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REFERENCES COMMITTEE
INQUIRY INTO PAPUA NEW GUINEA AND THE
ISLAND STATES OF THE SOUTH-WEST PACIFIC
SUBMISSION

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31 July 2002

Secretary
The Senate
Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade References
Parliament House
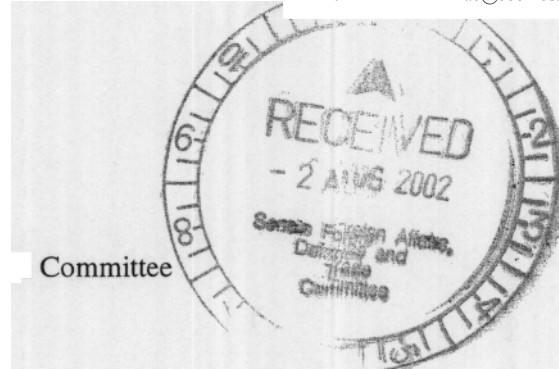
Dear Sir or Madam,

As an anthropologist with twenty years experience of research on and with people of highland New Guinea, I am writing to you about a matter which I would like to raise for consideration by the Senate committee who are currently looking into Australia's relationship to PNG and other Pacific Island Nations.

The matter is one that will no doubt be high on the committee's agenda already: the enormous problems that have been experienced in PNG in recent years with the national elections, especially in the highlands. It hardly needs pointing out that the threat which these developments pose to good governance in PNG is also a threat to the stability of the entire region, and hence is of direct concern to Australia.

As you will probably be aware of, the 2002 election is the last one that will be conducted under PNG's present first-past-the-post electoral system. The 2002 amendments to the *Organic Law on National and Local Level Government Elections* 1997, will introduce a system of Limited Preferential Voting to be used in the next national election in 2007, and in any by-election held after 15 July of this year. I believe that this change has the potential to remove many of the obstacles to free and fair elections that have been experienced under the first-past-the-post system as it has operated in PNG. The reasons for this are complicated, so rather than trying to explain them in this letter, I am enclosing an article which I have written on the subject, entitled `Social Segmentation, Voting and Violence in Papua New Guinea'. See especially pages 321326 on `Violence and proposals for electoral reform' and `Some possible benefits of preferential voting'.

What I would like to point out here, however, is that, for the potential advantages of the preferential system to be translated into actual improvement, there is a massive amount of work that will have to be done to implement the new system. A preferential system is of course inherently more complicated than a first-past-the-post system, and, as the 2002 election has shown, even the latter has proven impossible to manage in many areas of highland PNG. While a potential improvement, the preferential system if badly run could make things even worse than they are at present.

So I would urge your committee to consider ways in which the PNG Electoral Commission could be assisted in its difficult but vitally important task of implementing the new system. The

preferential system is of course one which has been used in Australia for many years (including outback areas where the rate of literacy among Aboriginal voters is probably no higher than in many parts of highland New Guinea, as discussed on page 325 of my article). So there is abundant expertise here that could be made available on how to implement such a system.

Another potentially useful measure that could be taken is a full review of what went wrong with this year's election --- despite extensive involvement by AusAid --- with the aim of trying to avoid repeating the same mistakes. These are matters about which there is considerable expertise at ANU, especially at the Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies. The School has a long history of collaboration with PNG-based scholars and government departments in such matters, and would, I'm sure, be responsive if approached for assistance in this one, through its Director, Prof. James J. Fox.

If you would like to confer with me about issues I have raised here or in the article, I would be glad to appear before your committee.

Yours sincerely,

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Social Segmentation, Voting, and Violence in

Papua New Guinea

Alan Rurnsey

One of the most prominent developments in the highlands of Papua New Guinea over the past quarter century has been a resurgence of warfare.' Much of this warfare and other violence has occurred at the interface between electoral politics and more " traditional" forms of social organization. On the one hand the elections themselves, and their outcomes, have precipitated deadly fights among the kinds of segmentary social units known as tribes, clans, and so on (Dinnen *1996;* Ketan *1998;* A Strathern *1992, 1993;* Standish *1996).*

On the other hand, the imposition of government with its national, provincial, and local electorates has added new forms and levels of segmentation to the previously existing ones., and these have themselves come to figure as new axes of organized violence. Here I examine the nature and degree of articulation between the older forms of segmentation and the newer, electoral ones. While the close relationship between these as matrices of violence is widely appreciated in the literature (eg, Strathern *1974, 1992, 1993* Burton *1989;* Ketan *1996;* Standish *1996),* I argue that this relationship is in need of further clarification. Although the influence of "traditional" segmentary politics on the "electoral" has been well documented, the converse impact has not. To help fill this gap, I offer some ethnographic evidence and use it to develop conclusions about sources of violence in present-day Papua New Guinea. I then ask what can be done about it and bring my ethnographic examples to bear on a proposal that has now been around for some time in Papua New Guinea, namely the return to a system of preferential voting as opposed to the present first-past-the-post system.

The ethnographic evidence on which my argument is based comes from the Ku Waru region of the Western Highlands of Papua New

Guinea, where Francesca Merlamand I have been doing fieldwork on and off since z98i. Before introducing the Ku Waru case I turn first to a relevant discussion by Andrew Strathern of the relation between electoral and "tribal" segmentation among the nearby Melpa people, and some later work on electoral politics that has been influenced by it.

