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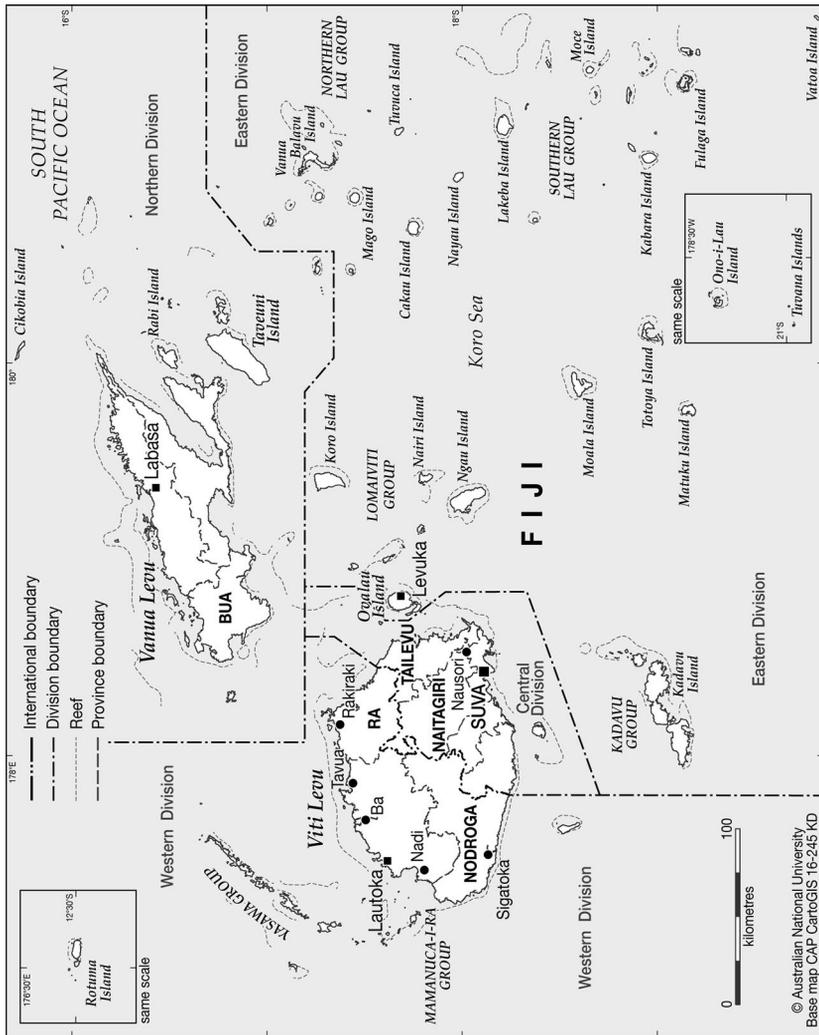
Villages, Violence and Atonement in Fiji

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Over the last 10 years or so, Violence Against Women (VAW) and gender violence more generally have been conceptualised as major obstacles to development insofar as they increase healthcare costs and reduce productivity.¹ The types of violence these terms most commonly refer to are domestic violence between spouses and other intimate partners, rape, sexual assault and child sexual abuse in which men are overwhelmingly the perpetrators and women and girls are overwhelmingly the victims and/or survivors.

1 While the term 'gender-based violence' (GBV) may be used to broaden understandings of violence to include women's violence against men, it is not always used this way. For instance, a recommendation made to the CEDAW committee defines GBV as 'violence that is directed against a woman because she is a woman or that affects women disproportionately'. See Sally Engle Merry, 2006, *Human Rights and Gender Violence: Translating International Law into Local Justice*, Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, pp. 76–77.



Map 2. Fiji

Source. © The Australian National University. Base Map. CartoGIS ANU 16-245 KD

In the Pacific, and in Melanesia in particular, VAW is considered severe and pervasive. A survey undertaken by the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre (FWCC) in 1999 found that 66 per cent of the 1,575 women surveyed had been physically abused by partners,² which suggests that roughly two-thirds of the women in Fiji can expect violence in the domestic sphere at some time during their lives. In cases of rape and child sexual abuse, statistics indicate that 70 per cent of rape victims knew their perpetrators, and in 'cases of sexual abuse against children, 94 per cent of perpetrators were known to the victim. Of these, fathers, stepfathers and grandfathers made up around 32 per cent of the perpetrators.'³ Although responses from government, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and churches have been immensely important in enabling girls and women to find help escaping violent relationships or coping with violent situations, my research shows that in Fiji the building of refuges and safe houses in urban centres has limited effectiveness. Often women and girls do not know about this accommodation and, even when they do, it often does not—and cannot—meet the needs of the victim, or of the community.

At the international level, cultural practices such as female circumcision, child marriage and the *iTaukei*⁴ practice of atonement (*bulubulu*)⁵ are viewed as oppressive to women to the extent that governments have come under pressure to outlaw such practices. With regard to

2 Australian Aid (AusAID) Office of Development Effectiveness, 2008, *Violence Against Women in Melanesia and East Timor: Building on Global and Promising Approaches*, Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, pp. 9, 151; cf. Nicole George, "“Lost in translation”: Gender violence, human rights and women’s capabilities in Fiji”, this volume.

3 United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) Pacific Sub Regional Office, 2008, *An Assessment on the State of Violence Against Women in Fiji*. Suva: UNFPA, p. 18.

4 *ITaukei* is the most recent term used to denote the indigenous people of Fiji, once known as Fijians. On 30 June 2010, the Cabinet approved the Fijian Affairs [Amendment] Decree, which shifted the meaning of the word 'Fijian' from a race to a nationality. Since the Decree, the people once known as Fijians have been renamed as *iTaukei* or 'land owners'. See Ministry of *iTaukei* Affairs, 2010, 'ITaukei now replaces Fijian and indigenous Fijian', Internal Circular (signed by Meli Bainimarama, Permanent Secretary for *iTaukei* Affairs), 16 July. In this paper, I follow the more recent usage for consistency, except when I use quotes from interviews conducted in 2009, the year before the Decree, where I have retained the old usage of the word 'Fijian', which refers to the indigenous people only. For an analysis of this shift, see Lynda Newland, 2013, 'Imagining nationhood: Narratives of belonging and the question of a Christian state in Fiji', in *State, Society and Religion in the Asia-Pacific Region*, ed. Sven Schottman and Monika Winarnita, pp. 1–15, Special issue of *Global Change, Peace and Security*.

5 *Bulubulu* is the Bauan or standard Fijian. In other regions, it may be known by the word *soro* (the term used by George, this volume).

the *bulubulu*, the committee formed to enforce the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) has called for the elimination of the ritual. By contrast, Sally Engle Merry argues that the *bulubulu* has been adapted in such a way that it now supports the victim,⁶ and suggests that the performance of the ritual 'is increasingly rare even in the villages'.⁷ However, my own research suggests that the *bulubulu* remains deeply problematic in this context because its objectives are fundamentally different from those intended in human rights discourse and because for the most part it continues to prioritise male relationships rather than justice for the victim.

Fiji has two major and very distinct communities, the *iTaukei* and the Indo-Fijian community, together with a small minority formed from Chinese, Koreans, Australians and others.⁸ In most parts of Fiji, the two main communities have retained very separate identities: living in different areas, holding different religious beliefs, marrying endogamously, and regarding each other as distinct. Although violence against women is prevalent in both communities, results from fieldwork suggest that it often occurs in ethnically distinct ways.⁹ While this article is based on research in both communities, I limit my discussion here to the *iTaukei* (who practise the *bulubulu*).

