

the age of steam

constructed identity and recalcitrant youth in a Papua New Guinea village

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Began fieldwork in the village of Pari, Port Moresby in the early 1990s while he was still employed by the University of Papua New Guinea. His chapter is based in part on fieldwork conducted on several visits from 1994 (when he was still with UPNG) to 1999, latterly as an affiliate of that University by courtesy of the PNG National Research Institute.¹

Introduction

The exploration of restorative justice as a constructive alternative to retributive or punitive justice is an attractive and worthwhile project. Restorative justice aims to restore social harmony, make amends to victims and reintegrate offenders into the community.² Prefacing a careful appraisal of both optimistic and negative accounts of restorative justice, John Braithwaite makes 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'.³ However, as an anthropologist 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 in Papua New Guinea, I contextualise a judicial process which might be glossed as restorative in issues of communal identity, the interpretation of tradition and the negotiation of modern sociality.⁴ 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 to which it is putatively adapted.

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',⁵ often to serve political ends.⁶ 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.⁷ 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'.⁸

I bring these considerations to a discussion of a village on the edge of the city of Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea, 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 arguably 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 missionization 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 describe the community's

negotiation of the contradiction between this perception and its inescapable socio-economic 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 eighteenth century by a Western Motu culture 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 Lakwahara, 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 Lakwahara, 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 consistently given in oral histories⁹ and its geographical and temporal aspects are reasonably corroborated by archaeological evidence.¹⁰

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, Ugata¹¹ Vaina, is at the centre of a story which charted the village's identity and behaviour as a moral community before the influence of Christianity. It is said that Ugata 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.¹² 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 accidentally 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.¹³ As a result, when the tuna seasonally returned to the bay (between, roughly, May and October of each year) fishing was both preceded and accompanied by strict taboos and many ritual activities.¹⁴ 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 ritual surrounding subsistence activities such as fishing by the Motu were not confined to Pari village. Groves reports similar netmaking and fishing ritual surviving into the 1950s in Manumanu, a Motu village west of Port Moresby, where turtle, dugong and barramundi were caught.¹⁵ However, the identity of Pari 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 anti-clockwise circuit into natural trenches in the floor of the bay to be corralled with nets by villagers. I have been told the story of Ugata 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. The fish still swim into the bay, though there are less 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 Ugata 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-Koitabu communities in general, was changed by the arrival of missionaries and, soon after, a colonial administration. The London Missionary Society (LMS) was active in the area from 1872, and from late 1874 missionaries were posted in local villages.¹⁶ The first Papuan to be ordained by the LMS was Mahuru Gaudi, of Pari village, in 1883. In the following year Papua was declared a British Protectorate (known for a period as British New Guinea) and in 1888 became a crown colony. The development of the principal town, Port Moresby, has been well documented,¹⁷ as have the effects of colonial administration and Christianity on the social activity of the Motu-Koitabu.¹⁸

By the end of the colonial period many ritual expressions of pre-colonial Motu-Koitabu culture had disappeared, most quickly in the Western Motu villages immediately adjacent to Port Moresby,¹⁹ but eventually in all Motu-Koitabu communities. Under Christian pressure traditional dancing was replaced by ersatz Polynesian dancing, which missionaries regarded as less sexually licentious, and later by European styles.²⁰ The lavish feasts described by Seligman,²¹ 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 in consequence.²² The Motu once undertook heroic and renown-winning trading voyages by large multi-hulled canoes to Papuan Gulf communities where tonnes of clay cooking pots made by Motu women were exchanged for sago.²³ 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-Koitabu, especially those of the Hanuabada village complex, initially paying with items of clothing and axes. Whether the Motu-Koitabu 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 via tokens of reciprocation and goodwill. The Administration's land acquisition procedure later included rental agreements and more substantial payments, but by the mid-twentieth 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-Koitabu.²⁴ By the end of the twentieth century the potential total loss of their homelands was being expressed in a familiar political rhetoric.²⁵