"TRIBES," ELECTORATES, AND VOTING PATTERNS

In his classic 1974 article, "When Dispute Procedures Fail," Strathern described two disputes that broke out in the late sixties and early seventies among Melpa groups near Mount Hagen. Both were precipitated by motor vehicle accidents. In the first a vehicle from the Mul council area knocked down an old man while passing through the Dei area, whereupon the driver was pulled out and beaten to death by Mul people. In the second dispute, a bridge collapsed under the weight of a car full of Kumndi people returning to the Mul council area from a funeral feast put on by Jika people in Hagen Central council. Both disputes escalated to the point where whole council areas opposed each other as blocks, in effect adding a higher level of segmentation at which thousands of people where brought into opposition as "Dei" versus "Mul"and "Mul" versus "Hagen Central." In both cases, Strathern argued, the disputes were made harder to settle by the fact that council boundaries corresponded with tribal ones: Jika and others versus Kumndi and others with Hagen Central versus Mul, and so forth. "Whereas before . . . there was only the tribal system of politics controlled from above by a monolithic Administration, now [in the era of self-government] there are new segmentary political identities [local, provincial, and national electorates], and where the boundaries of these coincide with previous boundaries between hostile tribes the probability of failure in dispute settlement increases" (Strathern 1974, z66).

More recent studies by other scholars have corroborated this claim about the rise of new segmentary identities. Scholars have often stressed the importance of traditional segmentary boundaries in electoral politics as a determinant of voting patterns and of the disputes that arise over electoral outcomes.2 Saffu referred to this concept in pure form as the "traditional community vote thesis," that "politics at all levels . . . are organised along traditional structural lines" (zgy6, qo).3 It can be seen as one aspect of a more general understanding of postcolonial politics in Papua New Guinea as a process of what Gordon and Meggitt (r985,
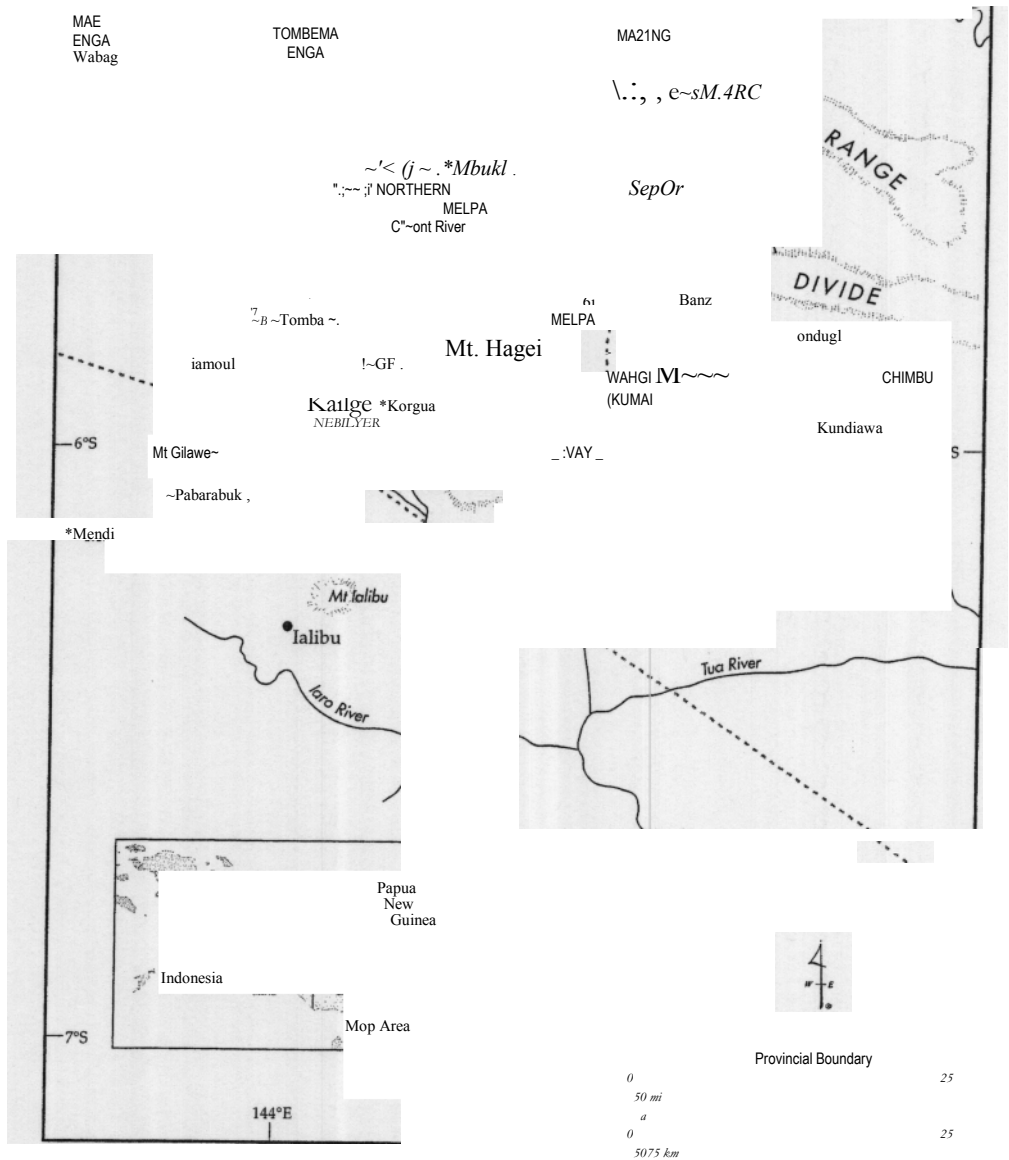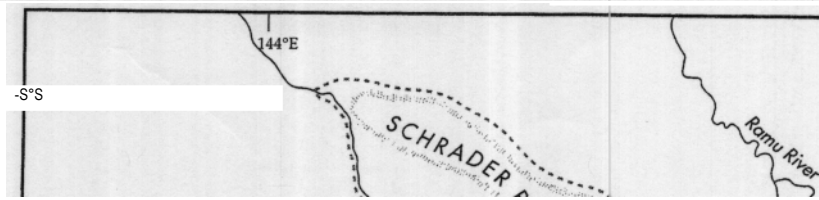
181) called "upward colonization [whereby] [f]ar from being displaced or neutralized by the downward thrust of central authority, local political traditions have proved remarkably resilient and, in many cases have successfully penetrated the state"(Dinnen 2996, 8z; compare Standish I99z).

