government land. Informal subdivision and subleasing of rented sites is not uncommon, resulting in great architectural diversity and a crowded atmosphere in some sections of the settlement, and a large and fluctuating population. It is a volatile habitat, since it contains a population of mixed migrant background from many regions of the country competing for housing and jobs and forced to share restricted space. Regional groups form enclaves within its general boundaries and try to get along with their neighbours as best they can. Violent confrontations are common, especially when alcohol consumption exacerbates chronic friction among diverse and mutually suspicious micro-ethnic groups.

　　　The potential for continuing friction to destroy the community is offset by a sense of unity against outside forces. Settlements are represented by the popular media as criminogenic and are constant targets for police raids as the State attempts to demonstrate efficiency in the fight against endemic crime (see Chapter One; also Dinnen 2001: 63–5). In addition, settlements such as Erima are being constantly 'researched' by officialdom, welfare-oriented organisations and academics, mostly working in teams, who legitimise their intrusion with assurances that research findings will result in better conditions and services. The failure of such assurances ever to come to fruition has made settlement-dwellers cynical and occasionally hostile towards outsiders who descend on them to ask questions and pry into their affairs. Negative experiences such as these contribute to a strong sense of territoriality in

the settlement as a whole, and a pronounced communal guardedness of the habitat they have created for themselves. Like a large, fractious family, they bicker and fight among themselves yet present a united front towards any outsider who does not have 'connections' within the settlement. Episodes of sometimes violent confrontation among themselves are followed by processes of reconciliation (though rarely complete resolution) in relatively short order, partially under the impetus of a shared sense of their need to maintain reasonable solidarity as a residential community.

When disputes occur, settlement-dwellers have a range of potential resources, amounting to neo-customary dispute-management procedures (Goddard 2000b: 244), which are used in preference to Local or District Courts to contain their problems within the community. Taking small disputes to Local and District Courts involves a risk of legal complications, unforeseen costs and technicalities that threaten the degree of control the community has over its own affairs. In many local communities in Papua New Guinea, including settlements such as Erima, social organisation is intrinsically connected with the social activity of various Christian church denominations, and consultation with church deacons or other officers provides a forum for the settlement of family and other local disputes. Most settlements also have at least one secular committee to address socioeconomic problems of the community in general, and these can be used as a dispute-settling resource, depending on the nature of the dispute. In addition, micro-ethnic groups within the community often form their own self-help associations (linked to networks of political micro-ethnic associations across the country) and, again, disputes of certain types can be taken to these groups. In comparison, the Village Court is a more formal and more public forum, which can serve several purposes for an aggrieved disputant: it is adjudicatory rather than arbitrational, monetary compensation for the aggrieved can be ordered (and

usually is) and the accused can be subjected to the censorious and shaming attention of a large crowd.

Despite the polemical connection made by politicians and the media between settlements, unemployment and crime, Erima, like most settlements around Port Moresby, contains a mixture of employed and unemployed people, who are mostly law abiding. On weekdays, those in formal employment leave the settlement in the morning and return in the late afternoon. During a large part of the day, Erima becomes the precinct not only of small children, housewives and the elderly, but of the unemployed and those in informal money-earning activities. It is a hive of activity in this respect. In addition to the smallgoods, soft drinks and black market beer sold from a sprinkling of tiny trade stores and 'tucker boxes', betel nut and baked or fried snacks are sold from small stalls in the settlement's pathways. Card games, bingo games and dart-throwing competitions, all played for money, are endemic. Small-scale usury is a common practice. These and other activities redistribute money through the community but are also opportunities for their organisers to gain some measure of local social prestige. Other opportunities for prestige in the settlement community are offered by church-related activities and membership of the various committees set up to protect and improve the living conditions of settlement-dwellers. Men, in particular, vie for membership and positions of authority in these committees to enhance their own prestige and gain at least a degree of control over their immediate social environment.

The Village Court offers an opportunity for prestige and authority, though without great monetary prospects. A number of magistrates are elected or re-elected by the community periodically, and then choose from among themselves a chairperson and deputy chairperson. The court also requires a court clerk and a number of functionaries officially called peace officers. All Village Court members are supposed to be issued

with a uniform of blue shirt and trousers and fabric badges of office. In practice, the uniforms are issued rarely and haphazardly by governing authorities who give little attention to the needs of Village Courts. Magistrates and peace officers covet these symbols of authority and wear them with pride, even when they have become ragged and threadbare with age. The various positions in the Village Court, then, provide an opportunity for the symbolic and practical expression of authority and are often sought by men with little education or vocational or professional training, some of whom hope the court will serve as a vehicle to higher goals, such as careers in politics or public service administration. At the same time, many Village Court magistrates are as much, or perhaps more, preoccupied with the good of the community than with achieving an elevated status. An example of the latter is Andrew Kadeullo, who is at the centre of the narrative to which I will now turn.

The rise and fall of Chairman Andrew

Andrew Kadeullo migrated to Port Moresby from Milne Bay in the late 1960s and worked his way up to what appeared to be a secure clerical position in a govenment office, but illness, involving hospitalisation, cost him his job. By then, he was married and had children at school, so he decided to stay in the capital city and obtained a block of land in Erima settlement, where he built a small house. He immersed himself in community work, while looking for reasonable employment, and soon found himself on the settlement's self-help committee. Here, his clerical background proved an asset for the settlement community. He knew how to handle paperwork, a valuable resource for the growing number of migrants negotiating with city authorities for land blocks and amenities in the sprawling settlement. His clerical skills also drew him into service in Erima Village Court.

His problem-solving abilities were noticed by the court's ageing chairman. According to Andrew, the old man groomed him as a successor, teaching him all he needed to know, ensuring his election as the next chairman and, having passed on his mantle, dying peacefully shortly afterwards. Andrew attributed his skills as a magistrate to this personal schooling and saw his work as a mission. Each Village Court has several magistrates, usually elected by the community they serve, and these in turn choose one of their number to be the chairman. Andrew was continually re-elected and was known commonly as 'Chairman Andrew' throughout the community at large. It was in this role that I first encountered him in the early 1990s, when I travelled the country looking at rural and urban Village Courts in action and talking with Village Court officials. Chairman Andrew struck me as unusually insightful about his work, compared with the other magistrates I had spoken to. Erima Village Court had the highest case load of any that I saw, serving an extremely mixed and volatile population of migrants from all over the country. Subsequently, in 1994, I chose Erima as one of three Village Courts around Port Moresby to monitor over a period of several months. Among other things, I was curious to see how Andrew and his fellow magistrates coped with the very heavy case load at Erima (far greater than those of the other two Village Courts combined) and how he negotiated the cultural and regional variations among court users, in light of the directive that Village Courts should follow 'local custom' as much as possible.

Like many Village Court magistrates, Andrew dichotomised 'law' and 'custom' discursively, and regarded it as a duty to be as knowledgeable of disputants' local customs as possible. This was a particularly daunting prospect in Erima Village Court, which Andrew described hyperbolically as catering to migrants from every province of the country. In practice, however, I found that Andrew worked with a

commonsense knowledge of regional variation in attitudes toward matters such as social obligation, reciprocation and compensation and subscribed to common urban stereotypic representations of the character traits of regional groups. It seemed to me that his success as a Village Court magistrate owed little to the idealised customary knowledge to which he aspired and much more to his understanding of the social and local historical context of the disputes he heard, his remarkable memory and a commitment to the wellbeing of the settler community at large. He was also expert at subtle persuasion. Village Court decisions should reflect the deliberations of all the magistrates who sit on the case (this must be at least three by law, and was often five at Erima). Andrew never perceivably forced his fellow magistrates to bring their often wildly disparate views on guilt or penalties into consonance with his own, but his own conclusions always prevailed in the corporate announcement of the court's decision.

In the early weeks of my observations, court decisions sometimes appeared strange to me, though in the interests of cultural relativism I withheld judgment on their fairness or rationality. Asking for explanations of various decisions at the end of a day's hearings, I would invariably receive a lesson in social and historical contextualisation and the politics of settlement life, and a demonstration of Andrew's memory and local knowledge. He would give me a long history of previous encounters with the disputants, their social relations with each other and the wider community. He would detail at length the ramifications of the decisions and the potential ramifications of possible alternative decisions. These explanations traversed socioeconomic considerations, micro-ethnic relations and networks of marriage and other social relations throughout the various settlements of the north-east area of Port Moresby that the court served. I found them dizzying in their complexity, but they made sense of the decisions, fitting them into wide-ranging

strategies managing the wellbeing of the community at large. An apparently unfair decision of the moment became contextualised, for example, in a long-term manoeuvre to extricate a woman from a violent marriage or to save a threatened relationship, or to avoid inter-ethnic violence, or other consequences destabilising settlement community life.

The official Village Court handbook, which Andrew knew by heart, recommended that mediation should be attempted, where appropriate, before disputes reached formal Village Court hearings. Andrew's dispute-management strategies, however, transcended these procedures. I became accustomed to the frustration of listening to a complex dispute, which was eventually adjourned to the next week's hearing, only to find when the subsequent court hearing took place that the case had mysteriously disappeared in the interim. Usually, this meant Andrew had effected some kind of truce or even a solution through meetings with the disputants at his house. Somehow he kept an account of these labyrinthine dealings, for the Village Court records were faultless. This was despite the shortcomings of the court clerks who came and went over the years and who displayed varying levels of commitment, integrity and competence. Through a variety of diplomatic strategies, during and between court hearings, Andrew would make sure their mistakes were corrected, their lapses breached and, if necessary, their incompetence masked.

