

Prologue: The Place of Papua New Guinea in Contours of Gender Violence

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Friday 24 March 2006. Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea. A large group of women and some men are gathering at Jack Pidik Park at Five-Mile to march to Tabari Place in Boroko. The women are of diverse generations but most of them are residents of Port Moresby. Some wear casual clothes, some are more formally dressed, some wear the striking uniforms of their professions, the women's and church groups they belong to or the NGOs they work for. Many are carrying *bilums* (string bags) which suggest both their national identity as citizens of Papua New Guinea (PNG) and their diverse ethnic origins (from the Sepik, from the Highlands, from the Gulf ...). They carry banners and posters, some professionally printed, some handmade on cardboard, which echo the language of protest against gender violence in many countries of the world. Some are in English: STOP the Violence against Women; No Means No; Say No to Incest; Respect Human Rights. Some are partially or wholly translated, vernacularised into Papua New Guinea's lingua franca of Tok Pisin: *Meri Ikirap Sapotim* Education for Good Governance, Active Citizenship and Women's Rights (Women Arise Support Them:¹ Education for Good Governance, Active Citizenship and Women's Rights), *Hei Ol Man Mipela ino Pik o Dog Bilong Yupela* (Hey men, We are not your pigs or dogs)² and *Lukautim yu yet long AIDS* (Protect yourself from AIDS). The banners protest gender violence, they call for stronger penalties against rapists and they affirm the importance of human rights in PNG. Street marches are part of the global vocabulary of politics and protest against gender violence along with Thursdays in Black and White Ribbon campaigns (see Merry 2006). For many Papua New Guineans, gender violence is a pervasive and intractable problem—in the home, on the streets, in the marketplaces, in the towns and villages of the nation. The women and their male supporters march from Five-Mile along the main highway to throng Tabari Place in Boroko, where the sole woman in the PNG Parliament then as now, Dame Carol Kidu, MP, a tireless advocate for women, human rights and HIV awareness in PNG, addresses the crowd. The scene is captured in a series of photographs taken by my co-editor Christine Stewart, some of which appear on the cover of this volume and in subsequent pages.³

1 *Meri Ikirap Sapotim* is variously known as just Women Arise or Women Arise Support Them. It is an NGO led by Sarah Garap (personal communication Katherine Lepani and Nicole Haley 26 January 2012). Its logo can be seen on their banner in the photo (see Figure 1).

2 This hand-made banner signs off more breezily with *Luv Mipela*, Love from us (see Figure 2).

3 I thank Christine Stewart for her description of this event of which she was a witness.



Figure 1. *Meri Ikirap Sapotim*. Some women, like members of this NGO, wear striking uniforms during the March against Gender Violence, Port Moresby, 2006.

Photograph by Christine Stewart.



Figure 2. 'Hey, men, we are not your pigs or dogs. Please think about that, and don't treat us badly.' Handmade banner proudly displayed during the March against Gender Violence, Port Moresby, 2006.

Photograph by Christine Stewart.



Figure 3. Dame Carol Kidu MP in the midst of the huge crowd gathered at Tabari Place, Port Moresby, 2006.

Photograph by Christine Stewart.

This march and a multitude of other public protests and workshops in the towns and villages of Papua New Guinea in the last decade suggest that gender violence is increasingly being seen as an important problem by many Papua New Guineans and that it is possible to mobilise large congregations of women and men in protest and to increase the visibility of gender violence as a national political issue. The shape of this march also suggests the huge ethnic diversity of PNG, the particular place of educated and urban people in such struggles, the respective roles of the state, police, churches and NGOs in combating gender violence and the ways in which such movements connect to global agendas and foreign aid.

Little over thirty years before this march, in September 1975, PNG gained independence from the erstwhile colonial power, Australia. Several authors (Wolfers 1975; Nelson 1977, 1982; Waiko 1993; Moore 2003) have told the complex story of European exploration and exploitation of this vast territory, started in earnest from the mid-nineteenth century by Germany in the north (German New Guinea) and Britain in the south (British New Guinea, later Papua). The British presence was primarily promoted by Australian interests in Queensland. The colonial fate of the country was intimately entangled with the two world wars between the rival imperial powers of Europe and Asia. Australian

troops occupied German New Guinea in World War I and administered the north first as a mandated territory and then, after brutal battles in the Pacific, including at Rabaul, the Bismarck Sea, Kokoda, Milne Bay and many other sites during World War II, as a United Nations Trust Territory (see Nelson 2006). Following World War II the two territories which had been administered separately were conjoined as a single administrative and judicial system: the Territory of Papua and New Guinea.