To me, these ways of putting the matter are illuminating and useful, but I think they are in need of some refinements. As all the writers cited would probably agree, history is never just a matter of assimilating new social forms and experiences to prior ones, and even where people try their hardest to do so, there are always unforeseen consequences and unexpected outcomes. Marilyn Strathern has said (in the context of talk in Britain about the revival of "traditional values") that one of the most powerful engines for social change is the deliberate, self-conscious attempt to keep things as they are (i992). In my experience, New Guinea Highlanders do not try to keep things as they are, or at least do not think of themselves as doing so, so the question here becomes the converse of her proposition, namely, "To what extent and in what ways do people reproduce the old even in the attempt to engage with the new?"
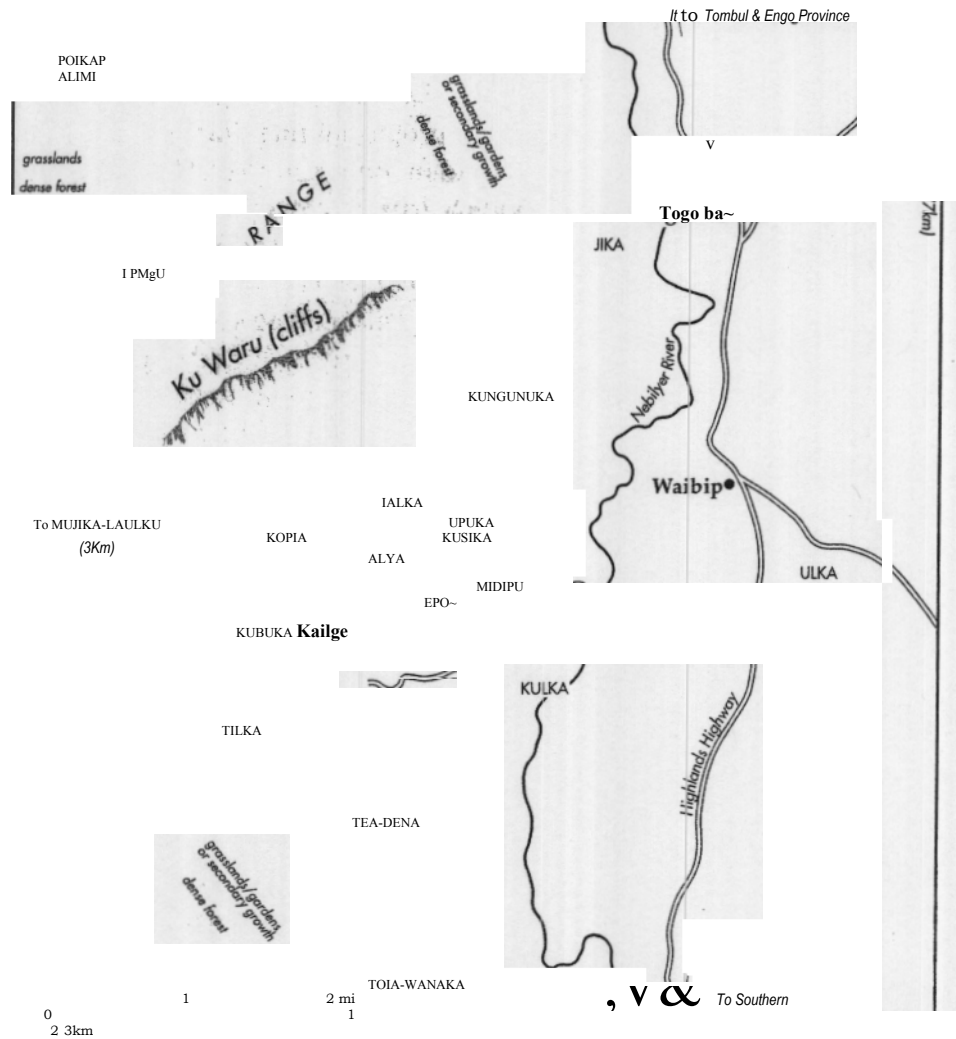
The evidence I bring to bear on this question concerns some relationships in the Ku Waru area between ceremonial exchange *(moka or,* as it is called in Ku Waru, *makayl),* marriage patterns, electoral politics, and organized violence. As necessary background for that discussion, I need to say a bit about the segmentary identities in the area, patterns of alliance and hostility, and electoral boundaries.

THE KU WARU REGION

The Ku Waru region is in the Western Highlands Province, along the eastern slopes of the Tambul Range overlooking the Nebilyer Valley, about fifteen kilometers southwest of Mount Hagen town (map z). "Ku Waru" and all other such regional designations in this part of New Guinea are evanescent, cross-cutting ones that group certain people together in certain contexts who in other contexts are differently identified. The most extensive regional identifications are generally made only by people outside the region in question. It is only the Melpa, for example, who have a term for all Nebilyer Valley people and dialects in general, *Temboka,* just as the term *Melpa* was itself originally used for only a small portion of the people who later became identified in that way from the Mount Hagen perspective (Strauss 19go).

