

# The payback beat

## *Ethnographic citizenship and the public kinship of indigenous subjects in postcolonial Papua New Guinea*

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**Abstract:** Unlike many postcolonial nations, Papua New Guinea defines itself through ethnographic citizenship in which members of its population are united in the empirical fact that they have an origin in some kind of indigenous society, rather than a common cultural tradition. In order to have standing in the PNG public sphere, people are required to produce knowledge of themselves as subjects of an integrated, functional social order. This poses an acute dilemma: one's inalienable belonging and enduring obligations to fellow members of a rural community—typically grounded in forms of kinship—are matters of public discourse, yet the preeminent value of relationships underlying these modes of sociality are potentially disqualifying stigmata in a liberal order. In this paper, I examine journalism for rural audiences in PNG as a site where alternative public discourses of collective life emerge. In *Simbu Nius*, a provincial news magazine, rural clans figure prominently as agents in local news events, yet the recognition of their reciprocal interrelationships is always haunted by the stereotype of tribal retaliation and so they remain precariously situated on the edge of the liberal public sphere. **Keywords:** media discourse, newsgathering, journalism, violence, stereotypes, Tok Pisin.

### The love gift

In early 2004, an Australian man was robbed at gunpoint and killed while withdrawing money from a bank machine in the town of Mount Hagen, Papua New Guinea (PNG). As an expatriate visitor, his death sparked much more public outrage in the press than the typical cases of random violence.<sup>1</sup> Several prominent people from and living in Mount Hagen town formed a committee to raise funds for a “love gift” to the victim’s family in Australia (see fig. 1). In their interviews with the national media and in the print advertisements they placed in national newspapers, the organizers of the Western Highlands Peace Committee (WHPC) stressed that their love gift to the kin of the deceased was a sincere expression of apology based in the “custom and tradition” of their rural province (PNG Post-Courier 2004, 4; see also Kapu 2004). Many people, however, saw it as a compensation payment, and criticized the group for placing a violent crime in a framework of extralegal restitution (Peter 2004; Paulus 2004).

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<sup>1</sup>The victim, Alan Mourilyan, was a pilot for a domestic airline but he and his family resided fulltime in Cairns, Queensland. He was very familiar with PNG and had substantial, longstanding relationships with the country but was not a citizen.



# "Love Gift"

All the People of the Western Highlands Province are urged to come forward and express their condolence by being part of a "LOVE GIFT" to the family of the late Captain Allan Mouriliyan, the Australian pilot killed in Mt. Hagen on Sunday 14<sup>th</sup> March 2004.

**The Gift is money.**

The National Steering Committee has organized for Contributions to be made at the Jack Pidik Park for those in Port Moresby and at the Pope John Paul Oval in Mt Hagen on Saturday 3<sup>rd</sup> April 2004 starting 11am.

Those who can't contribute this weekend can do so next Saturday at the same venues.

Or send them to this Account:

**Western Highlands Peace Account**  
**A/C No: 8202-1000972171 BSP - Waigani**  
**Or Phones: 323 6195/687 2562/683 4099**

**NATIONAL COMMITTEE MEMBERS:**

1. Pastor Tom Watinga - Chairman
2. Tom Kulunga - Deputy Police Commissioner
3. Dr. Nicholas Mann - Secretary, Dept. of Health
4. Gabriel Pepson - Secretary, Dept. Foreign Affairs
5. Andrew Ogil - Director, Dept. Civil Aviation
6. John Eggins - EMTV News Director
7. Pastor Anthony Dalaka - Senior Pastor AOG
8. Paulus Kei - Committee Secretary

Figure 1: "Love Gift," a display advertisement placed in the PNG *Post-Courier* on April 2, 2004 in response to the killing of Alan Mourilyan (Western Highlands Peace Committee 2004).