6 Sally Engle Merry, 2004, 'Tensions between global law and local social justice: CEDAW and the problem of rape in Fiji', paper given at the Justice Across Cultures Conference, Waltham, MA: Brandeis University, March, p. 9.

7 Merry, *Human Rights and Gender Violence*, p. 121.

8 According to the 2007 Census, *iTaukei* number 475,739 or 57 per cent of the total population, and Indo-Fijians number 313,798 or 37 per cent. The remaining 6 per cent is comprised of a mixture of ethnicities, including Korean, Chinese, and a loose category that, until recently, was officially cast as 'European'. See Fiji Islands Bureau of Statistics 2007, Population by Race, Gender, Marital Status and Province of Enumeration, Fiji. The term 'Indo-Fijian' is an ethnic category to describe the descendants of Indian indentured labourers and free settlers and tends to be used by academics at the University of the South Pacific seeking to promote multi-racialism. Outside the university, the term 'Indian' is still popular, although, by rights, Indo-Fijians can call themselves 'Fijians' under the most recent legislation. See Ministry of *iTaukei* Affairs, '*iTaukei* now replaces Fijian and indigenous Fijian'.

9 For instance, stereotypes depict *iTaukei* men as using their fists and Indian men as using knives. Often violence does seem to proceed in this way—but not always. While I focus on *iTaukei* here, more research needs to be done on high-profile cases of Indian men from Fiji murdering their wives and children, often as migrants in neighbouring countries like Australia and New Zealand, but also in Fiji. In the Indian community, violence against wives and girls is also said to come from mothers-in-law. This issue is clearly not covered in prevailing approaches to VAW in the region and needs more detailed study.

I conducted research on women's crisis accommodation¹⁰ for a consultancy in 2009.¹¹ In the course of this project, I trained three local female research assistants: a Rotuman in administration and an *iTaukei* and an Indo-Fijian as interviewers. Over a period of about three months, we interviewed a wide range of people working on VAW, including police, referral agencies, caretakers of crisis accommodation, and some of the women who used their services in Suva, Tavua and Rakiraki. We travelled into *iTaukei* villages and Indo-Fijian settlements in both urban and rural areas of Viti Levu, Vanua Levu and Kadavu, holding focus groups or *talanoa* sessions (discussions around the kava bowl) with both men and women. In all, we spoke to around 244 people, approximately 141 of whom were *iTaukei*. The results of our research suggest that much of the violence in *iTaukei* villages continues to go unreported, whether it occurs in the villages and settlements of urban or rural areas across the Fijian archipelago.

As just over half the *iTaukei* population lives in the rural sector—264,235 as opposed to 211,504 in urban areas¹²—this kind of research is not an easy undertaking. Travelling between and within islands and into the interior of the main islands is expensive and involves organisation. Before entering a village, visitors must acquire permission either through someone related to that village or through government channels. On arrival, the visitor must have an appropriate representative to present the *yaqona* (kava or Piper methysticum) and conduct a *sevusevu* ceremony to introduce the researcher and the project to the chief and the village, which is often followed by a protracted session of *yaqona* drinking. Such protocol prevents informal or unscheduled visits and requires more planning than most researchers have the time and resources to do. Yet without it, researchers will not have access to more than half of the *iTaukei* population.

10 I use the term 'crisis accommodation' to gloss shelters and refuges. The idea of a shelter or refuge is not widely understood in Fiji. Crisis accommodation was the term that came closest and was more readily understood, although people sometimes assumed we were referring to the places that people living in low-lying areas moved to during flood warnings.

11 I conducted this consultancy while working at the University of the South Pacific. In all, I lived and worked in Fiji for a total of nine years and therefore was interpreting my findings in relation to long-term experience in Fiji.

12 Fiji Islands Bureau of Statistics, 2007 Census of Population. Further, *iTaukei* men outnumber *iTaukei* women in every province except Rewa and Naitasiri. See Fiji Islands Bureau of Statistics, 2007 Census of Population.

In this chapter, I focus on three main areas of VAW: domestic violence (particularly husbands' violence against wives), rape and child sexual abuse (which often includes rape—or 'defilement' in police terminology). After describing the contemporary institutional network that supports victims of VAW, I analyse under-reporting in relation to village values such as *vakaturaga* and village-based responses such as the *bulubulu*, through which perpetrators atone for their actions. In evaluating men's views of spousal violence, local conceptions of community in *iTaukei* communities in Fiji, and the effectiveness of urban responses, some of the contributing factors to this violence become apparent. These include men's expected status in the household and the community, practices around *yaqona* consumption, family obligations and feuds, and the introduction of easily accessible pornography. I note that, in most areas of Fiji, *iTaukei* values motivate a focus on maintaining village harmony between men, not on reparations for the victim.

At the international level, the CEDAW Committee, which reviews all reports filed by countries that have ratified CEDAW, has condemned the practice of the *bulubulu* as deleterious to the rights of women. Merry critiques the CEDAW Committee's views, arguing that they have not understood the breadth of contexts the *bulubulu* is used in, and that they have assumed that culture does not change. She further argues that the *bulubulu* has been adapted in the victim's favour,¹³ a point I strongly question on the basis of my own research. First, however, I review the institutions currently responding to VAW.

Response to gender violence: The Fiji context

In Fiji, there are already a number of organisations that work with victims of gender violence. The most well-known and best funded is the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre (FWCC), which is focused on supporting women and girls surviving gender violence through counselling, and which also engages in research, advocacy, community education and the development of a regional network of gender violence activists.

13 Merry, 'Tensions between global law and local social justice'; Merry, *Human Rights and Gender Violence*.

Another NGO, the Pacific Counselling and Social Services (PC&SS), also offers counselling services. Government agencies involved with helping victims of violence and sexual abuse are the Women's Department; the Social Welfare Department; St Giles Mental Hospital, run by the Ministry of Health; and the police, who have set up the Sexual Offences Unit. In addition, while most churches in Fiji are very conservative about women's roles in the family, their leaders are often the first people to whom women turn for advice.

Religious organisations are important in this field because they manage almost all the existing crisis accommodation. All but two in Fiji are Christian. The Salvation Army runs two girls' homes and the Family Care Homes in Suva, Lautoka and Labasa for women and children who have survived violence or poverty or who have been evicted from their homes. The Methodist Church and the Anglican Church run orphanages in Suva, and the Assemblies of God manages a home for orphans in Nadi, all of which sometimes house children who have faced sexual abuse. A Christian organisation called Homes of Hope is set up to accommodate sexually exploited women and their young children. Another Christian organisation, The Good Neighbour International, has rooms for girls who arrive in Suva from rural areas looking for work. Housing destitute men and women, the HART Homes were built by an NGO on behalf of the World Council of Churches. The Society of Saint Vincent de Paul runs a home that takes in mentally ill, crippled, blind and destitute men and women who have nowhere else to go. The Ark of Hope is a faith-based home for street kids, the homeless, and anyone else who walks into the compound needing shelter. There are also two non-Christian shelters: Darul Iqamah, which is a home run by the Muslim Women's League for poverty-stricken women and children, and Clopcott Home, which was originally set up by the Social Welfare Department but which was later transferred to a voluntary committee. Last, although not technically a home, St Giles, a psychiatric hospital in Suva, takes in abused women and girls who have been abandoned on its doorstep.¹⁴

14 In 2009, the Anglican Church was planning to open the House of Sera, a counselling centre, with the possibility of expanding it to a halfway house. The FWCC was also exploring the possibility of opening a secular and feminist refuge. Lastly, since the project, there has been a discussion about opening a safe house in Kadavu. Another option of last resort is to billet the child or woman out to a family. Sometimes, young perpetrators must also be billeted for their own safety.