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MAP z. The Nebilyer Valley and environs. Adapted from Merlan and Rumsey 1991.

MAP 2. Tribes in the Western Nebilyer Valley

The literal meaning of Ku Waru is "steep stone" or "cliff." The reference is to the prominent limestone cliffs that loom above the area on the eastern face of the Tambul Range and on clear days :ire visible throughout much of the Nebilyer Valley. Designating the region and its people in this way distinguishes them from the people who inhabit the even more densely settled and intensively cultivated areas on the ,alley floor near the Nebilyer River (map 2), whom the Ku Waru people call Meam. Histor

ically, the Ku Waru people nearest to the Tambul Range, with whom Francesca Merlan and I have lived at Kailge, have had closer ties to people living on the other side of the range in the eastern Kaugel Valley (three or four hours' walk over well-established tracks through the montane forest) than they have had with Meam people, all their immediate neighbors on that side having been their traditional enemies. The Ku Waru dialect is closer to the one spoken immediately across the range than it is to the Meam dialects, no doubt due in part to extensive intermarriage across the range (as I describe in more detail later).

As elsewhere in the New Guinea Highlands, named segmentary social groupings-clans, tribes, and the like-continue to play a big part in Ku Waru people's lives, notwithstanding the changes that have occurred in other respects. Both land and people are still identified by such segmentary labels, in much the same way as Merlan and I have described in our earlier writings based on fieldwork in the z98os, which in turn are broadly similar to what Andrew Strathern and Mariilyn Strathern described regarding the Melpa region not far to the east. Although the wide variation in the size of maximal named groups makes it hard to specify levels in terms of a standardized hierarchical schema (tribe, clan, subclan, and so on), there are elaborate segmentary gradations of "sameness" and "difference," and a close and systematic correspondence between these and patterns of marriage, residence, land tenure, exchange, alliance, and hostility (Merlan and Rumsey 1991, 34-87).

To some extent, this sliding scale of sameness versus difference may be calibrated demographically in a fairly consistent way across the HagenNebilyer area irrespective of the dramatic differences in the size of maximal-level named groups. For example, the Ulka tribe numbers at least five thousand people, with six levels of named subdivisions, while the Epola, Alya, Lalka, Kusika, and Midipu tribes to the west (map z) are all of less than two hundred people each, with no more than three levels of named subgroupings. At the top level of segmentation the Ulka are divided into two groupings, between which there is free intermarriage. At the second level some Ulka segments have been involved in major hostilities with each other in the past and now conduct makayl ceremonial exchanges with each other. By contrast, the Epola, Alya, Lalka, Kusika, and Midipu are allies of long standing, do not regularly intermarry, do not conduct ceremonial exchanges with each other, and all occupy a single compact region, of approximately four square kilometers. In other words, relations among people within Ulka segments that each have three hundred

to six hundred people are similar to relations among the approximately five hundred people in the five small tribes to the west. I now consider the relationship between these segmentary identities and aspects of electoral politics.

KU WARD LOCAL AND REGIONAL POLITICS

The main point of reference for Merlan's and my view of segmentary politics in the Ku Waru area is that of the Kopia line (talapi), with whom we have lived during most of our fieldwork there, and their neighboring, paired line, the Kubuka (map z). We have also had a lot of close contact with people in all the nearby lines: Kusika, Midipu, Epola, Alya, Lalka, Tea, Dena. Before the pax Australiana (in the late *i94os)* all of these lines were, as already mentioned, major enemies of the Kopia-Kubuka. They were routed from their present location in a war that probably took place in the early forties, and fled in various directions, many of them across the Tambul Range to the west, where they had connections by marriage or through their mothers (for details see Merlan and Rumsey r99z, *48-49).*

At the time of our initial fieldwork in *1981-1983,* based on the census data and genealogies we collected of the entire Kopia and Kubuka lines, we found that there had been a strong tendency for men of these lines to marry women from over the Tambul Range. A clear plurality of the women who married into both these lines-i6 for Kopia and *13* for Kubuka-came from the Laulku tribe, whose territories lie immediately over the range to the west (map z). This finding came as no surprise to Ku Waru people: by *1981* this particular kind of marriage was prevalent enough to have become a stereotype, such that when I became identified by "adoption"as a Kopia man, my wife, Francesca, as a matter of course became identified as a Laulku woman, so as to complete the fiction in the most probable-or as Pierre Bourdieu would say "officializing"-manner *(1977, 38-43)*

The next most frequent kind of marriage for both Kopia and Kubuka men was to women from Palimi, also located over the Tambul Range, to the northwest (map z), with *8* and *9* such marriages respectively. Overall there had been a clear tendency for women to marry into this area of the Nebilyer Valley from over the range. When we looked at the marriages of Kopia and Kubuka *women,* there was no corresponding tendency for them to marry over the range. As compared with the total of *z9* Laulku

women married to Kopia and Kubuka men, there were only 6 KopiaKubuka women married to Laulku men. Overall, there was much less of a tendency for Kopia-Kubuka women's marriages to be to men who were concentrated in particular lines. They were more randomly distributed, but generally to men in nearby lines within the Nebilyer Valley and points east.