Clearly, Andrew controlled the Village Court, one way or another. The weekly hearings began at 9am and continued through to the evening. This was an arduous day, and Andrew would occasionally declare himself in need of a rest, retiring to the rear of the court area to chew betel nut while the deputy chairman and fellow magistrates managed a case or two. But even on these occasions he watched and listened, drifting in during the magistrates' deliberations to guide the discussion to a decision that his fellows regarded as their own. There is legal

provision for disputants to appeal against a decision of the Village Court, taking the matter to the District Court, and appellants were as prevalent in Erima Village Court as in any other. While Andrew's decisions may have been in the best interests of the community at large, they did not always suit the individuals immediately involved in the disputes. Weekly trips to the District Court were part of Andrew's routine. The appeals were rarely successful. Andrew was as persuasive of his legal superiors as he was of his fellow Village Court officials. There seemed no malice in the appeals: indeed, Andrew appeared to regard them as a kind of battle of wits and he announced his rare losses publicly in the Village Court when a case returned to be reheard, or a fine was reduced by order.

The community at large regarded Andrew with great respect. Slight of build and extremely mild in disposition, he made no gestures of self importance or patronage. There was a general recognition that he was a man of integrity with the best interests of the community at heart and his skills as a resolver of disputes were rewarded with a steady trickle of gifts of betel nut, beer and food items to his house. There were six other magistrates in Erima Village Court, of varying competence and commitment. Andrew worked with them as best he could, as they were elected by the community and he could do little about those he privately regarded as incompetent or lax. The fellow magistrate he regarded most highly was Reto (not his real name), a man very different from himself in temperament and background. Reto was from the Southern Highlands district. He was an ageing rogue, a hard-drinking gambler incessantly in search of cash by dubious means, for he was formally unemployed. He had begun his involvement with the Village Court as a peace officer, delivering summonses and acting as an executive servant of the magistrates. Andrew had encouraged Reto to become a magistrate, he told me, because he was tough and courageous, frightened of no one, despite his age and short

stature. He could not be intimidated and for this he had the respect of many people, despite them being exasperated by his roguish behaviour.

As a magistrate, Reto provided a marked contrast in behaviour to Andrew. Where Andrew was patient and polite to disputants who displayed recalcitrance or hostility before the court, Reto was intolerant and snarling: he imposed fines for 'contempt' with little provocation and dismissed cases if complainants could not or would not make themselves clear. He had no time for rambling explanations; the wordy were curtly told to get to the point. He swung unpredictably from bawdy humour to bad temper. When Andrew and Reto shared the bench to hear a case, they were a complementary pair: Reto's fiery presence and intimidating style could quickly undermine prevarication and webs of deceit, after which Andrew would guide the court towards fair and reasonable outcomes. In an election held among the magistrates in 1993, Reto became deputy chairman, a position offering him a rare opportunity for prestige in the urban settlement community. This was important to him, for he was too old and did not have the resources to achieve big-man status through the manipulation of exchange relationships as he might have in his natal place. Here, in an urban settlement, he was given the opportunity to belatedly achieve a position of prestige by other means.

Reto's strengths as a Village Court deputy chairman were challenged chronically by his extrajudicial failings. His drunkenness got him into trouble time and again, as did his various intrigues in pursuit of money — he was frequently obliged to appear before the very court he served on, as a result of petty disputes. Also, he was illiterate and lacked a sophisticated grasp of the areas of law within which the Village Court was obliged to function. Among chairmen and deputy chairmen in rural Village Courts these do not amount to problematic shortcomings, but urban Village Courts such as

Erima have much more contact with other arms of the judiciary and bureaucracy and Reto's lack of knowledge in these areas meant Andrew had no relief from dealing with these aspects of court work. Andrew bore this extra burden without complaint and considered that Reto's practical strengths as a magistrate made him a worthwhile deputy. In the intra-magisterial elections in late 1994, however, Reto was not re-elected to this office, possibly due to his fellow magistrates' misgivings about the amount of trouble he got into. Replaced as deputy, he continued to serve as a magistrate. He was clearly disappointed not to have been re-elected deputy, and his attendance subsequently became erratic.

A few weeks after Reto lost the deputy chairmanship, I moved from Papua New Guinea and was no longer able to monitor Erima or the other courts intensively. I paid yearly visits to the country, however, and was able to periodically investigate the state of the three Village Courts and the fortunes of their magistrates. Erima Court remained relatively stable, Reto seemingly reconciled with his loss of the deputy-chairman position, and Andrew presiding as ever over a volatile but manageable cohort of magistrates, peace officers and successive court clerks. I had come to regard Andrew as an ideal urban Village Court magistrate. Wise, fair, combining formal and informal notions of justice with Solomonic integrity, respected by everybody, he guided his erratic fellow magistrates with patience and good grace toward decisions in the best interest of the community. Given the difficulty facing a Village Court trying to manage the chronic friction attending such a volatile, regionally mixed community and having watched all the magistrates in action, I found it impossible to imagine Erima Village Court without Andrew at its helm.

When I visited Erima in 1998, the unimaginable had happened. Andrew had recently been deposed and Reto was the chairman. Reto himself fobbed off my requests for explanation by

joking and changing the subject. Andrew and the other magistrates were more forthcoming and I was able to piece together the chain of events. A few weeks previously, Reto had suddenly accused Andrew of misappropriating his fellow Village Court officers' financial entitlements, paid out by the NCDC. These entitlements were supposed to be regular small payments funded from the fines imposed by Village Courts in the National Captial District and were collected from a central office by Village Court chairmen, who distributed them to their fellow officers. In practice, the financial affairs of the Village Court System and the NCDC were chaotic. Payments rarely came through and Village Court officers often went for months without receiving their modest allowance. Unable to grasp why there was no money, Village Court officers throughout the district functioned in a climate of frustration and of suspicion of each other. As it was usually a chairman's lot to return from the NCDC office with the news that there had been no payout, chairmen themselves were commonly suspected of stealing the allowances.

Andrew had been shocked at his colleague's sudden accusation, but as his integrity was being questioned he had immediately stood himself down from the chairing position, forcing an election among the magistrates. He had expected support from his fellows, but they elected the self-nominated Reto as the new chairman. Magistrates told me Reto achieved this result by simple gifting (common at all levels of politics in Papua New Guinea). Moments before the vote, Reto had pressed money into the hand of each magistrate. The imperatives of the gift permeate all areas of Melanesian society: Reto's aggressive, carefully timed gifting would have been almost impossible to refuse and obligated his fellows to give him their vote. Andrew had never used such a direct method to achieve his own ends and was taken by surprise.

The magistrates soon regretted their election of Reto. Once in the chair, he became publicly autocratic, imposing his

own will irrascibly on court decisions and alienating his colleagues. His judgments proved to be hasty, erratic and harsh, and lacked the systematic rationality of the judgments made under Andrew's leadership. Appeals against court decisions increased greatly in number. Reto had no understanding of judicial processes beyond his own experiences in the Village Court and was unable to negotiate the appeal process in the District Court. This task fell back to Andrew, who was now faced with chronic defeat and embarrassment in the Appeals Court since Reto's idiosyncratic judgments, unlike his own, were indefensible. It was, in fact, through a consequence of a successful appeal that I first learned, on the first morning when I revisited Erima in 1998, that he was no longer the chairman. Approaching his house, I was greeted by his wife, Dai, with the news that Andrew was too embarrassed to see me because he was showing the effects of a beer-drinking session the previous night. A disputant had appealed against a decision by Reto, and had won the encounter with Andrew in the District Court. The disputant, recognising that Andrew was attempting to defend a judgment he would never have made himself, sympathised with the communally respected ex-chairman and, to show his goodwill, bought a case of beer, which they consumed together.

Not only had the magistrates come to regret electing Reto, they had realised that Andrew had been falsely accused of misappropriation and they had asked him to return to the chairmanship. Andrew had refused. Not only would this have to be done properly by another election (and unless Reto did something blatantly criminal or was physically unable to perform his duties an election was not due for some time), but he had been insulted. He expressed a willingness to continue to handle the District Court appeals and carry the clerical load — nominally there was a court clerk but his work needed correction, and Reto's idiosyncratic decisions made the clerical work even more daunting — but he was not ready for complete

reconciliation with his doubting colleagues. No longer in a position to fully control process and judgment in the Village Court, Andrew was now working harder than ever. His time was increasingly taken up with book work, appeals cases and behind-the-scenes mediation and negotiation with court disputants to prevent what he saw as the social damage that Reto's erratic judgments threatened to bring about.

In 1999, I returned to pursue four months of follow-up research in the same three Village Vourts. I found Erima Village Court in uproar. Reto had clung to his chairmanship in the year since I had last visited, but had recently been caught out in exactly the activity he had accused Andrew of. An internal shake-up in the NCDC had resulted in a well-publicised large payout of overdue allowances to Village Court chairmen for distribution. There was clear evidence that Reto had collected the money for Erima Village Court officers, but it had never been distributed. It was never found and Reto pleaded ignorance of what had happened to it. Legally lacking evidence to prosecute Reto, the NCDC nevertheless refused to countenance his continuance as chairman, as did his outraged fellow magistrates. Although this was Andrew's chance to return to the chair, he simply refused to be nominated. He was still smarting from the lack of support shown by his fellow magistrates when Reto had accused him of misappropriation, and he was exhausted from attempting to contain the various consequences of Reto's leadership of the court.