Until just over a decade ago, almost all the programs were focused on counselling female victims and very little was done by way of prevention. In 2002, the FWCC began to run a male advocacy program in Vanua Levu, encouraging men to become positive role models in their communities. At the request of village elders in Ba, Tavua and Rakiraki, male advocacy programs have since been implemented on the main island of Viti Levu.¹⁵ Another initiative has been set up by the Department of Women, which launched its pilot program for establishing Zero Tolerance Violence Free communities in 2008.¹⁶ However, the funding for this project is minimal, which means that not as much has been achieved in these communities as was hoped.

In 1995, the police set up the Sexual Offences Unit (SOU) with branches in the Suva area and in Labasa specifically charged with managing sexual assault more effectively. In regard to the law, a 'no drop' policy, in which police became duty-bound to prosecute reported domestic violence cases, was put in place in 1998. Eleven years later, in November 2009, the military government implemented the Domestic Violence Decree, giving the police and courts extensive powers to prevent perpetrators from continuing to assault their victims.¹⁷ Despite these initiatives and responses aimed at alleviating VAW, male violence against women and girls remains a part of everyday life in much of Fiji.

Maintaining the peace through atonement: *Vakaturaga* and the *bulubulu*

ITaukei villages are, in many ways, strongly bounded entities, which in most parts of Fiji maintain hierarchies based on submission to the chief. Asesela Ravuvu, for instance, notes that the 'most important and commonly used term for ideal behaviour is *vakaturaga*', a word literally meaning 'in the way of the chief' but which also refers

15 Margaret Wise, 2010, 'Men learn to respect women', *Fiji Times Online*, 27 May.

16 CEDAW, Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, 2008, Consideration of reports submitted by States parties under article 18 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. Combined second, third and fourth periodic reports of States parties, Fiji. CEDAW/C/FJI/2-4.

17 'Family violence to become a criminal offence', 2009, *Fiji Times Online*, 4 August.

to behaviour that 'befits the presence of a chief'.¹⁸ 'An individual who is labeled *vakaturaga* in his behaviour knows his place in the society and complies unquestioningly with his various traditionally defined obligations and responsibilities.'¹⁹ Although leaders are also expected to behave towards others in this way, the values of *vakaturaga* sustain a male hierarchy in which subordinate men (and women) are expected to obey the chiefs, who are considered to represent God's order. It is a hierarchy in which, as a former President of the Methodist Church of Fiji put it, 'The word "spoken" (authority) and the word "heard" (land, people) essentially belong together'.²⁰ Women are among those expected to listen silently rather than speak because women are not usually considered to be representatives at any level, a view that is supported in the teachings of a majority of the Christian churches in Fiji.²¹

The values of *vakaturaga* are embedded within broader ideas about *matanitu* (the chiefly system), *lotu* (Christianity, usually Methodism) and *vanua*, which is usually glossed as 'community' or 'land and people', but which also connotes the connection between the living and the ancestors and, through that, connection with one another.²² Maintaining these values requires a strong sense of communalism, often represented by conformity, reciprocity and obligation. If they are breached, it may be deemed necessary to perform a *bulubulu*, a term that means the burial of a wrong through a collective apology and atonement. Usually, the offender brings an offering to the family or village that has been offended as compensation and to improve relationships between offending and offended groups, whether families or villages. For important matters between villages, *bulubulu* offerings will include *tabua* (a whale's tooth, which holds significant cultural and economic value). For less important matters, gifts of kerosene and cigarettes may be enough to heal the breach.

18 Asesela D. Ravuvu, 1983, *Vaka iTaukei: The Fijian Way of Life*, Suva: Institute of Pacific Studies, University of the South Pacific, p. 103.

19 Ibid.; cf. Karen Brison, 2001, 'Crafting socio-centric selves in religious discourse in rural Fiji', *Ethos* 29(4): 453–74, p. 454.

20 I.S. Tuwere, 2002, *Vanua: Towards a Fijian Theology of Place*, Suva: Institute of Pacific Studies, University of the South Pacific, and College of St John the Evangelist, p. 73.

21 Lynda Newland, 2006, 'Fiji', in *Globalisation and the Re-Shaping of Christianity in the Pacific Islands*, ed. Manfred Ernst, pp. 317–89. Suva: The Pacific Theological College.

22 Winston Halapua, 2003, *Tradition, Lotu and Militarism in Fiji*, Lautoka: Fiji Institute of Applied Studies.

Christianity and colonialism have radically changed the shape of marriage and family forms and augmented husbands' control over wives. Missionaries transformed *iTaukei* social arrangements. Polygyny gave way to monogamy, men's houses gave way to nuclear family households, and a focus on brother–sister ties shifted to a focus on conjugal bonds.²³ In the early colonial period of the 1880s, the newly formed *Bose Vakaturaga* (Council of Chiefs) made decisions that eroded women's position in decision-making, curbed their freedom to drink *yaqona* and expropriated their rights to land. Because women of the time were freely wandering and refusing to marry, their movement was restricted to their villages unless they could show good reason to move beyond the village.²⁴ In villages today the husband's control over the wife as head of the household is socially sanctioned by both the village hierarchy and the church. Marriages tend to be virilocal, further limiting the support a woman might garner from her kin to gain influence in her marriage. Although expectations about gender roles are changing as villagers are exposed to other ideas during their visits to urban centres, in many places such changes have been strongly resisted.

When it comes to cases of domestic violence, people are reluctant to interfere in actual fights because this can cause wider problems within the community. Ideally intervention is only done by close relatives. After the argument has finished, the man's parents may advise the couple about how to deal with the problem. If the matter is serious and the dispute is prolonged, it may be referred to the police but police action is often limited for a variety of reasons. For example, police in Kadavu say that it can be difficult for them to intervene because they are required first to receive permission from the *turaga ni koro* (village head) to enter the village concerned, and then to participate in the *sevusevu* ritual described earlier. However, such conditions are not enforced across Fiji. For example, police in Vanua Levu are not expected to follow protocol when they are charging offenders.

Whether the perpetrator of physical violence is a husband or father, the victim is frequently blamed by both men and women for not having given the perpetrator enough respect. A male respondent from

23 Asesela D. Ravuvu, 1987, *The Fijian Ethos*, Suva: Institute of Pacific Studies, University of the South Pacific.

24 Robert Nicole, 2006, *Disturbing History: Resistance in Early Colonial Fiji, 1874–1914*, Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.

a village in western Viti Levu said that if the violence got worse and the woman died, that was just the way it was; men should always have the dominant place in the household. Ra informants said that they were told in church that women have to listen to men because men are the heads of the household: 'Man represents God in the family.' Near Suva, informants explained that women are beaten when they have overstepped 'their female boundaries' or gender role expectations.