The clear directionality of women's marriages into the Ku Waru region from over the Tambul Range had not been constant over the reconstructible past. From comparing the marriages on our genealogies across the generation levels going back to about 19zo, it was clear that the trend had intensified in the colonial and postcolonial periods. We surmised, and Ku Waru people agreed, that these marriage patterns had been strongly influenced by differences in people's perceived socioeconomic prospects on either side of the range. These are widely agreed to be more favorable on the Nebilyer side, which is better for cashcropping (including coffee) because of its lower altitude, temperate, frostfree climate, and greater proximity to markets in Mount Hagen: "[D]ifferences in directionality of marriage between men and women indicate that men as seekers in the marriage quest, requiring substantial wealth [for bride price], are more likely to be able to gain brides from areas where they are perceived to have social connections with, and material advantage relative to, wife givers. But a wife is perceived as desirable even if her kin have less material endowment and prospects than her husband's: she herself is a key valuable" (Merlan and Rumsey 79g7, 80-87).4

As elsewhere in the New Guinea Highlands, Nebilyer ceremonial exchange *(makayl)* relations are built on links through women (ie, marriage and matrilateral kinship). In the Nebilyer area this is true of exchange in both its interpersonal and intergroup dimensions, although the intergroup links often lag behind because of the very long time scale over which those exchange cycles take place. As of 783, the concentration of Kopia-Kubuka men's marriages into the Laulku line had not yet led to the establishment of a *makayl* exchange relationship between either of these lines and the Laulku line as such. Instead their intergroup exchanges for the previous twenty-five years or so had been with each other and with their old allies the Poika and Palimi lines to the northwest (map z). But in 782, the Laulku were recruited by Kopia into a fight into which they had themselves been recruited by their former enemies I<usika and Midipu. We subsequently witnessed a dramatic attempt by the lead

ing Kopia big-man, Noma, to use this as a basis on which to initiate a new makayl relationship between Kopia and the Laulku (along with their paired line, the Mujika). In a dazzling display of precisely crafted and targeted el ung oratory, Noma invoked an old unpaid debt they owed to Kopia, suggesting that the payment being given by Kopia to MujikaLaulku on that day be taken as an initiatory payment to be reciprocated by a much larger payment by those lines to Kopia (for details see Merlan and Rumsey i99z, 147-152).

By 1989, Noma's gambit seemed to be working. We heard in a letter from Kailge in November of that year that Mujika and Laulku had agreed to make a major payment of live pigs to Kopia in the following year (199o). This planned prestation by Laulku has never happened. During 199o and 1991 people from Laulku kept promising it, but continued to put it off. In 1992 relations between Kopia and Laulku took a sudden turn that is now thought to have probably ended the possibility of it ever happening. I was not on the scene at the time and did not hear in any detail about what had happened until I returned to Kailge in 1997 From the retrospective viewpoint of five years later, the change in relations was said to be due to a single incident arising from the 1992 election. In order to describe that incident I must introduce some relevant details of electoral politics, which have become much more important among Ku Waru people during the past two decades.

When I first read Andrew Strathern's 1974 article after our initial fieldwork at Kailge in 1981-1983 I was struck by how much more centrally electoral boundaries seemed to figure in the social lives of the Melpa people he worked with in the 1970s than they did even a decade later at Kailge, even though we had been there during the year of a national election (1982). Visiting candidates for the Tambul-Nebilyer seat had been politely received, and votes duly cast, but without any great fuss or effort to arrive at a determination of how the community should vote as a block. As a topic of discussion, the election figured far less centrally in 1982 than certain local land disputes, a war with neighboring tribes that the Kopia-Kubuka had been brought into, or the development of business ventures such as those pursued by a local women's groups-in none of which electoral politics played any conspicuous part. By 1997 things had come to look a lot more like the situation described by Strathern, perhaps in part due to a loss of faith in other possible avenues of "development."

When we settled at Kailge in 1981, the community school in the area

had been open for only nine years, so the first local youths to reach high school were still students, and marvelous things were expected of them. Especially after the *1979* surge in world coffee prices, people were optimistic about the prospect of economic development, and indeed could see it happening very close by in the person of Lkirim, a Midipu man who had successfully parleyed the profits from his own coffee holdings into a sizable coffee-buying and transport business based at the nearby village of Palimung. Here as in the middle Sepik case so well described by Colin Filer "local villagers . . . had not [yet] come to think of `business' as a game they could never win" *(1996, Zo9)*. But by the time I returned to Kailge in *1997,* the earlier optimism had waned considerably. Lkirim's business had failed, very few of the local school leavers had found jobs, and, as elsewhere in Papua New Guinea, kina devaluation and low agricultural commodity prices had probably left people with less buying power than they had fifteen years ago. While Ku Waru people are as passionately committed as ever to the goal of "development," they now seem to be fixed much more exclusively on winning a stake in government *(gabman)* as the way to achieve it.

Another reason why Ku Waru people have become more concerned with elections than they were in *1982 is,* no doubt, the fact that they now have a local candidate to support-Simon Noma. The most powerful man of his generation at Kailge (now about fifty years old), Simon is the son of Councillor Noma, mentioned earlier, who was the leading Kopia big-man of his generation and is now about seventy-five. Unlike his father, Simon has not spent much of his adult life at Kailge, preferring to live in Port Moresby, and Mount Hagen, where he has personal connections dating back to his boyhood, when his family relocated after the rout of Kopia people from Kailge. But he usually returns to Kailge in election years. In *1988* he was elected to the local, Upper Nebilyer seat in the Western Highlands Provincial government, which he held until the provincial assemblies were suspended in *199,5.* For most of that time he held a cabinet position as minister for finance.