The unity of a state was thus imposed on indigenous peoples of enormous diversity. PNG still boasts about 800 indigenous languages (*tok ples*) spoken by the current population of six and a half million people, alongside the lingua franca Tok Pisin and English. Its overwhelmingly indigenous inhabitants derive from two distinct migrations: ancestors of those who speak Papuan languages from around 50–60,000 BP and the ancestors of those who speak Austronesian languages from c. 4000 BP. Of these two distinct language families, the former are concentrated in the interior mountainous regions called the Highlands and the latter in the coastal and insular regions, but this is not an exclusive or rigid configuration. There has been much intermingling of diverse languages and cultures, occasioned both by indigenous patterns of exchange, trade, conquest and movement and processes originating in the colonial period: the circuits of Christian missions, schools, and hospitals, the predominantly male migrant labour to plantations and mines both within the territories and overseas and, increasingly, from the 1960s and especially after Independence in 1975, when freedom of movement was guaranteed by the new constitution, processes of migration to urban centres engaging women as well as men (see Moore 2003).

The remote valleys of the Highlands, though settled earlier by indigenous inhabitants (where the origins of agriculture can be traced to 50,000 BP), were the last region to encounter *ol wait man* (TP: white men) in the 1930s (see Connolly and Anderson 1983, 1988; Bonnemère and Lemonnier 2009). Coastal and insular regions such as the Sepik and the Massim had a far deeper experience of the several agents of European colonialism dating back to the mid-nineteenth century: explorers, Christian missionaries, planters and traders, and officials of colonial states. The Australian colonial state was arguably more successful in the promotion of its blatantly commercial goals through the establishment of private expatriate plantations and mines than in the cultural and political goals of bringing 'civilisation' and modern political and legal structures. Ted Wolfers (1977), Bill Gammage (1999) and Sinclair Dinnen (2001) and others have stressed the draconian, racialised character of Australian administration in its laws enforcing spatial segregation, sartorial differentiation, curfews and ordinances protecting white women from the perceived threat of sexualised violence from black men (see Inglis 1974). The independent state is still often seen today as a foreign, remote and ineffectual entity by many Papua New Guineans. Christian

missions were far more successful than secular political institutions in gaining indigenous legitimacy and adherents. Today 96 per cent of Papua New Guineans identify as Christian following either the mainstream denominations introduced early in the colonial period (Catholic, Anglican, Lutheran, Methodist/Congregationalist—the latter two now amalgamated as the United Church), a burgeoning variety of evangelical churches (Baptist, Seventh Day Adventist, Mormon, Assemblies of God) and an ever-increasing number of independent, charismatic, fundamentalist and Pentecostal churches (see Gibbs 2004; Jebens 2005).

The independent state has not fulfilled the more optimistic hopes of its founders and the nationalist aspirations of the first generation of leaders, intellectuals and artists. The huge wealth generated from the profitable extractive industries of mining and logging has too often benefitted primarily expatriate owners and multinational corporations, national and local politicians, and a minority of primarily male landowners (Filer 2001, Filer and Macintyre 2006). Bougainvillean attempts to secede from the independent state of PNG in the context of a controversial mine at Panguna morphed into a complex and bloody civil war which lasted a decade and engaged PNG national troops on one side of this divisive conflict (Saovana-Spriggs 2007; Regan 2010). Poverty, at least as defined by a commodity economy, is palpably worsening both in some remote regions and in the squatter settlements of towns (Allen, Bourke and Gibson 2005; Cammack 2007). The state of education and health is parlous especially in the rural regions of the country and some PNG citizens look back on the colonial period with nostalgia as a time when schools and universities, clinics and hospitals were better resourced and administered. Malaria, TB and various STIs continue to be endemic diseases while HIV has been pronounced a generalised epidemic (Luker and Dinnen 2010; Lepani 2012). There are major problems of law and order in urban centres like Port Moresby, Mt Hagen and Goroka and on major roads like the Highlands Highway where *raskol* gangs combine theft with murder and rape. Police responses tend to be as draconian and violent as those in the colonial period (Dinnen 2001). The national parliament continues to be dominated by men, with a sole woman representative, Dame Carol Kidu, MP, who has announced she will not stand at the next election in July 2012. As I began writing this Prologue, the Government of the new Prime Minister Peter O'Neill was promising to endorse the proposal espoused by Dame Carol Kidu and many others, that twenty-two seats in the National Parliament be reserved for women. The first stage of this process was achieved in November 2011, when Parliament passed enabling legislation. But an ongoing leadership dispute between O'Neill and previous Prime Minister Somare creates a strong possibility that necessary constitutional amendments may not be approved before Parliament is prorogued and the nation goes to fresh elections scheduled

for 2012. Dame Carol Kidu remains confident, saying that progress has been made, and whatever happens, the legislation sets the foundation upon which to build after 2012 (Tiwari 2012).⁴