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 1885.²⁶ As old opportunities for acquiring prestige, like 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-Koitabu became literate and well qualified tradesmen. They followed professional careers earlier than most other Papuan peoples.²⁷ Their adaptability to the changes being introduced by Europeans was such that an American researcher, in the climate of paternalistic colonialism of the mid-twentieth century, subtitled a doctoral thesis on the Motu 'A study of successful acculturation'.²⁸

In many respects, this general history of the Motu-Koitabu encounter with Christianity and colonialism encapsulates the particular history of Pari village. Traditionally the villagers made pots for trade²⁹ and Pari was one of the Western Motu villages involved in the *hiri* voyages. Like the other Motu-Koitabu villages, it came under the influence of the LMS before Papua was officially colonised, with a resulting atrophy over several decades of much traditional dancing, ritual and other activity.³⁰ The original limestone church built by the

LMS has been replaced by 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 twelve medical students sent to Sydney University for training³¹ 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, to becoming Mayor of Port Moresby and, later, Papua New Guinea's High Commissioner to Australia.

Like the Hanuabada complex, Pari was evacuated during the Second World War, 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 306.³² By the 1940s it had grown to about 600. During the war the villagers were shifted to a new location to the east,³³ 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 from Pari in 1943–44,³⁴ a significant proportion in itself, but more tellingly, Tarr provides figures showing that after able-bodied men (perhaps numbering about 80)³⁵ 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 477.³⁶ In other words, about a 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 had to be substantially rebuilt.³⁷ 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.³⁸ 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 assistants or shop assistants.³⁹ 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 post-war colonial period a number of Europeans married into or lived in Pari village, as a house-to-house genealogical survey conducted in 1974 revealed.⁴⁰ Some of these 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 following 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.⁴¹ A European doctor, Ian Maddocks, worked professionally in Pari in the 1960s,⁴² and specific research on health in the village was carried out by John Biddulph in the same period.⁴³ 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,⁴⁴ and whose mentor was alleged to be the European Girl Guides Commissioner.⁴⁵

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 modernized 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',⁴⁶ and Maddocks and Maddocks commented: 'Compared to most other populations of Papua New Guinea, the people of Pari are wealthy and well educated'.⁴⁷ 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 to 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-Koitabu village. The perseverance of the legends of Kevau Dabora and Ugata 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 which is creative but within limits imposed by the village's embeddedness in its determinate past.⁴⁸ 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 *lingue franca*. 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), originally developed 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-Koitabu 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.⁴⁹

Due to a long history of intermarriage with their traditional inland neighbours, the Koitabu, coastal Motu villages have a significant Koitabu complement, both by the presence of nominally Koitabu *iduhu*, and more subtly by the weight of genealogical connections. However, Motu dominates Koitabu linguistically as the spoken language. While working in Pari village, it was acceptable for me to lapse into English in conversation but I was humorously yet firmly corrected whenever I lapsed into *Hiri Motu*, which villagers referred to as the 'Kerema' (i.e. 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-Koitabu 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 which 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 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,⁵⁰ and described in detail by Groves half a century later in 1963.

In addition to these shared characteristics of the Motu-Koitabu 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 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 (i.e. toward 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 Ugata 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.⁵¹

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 nineteenth 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 twentieth century and traditional organised activities like dancing and feasting were replaced by church-related activities organised by church deacons.⁵² 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.⁵³

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, following the realisation that in spearing Ugata 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 which 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.⁵⁴

While Pari was missionised in the late nineteenth 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; the Church's opposition to Sunday fishing.⁵⁵ 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 which 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 eighteenth 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 which 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.⁵⁶

There are no legal liquor outlets in the village, but beer is easily obtainable in the city, and a small degree of black-marketing of beer through village trade stores is countenanced as a commonsense acknowledgement of the inevitability of village men wanting to drink alcohol. Compared to 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 but it loosens tongues. Polite, restrained language gives way to obscenity and the expression of normally private resentments.