In *1992* Simon tried to move up into the national arena, running for the Tambul-Nebilyer seat, which takes in the whole of the Kaugel Valley, most of the Nebilyer Valley, and the, sparsely populated West Kambia region (map 3). In the previous two national elections *(1982* and *1987),* no one had run for this seat from the Ku Waru region, and votes from the Kopia and Kubuka lines had been committed to Thomas Negints, from the Ulka line. But by *1992,* Negints was perceived to be in a weaker posi

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tion, for several reasons. First, after staking his reputation on his activities as a peacemaker, he was faced with a revival of warfare between his own line, Ulka, and their old enemies the Kulka, in which over a hundred people were killed between 1989 and *1991*. This not only undercut his credibility outside the Ulka line, but lost him votes within it, because he refused to supply guns and ammunition to his own people. A second, probably related, factor was that Negints's position had been undermined when his former People's Democratic Movement (PDM) ally and patron Paias Wingti encouraged another Ulka man to run for the seat, thereby splitting the Ulka vote. This strengthened the position of the other PDM candidate, Vincent Awali from over on the Tambul side, who went on to win the election (an outcome some say was deliberately engineered by Wingti in order to eliminate Negints as a potential rival).

The same developments that would, it was clear, split the otherwise decisive Ulka vote also emboldened Simon Noma to make his run for the seat. Following in his father's footsteps, he like Negints had staked his reputation on his ability to foster economic development by stopping tribal warfare. His (Kopia) line had not been involved in any fighting since *2982,* and since that time Simon had been instrumental in organizing the *Faipela Kansil,* a confederation of tribes within the five local council areas in the Ku Waru region, including the Tea-Dena with whom Kopia had fought in *1982,* and all their other erstwhile major enemies within the region. While regional coalitions on the Nebilyer Valley floor lay in tatters, the much smaller, formerly warring lines in the neighboring Ku Waru area had consolidated themselves into an effective regional force-one that could clearly deliver a sizable block of votes for Simon, and that they hoped would attract a good many more from disaffected voters elsewhere in the Nebilyer Valley as well as from their allies across the range, the Polka, Palimi, and Laulku.

As it turned out the perception (or perhaps self-fulfilling prophecy) that Negints could not win was correct, but not the perception that Simon could. In the event he lost badly, coming sixth in a field of ten candidates. The Polka and Palimi lines are said to have voted for Simon Noma, but the Laulku vote proved a major disappointment in that only one segment of Laulku committed its votes to Simon-the Wijangiyl segment, whose territory lies closest to Kopia (at the eastern edge of the Kaugel Valley) and which has the highest proportion of its women married into Kopia and Kubuka. The three other major segments of Laulku committed their votes to Vincent Awali, who comes from their side of the

range, but not from their line or a closely allied one. Though a first-time candidate, Awali won the election with *7,269* votes *(25.65 percent of* the total) as against *4,870* for Negints (the first runner-up).

To add insult to injury, a Kopia man visiting the Laulku reportedly overheard two Laulku men gloating over Awali's defeat of Simon Noma, characterizing him and his Kopia line as nothing but "coffee buyers" (ie, people who do not stay and work in their own place, but roam around from one place to another-perhaps a reference to Simon's rather transitory, and some would say opportunistic, relation to his home base at Kailge). When the Kopia man came back and reported this insult to other Kopia they were incensed, and, as one of them put it to me, "We all planned to kill a Laulku." Shortly after, when one of the two Laulku men who were reported to have made the insult was spotted walking through the Ku Waru region on his way to catch a bus for Mount Hagen, he was badly beaten up by some Kopia men, who were reportedly stopped from killing him only by the intervention of others from the Kulka and Epola lines (who were neutral with respect to this particular dispute).

Somewhat surprisingly, the Laulku have apparently never asked for compensation for this bashing. Kopia people say this is because the Laulku were afraid to in view of their own repeated postponements of the *makayl* payment they had been promising over the previous three years. Now, I was told, "we don't know if they will ever give us the payment. We never hear about it."

A relevant consideration here is that another shift seems to have taken place in Kopia-Kubuka marriage patterns in the sixteen years since we first began studying them. There has been a sharp increase in marriages between Kopia and their former enemies the Tea-Dena. Although we recorded only two such marriages that had taken place before *1982-1983* (over the previous fifty years or so), there have been at least seven since then.6

There has been a corresponding development in the field of *makayl* ceremonial exchange-an unprecedented one at that. In *i99z* we said that to the best of our knowledge exchange had never taken place in this area *between lines* who had *been* major enemies of each other, except in cases where they had become allied in opposition to a common enemy.? On my return to Kailge in *1997 I* learned. that in *1996* Tea-Dena had given an initiatory payment of five pigs to their former enemies the Kopia, to be followed up by a major return payment from Kopia to them. As of July *1998 these plans* were still in train. *These* groups are not joint

ly opposed to any other ones, and the purpose of this *makayl* exchange is said to be to put an end to fighting in the area for good.

SEGMENTATION AND VIOLENCE

I have reviewed at a rather microscopic level some recent political developments within a single electorate of Papua New Guinea. What conclusions may be drawn from them about relationships between "traditional" segmentary structures, electoral politics, and potentials for violence?

What Saffu has called the "traditional community vote thesis"-that "politics at all levels . . . are organised along traditional structural lines" (1996, 4o)-entails that people's voting behavior will be determined by those people's identification in terms of such "traditional" segmentary categories as Kopia, Kubuka, Laulku, and so on. Insofar as electoral boundaries such as the one between Hagen Central and Mul councils follow traditional boundaries such as the one between the Kurnndi and Jika tribes, there is the potential for superposed levels of segmentation. But these are viewed as elaborations of the traditional in the guise of the new.

A contingency not taken into account by this thesis is that social processes engendered within the higher-level social fields created by *elec*toral boundaries can disrupt relationships that have been established at lower, more local levels within the segmentary order. This, I would say, is what has happened to the alliance that had been developing between Kopia-Kubuka and Laulku. To see how it worked out, suppose that the electoral boundaries had been differently drawn. Imagine that the boundary between national electorates ran along the crest of the Tambul Range, with the whole of the Nebilyer Valley in one electorate and the whole of the Kaugel Valley in another (maps z and 3). There is no reason to think this would have had any effect on the marital alliance that had been developing across the range between the Kopia-Kubuka and Laulku, especially as that was well under way before the boundaries were even drawn up for the first House of Assembly election in 1964.