In Methodist villages, domestic violence between husband and wife is often viewed as a problem for the church, to be addressed by the *talatala* or lay preachers. It is considered discourteous to be direct about this kind of problem, and the *talatala* will in all likelihood not talk about the domestic violence directly but preach instead about the religious aspect of marriage and the values underlying *iTaukei* protocol, such as the respect a wife needs to have for her husband. *Talatala* tend to concentrate on reconciling the couple and are very unlikely to involve the police.

Another option is to go to the *turaga ni koro* or village head. *Talanoa* (focus group) participants in Kadavu described how problems are usually taken to the *turaga ni koro* and *talatala* together, who counsel the couple together. The *talatala* tends to talk about the spiritual aspect of marriage, and the *turaga ni koro* tends to talk about the laws of the village. As the island of Kadavu is at some distance from the urban communities in Viti Levu, the laws affirmed there are not necessarily those of the Constitution (which, at any rate, was abrogated in 2009, re-written in 2012, and revised again by the military government in 2013) but those considered to belong to the traditions that support the ideal of *vakaturaga* and that place a premium on local harmony and on upholding the village's reputation.

It is only if the *talatala* and the *turaga ni koro* cannot solve the problem that the police are contacted. In Viti Levu, a *turaga ni koro* explained that he aims to keep the family intact by holding weekly meetings, but he goes to the police if it becomes too difficult (although none of the villagers interviewed had actually witnessed this occurring). In some instances, the victim goes directly to the police, but, rather than laying charges, the police may advise the victim to return to the *turaga ni koro* to solve the problem with him instead, contravening the 'no drop' policy in favour of prioritising local relationships with men who are acknowledged as having legitimate and direct authority in

the community. One village head claimed that this has been effective in solving disputes and in bringing peace and harmony to the village. Another said that the best prevention against violence was to tell the couple that they would end up in prison alone. If a girl is raped, this same village chief told my assistants that he talks to the boy and his parents, which generally results in the couple being married. A third told us:

One time a girl who got married into this village came running to me because her husband had punched her up. I hid her to keep her safe and waited for the husband's anger to cool down. When he came to his senses, I went to him and told him how he had badly frightened his wife. At the same time, I kindly asked him why he did this. Finally, I gave him some fatherly advice and told him that what he did was wrong.

These responses show that, while the *turaga ni koro* might be considered to be in an ideal position to mediate, the overarching principles for many village heads are not about notions of justice with regard to individual acts of violence or even about protection of the victim but about village harmony. How a village head manages this is up to his (and it is almost always 'his') discretion; and the quality of the mediation is dependent on his personal traits and biases and his relationships with each party and with the village as a whole. However, with some good management skills, *turaga ni koro* can reduce conflict across the village. For example, because over-consumption of *yaqona* is often considered a cause of domestic arguments,²⁵ curfews and bans on *yaqona* drinking can be enacted at village meetings. In one Kadavu village, the curfew is imposed from 10 p.m. on every night, although its success remains unclear.

Instead of reporting violence to the police, many *iTaukei* women and girls resort to accepted tactics. A wife facing repeated and/or severe domestic violence is expected to find sanctuary at a brother's, father's or other close relative's house. The husband will then be compelled

25 After drinking a large amount of *yaqona*, the drinker experiences a relaxing, even sedating effect and, while allegedly thinking more lucidly, may experience an inability to speak and to walk. Like alcohol, *yaqona* in small quantities is said to heighten sex-drive, but in great quantities nullifies the ability to perform. Although the drink is considered calming while being consumed, the after-effects include heightened sensitivity to light and sound and bad temper. Another aspect of *yaqona* consumption that creates domestic conflict is the time spent consuming it, as men can spend long hours on most evenings drinking with other men.

to make amends to the woman's family by taking an offering such as kerosene or a whale's tooth. A man in a *talanoa* session in Kadavu described the process in the following way:

Over here, women know what to do, where to go. They usually run off to their brothers and then wait for the *bulubulu* and get back together again [jokes about coming and going] but at times we just call and ask them to come back. If a woman runs off to her parents, we take kerosene to ask her to come back. Her mother at this time usually tells us to love one another. Parents say to the husband, 'Take her [laughter], accept the *bulubulu*', and say to the girl, 'it was your decision to marry him'.

Although the woman's return to her brother's household or to her natal household gives her family an opportunity to intervene and mediate, the pressure is often on the father or brother to accept the husband's and husband's family's attempt to atone, especially if the offering is a *tabua* or whale's tooth. However, when asked what men would do if a daughter arrived with a bruised face as a result of domestic violence, some men insisted that they would not accept the *bulubulu* offering, either because husbands frequently turn up with very little or because accepting it could lead to problems later. If it is accepted, the wife must return to the husband, and she often appears to do this willingly. An oft-cited reason was that women must go back for the children's sake, and in some areas they are faced with having to leave the children with their father if they do not return to him. In some villages, the wife is not asked whether or not she is ready to reconcile but is expected to accept the *bulubulu* offering because the husband arrives with his *vanua* (community) and the recipient *vanua* feels obliged to maintain the relationship between the villages.²⁶

26 It is likely that many of these cases never go through the court system. Customarily, women are considered to be responsible for relationships, whether affinal or consanguineal, and therefore are vulnerable to being blamed for their failure. Children are expected to stay with their father and/or his parents in order to enable them to claim their land and village rights. When such cases do reach court, if the husband divorces the wife because of her adultery, he is likely to be awarded custody of children; but in other circumstances women may have a better chance of retaining custody. See P. Imrana Jalal, 2001, 'Ethnic and cultural issues in determining family disputes in Pacific Island courts', Paper given at the 17th LAWASIA Biennial Conference, Christchurch: New Zealand Family Law Section Conference, September.

In effect, as Pauline McKenzie Aucoin argues, 'the rituals assuage tension without actually challenging or eliminating its sociological source'.²⁷

In addition to the widely varying responses of *turaga ni koro*, there are still very strong sanctions against women or girls reporting rape and abuse, as it can exacerbate an already difficult situation within the family and bring shame to both the girl and her family. Victims of rape are frequently assumed to have enticed the rapist, and victims of violence and especially sexual violence are vulnerable to being blamed and resented for bringing shame upon their family. The conventional view is that a girl's future is ruined within the social group, but she is able to rebuild her life by moving to Suva or overseas and is likely to leave any children with her parents. Gang rape can indicate an ongoing feud between families; and incidents involving the rape of very young girls were explained in terms of past conflicts both within families and within communities, as episodes in family or community feuds.²⁸

In some villages, the victim is expected to report the rape; but, in others, it is the father's role, which limits the likelihood of the matter going beyond the family because of the expectation that fathers exemplify the values of *vakaturaga* and maintain village order. Some respondents discussed an awareness of the media, noting that if the father was implicated, the women would approach the police and the Department of Social Welfare and then call the immediate families together in case the media becomes involved. As in many societies, the wider kin group's honour is affected by rape and child sexual abuse, especially if it is reported in the national media.

In another instance that occurred 16 years ago in a settlement near Suva, a girl was raped by her cousin; but when her mother took her for medical treatment, her father went to the police and told them to dismiss the case because the boy was his sister's son. This left the mother completely shattered. The fact that the boy was a cousin did not sanction the violence in any way, but it did make it very delicate

27 Pauline McKenzie Aucoin, 1990, 'Domestic violence and social relations of conflict in Fiji', *Pacific Studies* 13(3): 23–42, p. 37.