The court had certainly fallen into disarray, ridden with blatant factionalism as various ambitious magistrates had jockeyed to overcome the autocratic leadership of Reto. The case load had increased through the inefficiency of the court and the large numbers of re-hearings as the District Court upheld appeals. Erima Village Court was now sitting two full days a week, where previously it had managed to process its case load through single weekly hearings. Shortly after I resumed

research, the magistrates met and, under the scrutiny of an NCDC officer to ensure fairness, elected a new chairman. The new chairman immediately gave a speech in which he acknowledged Andrew's long service in the chair and reaffirmed the court's trust in him, making it clear that his wisdom and clerical skills would be relied on in the future. Nothing was said about Reto. The latter prowled in the background accusing the group as a whole of a lack of trust in him and he eventually stamped out of the court area and disappeared.

The new chairman proved during the next few weeks to be competent, but relied heavily on Andrew's procedural and book work knowledge. In effect, Andrew was less burdened than during Reto's leadership but still working very hard. A constant stream of disputants visited his house, as they always had, for informal resolutions or to seek advice on how they should respond to developments in court or prepare for upcoming court appearances. He was still referred to in the community at large as Chairman Andrew, and seemed to be settling into an avuncular role in relation to the Village Court.

Meanwhile, Reto had acquired a document from the Village Court Secretariat (which all the other Village Court officials assured me was forged) stating that although he could no longer be chairman, he could still serve as a magistrate. Four weeks after his walkout, he appeared at the beginning of a day's hearings, thrust the document at the new chairman and sat himself on the magistrates' bench. He was unchallenged and effectively returned to the role he had fulfilled before he had accused Andrew of misappropriation a year previously. For his part, Andrew appeared to bear him no particular ill will and continued to represent him to me as a good inquisitorial magistrate. During the rest of my research period, Andrew continued to pursue his mission of ensuring justice and peace as far as he could in the community at large and when I finished my research he still appeared to have no wish to regain the chairmanship of the Village Court.

On a subsequent short visit in 2001, I found Andrew still serving as an avuncular advisor and substituting for an unreliable court clerk. Reto had been dismissed from service by the Village Court Secretariat. Andrew told me this was the result of complaints by the other magistrates, who would not tolerate his presence in the long term. At the time of my visit, Reto was serving as a security guard in a nearby produce market.

The Village Court in local praxis

The foregoing narrative discloses a complex engagement between the local community and the Village Court in which the court, as an element of State, undergoes a degree of transformation under the exigencies of community life and, at the same time, can be transformative of the projects of individuals in the community. As I noted earlier, as far as their practical operation is concerned, Village Courts have become institutionalised somewhere between autochthonous dispute-settlement procedures and Local and District Courts. For settlement-dwellers, the urban Village Court is a resource used strategically in relation to a number of others, such as church and settlement committees, which have developed organically from the complexities of settlement life. At the same time, it is an alternative forum to the Local and District Courts. Many settlement-dwellers prefer not to use the latter in the first instance, but nevertheless appeal to them if they are dissatisfied with the outcome of a Village Court hearing. Consequently, Erima Village Court fulfils neither John Kaputin's rhetorical prophesy of the enshrinement of 'customary law' in national law (1975: 12), nor the intention of legal planners that it would gather informal dispute-settlement procedures into the centralised legal system (Bayne 1975: 33).

Further, inasmuch as Village Courts were intended to settle intra-community disputes and restore community peace and harmony, Chairman Andrew's decisions on individual cases

disclosed the contradiction embedded in the adjudicatory project of the Village Court System. In the 1960s, the mooting of some form of 'native courts' was informed partially by concern about the contrast between the introduced law's procedural emphasis on producing a winning litigant and customary Melanesian concern with the maintenance of community stability (Chalmers 1978b: 57ff.). Nevertheless, the strictures of the Village Court System's origins in State planning and the categorisation of the Village Court as a legal forum — however informal and putatively informed by local 'custom' — commit Village Courts to the ideal of abstract and impartial justice administered to the two parties before the court. In Erima Village Court (like others I have seen in action), this ideal frequently gives way to the need to maintain community harmony.[7] Indeed, Peter Lawrence's apt comment on the maxim *Fiat justitia ruat coelum*, that Melanesians are more concerned with keeping the sky up (Lawrence 1970: 46), is manifest in Andrew's preoccupations.[8] Andrew was obliged to deal with the adjudicatory contradiction by negotiating with disputants informally outside the Village Court and (in the case of appeals) by exercising his skills of persuasion in the District Court. Andrew's manipulations indicate that Village Courts have not ameliorated the problem that concerned legal planners in the late colonial period, but rather have become intrinsic in the unresolved dialectic between legal and social exigencies in communities such as Erima.

The use of legally untrained community members as Village Court magistrates, related to an imagined reliance on expertise in 'custom' in Village Court decisions, has contributed significantly to the adjudicatory contradiction. Magistrates are aware that they are not supposed to show bias and routinely remove themselves from hearing individual cases if a kinsperson is involved, but their participation in the community's social life prevents them from taking the disinterested position implicit in

the courts' terms of reference, even though they may not be as consciously protective of the community as Chairman Andrew. The involvement of local community members draws the Village Courts into other dimensions of local sociality as well, as the toppling of Andrew from the chair shows. My own assessment of Andrew after a few months of fieldwork had been that he was indispensable as the chairman of Erima Village Court, based on observation of his remarkable skills for solving disputes, managing community tensions and discord and keeping the court's juridical affairs in order. But I had not taken account of the degree to which the Village Court was articulated into the community's political life.

Nobody denied Andrew's wisdom and skill, and I doubt that anyone in the community would have questioned his appropriateness as chairing magistrate according to the criteria I had used. But his long-proven trouble-managing ability was not enough to preserve him when Reto seized his chance. Perhaps unspoken jealousies among his fellow magistrates about his status played a part, in addition to suspicions generated by the constant non-arrival of their payments. Certainly, the Village Court chair was a coveted position, but few of the other magistrates would have had the temerity to publicly accuse Andrew of misappropriation in order to replace him. Crude as it may seem, Reto's accusation exploited the chronic issue of non-payment which has vexed magistrates throughout the National Capital District and which is raised constantly in meetings at the end of court days, at which court officers discuss administrative affairs. Andrew played into Reto's hands by suspending himself from the chair and calling for an election. Simple gifting elicited a cultural response, which superceded any considerations related to Village Court administration, such as Andrew's character, past record and chairing skills, or concern for the efficient running of the court.

For Reto, the deposing of his mentor served his own drive to achieve belated big-man status in the settlement

community. His triumph quickly became hollow, however, as his unsuitability for the chairman's position became obvious. Yet in the aftermath of the deposing of Andrew, we see another aspect of the appropriation of the Village Court into local praxis. While the Village Court itself was in disarray, Andrew continued his role as a dispute manager to the community at large, albeit beset by the complications wrought by Reto. Importantly, Andrew's dispute managing took place largely beyond the formal precincts of the Village Court, away from the public gaze. The ambiguity of the Village Court's role in the community's pursuit of justice is visible in this divergence. Not only is the Village Court the most formal of a number of resources available in the community for dispute managing, it is an arena where the complainant can bring the censorious gaze of the public onto the other party, adding shame to the weight of accusation. The complexities of mollification, compensation and reconciliation can often be dealt with outside this theatrical space. Thus, even with the incompetent and autocratic Reto in the chair, the Village Court serves usefully to certain ends, while judicial outcomes can be pursued beyond it.

Reto's subsequent fall, and Andrew's ambivalence about returning to the chair while remaining integral to the court's operations, indicate that his status transcended the nominal position at the head of the Village Court, although the chairmanship had contributed to the development of his status. While he was hurt by Reto's accusation and the immediate lack of support shown by his fellow magistrates, Andrew remained secure in the value that the community at large placed on his wisdom. Indeed, he continued to be called Chairman Andrew regardless of the chairmanship of Reto or his successor. Andrew had never flaunted his big-man status and did not need to reassert himself by attempting to reclaim the nominal chairmanship after Reto fell from grace. While the Village Court served as a vehicle for the pursuit of individual status, its

integration into the community, by virtue of its officers being community members, militated against its exclusivity as a road to prominence. Reto was undone not only by misappropriating payments, but by his behaviour and reputation within the community at large. The Village Court, the financial dysfunction of the NCDC and the consequent climate of frustration and suppressed distrust among court officers provided Reto with his chance, but he had none of the other qualities he needed to pursue the kind of status Andrew had achieved through the Village Court.

Conclusion

Returning to Migdal's State-in-society model, and his observation that the engagement between the State and social forces might be mutually empowering in some instances and a struggle for agency in others, often marked by mutually exclusive goals (Migdal 1994: 24), I think my narrative demonstrates this well enough. Certainly, Village Courts make the justice system accessible to grassroots communities and simultaneously bring some (but certainly not all) unofficial dispute-settlement procedures into the centralised system, as State planners intended. They offer an opportunity for status and the authoritative management of community problems, to the advantage of the grassroots communities they serve. Yet mutually exclusive goals are certainly evident in the contradiction between the State justice system's imperative of justice for disputants, and magistrates' attempts to weigh matters of individual guilt and punishment against wider communal issues. And further, where Andrew's benevolent intent as a magistrate exemplifies the ideals of 'grassroots justice' embedded in the original model of the Village Court System, a very different goal is evident in Reto's ruthless lack of concern for the same ideals in his own quest for status. At the same time, in such examples as the exploitation by Reto of the NCDC's financial dysfunction,

we have seen the effects within the community of its administrative connection with other elements of State. In these and other linkages and disjunctions evident in the foregoing narrative, the Village Court serves as a handy example of Migdal's basic argument about the lack of autonomy of the State from social forces, and the need to view States in their social contexts.