Nationally and internationally, rural Highlands societies are seen through a stereotype of the primitive, and believed to be not only violent but literally ungovernable. In the news discourse of the national press, whose audience is largely urban and educated, Highlands societies are locked in constant cycles of *payback* (or, retaliatory) violence. The practice of giving compensation for deaths is also seen as part of this pathological cultural syndrome. The WHPC raised K20,000, but in the end presented handicrafts to the victim's family in a public ceremony and erected a plaque in his honor (Gumuno 2004). The love gift proved unable to overcome the stigma of *payback*. The victim's death created a perfect Catch-22. The WHPC wanted to use a monetary gift as a symbol of their commitment to peace. Yet in doing so they were seen through a variation on the stereotype they sought to negate. As Brackette Williams (1991) argues for other creole nations, the politics of difference in PNG turns on people's capacity to embody both Prospero and Caliban.

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I start with this story because it illustrates the nature of citizenship in this postcolonial country where the overwhelming majority of people live as members of rural, indigenous communities bound by forms of kinship. As an independent nation-state, Papua New

Guinea (PNG) has embraced this diversity, yet only through the lens of an ethnographic kind of citizenship (Schram 2018, 203). Rather than defining the nation through a symbol of a common culture and tradition, the dominant discourse conceptualizes the population as many distinct societies which are each governed by their own customs. People bear the burden of making their patterns of life and relationships intelligible to the state on its terms by showing how customary practices function to maintain order. Insofar as these institutions can be shown to govern people in the ways that a state governs citizens, they are recognized as legitimate. If they cannot be, then they become a threat to the state.

In this sense, ethnographic citizenship reveals a deeper paradox in the liberal political imagination. On the one hand, ethnographic citizenship recognizes the power of social bonds, but it only finds value in them where they protect and nurture individuals as bearers of rights. It can be argued, as Joel Robbins (2009) does, that many indigenous societies of Papua New Guinea make relationships central to their conception of justice. According to this principle of “relational justice,” the relationships and groups within a community are recognized as having rights (Robbins 2009, 177). Individuals only appear in this framework as bearers of obligations. Agency is attributed to relationships as transindividual persons<sup>2</sup> (see also Sahlins 2012, 44). Wrongs are thus judged according how much they harm relationships rather than individuals. When individual subjects primarily serve as a medium of social forces, the liberal ethnographic state sees an unruly tribe which takes the law into its own hands.

Collective violence, for instance, generally follows a customary pattern of retaliation, yet for this reason will always be seen as inconsistent with the rule of law. Similarly, compensation payments have also been regarded ambivalently. Many societies practice forms of compensation, and PNG courts have at times endorsed compensation as an appropriate form of criminal sanction (although usually in addition to incarceration). Yet people often negotiate compensation directly with the perpetrators for harm from otherwise criminal acts, instead of appealing to the police and courts. Thus, Melissa Demian concludes,

[C]ompensation suffers from excess on two fronts: that people choose to engage in it outside the remit of the law, and that it can be used to assess value on a scale that the law does not provide for. Both of these practices are seen as interfering with the process of the law, and as such they disrupt the potential for compensation to be appropriated (in the most positive sense of the term) into Papua New Guinea’s legal repertoire. (Demian 2011, 62)

Although the state seeks to recognize the contribution of indigenous communities to the civil order, it believes that empirical social orders should be perfect mirrors of modern state institutions. When confronted with what Polanyi calls “the reality of society” as a material organism, it is forced to pivot away from ethnography as a basis for recognition (Polanyi 1947, 115). Ethnographic citizenship depends on the production of knowledge of difference, yet no amount of empirical information by itself can ever grant standing

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<sup>2</sup>Marshall Sahlins (2012) uses the term “transpersonal praxis” to denote the agency of relationships, but this is misleading in the context of legal theory, where the term *person* generally denotes the entities that are recognized as having agency, and need not only be an autonomous individual.

in a liberal public. Because it rests on bringing together two antagonistic epistemologies, one's claim to ethnographic citizenship is always insecure and open to challenge.