28 Family feuding is a delicate area that should be better investigated. A high-profile case concerning the rape of a young girl in primary school toilets in Suva a few years ago was briefly alleged by the media to be one such case. Unfortunately, this mention was so brief that I have not been able to find the source of this allegation.

because he was a close relative. However, the mother's mental state affected the community in such a way that it could not be ignored. The villagers asked if they could revive the case and bring the boy to justice, so that the girl's mother could get better. The male's offence continued to severely affect close family relationships, and he was eventually charged and imprisoned because of it.

In relation to child sexual abuse, a community in Ra, northern Viti Levu, went so far as to say that tradition was the line that stood between them and the law because when a *bulubulu* was held it was felt there was no longer any need to report the incident to the police. For example, one boy impregnated his 16-year-old cousin, but the girl's family did not feel they were able to report it after his family performed the *bulubulu*. The participants from the settlement near Suva responded in a similar fashion when a physically disabled young girl was raped by a close relative and had two children by him. There was not much reaction from the community or family because the traditional atonement ceremonies had been performed and the gifts (*tabua*, *yaqona* and kerosene drums) had been presented to the girl's family.

Here, the tension between trying to maintain harmony within the family through the *bulubulu* ceremony and the women's views regarding the sexual exploitation of a young girl is explicit. Women see the value of harmony between men and their clans but do not necessarily accept that this should replace justice through the court system. The *iTaukei* women with whom we talked expressed the view that the *bulubulu* does not solve the problem but prevents them from accessing the services of the law. The fact that many women desire this to change is borne out by the fact that in places like Kadavu women are turning up in ever higher numbers at police stations, despite significant pressure to resolve matters at the village level.

If the crime is reported, negative repercussions can continue for the girl after the perpetrator has been charged, because the rape becomes public knowledge. We were told that in a village in Vanua Levu, 'a 14-year-old was gang raped by adult men in a Fijian community, some of them married with children. The family suffered. The girl was left sitting alone, even in church; no one talked to her.' The parents

sought assistance from the Department of Social Welfare to get her a room at a shelter but were refused because the perpetrators were not family members.²⁹ Eventually, she was accommodated in a hostel.

However, depending on the outlook of the village, a lone rapist or paedophile is not necessarily going to get off lightly. Participants from one village in Kadavu said that they took perpetrators to the police to protect them from the relatives of the victim. In this case, gender violence could well lead to further rifts between families and violence between men. On the other hand, perpetrators are known to develop tricks of their own. In one instance, an old man had been charged with molestation but every time the court case was called, he became seriously ill.

In this way, in much of Fiji, the *bulubulu* continues to be used for incidents of domestic violence and also for rape and child sexual abuse. The ritual is not intended to offer justice or to protect the victim but to maintain village harmony by containing feuding, and it tends to do this at the expense of the victim. In the discussions about the *bulubulu* that my research assistants and I had with men and women in villages across Fiji, it was clear that women had little influence over the *bulubulu* because there was no space in which their views had credence. Yet, while the importance of male harmony is evident to women, many do not accept its consequences in matters of gender violence.

However, while the villages are, by and large, very conservative in the way they manage gender violence, many of the sessions in the communities we visited would finish with men and women asking for advice on what to do when confronted with the scenarios we raised with them, where they could get help, and what kinds of programs were available. Our discussions were often the first occasions on which they had discussed these issues, and it was clear that they were interested in learning about alternatives that could further enhance relationships between men and women within the village.

29 Children are directed to homes through the Department of Social Welfare. They are not removed from their families unless they are considered to be at risk directly from family members. It is testament to the rigidity of institutional requirements that no place could be found for this girl because she was at risk not from her family but from the wider village.

Notions of community and gender hierarchy

Yaqona ceremonies are classically staged around the *tanoa* or kava bowl within the village hall, around which men sit according to their importance. Unless they have an important title of their own, the women of the village are usually seated at the rear of the hall, behind the men. The sequence in which men speak and *yaqona* is offered reflects the accepted public hierarchy, which constantly shifts according to contestations between and among men. For these reasons, men can be very competitive about issues of rank.³⁰ I have experienced the display of hierarchy many times in *yaqona* ceremonies, observing the attentiveness of men in arranging guests to receive *yaqona*, according to their perceived importance. In some villages everybody may eventually drink, but in others *yaqona* drinking is limited to men.

Notions of the husband's dominance over the wife as being part of the natural order of things are widespread in Fiji, but villages in the southeastern seaboard of Viti Levu—particularly from Bau northward to Tailevu, inland toward Naitasiri and westward towards Nadroga—are known to be very conservative about gender issues. Women in these areas are usually included in the formal line of guests and receive *yaqona* only if they are from chiefly families or if they have educational and institutional affiliations, but they will be served only a small cup of *yaqona* and may not be served at all. The rules regarding drinking order are more relaxed in other areas of Fiji, but the same principle of male-centredness applies.³¹ Women do have important roles in many communities, ones that are often conceptualised in terms of being keepers of kinship pathways, remembering and keeping active the web of relationships they were born and married into through the

30 Karen Brison reports that in Rakiraki women also compete over rank, arguing over whether the status of their natal village or their husband's status is to be acknowledged. Karen Brison, 2001, 'Constructing identity through ceremonial language in Fiji', *Ethnology* 40(4): 309–27.

31 For example, Christina Toren, 1994, 'All things go in pairs or the sharks will bite: The antithetical nature of Fijian chieftainship', *Oceania* 64(3): 197–216, for Gau; Brison, 'Constructing identity through ceremonial language in Fiji', for Rakiraki; and Ravuvu, *The Fijian Ethos*, for the Wainimala Valley. S.G. Aporosa emphasises the relationship between *yaqona* drinking and masculinity for young male teachers. S.G. Aporosa, 'Yaqona and education in Fiji: A clash of cultures?' MA thesis, Palmerston North: Massey University, 2006.

exchange of women's valuables such as mats.³² However, in everyday social hierarchies, in which formal village decision-making takes place, women take a back seat to men.

Another aspect of gender conservatism found in villages is expressed through clothing. Dressing inappropriately for village life is said to be one of the causes of gender violence. In almost all villages, everyone is obliged to follow a dress code. No commoner is permitted to wear a hat and sunglasses as this is perceived to be acting as if above the chief. The dress code is especially strict for women, who are expected to wear a *sulu* (a sarong covering the legs) and to cover their shoulders, especially in the meeting hall. In some areas, village heads may insist that women obey a 'traditional' dress code, which requires wearing a *sulu-jaba* (a long skirt and short-sleeved top, usually in bright floral designs and with varying degrees of trim) and a hairstyle called the *buiniga* (*iTaukei* equivalent of an 'Afro'). Girls are not allowed to wear pants in the village because they blur very clear gender distinctions. This gender hierarchy is also expressed spatially in both the village hall and private homes. Women are expected to sit on the side that is, figuratively speaking, 'below' the male side.³³

In her study of a Ba village in western Viti Levu, Aucoin records that a husband has authority over his wife (although opposite-sexed cross-cousins tend to treat each other as equals).³⁴ Christina Toren, in her study of village life in Gau, takes these claims a step further, noting that cross-cousins, once married, cease to be equal:

It is axiomatic that a wife is subordinate to her husband, so when cross-cousins marry (by definition one always marries a cross-cousin) their equal relation becomes a hierarchical one. This shift is evident in betrothal and marriage ceremonies and further established, at least in part, by the young man's periodic violence towards his wife. Not *all* young married men beat their wives, but violence does seem to characterise the early years of marriage and is attributed by both women and men to male sexual jealousy.³⁵

32 Jacqueline Ryle, 2010, *My God, My Land: Interwoven Paths of Christianity and Tradition in Fiji*, Farnham: Ashgate.

33 Cf. Christina Toren, 1995, 'Cosmogonic aspects of desire and compassion in Fiji', in *Cosmos and Society in Oceania*, ed. Daniel de Coppet and André Itéanu, pp. 57–82, Oxford and Herndon: Berg, p. 59.