Such a redrawn boundary might well have dissuaded Simon Noma (or any other Kopia-Kubuka person) from standing for the national seat, because it would have rendered their Kaugel-side connections irrelevant for drawing in votes. But whether or not a Kopia candidate had stood for the seat on the Nebilyer side, such a redrawn boundary would almost certainly have altered the course of *makayl* ceremonial exchange relations between Laulku and Kopia-Kubuka, because if the two groups had not

been located in the same electorate, the conflict between them would not have arisen.

What does all this have to do with questions of violence? Happily, our fieldwork in the Ku Waru region over the past fifteen years has afforded few examples of organized violence: the Kopia-Kubuka people with whom we have lived have not been involved in any lethal clashes since the 194os-in stark contrast to what has happened elsewhere in the Western Highlands, including the Nebilyer Valley floor only a few kilometers to the east, where over a hundred people have been killed over the past twenty years.8 But this does not mean that the Ku Waru experience is irrelevant to the question of violence. On the contrary, it is highly relevant for understanding possible avenues for *avoiding* violence. What has happened in the Ku Waru region over that time affords some striking examples of locally organized, largely successful attempts to do just that.

The most dramatic example was the ending of the 1982 "Marsupial Road War" (the only one the Kopia have been involved in) by the intervention on the battlefield of a neutral women's group, which ended it before anyone was killed. Merlan and I have analyzed this in detail in our book *Ku Waru* (1991, 190-197, 2IO-ZI4; see also Rumsey 1999) and it would be beyond the scope of this paper to go into it again. What is relevant here is that one of the key enabling conditions for the women's action, and its most brilliant innovation, was the way in which the women assimilated their "in-between" position in the segmentary field with that of the perceived new order of "government law" and "business," allowing them to draw on men's interest in the new order to suppress conflict in the old.

The other, more recent development is the *Faipela Kansil* federation among former major-enemy lines in the area, and its consolidation by the development of *makayl* relations between them, where the perceived common threat that this is intended to counteract is not any other hostile segmentary alliance, but warfare itself.

These are extraordinary efforts at self-help against organized violence. Even more extraordinary is that they have so far been almost entirely successful, to the extent that it came to me as a shock in 1997 to hear that Kopia man say of the 1992 dispute, "We planned to kill a Laulku." If the Laulku man they assaulted had died, it could well have destroyed all the peacemaking achievements of the Kulka Women's group and the *Faipela Kansil,* because there would probably have been retaliation by Laulku that could well have escalated into full-scale warfare.

In the Ku Waru area, the greatest threat to peace has come not as an aspect of local-level segmentary-political affairs, but in the disruptive effect on them of electoral politics9 at the national level. Thus , while it is undoubtedly true that in some cases, such as the ones discussed by Strathern (I974), previously existing segmentary conflicts can be exacerbated by the coincidence of segmentary boundaries and electoral ones, it is also true that otherwise harmonious segmentary relations can be undermined by the inclusion of the relevant segmentary parties within a single electorate.

I am not claiming that the elections, or electoral boundaries, were in any simple sense the "cause" of a breakdown in relations between KopiaKubuka and Laulku. By the time of my return to Kailge in 1997, electoral politiks was, as I have said, the standard explanation that people were offering for it. Bearing in mind Hagen Joseph Ketan's (I996, 98) detailed and convincing demonstration that what appears to be "electoral violence" is often largely grounded in preexisting segmentary tensions, I readily concede that there may have been other, now-forgotten developments during Ig9o-I99a that contributed to the undermining of the earlier plans for a wealth exchange between these two groups. Insofar as it is appropriate to speak of "causes" at all in such cases, one must allow that not all of them may be accessible to the actors' consciousness. But in this case I see no reason not to agree with them that the elections were at the very least a major triggering factor in the violence that followed them.

It is equally undeniable, judging from the published accounts referred to in my opening paragraph, that elections in Papua New Guinea are increasingly accompanied by such violence, especially in the highlands. Later I raise the question of what, if anything, can be done about it. Before I do that it is important to affirm that Papua New Guineans themselves do regard violence as a problem, though it might appear otherwise in light of some of the understandings now widely current among Melanesianists.

SOME MELANESIAN AND MELANI?SIANIST PRESPECTIVES ON VIOLENCE

Partly in reaction against an earlier functionalist orthodoxy in which a wide variety of human social arrangements and cultural forms were explained as mechanisms of "social control," it is often pointed out by anthropologists nowadays that New Guineans do not necessarily regard

peace as a normal state of affairs and conflict as aberrant. An influential advocate of this view has been Marilyn Strathern, who, following in part on Fitzpatrick (198o; see also Clifford, Morauta, and Stewart 1984), has mounted an effective challenge to the notion that warfare and exchange are somehow inherently opposed to each other. True enough, "indigenous orators (mediators, dispute settlers) comment that to exchange wealth is better than to fight." But one cannot infer from this that exchange operates as a form of social control, because "an underlying premise [of such comments] is that the two activities [wealth exchange and fighting] are convertible. It is not simply that the exchange of gifts enables people to settle their differences peacefully, but that either exchange or warfare can turn into its alternative" (M Strathern 1985, 124).