Complaints about drunkenness are mostly dealt with in the village court. Village courts were introduced by legislation at

the end of the colonial era, and intended as a locally accessible dispute settlement resource. Court officials were elected or chosen from the local community and enjoined to be guided by local custom, rather than introduced law, in their decisions.⁵⁷ Over the decades village courts overall have drifted away from this neo-customary vision under the exigencies of bureaucratic and legal impositions as well as community expectations that village 'courts' would behave like the long-familiar formal local and district 'courts'.⁵⁸ Nevertheless 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.⁵⁹

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 had 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 description of Motu-Koitabu 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.⁶⁰ 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-Koitabu 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 regular 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

Recently, Pari's ability to maintain its communal integrity has been challenged by some of the young people it had hitherto been able to restrain through the restorative techniques described above. The recalcitrant attitudes which are being displayed, particularly among young males, are 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-Koitabu 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 times⁶¹ — had privileged access to them. But in recent decades serious inadequacies have become apparent in Papua New Guinea's schools and training facilities.⁶² 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,⁶³ which undermine policy initiatives 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 twenty 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'. The *wantok* system (from the *Tokpisin* '*wantok*', referring to near or distant kin) is a common urban catchcry referring to the acquisition of benefits, including high-ranking employment, through nepotism and patronage. The Motu-Koitabu no longer enjoy the same degree of dominance in prestigious positions as they once 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 of the story such as how many tuna she gave birth to, or the precise locations at which each successive event 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 which the street slang connotes and which local pop music videos portray as the modern, urban youth culture of the nation.⁶⁴

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. 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.⁶⁵ 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 recently resurrected by a Motu-Koitabu 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.⁶⁶ Alcoholic 'homebrews' 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. Following the raid, the destruction of the still and the lecture, the homebrew disappeared and the adult villagers assumed the matter was resolved. However in 1999 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 *en masse* to appear in the village court. Out of a reliably identified fifteen youths only six attended.

Questioned by the magistrates these 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 following 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 utilized 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 seventeen *iduhu* is in fact identified as 'Kerema' (i.e. Gulf area) and patrilineally traced to an earlier extended family of migrants. However, for the most part intermarriage with Motu-Koitabu 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-Koitabu villagers, and there was talk of 'bad influence'.

Blaming Kerema youths for corrupting Motu-Koitabu youths, however, did not solve the problem of what to do and in the climate of restraint and politeness which 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. However, the steam drinkers' intoxicated behaviour is only a superficial aspect of the problem they create for Pari, which is accustomed to drunkenness, albeit of a slightly more conventional kind. More important is their failure to attend the village court, or their apparent lack of shame if they do attend. The village court's inability to effect an acknowledgement by the youths that they have done anything significantly wrong, or to instigate any gesture from the youths of commitment to the moral community which Pari claims to be, exposes 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 co-operation in its enactment, reaffirming the moral community of which membership affirms villagers' survival as Motu-Koitabu 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,⁶⁷ 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 socio-economic 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 ongoing contradiction between Pari's Motu-Koitabu 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',⁶⁸ 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'⁶⁹ constrained by history and susceptible to the politics of identity as cultural meanings are challenged not only from without, but from within the community.