34 Aucoin, 'Domestic violence and social relations of conflict in Fiji'.

35 Toren, 'Cosmogonic aspects of desire and compassion in Fiji', p. 58.

Cross-cousin marriage is not practised in areas such as northern Vanua Levu,³⁶ but husbandly authority is the ideal as elsewhere in Fiji.

Many female respondents in our *talanoa* or focus-group sessions recognised that issues of hierarchy, power and control in the household underlie much of the violence against both wives and daughters or step-daughters. They noted that men tend to assume they can make decisions without consulting their wives, and tend to see women who are the main income-earners as challenging their status. One respondent expressed it this way: 'In Fijian custom, men have to be superior. Women who earn more will always tell their husbands what to do. Women should obey their husbands.' According to *talanoa* participants, domestic violence occurs when women do not listen to their husbands or do what the husbands want. For instance, if the wife converts to another church, this is likely to cause tension because it flouts the husband's authority as well as that of the chief's—given that conversion may involve a renunciation of major village practices.³⁷ On their part, women do convert to incoming churches, sometimes as a way of asserting themselves in the household, particularly with regard to *yaqona* consumption.³⁸

As previously mentioned, extended sessions of *yaqona* drinking often lead to marital disputes. From both this and previous research conducted in *iTaukei* communities, from listening to student responses in class discussions, and from witnessing neighbours' fights while living in Suva, a few very common scenarios in which domestic violence occurs in relation to *yaqona* consumption are worth mentioning:

Scenario 1: Arriving home late from a *yaqona* session, the husband finds his wife has fallen asleep. There is no dinner ready. He becomes enraged.

Scenario 2: The wife wakes early in the morning to discover her husband still asleep. She is worried about the state of the gardens and whether there is enough to eat in the house. She wakes him, and they fight.

36 Personal communication, Akanisi Tarabe, 30 October 2012.

37 Conversion to Pentecostal churches usually entails giving up *yaqona* drinking, because it is seen as idolatry, linking the chief with the ancestors. However, the symbolism of *yaqona* consumption is also enmeshed with concepts of *vanua* (land and community) and chiefly power, both temporal and cosmological. To refuse to drink an offering of *yaqona* is to insult the chief and the community. For more detail, see Lynda Newland, 2004, 'Turning the spirits into witchcraft: Pentecostalism in Fijian villages', *Oceania* 75(1): 1–18.

38 Newland, 'Turning the spirits into witchcraft'.

Scenario 3: A male student from Vanua Levu pointed out that it can be reversed: the wife might drink too much *yaqona*. The man arrives home to a dirty house, which also causes conflict.

Although the third scenario reflects a situation where the gender expectations in drinking *yaqona* are reversed, the husband exerts his authority as head of the house in all of these cases. Because the husband is asserting his culturally sanctioned authority, a certain level of domestic violence is deemed acceptable, just as a father is considered to have the authority to discipline his children.

As discussed earlier, the wife may escape her husband's violence by moving to her father's or brother's house (which is likely to be in another village) until the husband comes to conduct the *bulubulu*. This strategy brings domestic conflicts into the open, but the pressure is clearly on the woman's family to accept the husband's gesture without necessarily addressing the root causes of the conflict. Aimed at restoring harmony and preventing further feuding between male members of the community, the ritual does not seek justice or reparation for the victim. Further, although women may be invited to discuss their problems at village meetings, the presence of the chief and the *talatala* (lay preacher) mark the gathering as formal and male-centred territory. In these gatherings, women's views are secondary to those of men, making it very difficult for women to speak about domestic violence because, as listeners, they are not credited with any authoritative place from which to speak. Women's informal access to chiefs is more dependent upon the circumstances, including their own village position relative to their husband's and the chief's openness to such approaches.

In one village, a group of relatively well-educated women took some time to open up and speak about the violence they had witnessed in other families and the tensions they experienced on a daily basis in their own relationships. Their experiences indicated that *yaqona* caused many conflicts and that, when the men were home, they 'growled' at their families and ordered them around. One woman noted, 'Only the mouth and stick will be talking'. Yet they also acknowledged that women participate in the perpetuation of violence in families by beating their children: 'You pass on what has been done to you—women to girls also.' A woman spoke of how her mother-in-law had beaten her husband and his sister when they were young and

how the sister had once fainted from '10 sticks'. In turn, her husband was now beating their children. Associating this kind of violence with sickness and early death, the woman asked, 'With all those bruises, where does the dead blood go?'³⁹

When we held focus groups with women, whether in Kadavu or Vanua Levu, they confessed they had never discussed these topics, even among themselves. Yet, despite their lack of access to advice and support, women in Vanua Levu insisted that the *bulubulu* should not be allowed to substitute for justice, especially in cases of molestation. Moreover, once the concept of crisis accommodation, safe houses, shelters, and refuges was explained to them, most *iTaukei* women viewed the idea of building one of these in the locality as a positive step because it offered both the possibility of a place of safety and healing and a signal to men that violence would not be tolerated. This, they hoped, would change men's perspective on their treatment of women.

Child sexual abuse

The question of child sexual abuse was still more daunting to approach and, in our fleeting visits to the communities, we could not address this directly. However, at least three different contexts of child sexual abuse were reported to us: teenage experimentation, involving male sexual abuse of younger sisters; sexual abuse between an adult male and a young girl (often a daughter or step-daughter), which perpetrators tended to justify in terms of being in a romantic relationship with the victim; and sexual abuse between an adult male and a young girl (a step-daughter or girl of the extended family), justified in terms of the perpetrator's resentment at having to feed children from his wife's former husband or husbands or the children of other close relatives.⁴⁰

39 This comment appears to be referring to the idea that dead blood accumulates as a result of bruising, which was at the base of 19th-century notions of bloodletting and which was probably introduced by missionaries and early colonists. Personal communication, Martha Macintyre, August 2012.

40 Unfortunately, some of this information was gathered from workers in the field who did not always differentiate *iTaukei* from Indo-Fijian responses. Likewise, in mixed groups, most responses were recorded anonymously, and therefore it is not always possible to cleanly separate out *iTaukei* data from Indian data. Clearly, long-term research on the differences between the two communities needs to be conducted.

All of these instances suggest the idea that men are considered not only the heads of households but the owners of the bodies within it. This has been vividly portrayed in another recent study:

We learned of a Fijian girl who had been sexually abused by her uncle. Her uncle and aunt were acting as her caregivers while her parents were living in the village. There were other female family members living in the house at the time. When it was discovered that this girl had been sexually abused by her uncle, the other female members also admitted that they had been sexually abused by their uncle as well. Upon questioning the uncle, he said that he sexually abused the girls because he was fed up with looking after his relatives' children. He had abused his nieces in the hope that it would deter his relatives from sending their children to live with him and his family.⁴¹

Here, sexual abuse is intended to be a form of communication of anger directed at other adults. As one caretaker noted, 'There are a lot of people who have had several marriages in a row and children in each marriage. Both Fijians and Indo-Fijians might have two or three marriages. The women say openly that they don't want to bring up the man's other children. Men won't say it openly. Instead, they abuse them.'