One area where the dilemmas of ethnographic citizenship are managed is in the news discourse of PNG print journalism. For Mark Fishman (1978), news discourse in mass media is largely shaped by the bureaucratic organization of everyday life in mass society. Gathering news about crime, for instance, consists of making a daily round of the police office and courthouse as a "beat" (Fishman 1978, 51). Reporters on the crime beat rely heavily on information they obtain from police and prosecutors as the "authorized knowers" of crime (Tuchman 1978). In PNG, by contrast, journalists must move between multiple ways of knowing. The methods of rural journalists in particular must conform to the rhythms imposed on events by both bureaucratic organization and many different kinds of indigenous social forms. They must make their rounds within spaces that are neither fully public nor fully private, and must learn how to see the connections between the subjective perspective of rural communities and matters which are deemed to be of public importance. On this basis, rather than the bureaucratic organization of reality, journalists are able to narrate events for an audience of potential ethnographic citizens. While in some ways these ethnojournalists identify the emergence of a vernacular modernity in their chronicling of the present, their alternative narrative sits on a knife's edge. Like the Western Highlands Peace Committee love gift, ethnojournalistic discourse produces an Janus-faced indigenous subject whose political agency is always liable to be transvalued as uncivil and unruly, and thus can only ever stand at the boundary between tribal and civil society.

In this paper, I examine several examples of news reporting of indigenous politics taken from *Simbu Nius*, a provincial newspaper published in the 1980s and 1990s. The government of PNG saw the growth of a national news media which reached both rural and urban audiences as a priority for the country's economic development. Recognizing that the economics of daily newspapers made commercial publication risky in a mostly rural country, the national government office of information subsidized the creation of several provincial newspapers to provide information as a public service to rural residents who were otherwise unreached by commercial media. Based in Kundiawa, the capital of Chimbu province, and operating out of the offices of the provincial administration's media department, *Simbu Nius* covered news events in rural and urban areas of the province in both English and Tok Pisin.<sup>3</sup> In addition to a small professional staff, it paid freelance reporters for news reports and other authors for feature articles. One of the most frequently credited reporters, Lawrence Gigmai, hoped to eventually place his own feature articles in national magazines, and write news for the Times of Papua New Guinea. Another writer, Dilu Deck, was a community activist involved with a local development NGO and a Simbu cultural center, and wrote frequently on cultural traditions and social change. Thus in seeking to bridge a gap in knowledge, *Simbu Nius* also relied on the knowledge of Simbu people who are already adept at crossing boundaries, and who made use of the medium for their own purposes.

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<sup>3</sup>*Simbu Nius* can be translated as *Chimbu News* in English, with one important qualification. *Simbu* is the common Tok Pisin spelling and phonotactically-constrained realization of the name *Chimbu*, which is a corruption of a vernacular term that originated in the colonial era from Australian administration reports on the region. Because of the negative historical associations with the [tʃ] sound in the name, *Simbu* has also become the preferred name within the province for the province and its residents, and is often used to denote a quasiethnic identity.

By the 1980s, Chimbu province had become known nationally for frequent fighting among rural groups. At the time, the country's sole national newspaper, the PNG *Post-Courier*, provided extensive coverage of what it called "tribal fighting" in Chimbu (e.g. PNG *Post-Courier* 1980b). The news discourse used by the *Post-Courier* situates rural societies on the outside of the liberal public to which its mostly urban readers belonged. *Post-Courier* reports rely heavily on statements from provincial police and government officials, and thus as one would expect, consistently depict the fighting "clans" and "tribes" as violent primitives locked in a perpetual cycle of retaliation, or "payback" (PNG *Post-Courier* 1981a; PNG *Post-Courier* 1980a; PNG *Post-Courier* 1980c). The persistence of tribal fighting in the postcolonial era, moreover, is treated as symptom of a gradual breakdown of the rule of law. Editorials from this period call for strong (although not necessarily punitive) action by the government to stop and prevent these fights by bringing "tribes" into a "modern" system of justice which they did not yet understand (PNG *Post-Courier* 1981b). *Simbu Nius* also reported on fights and compensation exchanges by rural groups quite frequently but uses a very different news discourse in which it identifies the normativity of violence and compensation which the *Post-Courier* is unable to see.