But importantly, we have also seen that the Village Court, an element of the State, has been transformed in the dialectical relationship with community praxis, a matter that Migdal's model does not appear to address. This transformation is due partly to the Village Court System's social permeability, staffed as it is by members of the community it serves, which enables its political appropriation into the sociality of the community. In the context of a long history of creative appropriation of introduced institutions into Melanesian praxis since the late 19th century, this last observation is unremarkable, at least in social anthropological terms. Indeed, in observing the Village Court in relation to State and local community praxis we simply serve a contemporary imperative for anthropology to contextualise its traditionally localised research in wider social, economic and political processes (preferably without sacrificing the central place of ethnography in our endeavour). Certainly we should not conceive of the State analytically as autonomous from social forces, and Migdal's model, gathering in themes already explored by social scientists, has heuristic value, particularly in respect of Melanesian societies. But we should be careful to employ the model in such a way as to admit the dynamism and creativity of social life and the continuing transformations in the State in all its aspects and the local communities with which it is intimately engaged.

ENDNOTES

1   Standish refers to some Africanist literature along similar lines from the 1970s (1981: 44–9), with which I am not familiar, but which encourages an inference that the thematic substance of Migdal's model is not particularly new.

2   I use this term in the dialectical sense (the negation of the negation) elaborated in regard to the social subject by Marx in his critique of the Hegelian dialectic (Marx 1974: 124–47).

3   The first elections for Papua New Guinea's House of Assembly (which succeeded the Legislative Council) were held in 1964. Thirty-eight of the 64 members were Papua New Guinean.

4   Read September 2,8 1973, recorded in *Hansard* Vol. III, No. 21, p. 2881.

5   Personal communication, Village Court Secretary, March 1999.

6   There is nowadays a general assumption in Papua New Guinea that corruption is a natural attribute of government and public service institutions, and bureaucratic inefficiency is also rife, as are heists and cash theft. The payout office of the NCDC has experienced robbery and theft several times in the past decade.

7   An example can be found in my account of a case in which an arguably innocent woman was found guilty of a sorcery-related offence to satisfy community expectations, but was subsequently extricated from the punishment process by Andrew's skilful handling of paperwork (Goddard 1996).

8   I presented an abridged version of this chapter in a seminar at the Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies, Australian National University. During discussion, Anton Ploeg observed, in respect of the customary orientation that Village Courts were intended to have, that the behaviour of those involved in Erima Village Court actually exemplified Melanesian custom. I agree, but this customary behaviour is not of the same order as the imagined 'local customs', which late colonial planners were attempting to appropriate into juridical consideration.

THE AGE OF STEAM
Constructed identity and recalcitrant youth

Introduction

In recent times, there has been an interdisciplinary turn among scholars and researchers of the Pacific Islands to the exploration of alternatives to retributive or punitive justice. The concept of 'restorative justice' in particular has become attractive to sociologists, criminologists and anthropologists, for worthwhile reasons. Restorative justice aims to restore social harmony, make amends to victims and reintegrate offenders into the community (see, eg, Braithwaite 1999: 4–6; Dinnen 1997: 254–5). Prefacing a careful appraisal of optimistic and negative accounts of restorative justice, Braithwaite has made the seemingly innocuous comment that restorative justice is present particularly in the families, schools and churches of all cultures, and that 'all cultures must adapt their restorative traditions in ways that are culturally meaningful to them' (Brathwaite 1999: 6). As an anthropologist, however, I approach matters of tradition and cultural meaning with a great deal of caution since the more closely one examines

them, the more equivocal they invariably prove to be. In this chapter, about a peri-urban village, I contextualise a judicial process that might be glossed as restorative in issues of communal identity, the interpretation of tradition and the negotiation of modern sociality.[1] I hope to show here that restorative justice cannot be analytically abstracted from its immediate social context, and that within that context it can founder on the contestability of the cultural meaning it is putatively adapted to.

In respect of 'tradition', a body of literature emerged in the 1980s examining the way this can be a conscious invention, a 'creative fashioning of the past in the present' (Turner 1997: 347), often to serve political ends (cf. Keesing and Tonkinson 1982; Hobsbawm and Ranger 1992; Hanson 1989; Carrier 1992: 19). James West Turner, while acknowledging the usefulness of this literature in relation to discussions of history, social reproduction and change, has suggested that it was often based on a distorted view of the nature of tradition (Turner 1997: 347). He argues that more attention should be given to continuity and constraint in the so-called invention of tradition, pointing out that 'societies, like persons, are embedded in determinate pasts that limit and explain the process of self-identity' (1997: 356–7).

I bring these considerations to a discussion of a village on the edge of the city of Port Moresby, which is attempting to sustain its identity as a tradition-oriented moral community, despite its intimate relation to the growth of the modern city and its participation in its modern sociality. In this respect, the community is living out a contradiction, for it undoubtedly owes its putative integrity as a 'traditional' village to its involvement in the processes creating the modern environment whose profane influences it tries to resist. In particular, its early missionisation and the embeddedness of Christian principles and church activity in its modern sociality have enabled it to retain and regenerate its moral identity. Its ability to negotiate the contradiction between its sense of tradition and morality and its connectedness with the modern city has recently been challenged by the disruptive

behaviour of village youths. Their failure to respond to the community's established methods of restoring respectful social relations — arguably a version of restorative justice — is exposing the fragility of its self-image.

I begin with a discussion of the history of local engagement with Christianity and colonialism, and then move to a discussion of the village's perception of itself as a tradition-oriented community maintaining its integrity in the face of a profane modern sociality, represented by the adjacent city. I then address the community's negotiation of the contradiction between this perception and its inescapable socioeconomic intimacy with the city. In particular, I illustrate this negotiation at work in a restorative approach to disruptive behaviour, formally implemented in the Village Court. In the final section, I describe the court's apparent inability to deal in recent months with the recalcitrance of a number of village youths.

The history of Pari village

Pari village was founded in the late 18th century by a Western Motu cultural hero, Kevau Dagora. Earlier that century, the ancestral village of the Western Motu at Taurama, south-east of what is now Port Moresby, was destroyed by the Lakwaharu, the ancestors of the Eastern Motu. The inhabitants of Taurama village were massacred, with the exception of a pregnant woman who escaped and fled to her natal village, Badihagwa. She gave birth to a child, Kevau Dagora, who grew to manhood and led a successful attack on the Lakwaharu, avenging his father's people. He then established a village on the coast not far from the site of Taurama village, at a place called Tauata. Fish were plentiful in the area and it is said that humorous comments about the Tauata villagers' throats being permanently slick with the oil of fish led to the village being renamed Pari, which means 'wet' in Motu. This account of events, from the destruction of Taurama to the founding of Pari, is given consistently in oral histories (Oram 1968, 1981; Pulsford and Heni 1968) and its geographical and

temporal aspects are reasonably corroborated by archaeological evidence (Bulmer 1971; Golson 1968).

The residential group headed by Kevau Dagora was joined at Pari by other groups (these are known as *iduhu*, in the Motu language), including one led by a man called Vagi Boge. Vagi Boge's wife, Uguta[2] Vaina, is at the centre of a story that chartered the village's identity and behaviour as a moral community before the influence of Christianity. It is said that Uguta Vaina, pregnant to her husband, gave birth to five *kidukidu* (tuna) at the shore of an inland bay, now called Oyster Bay, which opens off a larger bay, now called Bootless Inlet.[3] Concealing this unusual event from her husband, she released the tuna into the bay and arranged to suckle them every day, summoning them by breaking a mangrove twig. Vagi Boge discovered the fish by accidently breaking a twig by the shore himself, and when they swam into the shallows he speared one (unaware of its origin) and took it home for a meal, which his anguished wife refused. She subsequently sent the remaining four tuna away to sea for safety and later she revealed to her husband that she had given birth to the *kidukidu*, and that he had killed his own child (Ikupu 1930; cf. Egi 1963; Gebai 1973; Kidu 1976; Pulsford 1975). As a result, when the tuna seasonally returned to the bay (between, roughly, May and October of each year), fishing was preceded and accompanied by strict taboos and many ritual activities (Ikupu 1930; Kidu 1976; Pulsford 1975). These included sequestration and sexual abstinence of intending fishers, and rituals accompanying every activity from the collection of materials for making nets through to the cooking of the fish after they were caught (*kidukidu* were not speared but taken from the water by hand). Moral behaviour in the village was said to affect the success of the fishing expeditions.