Another factor that appears to be exacerbating child sexual abuse is the increasing availability of pornography through DVDs downloaded from the internet and sold for FJ\$1 as well as imagery uploaded onto mobile telephones. Observing an increasing trend of sexual abuse occurring between relatives, a policewoman told us: 'We had a case where a 14-year-old boy was the perpetrator. I asked him why he committed the offence, and he said, "I was watching blue movies at my uncle's house and became aroused." Four boys raped a girl. During our investigation I checked their mobile phones and saw graphic images of nude women.' Media seem to have added to an already potent mix of values and ideas about gender relations, especially as pornography is not simply about sex but is also about power relations between men and women, where women are, on the whole, devalued as sexualised objects subject for the male gaze and grasp. Thus, pornography gives impetus to the notion that men have a right of access to women's and girls' bodies for their own sexual satisfaction, even if taken violently.

41 Regional Rights Resource Team, 2006, *Child Sexual Abuse and Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children in the Pacific: A Regional Report*, Suva, p. 83.

Combined with frustration, boredom and peer pressure, pornography sends the message that sex is one of the ways boys can continue to express their dominance over girls.

The limits of urban responses to gender violence

Throughout our study, it was clear that the idea of a women's refuge or shelter was a new concept to many and a very alien one, particularly in *iTaukei* villages. A representative of the Department of Women in Suva echoed this, when she said, 'The truth is that a lot of people are ignorant and don't know about it. I can't emphasise that enough!' While most people we asked responded to the terms 'refuge' and 'shelter' with incomprehension, they thought of crisis accommodation as accommodation for flood victims, the poor and orphans. Many suggested that women and girls needed to reconcile with their families, using the extended family, the police, religious help and counselling, and Social Welfare Department. They were unaware of the work of the FWCC and crisis accommodation in helping women and girls escape violence. Even in Suva, women's religious organisations that were predominantly *iTaukei* did not necessarily know about the existence of such accommodation.

Of those who knew about it, the most crucial issue was access. Since nearly all the accommodation is located in the Suva/Nausori region, many knew that they would have to relocate in order to use it, which would entail cutting themselves off from their families, communities and workplaces. For women and girls living, working and/or attending school outside Suva, accepting referral to accommodation in Suva is difficult because of the distance they have to commute. The situation is only more difficult for those living outside regional centres like Labasa in Vanua Levu. According to the Social Welfare officer in Bua, girls are only sent to Labasa if there is a risk of abuse at home. Returning home after a court case can create unbearable tensions in a small community. Yet, family members find it too expensive to travel to Labasa and therefore are inhibited from visiting girls who have been referred there. Once in Labasa, there is only one formal home, and the only alternative is to send women and girls to Suva, which

also comes at high cost. In one example recounted by a counsellor, a 13-year-old was sexually assaulted and impregnated by the uncle's father's brother:

She was taken to the Salvation Army for a few days and then sent to Suva crisis accommodation, where she gave birth. She had to give birth alone in Suva while her mother was here because her mother could not afford to [join her in Suva for the birth]. A girl needs her mother when she is giving birth.

As one Social Welfare officer in Labasa put it, 'Putting children in Suva is *not* strengthening family well-being'.

Despite the distances, the demand for crisis accommodation services is high, and chances are that facilities are full. While a vast amount of aid is spent on gender violence, very little of it finds its way to crisis accommodation. The accommodation cannot cater to special needs, and the caretakers who manage the accommodation are often not trained social workers and face burnout. A respondent from the Assemblies of God in Suva summed up the situation by saying, '[The caretakers at the accommodation] have the heart to take them in but are facing many constraints, like finances, lack of space, and resources'. These factors often lead referral organisations to intensify their efforts to locate immediate or extended family members or friends who can accommodate the victim. More often than not, the referral agencies will use crisis accommodation as a last resort, when all other options have been exhausted.

While the preference for community-based resolutions stems from practicalities (Suva may be a long way away, there may be a waiting period to get accepted into crisis accommodation, etc.), it also reflects community family ideals stipulating that, in the case of domestic violence, husband and wife should be reconciled, but, if this is impossible, a wife should return to her natal family. Thus, respondents noted that, although crisis accommodation was important for the safety of women and girls, it might also encourage marriage breakups or the victim becoming a wanton. For instance, a representative from the Methodist Church's Women's Department in Suva claimed, 'I think there is [both] a good [side] and a bad side to crisis accommodation. It helps resolve the problem, but sometimes some victims are just to blame. They want to be on their own and will still give way to worldly lust', suggesting that accommodation facilitates women to become

prostitutes. Likewise, an informant in Tavua said, 'Women over 18 years may be put in a home or refuge, but at that age, they can be tempted to go astray and do things that are against the principles of refuges'. For these respondents, the order in the villages enforces morality and sexual constraint, the very basis of communal sociality.⁴²

As children facing problems are expected to live with the grandparents or aunts, the view that crisis accommodation was a dumping ground for unwanted children and especially handicapped children, street kids and single parents was relatively widespread. As one informant saw it, 'Most of the people are villagers and they come from close-knit communities. They might think that the victim's family has neglected her if she is placed in a refuge.'

If women and girls are seen as morally wayward when they stay in crisis accommodation institutions, they are doubly stigmatised if they end up being patients in St Giles Hospital, because mental illness is strongly stigmatised (although a number of campaigns in the last several years are beginning to change this). The Superintendent at St Giles, Dr Shishram Narayan, explained that women run away from home and walk into the hospital or are dropped off, some without any mental illness but with nowhere else to go. 'We stabilise them and have to send them home. They have lots of relapses. Some would like to come out of that environment but there is no place to go. It's a big problem.' Sometimes *iTaukei* women arrive with bruises and black eyes or with their hair ripped out in an exorcism.⁴³ They are given medication so they become docile and their families are given advice, and then they are released. Others are elderly women who have become difficult to care for at home. Dr Narayan continued, 'It's mostly women, married women. It used to be the Indian community. Now, it's the Fijian community as well.'

42 This may also reflect the desperate straits that some women find themselves in, if they are accepted in long-term accommodation.

43 More research is needed on exorcisms in both *iTaukei* and Indian communities.

The normalisation of violence and the question of representation

While international aid is being channelled into particular urban organisations with some success, the focus on male behaviour, and the inclusion of men in the process of combatting gender violence in the villages, has been too recent to show any major change in community attitudes toward gender violence. Although there is no doubt that boys and men are almost always the perpetrators of gender violence, these forms of violence exist in a wider field of violence that includes male-to-male violence, female-to-female violence, and female-to-male violence. For instance, until recently, punishment of children has been heavy-handed, with stories such as: a child hospitalised with *sasak* broom spines in her skin and eventually dying,⁴⁴ teachers admonishing a teenage girl for not showing enough respect to the father who was severely beating her, teachers beating students (and when this has been made illegal, a concerted call to the Constitution Commission in 2012 to bring back corporal punishment), and males describing how they were hung up in sacks as a form of discipline when they were children. A psychology student at the University of the South Pacific wrote her master's thesis on her experience as a nurse dealing with men who were too ashamed to admit they had been abused by women.⁴⁵ Given that these kinds of violence seem to have been uncommented upon until recently, this wider field clearly needs to be addressed.⁴⁶

With regards to violence against women, *iTaukei* women and girls do have the option of going to a relative's house and waiting for the *bulubulu*. Yet, because women and girls have little say in the outcome, international women's rights groups such as the CEDAW Committee have called for its elimination. Merry critiques this position, noting its role in preventing male conflict from escalating. She argues that the *bulubulu* should not be used in rape cases, but neither should the practice be eliminated because the structure of the ritual has wider

44 In this case, the perpetrator had not been identified but because a *sasak* broom is closely associated with women's domesticity, the perpetrator was assumed to be a female relative.