### Tupela lain wanpisin

*Simbu Nius* news articles are written in either English or Tok Pisin, and this "textual diglossia" reflects the stratification of English and Tok Pisin in which English is both a prestige code and the dominant language of government, and Tok Pisin varieties are further ranked with respect to the extent of their lexification by English (Walczyński 2013). Code choice appears to be driven by the type of source which is featured most prominently in a particular article. English articles in *Simbu Nius* tend to rely on official sources, both reporting their words as direct quotation as well as generally adopting their language. For instance, in an article in English on a criminal verdict, the report quotes a government official as saying that the people involved had "taken the law into their own hands" (*Simbu Nius* 1989b). In another English article on a fight between rural communities, this same phrase is used to characterize the combatants as part of the reporter's own narration of events (Koma 1991). Most of the news articles on fighting and compensation payments in *Simbu Nius* are written in Tok Pisin. Furthermore, they often switch between high and low registers of Tok Pisin, reflecting the voices of different sources of information who are quoted or paraphrased by the reporter.

Many of the articles on fights quote or summarize statements by the police officers and government officials who were involved in stopping the fights. In reporting their words in direct quotation, *Simbu Nius* articles also take up the official discourse in which violence is constructed as a threat to the rule of law. Fighting articles often appeared in a section entitled "Lo na Oda" (Law and Order), which is a phrase frequently used in the *Post-Courier* and by national leaders to identify violence as a social problem (e.g. *Simbu Nius* 1987e). These articles also often adopt Tok Pisin translations of the official English terminology of the Inter-group Fighting Act, which governed the responses by police and public officials. For instance, in an article in Tok Pisin on a fight, the reporter quotes the police commander as saying:

“Mi laik tokaut olsem Kup eria em wanpela peles bilong pait (declaring Kup area as a fighting zone)....” (Gigmai 1988a, 10)

**“I would like to announce that the Kup area is a fighting zone (declaring Kup area as a fighting zone)....”**

The Inter-group Fighting Act specifically provides for the declaration of a specific area as a “fighting zone” (*Inter-Group Fighting Act 1977* 1977). This article also uses several other calques of the English language terms used by officials to refer to violence, and thus emphasizes the perspective they index in which violence as a threat and a stigma. The headline of this article is simply “Tribal pait;” here and elsewhere the official terminology of violence is not even respelled in Tok Pisin orthography (Gigmai 1988a). Other also use Tok Pisin calques of the state’s language for describing the rural population as well. A specific fight takes place in a particular “distrik” (district) and affect a specific “vilis” (village) (Simbu Nius 1987c, 14; Simbu Nius 1987d, 4). Combatants might be said to request “kompensesin” or “compensation” (Simbu Nius 1987b; Gigmai 1988b)

Yet these news articles also switch from an official register which relies on English as a lexifier to a popular register when describing the fighting itself. An injury, for instance, is often described as “catching a spear” (*kisim spia*) (Simbu Nius 1987b, 6; Simbu Nius 1987h, 4). Peace making is described as “breaking sugarcane” (*brukim suga*), referring to the act performed by combatants to symbolize their truce (Simbu Nius 1987e, 4).<sup>4</sup> In other ways, the reporter often bridges between these two registers and the perspectives they entail. One article initially mentions that the sides in a fight are two “sab klen,” using one of the terms mentioned in the Inter-group Fighting Act, but then switches to referring to the same group as a “lain,” a common term for a group or community (Simbu Nius 1987b, 6). The prototype of the category denoted by *lain* is a rural, coresidential kinship group, also denoted by the term *hauslain*. By adopting an everyday register of Tok Pisin in news narrative as an alternative to the official register, these articles index the perspective of rural people on violence. In these switches, the reporter shifts to addressing the readers as people who are themselves members of *hauslain* who are similarly enmeshed in cycles of obligation and conflict.

Moreover, many ways of talking about violence in this popular register presuppose specific cultural understanding of collective violence, and their use in news narratives establish these values as the interpretive context in which the public significance of the events are located. For instance, in this and several other articles on fights between what state agencies describe as subclans, the opponents are described as “*tupela lain wanpisin*” (two groups [*lain*] of the same totem [*pisin*], or clan) (Gigmai 1988b, 21; Simbu Nius 1989a, 18; Simbu Nius 1987c, 14; Simbu Nius 1987b, 6; Simbu Nius 1987h, 4). This formulation of a fight among two neighboring groups of one clan not only breaks with the reliance on English calques as an authoritative translation, it also makes explicit the segmentary logic of kinship which underlies these fights.