Endnotes

- ¹ I am indebted to my local research assistant, Andrew Kadeullo, and the people of Pari village, especially the village court officials, for their patient help, and to Denis Crowdy and Gima Rupa for their hospitality in 1999. I benefited from discussion of the substance of this chapter with Deborah Dunn, Lyne Harrison and Barry Morris.
- ² See e.g. Braithwaite, John 1999. 'Restorative justice: assessing optimistic and pessimistic accounts' pp 4–6; Dinnen, Sinclair 1997. 'Restorative justice in Papua New Guinea': pp 254–255
- ³ Braithwaite 1999: p 6
- ⁴ In an early draft of this chapter I employed the 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.
- ⁵ Turner, James West 1997. 'Continuity and constraint: reconstructing the concept of tradition from a Pacific perspective': p 347

- 6 cf Keesing, Roger M and Robert Tonkinson (eds) 1982. 'Reinventing traditional culture: The politics of kastom in island Melanesia', Hobsbawn, Eric and Terence Ranger 1992. *The Invention of Tradition*; Hanson, Allan 1989. 'The making of the Maori: culture invention and its logic', Carrier, James (ed) 1992. 'Introduction', *History and Tradition in Melanesian Anthropology*
- 7 Turner 1997: p 347
- 8 Ibid: pp 356–57
- 9 Oram, N.D. 1968. 'Taurama—Oral sources for a study of recent Motuan prehistory', 1981. 'The history of the Motu-speaking and Koitabu-speaking peoples according to their own traditions'. Pulsford, R L and V Heni 1968. 'The story of Taurama Village as told by Aire Aire Rahobada of Pari Village'
- 10 Bulmer, Susan 1971. 'Prehistoric settlement patterns and pottery in the Port Moresby area', Golson, J 1968. 'Introduction to Taurama archaeological site Kirra Beach'
- 11 I have read and been given four versions of this name: the others are Igutu, Iguta and Uguta. 'Ugata' is the version used by Pulsford and is used here for convenience (1975)
- 12 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.
- 13 Ikupu, Ovia 1930. 'Story about Kidukidu', cf Egi, Lahui Tau 1963. 'The tale of five tuna fish'; Gebai, Allen M 1973. 'How the people of Pari have come to believe strongly that the tuna fish comes originally from the human family'; Kidu, B 1976. 'The Kidu of Pari'; Pulsford, R L 1975. 'Ceremonial fishing for tuna by the Motu of Pari'
- 14 Ikupu, 1930; Kidu, 1976; Pulsford, 1975
- 15 Groves 1957. 'Sacred past and profane present in Papua'
- 16 Garrett, John 1985. *To Live Among the Stars: Christian Origins in Oceania*: pp 206–208
- 17 eg Oram, N D 1976. *Colonial Town to Melanesian City*: p 175ff; Stuart, Ian 1970, *Port Moresby Yesterday and Today*
- 18 cf Austin, Tony 1978. *Technical Training and Development in Papua 1894–1941*; Groves, Murray, 1954. 'Dancing in Poreporena'; Oram, N D 1976; 1989, 'The Western Motu area and the European impact: 1872–1942'; Robinson, Neville K, 1979. *Villagers at War: Some Papua New Guinean Experiences in World War II*; Rosenstiel, Annette, 1953. *The Motu of Papua New Guinea: a study of successful acculturation*; Seligman, C G, 1910. *The Melanesians of British New Guinea*; Tarr, Jim 1973, 'Vabukori and Pari — the years of war'