Taboos and rituals surrounding subsistence activities such as fishing by the Motu were not confined to Pari village. Groves reports similar net-making and fishing rituals surviving into the 1950s in Manumanu, a Motu village west of Port Moresby, where turtle, dugong and barramundi were caught (Groves 1957). The

identity of Pari, however, continues to be linked to tuna fishing in particular, and to the phenomenon of an annual journey by the fish from the sea into the inland bay where they obligingly swim an anticlockwise circuit into natural trenches in the floor of the bay to be corralled with nets by villagers. I have been told the story of Uguta Vaina many times, by villagers of all ages, though young people are less sure of the details. The rituals associated with tuna fishing have long disappeared from Pari village: their decline was recorded some decades ago by Pulsford (1975). The fish still swim into the bay, though there are fewer of them than in earlier times. In 1999 (my most recent visit), some villagers still moved to Daugolata, the fishing site at Oyster Bay, and camped during the tuna run. People told nostalgic stories of the rituals of the past and Pari was still celebrating, albeit with restraint, its intimate relation to *kidukidu.*

Kevau Dagora, the father of the village, and Uguta Vaina, the mother of tuna, are enduring and fundamental elements of Pari's identity as a community. But Pari's sociality, and that of Motu-Koita communities in general, was changed by the arrival of missionaries and, soon after, a colonial administration. The London Missionary Society was active in the area from 1872 and, from late 1874, missionaries were posted in local villages (Garrett 1985: 206–8). The first Papuan to be ordained by the London Missionary Society was Mahuru Gaudi, of Pari village, in 1883. The next year, Papua was declared a British Protectorate (known for a period as British New Guinea) and, in 1888, it became a Crown colony. The development of the principal town, Port Moresby, has been well documented (Oram 1976a; Stuart 1970), as have the effects of colonial administration and Christianity on the social activity of the Motu-Koita (cf. Austin 1978; Groves 1954; Oram 1976a, 1989; Robinson 1979; Rosenstiel 1953; Seligman 1910; Tarr 1973).

By the end of the colonial period, many ritual expressions of pre-colonial Motu-Koita culture had disappeared, most quickly in the western Motu villages immediately adjacent to Port Moresby

(Groves 1957), but eventually in all Motu-Koita communities. Under Christian pressure, traditional dancing was replaced by ersatz Polynesian dancing, which missionaries regarded as less sexually licentious, and later by European styles (Groves 1954, 1957). The lavish feasts described by Seligman (1910: 141–50), to which the dancing was often connected, also disappeared, and the *iduhu* leaders and other prominent men who organised such activities suffered a diminished public profile as a consequence (Groves 1954: 80–2; Gregory 1980: 630, 1982: 206). The Motu once undertook heroic and renown-winning trading voyages in large multihulled canoes to Papuan Gulf communities, where tonnes of clay cooking pots made by Motu women were exchanged for sago (Dutton 1982). These expeditions, known as *hiri*, gradually disappeared during the colonial era as the cash economy, wage labour and European goods became institutionalised.

Missionaries and the administration 'bought' land from the Motu-Koita, especially those of the Hanuabada village complex, initially paying with items of clothing and axes. Whether the Motu-Koita recognised this process as a land sale in the European sense is debatable: traditionally, land had either been taken by conquest in warfare or land use by outsiders was negotiated in terms of continuing tokens of reciprocation and goodwill. The administration's land acquisition procedure later included rental agreements and more substantial payments, but by the mid-20th century, local landholders had become alarmed by the growth of permanent infrastructure and buildings. By the end of the colonial era (the 1970s), the de facto loss of their land to what had become a city of migrants was developing into a major issue for the Motu-Koita (Oram 1976a: 175ff.). By the end of the 20th century, the potential total loss of their homelands had become a familiar political rhetoric (eg, Joku 1999; Kidu 1999; Nicholas 1998; Sefala 1999).

Church-related activities replaced many of the traditional practices referred to above. Church buildings became architectural centrepieces in a number of Motu villages, including Pari, and

church organisation was integrated into the social structure of the community. The Christian Gospels were translated into the Motu language by 1885 (Oram 1976a: 15). As old opportunities for acquiring prestige, such as organising *hiri* voyages and competitive dancing and feasting, began to disappear, men found new ways to gain high social standing by becoming church deacons and preachers. Educational opportunities were available through the mission schools and, taking advantage of these and proximate technical training facilities, many Motu-Koita became literate and well-qualified tradesmen and followed professional careers earlier than most other Papuan peoples (Oram 1976a: 52–7). Their adaptability to the changes being introduced by Europeans was such that an American researcher, in the climate of paternalistic colonialism of the mid-20th century, subtitled a doctoral thesis on the Motu, 'A study of successful acculturation' (Rosenstiel 1953).

In many respects, this general history of the Motu-Koita encounter with Christianity and colonialism encapsulates the particular history of Pari village. Traditionally, the villagers made pots for trade (Bulmer 1982: 122) and Pari was one of the western Motu villages involved in the *hiri* voyages. Like the other Motu-Koita villages, it came under the influence of the London Missionary Society (LMS) before Papua was officially colonised, with a resulting atrophy over several decades of much traditional dancing, ritual and other activity (Oram 1976a: 59, 1989: 56). The original limestone church built by the LMS has been replaced with a large modern church building representing the United Church (successor to the LMS in the region), which was built with the proceeds of donations from the village community. It is centrally placed and visually dominant as one enters the village.

Long contact with missionaries and proximity to Port Moresby and technical training opportunities contributed to increasing numbers of males being involved in non-traditional work, such as teaching, pastoring, carpentry and other trades, and professional careers. In 1933, two Pari men were among 12 medical students sent to Sydney University for training (*Papuan*

Villager 1933: 79; Oram 1976a: 54), and before long other local
people were moving into colonially created positions of high
social status. For example, Pari was the birthplace of one of Papua
New Guinea's first national political figures, Oala Oala-Rarua,
who worked his way from pastoring in early adulthood to senior
public service, union leadership, political candidature and, still in
his 30s, he became Mayor of Port Moresby and later Papua New
Guinea's High Commissioner to Australia.

    Like the Hanuabada complex, Pari was evacuated during
World War II, with serious repercussions for the population. The
LMS had conducted a census in 1888, when the village's 56 houses
were built in traditional line formations over the water. The
population then was 306 (Rosenstiel 1953: 145). By the 1940s, it
had grown to about 600. During the war, the villagers were shifted
to a new location to the east (Tarr 1973), and able-bodied men
were taken to work for the Australian military. The shift took a
mortal toll as a lack of gardening resources and poor nutrition made
evacuees vulnerable to illness. An official report noted the death of
48 evacuees of Pari in 1943–44 (Robinson 1979: 106),[4] a
significant proportion in itself, but, more tellingly, Tarr provides
figures showing that after able-bodied men (perhaps numbering
about 80 [Tarr 1973: 16]) were taken, the village's evacuee
population was 497 in January 1943; yet, after the able-bodied men
were returned, the population in October 1946 was only 477 (Tarr
1973: 22) — in other words, about one-sixth of the population had
died. Meanwhile, most of the houses had been destroyed as the
village had been looted for timber and garden produce (older
villagers told me Australian soldiers had been responsible) and it
had to be substantially rebuilt (Tarr 1973). As the village re-
established itself, houses began to be built on the land, although to
the present day lines of houses still extend over the water.

    After the war, trade goods became more available and
employment opportunities for villagers increased in the growing
town of Port Moresby. By 1970, Pari, about nine kilometres from
downtown Port Moresby and six kilometres from the nearest

suburb of Badili, was linked to the Port Moresby water supply and there was a bus service into town (Biddulph 1970: 23). At the time, it was reported that the majority of adult men worked in town, mostly in artisan positions, and about a quarter of the women were employed, mainly as clerical or shop assistants (Maddocks and Maddocks 1972: 227). By the 1990s, a significant proportion of village men were also employed in high-ranking district and national governmental positions, and women in administrative secretarial positions.

During the postwar colonial period, a number of Europeans married into or lived in Pari village, as a house-to-house genealogical survey conducted in 1974 revealed (Maddocks et al. 1974). Some of these people were active in the village's business and political affairs. For example, when Oala Oala-Rarua campaigned unsuccessfully in the 1977 national elections, his main village rival was William Rudd, the only European candidate in the recently created Moresby South electorate. Rudd became a resident of Pari village after marriage to a local woman in 1971. He was a research officer in the Ministry of Labour and Industry, and was encouraged by Pari villagers, having helped them in setting up businesses and having been instrumental in providing water supplies and resolving land disputes (Premdas and Steeves 1978: 31). A European doctor, Ian Maddocks, worked professionally in Pari in the 1960s (Maddocks 1971; Maddocks and Maddocks 1972, 1977), and specific research on health in the village was carried out by John Biddulph in the same period (Biddulph 1970). Other personal European influence in the village can be inferred from the relatively strong European support for Ana Frank, a carpenter's wife and indigenous missionary teacher, who competed with her fellow villager, Oala-Rarua, in the 1964 election (Hughes 1965: 349, 366), and whose mentor was alleged to be the European Girl Guides Commissioner (Hughes 1965: 349).

The foregoing evidence of their long history of Christianity and Western education, their close familiarity with Europeans in

the late colonial era and their involvement in the upper echelons of Port Moresby's public service and political life, implies that the people of Pari have become significantly modernised and integrated into the urban sociality of the adjacent city. As long ago as the early 1970s, Pari was described as 'a village undergoing rapid change — change in education, economy, communications and culture' (Biddulph 1970: 23), and Maddocks and Maddocks commented: 'Compared to most other populations of Papua New Guinea, the people of Pari are wealthy and well educated' (1972: 225). Pari, as a community, could reasonably be described as having developed a Christian, modern sociality.

Despite this objective representation, adult villagers regard Pari as having preserved a significant degree of tradition, relative to the modern sociality of Port Moresby. In this respect, it is common to hear them compare their own village with the Hanuabada complex, which they see as having lost its customs and capitulated to the mores of the city. Whether or not this comparison is accurate or reasonable, Hanuabada's alleged fall from the grace of tradition rhetorically serves Pari villagers' image of themselves as having maintained their integrity as a Motu-Koita village. The perseverance of the legends of Kevau Dagora and Uguta Vaina contribute to this self-image but are not sufficient in themselves to explain how a relatively affluent village with durable and dependent ties to the city can view itself as having resisted incorporation into its urban culture to any significant extent. In the following section, we shall see that the construction of Pari's oppositional identity is an example of what some writers have called the 'invention' of tradition, though, like Turner, I prefer to understand it as an interpretation of tradition, an enterprise that is creative but within limits imposed by the village's embeddedness in its determinate past (see Turner 1997: 347, 356–7). Necessarily, it combines indigenous elements and colonial elements of the historical processes described earlier.