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<sup>4</sup>The phrase *brukim suga* occurs once in the Simbu Nius articles I examined, and is attributed to the elected provincial premier in a direct quotation, but of his comments to groups involved in a recent fight, rather than to the reporter.

Several articles describe the role of public officials in arranging and overseeing informal mediation between warring sides, referring to the discussion as “straightening the talk” (*stretim toktok*), or resolving the conflict and obtaining an agreement to make peace (Simbu Nius 1989a, 18; Simbu Nius 1987e, 4; Simbu Nius 1987c, 14). In one such article, the reporter incorporates the perspective of one side in a fight who refused to cease:

Ripot i tok, ol lain Dom i laik pait yet na ol i askim ol polis na kiap long givim ol wanpela mun mo long pait.

**A report says that the Dom group wants to fight more and asks the police and district officers to give them one more month to fight.**

Ol i tok, ol i no inap long stopim dispela pait hariap inap long taim ol i bekim bek na kilim wanpela man long Gunagi. (Simbu Nius 1987c, 14)

**They say they are not able to stop this fight soon until they reply back and kill a man from Gunagi.**

The Dom people are asking to be allowed to reciprocate (*bekim*) a death for a death. In the official perspective on violence, the desire for payback is itself the cause of inter-group fighting. Yet from the Dom people’s point of view, their actions are governed by rules. In this account of their conflict, the people of Dom are not simply taking the law into their own hands, but appealing to the state to respect their own principles, specifically the need for a balance to be restored between the two sides.

The perspective of Dom people which is indexed by their use of the term *bekim* also informs how this article frames the events. Its lead sentence says specifically that the fight will not end soon because they Dom people have not yet agreed to end it. Likewise, another article mentions that police intervened to stop a fight between two sides, but then notes that prospects for a quick resolution are poor because of the anger that remained on both sides, saying:

Tupela haus laen wanpisin bai i bung long sampela taem na stretim toktok long kompensasin long sampela taem i kam sapos bel bilong tupela haus laen i kol gen. (Simbu Nius 1987b, 6)

**The two groups of one clan will meet for some time and negotiate the compensation after some time has passed when the hearts of these two groups are cool again.**

Besides acknowledging the emotions of the combatants, the phrase “*bel ... i kol*” also connotes the exchange of *bel kol*, which is a synonym for compensation and sometimes a minor gift that opens compensation negotiations. Both English-language news and opinion articles frame fighting and payback as a shameful stigma of rural backwardness (Simbu

Nius 1988a, 7; Deck 1988b, 21; Deck 1988a, 18). While *Simbu Nius* articles in Tok Pisin are informed by this viewpoint when they draw on official sources speaking in an English or acrolect Tok Pisin register, its narration of fights in Tok Pisin adopts the subjective perspective of the combatants in which fighting is itself both orderly and governed specifically by reciprocity as a principle of justice.

### The compensation page

On a more general level, the vernacular principle of restitutive justice also shapes the discourse of news articles on compensation demands and exchanges. Compensation news articles all tend to contain the same elements, making each story an instance of a recognized type. Articles on compensation are also often grouped together, and in one issue, several articles on compensation appeared in a two-page section entitled “The compensation page” (Simbu Nius 1988b, 21–22). Compensation articles focus on either an *askim* (demand, request) by one named *hauslain* of another *hauslain* or group (Simbu Nius 1987f; Simbu Nius 1987a), or the event at which one group pays compensation to another (Gigmai 1988b; Simbu Nius 1987g). In either kind of article, the *mak bilong kompenseisen* (compensation mark, compensation target), a specific quantity of pigs and money to be paid, is usually mentioned (Gigmai 1988b; Gigmai 1988c; Simbu Nius 1987g). The cause of the harm to the demanding group is also briefly noted. For instance, if someone dies in a car accident, the *lain* of the accident victim demands from the *lain* of the driver, and gives them a specific mark to meet. When the article reports the details of the payment of this, it is usually described as a public event, and may note the number of people who attended (e.g. Simbu Nius 1987a).