- 19 Groves, Murray 1957. 'Sacred past and profane present in Papua'
- 20 Groves 1954, 1957
- 21 Seligman 1910: pp 141–150
- 22 Groves 1954: pp 80–82; Gregory, C A 1980. 'Gifts to Men and gifts to
god: gift exchange and capital accumulation in contemporary Papua'
p 630; 1982, *Gifts and Commodities*: p 206
- 23 Dutton, Tom 1982. *The Hiri in History: Further Aspects of Long Distance
Motu Trade in Central Papua*
- 24 Oram 1976: p 175ff
- 25 eg Joku, Harlyne 1999. 'Landowners to wage war against port
relocation'; Kidu, Carol 1999. 'Need to halt menace of illegal
settlements'; Nicholas, Isaac 1998. 'Pay Motu-Koitabu folk for land,
says Kidu'; Sefala, Alex 1999. 'Report Recommends Setting Up of
Motu-Koita Panel'
- 26 Oram 1976: p 15
- 27 Ibid: pp 52–57
- 28 Rosenstiel op cit
- 29 Bulmer 1982: p 122
- 30 Oram 1976: p 59, 1989: p 56
- 31 *Papuan Villager* 1933: p 79; Oram 1976: p 54
- 32 Rosenstiel 1953: p 145
- 33 Tarr, 1973
- 34 Robinson 1979: p 106. 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 villages
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.
- 35 Tarr 1973: p 16
- 36 Ibid: p 22
- 37 Ibid
- 38 Biddulph, John 1970. 'Longitudinal survey of children born in a
periurban Papuan village — a preliminary report': p 23
- 39 Maddocks, DL and I Maddocks 1977, 'The Health of Young Adults in
Pari Village': p 227
- 40 Maddocks et al 1974, *Pari Hanua Ruma Ai Lada-Torena*
- 41 Premdas, Ralph and Jeffrey S Steeves 1978, *Electoral Politics in a Third
World City: Port Moresby 1977*: p 31
- 42 Maddocks, I 1971. 'Udumu A-Hagaia'; Maddocks and Maddocks
1972. 'Pari village study: results and prospects'

- 43 Biddulph 1970
- 44 Hughes, Colin A 1965, 'The Moresby open and Central special
elections': pp 349, 366
- 45 Hughes 1965: p 349
- 46 Biddulph 1970: p 23
- 47 Maddocks and Maddocks 1972: p 225
- 48 Turner 1997: pp 347, 356–357
- 49 see Garrett 1985: p 211; 1992. *Footsteps in the sea: Christianity in
Oceania to World War II*: p 37
- 50 Seligman 1910: pp 49–65, 66–91
- 51 Pulsford 1975: p 112
- 52 Groves 1954
- 53 Gregory 1980
- 54 Pulsford 1975: p 111
- 55 Pulsford 1975
- 56 Maddocks and Maddocks 1977: p 112, emphasis in orig
- 57 Village Court Secretariat, 1975. Selection of Court Officials; 1976.
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- 58 Paliwala, A 1982. 'Law and order in the village: Papua New Guinea's
village courts'; Goddard, Michael 1992. 'Of handcuffs and foodbaskets:
theory and practice in Papua New Guinea's village courts'
- 59 cf Garap, Sarah 2000. 'Struggles of women and girls — Simbu Province,
Papua New Guinea'; Goddard, Michael 2000, 'Three urban village
courts in Papua New Guinea: some comparative observations on dispute
settlement'; Scaglione, R 1990. 'Legal adaptation in a Papua New Guinea
village court'; Westermarck, G 1986. 'Court is an arrow: legal pluralism in
Papua New Guinea'; Young, D W 1992. 'Grassroots justice where the
justice national system is the "alternative"'; Zorn, J 1990. 'Customary Law
in the Papua New Guinea village courts'
- 60 Seligman 1910: p 133
- 61 Austin 1978
- 62 Gannicott, Ken 1993. 'Human resource development'; Gibson,
Margaret and Wari Iamo 1992. *Community School Relations and the
Teacher*; Stein, Leslie 1991. *Papua New Guinea: Economic Situation
and Outlook*: pp 55–56
- 63 Standish, W 1999. *Papua New Guinea 1999: Crisis of Government*.
p 4 and passim
- 64 cf Gewertz, D and F Errington 1996. 'On PepsiCo and Piety in a Papua
New Guinea "modernity"'

⁶⁵ Betel (areca) nut, the traditional mild intoxicant of Papua and elsewhere, 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 when it is spat out), betel is treated by Papua New Guineans rather like a feel-good chewing gum.

⁶⁶ Gaudi, Haraka 1998. 'Towards wise coastal development practice'.

⁶⁷ Goddard 1992

⁶⁸ Braithwaite 1999: p 6

⁶⁹ Turner 1997: p 347