The construction of Pari's modern identity

One relatively obvious feature of Pari's assertion of distinctiveness from Port Moresby is its politicising of language. This it shares with most other coastal Motu villages, including Hanuabada, in privileging its traditional language against the linguae francae. As Port Moresby is predominantly a migrant town, a majority of its people speak Papua New Guinea's main lingua franca, Tokpisin. A large part of Papua has its own lingua franca, 'Hiri' Motu (known in colonial times as Police Motu), developed originally from a simplified version of the Motu language. The mother language is commonly referred to as 'Pure' Motu. Older Motu villagers typically demonstrate a disdain for Tokpisin, which they regard as a crude language spoken by the uneducated. They regard Hiri Motu as a necessary compromise in communicating with other Papuan groups but do not encourage its use among themselves. Many Motu-Koita are fluent in English, the language of missionaries and of Western education, and prefer to use it when communicating with non-Motu speakers. Their pride in Pure Motu is historically reinforced by its having been recognised by early missionaries as an acceptable vehicle for the transmission of Christianity (see Garrett 1985: 211, 1992: 37).

Due to a long history of intermarriage with their traditional inland neighbours, the Koita, coastal Motu villages have a significant Koita presence, by the presence of nominally Koita *iduhu*, and more subtly by the weight of genealogical connections. Motu, however, dominates Koita linguistically as the spoken language.[5] While working in Pari village, it was acceptable for me to lapse into English in conversation, but I was humorously but firmly corrected whenever I lapsed into Hiri Motu, which villagers referred to as the 'Kerema' (ie, Gulf district migrants') version of their language. Pari has a significant 'Kerema' population, by virtue of in-migration by traditional trading partners from the Papuan Gulf area, and even has a recognised *iduhu* of Gulf people. Despite the condescending discursive linking of Hiri Motu with Kerema, the Motu villagers of Pari have

accepted the latter people as part of the community and there has been significant intermarriage over a number of decades.

Pari also shares with other Motu-Koita villages the retention of the corporate groups known as *iduhu* as a principle of social organisation. Mature villagers trace genealogies back to the 18th century, using a patrilineal idiom that admits cognatic elements. Through these means they link themselves to classical *iduhu* and *iduhu* leaders and identify with contemporary *iduhu* generated by fission, fusion and migration. *Iduhu* leaders inherit their position through agnatic primogeniture as a general rule. While many of the activities and symbols expressive of *iduhu* identity described nearly a century ago by Seligman (1910: 49–65) have long since disappeared, the corporate nature of *iduhu* in modern Pari remains the same as that implied in his explanations of descent, inheritance and marriage tendencies (1910: 66–91), and described in detail by Groves half a century later (Groves 1963).

In addition to these shared characteristics of the Motu-Koita in general, Pari's perception of its integrity as a village is fed by its pride in having retained its land, apart from an inland section about a kilometre and a half from the village area, which it sold in the late colonial period and which is now the site of the Taurama Military Barracks. The city has swallowed the Hanuabada area, and its suburbs have stretched several miles inland, but there is a clear stretch of land between its south-east suburbs and Pari village. The villagers regard as theirs all the land from the sea coast several hundred metres west of the village (that is, towards the city) through to inland Oyster Bay, some five kilometres behind the village. They have allowed a small community of settlers to inhabit a patch of land to the west and, while a few unapproved squatters have recently begun to appear among this group, the lack of infrastructural or migrant encroachment is a quiet triumph for a village so close to Port Moresby.

In maintaining its general landholding, the village has preserved in particular the geographical provenance of its moral

identity, on the shores of Oyster Bay. In 1975, discussing the decline of the ceremonial activity associated with tuna fishing, Pulsford raised the possibility of outside intrusion into the sacred site of Daugolata, where Uguta Vaina suckled her tuna children, with the continued growth of Port Moresby:

> Until 1973 [villagers] had succeeded in keeping settlers and most other intruders away, even though this spot is so close to Taurama Barracks and the heavily populated Port Moresby suburb of Boroko. The growth of urban Port Moresby threatens Pari's ability to hold it for their own to the exclusion of others. (Pulsford 1973: 112)

A quarter of a century later the threat has not yet been fulfilled and the tuna legend continues to receive sustenance from villagers' relatively exclusive access to Daugolata and the seasonal visits of tuna.

The central and most self-conscious focus of Pari's sense of integrity as a traditional community is its Christianity. Despite the fact that sorcery continues to be a powerful force in Motu society (as it does throughout Melanesia) and Pari villagers privately suspect various individuals in the community of such activity, demonstrating the resilience of non-Christian beliefs, Christianity has become a tradition in itself since its introduction in the late 19th century. Photographs and documents from the early days of colonialism have been preserved by some villagers with pride, including copies of a photograph of the village's original limestone church building. Among the Motu in general, the Christian church, as a social institution, was integrated into the structure of the traditional corporate groups (*iduhu*) by the early 20th century and traditional organised activities such as dancing and feasting were replaced by church-related activities organised by church deacons (Groves 1954). Such activities abound in modern Pari, where elected deacons head activity groups comprised of clusters of families. Church donation competitions provide church funds, as they do in other Motu villages (Gregory 1980).

In former times, the need for appropriate behaviour to ensure the success of tuna fishing had underpinned the village's sense of itself as a moral community. According to the village's central legend, after the realisation that in spearing Uguta Vaina's tuna her husband had killed his own child moral injunctions were issued to ensure the village's continued nourishment from the regular return of the tuna. Social behaviour was believed to have a bearing on the number of fish that would return to be corralled and caught. Pulsford's account of ceremonial tuna fishing lists a number of sins and lapses likely to keep the fish away from the nets, including broken household taboos, anger, stealing, adultery and failure to meet obligations, and adds that a dearth of tuna would generate speculation about wrongdoing, which led to open confession of sins (Pulsford 1975: 111).

While Pari was missionised in the late 19th century and Christianity quickly consolidated its presence in the village, it did not effect an immediate rejection of all traditional activities. In particular, the rituals associated with tuna fishing waned slowly. The eventual decline was due to many influences: the development of the cash economy drawing men to work in town; the advent of manufactured nets, which replaced handmade nets and rendered their accompanying rituals obsolete; the decision to bless the nets in church; and the Church's opposition to Sunday fishing (Pulsford 1975). By the time the rituals had disappeared, the United Church as an institution was so thoroughly integrated into Pari's sociality that its codes of morality had become a familiar discourse among villagers. Moreover, behaviour that offended the Christian God was the same as that which offended the sacred tuna. Consequently, by the end of the colonial era, the significance of the 18th-century birth and death of tuna remained a central theme in the village's historical identity, while the birth and death of Christ had become the new focus of its moral identity.

The early acceptance of Christianity, the self-conscious privileging of Pure Motu language and the retention of land,

including a focal sacred site, are major factors in the retention
and regeneration of Pari's perception of itself as a tradition-
oriented moral community. Yet the maintenance of this
perception requires the negotiation of contradictions grounded
particularly in the village's amenability to Christianity and the
colonial presence. Christianity and church-oriented social
activities nourished the moral identity that could have been lost
with the decline of ritualised tuna fishing, but Christianity also
provided educational opportunities and associated technical
training, which facilitated the villagers' access to more material
and profane colonial resources. Pari's orientation to 'tradition' is
not so rigid that the culture of commodities is rejected or the
allure of urban sociality resisted altogether. Nor are the villagers
collectively a model of Christian morality. Even church deacons
are susceptible to Port Moresby's worldly attractions.

Negotiating profane modern sociality

The most aggravating challenge to Pari's self-image as a peaceful,
moral community has come from alcohol. There are other
undercurrents of discontent in the village, generated, for
example, by competing claims over plots of gardening and
residential land, but drunkenness — usually at weekends — is
acknowledged by the community to be the most disruptive
influence affecting its sociality. This is not a new phenomenon —
it stems from the late colonial era (alcohol became legally
available to Papua New Guineans in 1962 and had been
obtainable, illegally, previously). Maddocks and Maddocks wrote
of the injuries treated at their medical clinic in the village in the
late 1960s: 'Severe lacerations were often *alcohol-related*,
stemming from fights which arose in drinking groups. Many
young men, reserved or even withdrawn when sober, become
violent when drunk' (Maddocks and Maddocks 1977: 112,
emphasis in orig.). There are no legal liquor outlets in the village,
but beer is easily obtainable in the city, and a small degree of
black-marketeering of beer through village trade stores is

countenanced as a commonsense acknowledgement of the inevitability of village men wanting to drink alcohol. Compared with alcohol consumption and related violence in the adjacent city, Pari's problem with alcohol is relatively slight. Nevertheless, the community regards drunkenness as particularly vexing. Not only can it result in fighting among drinkers, it loosens tongues. Polite, restrained language gives way to obscenity and the expression of normally private resentments.

Complaints about drunkenness are dealt with mostly in the Village Court (see Chapters Two, Five and Six). Individual Village Courts reflect the character of the particular local community they serve and each has a different 'style' shaped by the type of cases it mostly deals with and local notions of just solutions or punishments (cf. Goddard 2000b; Scaglion 1990; Westermark 1986; Young 1992; Zorn 1990).