In articles on compensation payments, the group paying compensation often does not meet the mark. This usually prompts an angry reaction by the recipients, and in one story the recipients lobbed spears in the direction of the donors. In this article the reporter makes sure to note that the recipients were only “a little angry” and that no one was injured (Simbu Nius 1987g). In other words, although the mark is not reached, the compensation offered is usually not refused.

One article on a compensation payment dwells on the potential for conflict at this moment. In this event, the donors offered all of the 15 pigs but only 25% of the money that was marked by the Aglaiku *lain*. The reporter then writes:

Mausman bilong Aglaiku, Mr Alois Ambaidungua itok, “Ol Aglaiku bai ino inap long kisim dispela K2,500.00 long wanem, yupela save olsem Gende kisim bikpela bagarap we kola bun bilong em ibruk, na ino inap long wok.” “Sapos yupela putim narapela K2,000.00 moa, bai mipela kisim, tasol nogat bai nogat.” (Gigmai 1988b, 21)

The spokesman for Aglaiku, Mr Alois Ambaidungua said, “The Aglaiku will not be able to accept this K2,500.00 because, as you all know, Gende received a big injury where his collar bone was broken, and he can’t work.” “If you all put another K2,000.00 more, we will accept it but if not, then nothing.”

The reporter then notes that the public officials present then spoke with the Aglaiku group to avoid a fight. The next day, they returned to accept the money originally offered. The report concludes by saying:

Dispela kain problem isave igo bikpela na bikpela pait isave kirap, tasol tupela Kondobu na Aglaiku wan pisin i pasim dispela kain trabel na nau ol pas wantaim istap. (Gigmai 1988b, 21)

**This kind of problem usually gets bigger and a big fight usually erupts but the two fellow subclans Kondobu and Aglaiku have prevented this kind of trouble and now they have come together as one.**

While the reporter plays up the tension in this event, he also incorporates three important elements of the transactors' perspective that shape how the compensation process is presented to readers. First, the Aglaiku spokesman is quoted as mentioning the nature of the injury to the victim as a justification for the demand. Second, even as the recipients walk away (which would likely be seen as an implied threat of violence), they leave the door open to a lesser amount. Their original mark—K10,000 and 15 pigs—was merely the beginning of a negotiation. Third, the reporter also explicates the significance of this event in the final paragraph, noting that this successful exchange also means that there will be no further fighting. Not only does he attribute this to the two parties themselves, but situates this in the context of the overarching kinship order of which they are part: Two groups of one clan have ended their conflict and now have come together again.

These articles may mention the presence of a “mediator” or of public officials, but they usually do not figure prominently in the story. Rather, the articles suggest that compensation demands and payments largely proceed on their own according to rules understood by both. In the “Aglaiku” article above, public officials do intervene when it seems that the process will not conclude on its own. While several articles report compensations for car accidents, there is no mention of a court case, let alone a decision by a court to assign compensation. Moreover, the parties to a compensation also agree on the need for compensation. For instance, in compensations demanded after car accidents, no one is said to challenge either the liability of the driver or the driver's *lain*.

Other *Simbu Nius* articles extends its recognition of the value of compensation to situations in which people apply the principles of restitutive justice to their relationships with the state itself. For instance, one article reports that Narku Kombaku, a *hauslain* near Kundiawa town, established a roadblock on the section of the Highlands Highway crossing their territory between Kundiawa and Mount Hagen town. The reporter quotes a “spokesman” of the *hauslain* for the reason for this action:

“Mipela askim gavman long wokim kompensaisen long dispela graun bruk tripela (3) yia igo pinis. Tasol dispela askim bilong mipela igo nating na ino gat bekim ikam yet inap nau.”