These persisting problems in PNG have occasioned negative media both within PNG and beyond, most especially in the erstwhile colonial power, Australia. There have been several versions of doomsday foreign policy rhetoric, portraying PNG as a 'failed state' or as a crucial point in an 'arc of instability' which curves around the region embracing Solomons, Fiji and even Vanuatu (May ed. 2003; Jolly 2007; Fry and Kabataulaka 2008). Such dystopian discourses are fuelled by the fact that Australian aid to PNG consumes the largest part of its aid and development budget (\$436.5 million in 2011–12).⁵ Such expenditure on programs to assist education, health, justice and good governance, to promote gender equality and combat HIV and gender violence are seen by some to be 'wasting' the money of Australian taxpayers, especially if inefficacy, extravagance or corruption can be detected. This has led to successive controversies and standoffs around the tension between the sovereignty of PNG as an independent state and how Australia perpetuates its 'special relationship' with PNG through various forms of tied or conditional aid or by sending Australians to be line managers and executives in its state bureaucracy.

Clearly any analysis of the pervasiveness of gender violence in PNG must perforce contribute to the negativity of its national portrait. This is patent in any website search and especially from the salience of gender violence in PNG in the web presence of major NGOs such as Amnesty International, International Women's Development Agency, Save the Children, Caritas Australia, Human Rights Watch and Medicins Sans Frontiers. The contributors to this volume, all long-term residents or scholars of PNG, are painfully aware of this fact. But it must be acknowledged that there was recognition of the problem of gender violence by the independent state in the early 1980s and indeed a series of studies and reports emanating from the Law Reform Commission which still constitute some of the most comprehensive studies of the problem in PNG. But, as a series of subsequent reports has suggested, successive governments have failed to implement recommendations fully and indeed some initiatives such as public awareness programs or attempts to change the perceptions and practices of the police have failed (see Introduction).⁶

4 I thank Christine Stewart for the wording of the four preceding sentences. There is now a striking difference between the several independent and predominantly Anglophone states of PNG, Solomons, Vanuatu and Fiji where there are very few women in national parliaments and the Francophone territories of New Caledonia and French Polynesia where the French metropolitan laws on 'parity' have been recently mandated and have in general been highly successful in bringing women into the formal political system. Despite some caveats expressed about the possibility of similar legislation elsewhere in the Western Pacific, Jon Fraenkel (2006) Nicole George (2011) and others support the enormous potential of such moves to break the perduring male domination of legislative politics in countries of the western Pacific.

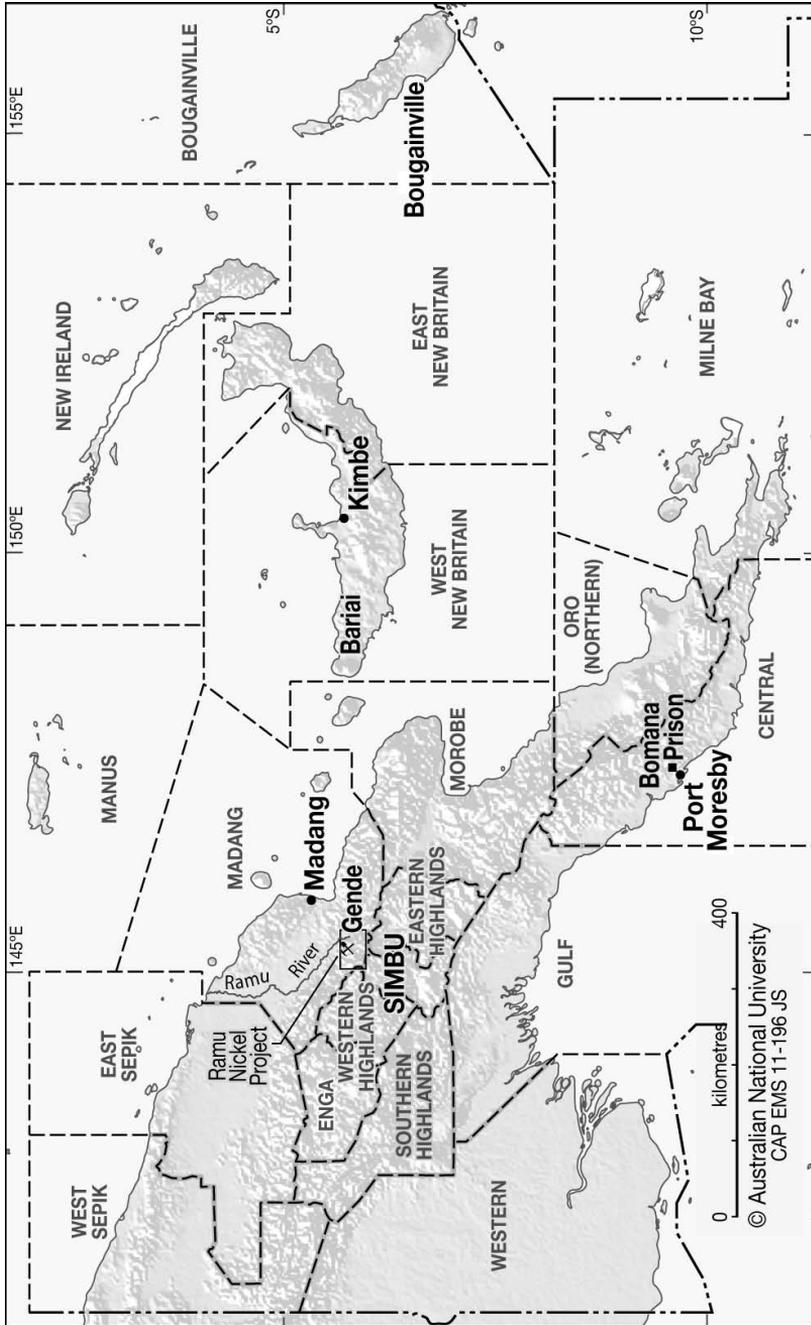
5 This is the amount directly from AusAID. The total from all Australian government departments was \$482.3 million (Papua New Guinea. *Australian Government AusAID* 2012)