Village Court hearings in Pari are conducted at the community hall, which is near the church building. The atmosphere of court hearings is extremely polite, reflecting the idealised personality of the village as a whole. The proceedings open and close with Christian prayers. Voices are rarely raised, magistrates' condemnations of the guilty, regardless of their severity, are delivered in a tone of gentle reproach. The majority of the cases heard are about drunkenness and are often the result of complaints by mature women that they were insulted by the behaviour and obscene language of drunkards. The strategy of the magistrates in dealing with these complaints reflects the village's self identification as a peaceful, Christian, moral community, and is aimed at the restoration of respectful social interaction rather than at punitive attempts to stamp out drunkenness. Older male villagers concede that they were once young and careless themselves, that many of them enjoy alcohol and are still susceptible to its intoxicating effects. It would be hypocritical, they say, to visit heavy penalties on youthful drunks. They are also concerned not to alienate young people by the imposition of stringent rules about alcohol consumption and severe penalties

for drunkenness, for fear of driving the youth from the village into the city and undermining the solidarity of Pari as a community.

In a small community such as Pari, anonymity is impossible, and gossip networks ensure that offences are public knowledge, sometimes within minutes of their occurrence. On court days, the names of disputants are called out across the village by the Village Court clerk at the beginning of the day. For offenders, there is thus no escape from public scrutiny. In the case of drunkenness, the public description of their behaviour and obscene language by the offended woman in court, repeated by the magistrates with deliberate clarity, is highly embarrassing for the now sober, polite young men. Magistrates tend to make a point of repeating the obscenities several times. A women's Christian fellowship group holds meetings in the nearby church at the same time that the weekly Village Court has its hearings. They sing *peroveta* (prophet) songs, whose exquisite harmonies and beatific lyrics drift across the main village area, providing a sonic background against which the obscenities of the accused sound all the worse.

Asked for an explanation of their utterances, the offenders are commonly reduced to shamed murmurs that they were drunk and had not meant what they said. The magistrates can prolong their discomfort by asking for clarification of the meaning of an obscene metaphor, or for an explanation of why they addressed their remarks to the particular female complainant, bringing the ordeal to an end with a moral lecture invariably referring to self and mutual respect, and rhetorically asking what the offender learned at school. A nominal fine (usually K5) is imposed. The final gesture of reparation is a public handshake between the complainant and the accused, after which both ritually shake hands with all court officials. The Village Court is the most formal of Pari's dispute-settling resources. Family problems and other frictions are often dealt with through mediation by church deacons. It is difficult to ascertain, from early descriptions of Motu-Koita society, whether public responses to offensive or

disruptive behaviour have always been restorative, rather than punitive. Seligman's early account of the Koita (which extended to the Motu) represented them as mild in disposition, while alluding to violent physical retaliation, as well as the employment of sorcery, against offences such as theft (Seligman 1910: 133). Sorcery, a secret activity, remains prevalent beneath the village's self-conscious Christian lawfulness and is a powerful sanction, but in modern Pari, restorative strategies have become institutionalised as the appropriate way to deal with offences against individuals or the community.

Through the Village Court, then, the community negotiates the most disruptive manifestation of the contradiction it cannot fully resolve in its Christian modern sociality. It is fiercely proud of its Motu-Koita identity, which it expresses through a neo-traditional morality centred around the integration of the Christian church into its sociality; yet it is inexorably connected with the modern city of Port Moresby, to which villagers commute to work and play, and of which they enjoy the material benefits, from late-model cars and electrical goods to alcohol. Through the public ritual of explicit descriptions of drunken behaviour and obscene language precipitating shame and expiation week by week in the Village Court, Pari reconciles itself with its susceptibility to the profane temptations of urban modern sociality.

The age of steam

In the late 1990s, Pari's ability to maintain its communal integrity was being challenged by some of the young people it had hitherto been able to restrain through the restorative techniques described above. The recalcitrant attitudes that were being displayed particularly among young males were in part the consequences of deterioration in the institutions put in place during the colonial era. Educational and technical institutions served Pari villagers, and the Motu-Koita in general, well to the end of the colonial era. They were pathways to employment and affluence, and the

villagers around Port Moresby — and in some other areas favourably settled by missionaries and colonial agencies along the Papuan coast in earlier times (Austin 1977) — had privileged access to them. But in recent decades serious inadequacies have become apparent in Papua New Guinea's schools and training facilities (eg, Gannicott 1993; Gibson and Iamo 1992; Stein 1991: 55–6). Schools have become run down and in some cases inoperative in the general climate of political-economic dysfunction in the country. National governance has become rife with corruption, mismanagement and inefficiency (Standish 1999: 4, and passim), which undermine policy intitiatives aimed at remedying the situation. Adolescents in Pari are understandably cynical about their parents' faith in the inevitable benefits of attending school and then tertiary or technical institutions.

The migrant population of Port Moresby is ever-increasing and competition for jobs is far greater among Papua New Guineans than it was even 20 years ago. The perception of younger Pari villagers, like that of urban Papua New Guineans in general, is that good jobs are less likely to be obtained through education or professional skills than through luck, or more commonly through the *wantok* system, a common urban catchcry referring to the aquisition of benefits, including high-ranking employment, through nepotism and patronage. The Motu-Koita no longer enjoy the same degree of dominance in prestigious positions as they did when Port Moresby was a small town and they were one of the few indigenous societies with the opportunity to claim eligibility for non-servile employment. The faith of older villagers in the values instilled by several generations of missionaries and colonial patrons is difficult for contemporary adolescents to share. Their disillusionment undermines their commitment to the neo-traditional ethos of the older villagers into which these values are integrated. For example, while everybody in the village knows that a woman is said to have given birth to tuna, some adolescents now are unsure

of her name and of many other details, such as how many tuna she gave birth to and the precise locations at which each successive event in the story occurred. The legends of the village, contextualised in the discourse of Pari's unique identity, its Christian morality and its reverence for 'tradition', are losing their relevance for these young people.

Where older villagers privilege the Pure Motu language, many adolescent males use among themselves the local street slang of young city-dwellers. Moresby street slang is a dynamic and evolving combination of English, Tokpisin and Hiri Motu, with its own shorthand devices and a phraseology adopted from local popular music or generated through spontaneous alliteration and other playful speech. In the presence of older villagers, this slang is usually suppressed, although its sexual metaphors in particular often emerge in drunkenness. The adolescents covet the free and easy, self-indulgent life that the street slang connotes and which local pop music videos portray as the modern, urban youth culture of the nation (cf. Gewertz and Errington 1996).

The music videos, inescapably subservient to international marketing systems through local production studios, commonly portray musicians, dancers, young lovers and others enjoying selected brands of soft drinks, but alcohol and drugs are also a significant part of Port Moresby street life. Marijuana, grown in the Highlands and with a particularly high THC (tetrahydrocannabinol) content, is readily available and often consumed together with large quantities of beer.[6] Experimentation with various kinds of toxic substances, including commercial household products, is widespread. While there is 'official' concern, expressed through anti-drug messages and campaigns, city-dwellers have become fairly inured to the prevalence of drug use. One urban legend dating to the late 1970s concerns a group of young men from Hanuabada who died after drinking an unidentified toxic liquid they found in a drum at a local rubbish dump, mistakenly believing it was methylated spirits. The story was resurrected recently by a Motu-Koita spokesperson in a

discussion paper about environmental damage and irresponsible waste-dumping in which, notably, the stated predilection of the victims for drinking methylated spirits in the first place went unremarked (Gaudi 1998). Alcoholic 'home-brews' are also experimented with. In particular, a concoction combining yeast, sugar and fruit (usually pineapple), and claimed by enthusiasts to be 90 per cent alcohol, has become a popular illicit brew. In street slang, it is referred to as 'Paina' or 'Y', or (alluding to its distillation) 'steam'.

In late 1998, a group of Pari village youths built themselves a crude still and began producing and consuming steam. Under its influence, their behaviour was more erratic than that of conventional drunkards, possibly as a result of its impurities as well as its alcoholic concentration, for the distilling equipment was crude piping, dirty and unsterile. This sudden new complication in the hitherto manageable problem of alcohol took the community by surprise. The weekend disruptions of peace and the subsequent ritual of reproach and atonement in the Village Court had become commonplace over a period of some years, masking the growing estrangement of a significant proportion of young males from the tradition-oriented values it represented. Now a more potent phenomenon of the city, which the community had previously been able to ignore, was plunged into its midst.

The Village Court proved immediately to be inadequate to deal with the problem. The ageing magistrates were familiar with alcohol and its social consequences from their own experience and drew on this in their clever handling of youthful drunkenness. But they knew nothing of steam and the contemporary ambience of city youth to which it was an illicit adjunct. Lacking discursive resources, they were at a loss as to how to negotiate this new turn. Within a short time, there was a restrained police raid on the village. Police raids in Port Moresby, commonly experienced in the city's settlements, are usually brutal episodes in which dwellings are damaged, people beaten and

property 'confiscated'. The politeness of the raid on Pari was in marked contrast. The still was 'discovered' remarkably quickly, and publicly and dramatically destroyed. No one claimed responsibility for calling the police, but a number of older village men are highly placed in political and public-service circles, and there was a subsequent inference in the community that the raid was stage-managed to frighten the youths. It was embarrassing for the villagers. Pari was unaccustomed to police raids and prided itself on being a 'Christian', law-abiding village, which dealt with its occasional misdemeanours internally.