**“We have asked the government to make compensation for the landslide for three years. But this request of ours went nowhere and there has been no reply until now.”**

“Sapos gavman ino wokim haiwe, giraun bai ino inap bruk tasol haiwe kamap na giraun bruk olsem na gavman mas tingim mipela.” (Gigmai 1988c, 22)

**“If the government did not build the highway, the land would not have collapsed, but the highway was built and so the land collapsed and the government must remember us.”**

The article states that over 500 people established the blockade, and yet the reporter does not label this event as a protest or demonstration, or in any particular way. Rather the spokesman’s words take precedence. In this view, the roadblock is a public demand for a response (*bekim*) from the government in which it takes responsibility for a harm caused by the road. This view is further reinforced by a quotation from the elected premier of the province, who is quoted as saying that:

“Dispela rot blok em igat mining bilong em. Yupela man mas pasim rot inap gavman karim cash moni ikam kapsaitim long yupela orait opim rot. Nogat bai nogat.” (Gigmai 1988c, 22)

**“This road block is meaningful. You all must close the road until the government brings cash money and dumps it on you all, and then open the road. If not, then nothing.”**

The premier and officials promise to reply (*bekim*) to the demand within one week, and it seems that they planned on advocating for the protesters before the national government (which in any case would have the responsibility for both construction of the road and aid in a natural disaster). The reporter also notes in passing that the elected representative of this area in the provincial assembly also supported the roadblock, with the qualification that the protesters only stopped cars, and did not hurt travelers. Confirming that in fact the protest was limited in this way, the reporter then states that any passengers on public vehicles going in either direction simply walked around the blockade and proceeded on their way. Thus, the views of the protesters and the provincial politicians both agree on the nature and significance of this action. As a symbolic demand for compensation, the roadblock is a legitimate way to petition the state, not as citizens, but as people who have been harmed by its actions.

### **Kinship in public**

Unlike the national media of this time, which tended to situate rural societies as an external threat, *Simbu Nius* provides its Simbu readers a new public discourse in which rural people appear as political actors with legitimate stakes in how conflicts are resolved. When reporting on disputes among rural communities, it uses a colloquial register of Tok Pisin. Readers are addressed in this way as insiders who are familiar with the nature of conflict in these communities because they themselves are also members of other *haus-lain* which are similarly involved in their own reciprocal obligations with their neighbors.

It is assumed that they will be able to understand the subjective perspective of the combatants.

In some ways, *Simbu Nius* seems to represent local events in relation to an alternative modernity. Car accidents, for example, are framed as conflicts between kin groups which can be resolved through reciprocal exchanges because the principles of collective responsibility and restitutive justice inform the narrative of these events. Yet *Simbu Nius* also seems to reify these practices as norms, and thus transform the significance of events by placing them in relation to these norms. People whose conflicts are reported in the newspaper must be kin in public space. The cycles of obligation which constitute the hauslain and its relationships with other hauslain become matters of public knowledge and open to public scrutiny. Because these articles take a generic form, they reinforce particular norms of violence and compensation, and thus identify deviance in particular actions which depart from the narrative frame. On a more general level, compensation becomes dematerialized in this new public discourse. It is recognized as a valid kind of political action, but only as a symbol which represents a particular kind of claim to a relationship based on equivalence and mutual obligation which is in fact established through rational discourse. In a politics of public kinship, the statements by spokesmen for a hauslain, the symbolic roadblock that does not impede traffic, and the self-conscious labeling of compensation as a love gift all have efficacy that violence and compensation do not. In this view, the postcolonial subject is alienated from her own social relationships and acquires a peculiarly double consciousness.

This debate between alternative modernity and cultural domination dominates the ethnographic literature on the contemporary politics of kinship in Papua New Guinea. The hauslain that appear in the news reports of *Simbu Nius* could potentially be used as evidence for either side. I would like to suggest that indigenous creativity and double consciousness are both steps in an ongoing process by which liberal ideologies establish their hegemony. The concept of ethnographic citizenship, for instance, calls forth the production of knowledge of people as subjects of cultural orders. Much as anthropologists require bilingual and bicultural informants, state agencies depend on people's own capacities to straddle disparate values ways of knowing. As Ann Stoler (2010) argues for the colonial state, postcolonial liberal polities are also threatened by the possibility that they might thus lose their epistemic supremacy. They must appropriate people's creativity from themselves to produce the authoritative knowledge of difference as culture.

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