45 Akisi Kasami, 2010, 'Spouse abuse by women: The hidden side of domestic violence in Fiji'. MA thesis. Suva: University of the South Pacific.

46 Periodically there are projects addressing different aspects of these behaviours. For instance, there was an advertising campaign running on television raising awareness of bullying in 2012.

cultural applications than its responses to rape.⁴⁷ However, from a couple of limited examples, Merry then infers that communities are changing and the practice of the *bulubulu* 'has begun to shift from a practice that focuses on preventing vengeance between clans to one that supports a victim and holds the offender accountable'⁴⁸ and that the ritual is 'adapting to a more gender equal, urban society'.⁴⁹

It is clear that the gift-giving and male oratory at the base of the *bulubulu* recurs throughout *iTaukei* ritual, but Merry has greatly overstated the case for the *bulubulu* being redesigned to support the victim. In my research, many respondents—mostly men—showed resistance to changing attitudes towards gender violence because it would undermine concepts of gender hierarchy: specifically the idea that men are household heads who have authority over their families (although sometimes the same men would consider our questions seriously later in the discussion). Village communities (in which more than half of *iTaukei* still live) continue to be strong, relatively bounded and, in many areas, very patriarchal. As shown in this research, the *bulubulu* is not, as Merry describes it, 'increasingly rare even in villages'.⁵⁰ Nor is it a local arrangement that 'can promote human rights and social justice'⁵¹ because it is directed to fundamentally different ends—namely, negotiating relationships between men as heads of clans and households. Moreover, it is clear that the victim continues to have very little say over the outcome.

As Merry intimates, the judgements of the CEDAW Committee are likely to appear neocolonial to many *iTaukei*—and particularly those in conservative areas—but it is also clear from women's responses to

47 Merry, 'Tensions between global law and local social justice'; Merry, *Human Rights and Gender Violence*.

48 Merry, 'Tensions between global law and local social justice', p. 9.

49 Merry, *Human Rights and Gender Violence*, p. 130. In her book *Human Rights and Gender Violence*, there is an odd disjunction in Merry's argument. On the one hand, she argues that the use of the *bulubulu* for rape cases appeared at the time when a chauvinistic ethno-nationalism was at its strongest, in the 1987 coups. On the other, she argues that the CEDAW Committee uses the word 'culture' in such a way that they do not acknowledge cultural change, and proposes that the *bulubulu* has adapted in such a way that it reflects a more gender-equal society. See Merry, *Human Rights and Gender Violence*, pp. 125–30. Yet, a significant gap remains in her explanation about how and when the *bulubulu* changed from being a tool of ethno-nationalism to a ritual that supports women. At this point, Merry underestimates the broad support among the *iTaukei* for values that are often attributed only to the most vocal ethno-nationalists. See Newland, 'Imagining nationhood'.

50 Merry, *Human Rights and Gender Violence*, p. 121.

51 *Ibid.*, p. 104.

our questions that many women would like to see other options emerge that would support them in regard to the gender violence occurring in villages. At the same time, because men play a central role in leading villages and church groups and therefore in managing conflict, they must be included in discussions and processes that might lead to change. Without them, it is unclear how deep structural change could possibly occur.

As elsewhere in the world, conservative church leaders are often in opposition to women's rights groups, arguing that they are against God and against culture; but some church leaders are more moderate, having experienced the violence in villages or watched their female kin experience it and thus understand the need for change. In our study, some women went so far as to use their religion to confront gender violence. For example, women in a settlement near Suva noted:

Because of this culture, women are abused and men have their way in the family. Because of the cultural structure, men have the right to beat up women. Through religion, these women have found the courage and strength to overcome their violent situation. People should be encouraged to spend time with the family to break the cultural values that cause this problem.

Statements like this show very clearly the need to involve the churches.

Despite the fact that Christianity is a very strong part of *iTaukei* life, many organisations devoted to mitigating gender violence and its effects have been reluctant to become involved with the churches. Yet nearly all of the crisis accommodation is funded by them. Existing crisis accommodation faces enormous challenges as they are run on shoestring budgets, have no facilities at all for the disabled, and only two have the expertise to care for those in psychological trauma. Moreover, in almost all the villages we visited, women and girls did not know that crisis accommodation was available. While a number of urban-based support services now exist, our study shows that women and girls in the villages were not receiving any information about them. In the words of one gender violence activist:

Stakeholders are working separately instead of together ... there is a need for more training brought to the village level. In the past, there was a tendency to bring representatives [out of the villages] to a program [in the urban areas]. The representatives were women

who, when they got back to their community, found they didn't have the weight to make much difference. If the program is conducted at the village level, you can affect the whole village.

Toward the end of our *talanoa* sessions, both male and female participants were asking for anger-management programs to be brought to their villages. Women responded particularly passionately:

There should be anger management courses conducted in the village. They should start from Bua because mothers and children died in their own houses there. Have one in Bua, Macuata, Cakaudrove, Savusavu, Nabouwalu, and Labasa. The women want this kind of workshop because domestic violence is happening in their village and surrounding community. They also want to target newly married couples in the village so that problems that cause domestic violence can be resolved at the beginning. Some of the women need to be trained and work in a committee to help resolve these issues.

Such programs are unlikely to resolve tensions resulting from the structure of *iTaukei* village life, but the fact that both women and men were asking about them suggests that some men are open to enabling change, and village chiefs can be primary motivators. Indeed, some *turaga ni koro* in our study asked to be trained in marriage counselling, feeling that it would make them better leaders when faced with tensions in the villages. A respondent from the Department of Women in Labasa noted similar responses coming from chiefs of villages participating in the Zero Tolerance Violence Free Community campaign:

When we first started with the Zero Tolerance initiatives, there was resistance from men. As we kept pushing, men began to agree that violence is not acceptable. Men are coming forward for training. In one instance, a woman was killed. Two months later, the *turaga ni koro* requested training. The challenge now is to get people to embrace it and internalise it and act on it.

Since this research was completed, chiefs such as Roko Tui Aca Mataitini from Cakaudrove in Vanua Levu have been very vocal about their support of the Zero Tolerance initiative, banning violence against women and children and accepting women's participation in discussions in their villages.⁵² More recently, the Methodist Church

52 Serafina Silaitoga, 2011, 'No violence', *Fiji Times Online*, 1 December.

of Fiji, which is well-known for its conservative ideas about the family, has posted an article on their blog affirming their commitment to addressing abuse and violence, particularly towards children.⁵³ While gender violence remains endemic in Fiji, there is evidently cause for hope.

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