After the raid, a respected senior village man, a heart specialist at Port Moresby General Hospital, brought a team of experts to Pari who conducted a day-long public educational seminar on the physical, psychological and social dangers of drugs and other illegal substances. After the raid, the destruction of the still and the lecture, the home-brew disappeared and the adult villagers assumed the matter was resolved. In 1999, however, the youths built another still and resumed their consumption of steam. This time the Village Court magistrates, in consultation with village elders, decided to call all the youths involved together and confront them as a group, rather than in twos or threes as individual complaints about them arose, which had been the case in 1998. A list of all the known steam users was compiled and they were summonsed to appear en masse in the Village Court. Out of a reliably identified 15 youths, only six attended.

Questioned by the magistrates, these youths affirmed that they drank steam and gave details of how ingredients were obtained and how the brew was made. They were polite and respectful, but showed no sign of shame or remorse. The magistrates adjourned the matter to the next week and reissued the summons for the rest of the youths to appear, including the alleged ringleader — an ex-brewery worker said to have shown the other youths how to build a still. Even fewer youths attended this time, and a third summons proved equally ineffective, while the investigation of new complaints about offensive behaviour

was revealing that more young men were consuming steam. Officially, if Village Court summonses are ignored, the matter can be passed on to the police, but most Village Courts follow a 'three-chances' policy before referring cases to police attention and exposing offenders to more serious legal processes. The magistrates were nonplussed by the lack of concern of the few youths who had bothered to come to court, and the complete disregard for the summonses by the others.

During the first hearing, when it was clear the majority of the summonsed youths were not responding, one of the magistrates commented that it was perhaps time to call the police and have people arrested. This was a scare tactic, for nobody wanted village youths to go to prison, where they would be in the company of experienced criminals, and estranged from the village. The threat had no effect on the youths and the Village Court, which had never utilised its option to refer local cases to the police (unlike most Village Courts in the urban area), found itself unable to proceed by any means with the strategy of confronting the youths as a group.

Meanwhile, the search for an explanation for the steam drinking was exposing veiled prejudices in Pari as adult villagers sought something or someone to blame. Beyond the notion of a Faginesque ringleader (for example, the ex-brewery worker), a section of the community was privately (and in conversations with me) suggesting that 'Kerema boys' were the main offenders. Migrants from the Gulf district had lived in Pari since at least the 1920s, their initial entry to the village sanctioned by their past links as trading partners of Motu *hiri* voyagers. One of Pari's 17 *iduhu* is in fact identified as 'Kerema' (ie, Gulf area) and is patrilineally traced to an earlier extended family of migrants. For the most part, however, intermarriage with Motu-Koita villagers has blurred ethnic distinctions and a number of people in the village have mixed parentage. Despite this, Gulf migrants and their descendants are occasionally discursively sequestered in the course of village politics (for example, when negotiating

gardening and residential land claims). The steam issue triggered memories for some older men of occasional discord in earlier generations between Gulf migrants and Motu-Koita villagers, and there was talk of 'bad influence'.

Blaming Kerema youths for corrupting Motu-Koita youths, however, did not solve the problem of what to do and, in the climate of restraint and politeness that Pari carefully maintains, no public accusations were made. There seemed to be no way of dissuading the youths from consuming steam using the restorative approaches that the village relied on, and village elders realised that destroying the still again would be ineffectual in the long run, and were worried that haranguing the youths would cause them to leave the community. When I completed my fieldwork at mid-year, the adult community was still searching for a solution.

Conclusions

Bearing in mind that the consumption of steam and other illicit substances is not unusual in Port Moresby, that the resulting behaviour in the village amounted more to public nuisance than violent crime and that only a few youths were involved, Pari's problem seems slight, in relation to the degree of public disturbance, crime and violence in suburban Port Moresby. The steam drinkers' intoxicated behaviour, however, was only a superficial aspect of the problem they created for Pari, which was accustomed to drunkenness, albeit of a slightly more conventional kind. More important was their failure to attend the Village Court, or their apparent lack of shame if they did attend. The Village Court's inability to effect an acknowledgement by the youths that they had done anything significantly wrong, or to instigate any gesture from the youths of commitment to the moral community that Pari claims to be, exposed the fragility of its identity. Through the Village Court's restorative strategies, that identity — a modern sociality constructed in terms of historical particularities — is asserted in direct confrontation with the perceived alternative modern sociality with which it coexists.

The restorative process must be seen to be effective, not through the absence of recidivism among the offenders it deals with, but through their cooperation in its enactment, reaffirming the moral community of which membership affirms villagers' survival as Motu-Koita against the influence of the migrant city, which they perceive as taking the land and destroying the traditions of nearby communities such as Hanuabada.

The colonially created Village Court, which in many other communities has come to reflect the juridical attitude of the formal District Court (Goddard 1992a), has been appropriated into Pari's sociality as a restorative, rather than punitive, resource, reflecting a commitment to the Christian ideal of non-punitive justice. But that appropriation has rendered it medial in a dialectical process of which the age of steam is a recent manifestation — the contradiction between the socioeconomic reality of its relationship to the city and its integrated discourses of Christian morality and tradition. This dialectic will continue, and with it the dynamic process of self-identity by Pari village as it engages the ever-changing modern sociality of Port Moresby, the threat to its land, the continuing depletion of tuna and other transformations. Whether the village's restorative strategy is adaptable in the long run to negotiating the continuing contradiction between Pari's Motu-Koita identity and its intimate relation to the adjacent migrant city remains to be seen.

Returning to the observation by Braithwaite that 'all cultures must adapt their restorative traditions in ways that are culturally meaningful to them' (Braithwaite 1999: 6), I hope to have shown here that, at least, 'traditions' and cultural meanings are invariably contestable and constantly being refashioned. In this respect, Pari village's restorative tradition is part of a 'creative fashioning of the past in the present' (see Turner 1997: 347) constrained by history and susceptible to the politics of identity as cultural meanings are challenged not only from without, but from within the community.

Epilogue

Since the steam episode described above, a stand-off of sorts has continued between the recalcitrant youths and the Village Court. The magistrates' next strategy after the episodes that occurred during my fieldwork was to deliver a formal letter to the house of each of the youths known to be members of the 'core' group of steam users threatening that a police raid would be made on the youth's house (thus shaming his family) if he did not desist. This was effective in the short term, but, after some months, steam-making was resumed. Meanwhile, the chairing magistrate of the Village Court died, the personnel of the Village Court subsequently changed and there was a reappraisal of the situation. The new chairman consulted with police in town seeking strategic advice. He was told that home-brew making and use were offences beyond the jurisdiction of Village Courts (the courts are legislatively limited to hearing petty offences: they can, for example, deal with cases of offensive behaviour arising from drunkenness or drug use, but cannot hear cases concerned with the manufacture, acquisition or use of toxic substances in the first place).

   Unable to directly address the production and use of steam under its own authority, the Village Court was obliged to rely on complaints from villagers about derivative offensive or disorderly behaviour and to bring individual youths to court in an ad hoc fashion. Meanwhile, acting as elders rather than magistrates, the Village Court officials resorted to further deliveries of notes to individuals threatening that the police would be informed. This created a pattern of periods of abstinence lasting a few months, followed by a resumption of steam use, followed by a threat of police intervention, cyclically, until the time of writing. During my most recent brief visit to Pari, the current Village Court chairman told me that he doubted the problem could be resolved, but it was being controlled as well as the village could hope without resorting to intervention by outside authority.

ENDNOTES

1 In an early draft of this chapter as a conference paper, I employed the popular term 'modernity' without reflection. After discussion with a number of disciplinary colleagues, most notably Jadran Mimica, I have come to regard 'modernity' as a term to be used with a great deal of caution in respect of Melanesia (see Hirsch 2001), and have consequently avoided it.

2 I have read and been given four versions of this name: Igutu, Iguta, Ugata and Uguta. 'Ugata' is the version used by Pulsford (1975) and I have used it in previous publications for convenience (Goddard 2001b; Goddard and Van Heekeren 2003). The most common, though, is 'Uguta', and I have come to believe Pulsford's rendering is incorrect.

3 Bootless Inlet and Oyster Bay are names ascribed by Europeans and have no Motu translation. The Motu did not give names to these bodies of water, but named every piece of land forming their shores.

4 Where Tarr (1973) reports Pari villagers being moved to a site to the east, near Gaire and called 'New Pari', there is an implication in Robinson's more general account of Motu villagers (1979) that some Pari villagers were evacuated to Manumanu, west of Port Moresby; but all older Pari informants told me all evacuees went to 'New Pari'. It is not clear in Robinson's text whether he is referring to deaths of Pari evacuees at Manumanu in particular, or to Pari evacuees overall.

5 A measure of this dominance is that the Motu word for the Koita, *Koitabu*, is used commonly in Papua New Guinea in preference to *Koita*, with the acquiescence of the Koita themselves. On one occasion, when I asked a Koita resident of Pari which term was 'correct', he confessed to not knowing, but advised me, 'Don't say *Koita.*'

6 Betel nut (areca), the traditional mild intoxicant of Papua, is not recognised as a 'drug' among local people and is chewed everywhere during work and leisure, including in Pari village. Despite periodic crusades against it by health authorities (often appealing to the possibility of mouth cancer), and anti-litter campaigns (appealing to the stains it leaves on pavements and walls when it is spat out), betel is treated by Papua New Guineans rather like a feelgood chewing gum.

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