6 I thank Martha Macintyre for the wording of the two preceding sentences.

The way in which current debates about gender violence articulate with fraught colonial histories both in settler states like Australia, New Caledonia and Hawai'i and sovereign states like PNG, Vanuatu, Solomons and Fiji is worthy of a broader comparative study (see Merry 2000; Merry and Brenneis 2004). Writing from Australia in 2011 it is impossible not to mention the salience of gender violence and the sexual abuse of children in legitimating the bipartisan political support of the national government's 'intervention' in the indigenous communities of Northern Australia, even though that has been hotly contested and critiqued by both indigenous and non-indigenous Australians (Altman and Hinkson 2009). Yet it is a complete dead end to blame *either* indigenous 'culture' *or* the devastating dispossession and emasculating effects of colonialism for such contemporary configurations of gender violence. The pervasiveness and complexity of the problem require more than such black *or* white solutions. To name and to analyse indigenous gender violence is fraught, especially for indigenous women, and is too often portrayed as a betrayal of racial or ethnic solidarity. As the brilliant Kanak author, feminist and independence activist and now Deputy President of New Caledonia, Déwé Gorodé, suggests in her incendiary novel *The Wreck*, there is a complicity between the gender violence of indigenous patriarchal forms in New Caledonia, perpetrated in *la coutume* (custom) over generations and the violence of colonial possession of the land and gendered violence against its peoples, including the capitalist commodification of women's bodies.⁷ The same might be said of PNG.

This then is the complex historical and contemporary context for the essays in this volume. The chapters traverse the diversity of the country from the remote rural regions of the islands (West New Britain, Ch. 1) and the Highlands (Simbu, Gende, Chs 2 and 3) to the towns of Madang (Ch. 4), Port Moresby (Chs 5 and 7) and Bomana Prison on Moresby's outskirts (Ch. 6) (see Map 1). We approach the problem from diverse vantage points complementing the particularities of localised research done in indigenous languages in villages and mine sites, with a national perspective viewed from the courts, police stations, jails, government suites, NGO offices, and guesthouses of the towns and a global perspective on how gender violence in PNG is situated in the complex networks of foreign aid, development assistance and international agendas (Introduction and Ch. 8). We trust this volume contributes not just to enhanced understandings but to strategies for effecting change so that the pervasive and perduring problem of gender violence in PNG can be ameliorated.

⁷ The novel, while it celebrates the joy of sexual desire and heterosexual union, depicts intergenerational practices of older Kanak men coercing younger women into incestuous relations and the horrors of a gruesome pack rape and murder of a wilful woman. Her editors comment on the multilayered character of her view of gender violence and its perduring perversity: 'Moving edgily between a critique of the violence of colonization, a protest against the global exploitation of women's bodies and an uncompromising gaze at the underside of Custom, Gorodé's novel attempts to mitigate the impact of its revelations by showing that its criticism of violence against women is both anchored in particular historical and social contexts and resonates beyond Kanak society. In fact perplexing many of her readers, Gorodé's fiction leaves the question of the origin of violence against women open, partially undecideable' (Walker-Morrison and Ramsay 2011: xii).



Map 1. General map of PNG showing the sites of research included in this volume. Map production by Education and Multimedia Services, College of Asia and the Pacific, The Australian National University.

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