In support of this view Strathern noted that wealth exchanges not only settle differences but also "afford a facility for the mobilization of allies in warfare."(1985, 123). But this does not .imply that warfare and wealth exchange are transactions of the same order, since it is clear from all the ethnographic accounts (eg, A Strathern 1971; Meggitt 1977; Merlan and Rumsey 1991) that the groups that oppose each other in warfare are not normally the same ones who then exchange wealth objects. Moreover, even to the extent that the two kinds of transactions are seen as interconvertible, it follows that they must be seen as *different.* This is amply borne out by the remarks one often hears from Highlanders to the effect that, though it is proper to compensate the bereaved for their grief and anger, no amount of wealth can pay for the life of a man (see, eg, Merlan and Rumsey 1991, 168-169, 2o8). While "either exchange or warfare can turn into its alternative," in our experience most Ku Waru people most of the time place a higher moral value on exchange, and show a greater interest (in both senses of the word) in converting hostile relations into peaceful ones than vice versa (Merlan and Rumsey 1991, I52-154, 196).

The same is true, unsurprisingly, of public discourse at the national level in Papua New Guinea. A look at the record of parliamentary proceedings and discussion in the Papua New Guinea newspapers over the last fifteen years reveals voluminous discussion of violence as a problem.

VIOLENCE AND PROPOSALS FOR ELECTORAL REFORM

Can anything be done to counteract the tendency toward increasing violence? It would be arrogant and almost certainly futile for outsiders to try

to dream up solutions to such a perceived problem from afar. Yet I believe that some proposals and steps under way at the national level in Papua New Guinea have the potential to help obviate the problems I have been discussing and to help remove some of the obstacles to local-level peacemaking efforts.

Like most former British colonies, Papua New Guinea has a system of first-past-the-post voting, in which the candidate with the most votes (a simple plurality) wins. The more people who run for a given office, the smaller the winning plurality may be. For reasons that will become clear later, one of the proposals that has often been advanced in the country to reduce election violence (and increase the stability of governments) is a return to the alternative system of voting that was used there until 19-75, the preferential system. Although the mechanics of preferential voting will be well known to readers in Australia, where it has been used in federal elections since 1918, some explanation is in order for others to whom it may be less familiar.

In a preferential system, voters do not just choose one candidate for each office on the ballot, but are allowed or required to rank candidates in order of preference (or to vote a party ticket on which the party's ranking of other parties' candidates below their own is specified). In an "optional preferential" system, the filling in of second and lowerorder preferences is voluntary, the vote retaining its validity so long as at least a first preference is specified. In a field where there are more than two candidates for a given office, the outcome is determined not by a simple plurality, but by a run-off count that first eliminates the candidate who has obtained the fewest first preferences, then the one with the fewest first and second preferences, and so on, until one candidate has a majority of votes remaining in the count (for illustrative examples see Reilly 1997b).

An optional preferential system was introduced into Papua New Guinea by the Australian colonial administration in the run-up to independence during 1964-1975. As the 1975 deadline for independence drew near, however, a feeling developed that the system would be too complicated to administer, and it was abandoned in favor of a first-past the-post (plurality) system. This system had the undeniable advantages of lowering the number of ballots that had to be discarded because improperly filled out, and greatly simplifying the vote counting. But it also had major disadvantages, which do not appear to have been much anticipat-

ed before the switch. In hindsight, by comparison to the earlier preferential system, they became painfully evident. Political parties are numerous and evanescent in Papua New Guinea, and electoral fields such as I have described with ten or more candidates-even twenty or thirty-for a single office are not at all uncommon. As a consequence, it is now equally common for them to be won by a candidate with a plurality of no more than io-2o percent of the vote. People usually do favor their home candidate (per the "traditional community vote thesis"), but the effect of this on electoral outcomes is different in the two voting systems. Under the plurality system it results in much stronger local polarization. As explained by former Papua New Guinea Minister Sir Anthony Siaguru:

> [People] consider themselves to be bound by social and family obligations to cast their first vote for their relative or a person from their own clan, house line or language group. It might not be that that person is the best candidate in the judgement of the voter! But he or she is obliged because of social traditions to vote for him. I know of elections in the past, when the optional preferential system was used, where candidates went around the electorate saying "Don't vote for me as your first choice. I know you will have to give your first choice to your line candidate. But give me second." And they did get in on second preferences or third preferences. They did it with far greater representative support than, say, the member who has got in with less that ten percent of the vote. That is ridiculous. (Siaguru, quoted in Dorney 1990, 78-79)

During 1982-1988, Siaguru led a campaign for electoral reform that included as one of its main planks a return to optional preferential voting (for details see Reilly 1996, 49-54). In 1986 he moved a private member's bill to reintroduce that system for the 1987 elections. It failed to win the necessary two-thirds vote, but man)- of the members who voted against it said that they favored the preferential system, that they were voting against the bill only because there wasn't time to implement it in the six months before the election, and that they would support the bill if Siaguru reintroduced it after the election (Reilly 1996, 52). Unfortunately he did not have the chance, as he lost his seat that year.

While that particular campaign dissolved with Siaguru's defeat, interest in his proposal has been revived several times since then. In one province, Manus, it was reinstituted on an experimental basis for the 1993 provincial elections, and was widely regarded as a success (PNG Electoral Commission 1996; Reilly 199 8, 13 5-13 6). In 199 5 the PNG

Cabinet agreed that the 1997 national election would be held under an optional preferential system (PNG Electoral Commission 1995, 1). Legislation was drafted, but in the event it was never brought to a vote in Parliament, apparently because "Prime Minister Chan was unable to convince his back bench that a change of electoral system would not harm their own interests" (Reilly:1998, 137). Though the proposal seems unlikely to succeed in the foreseeable future, pressure for change is likely to continue. For example, a Commonwealth Observer Mission report on the 1997 PNG elections recommended that "given the number of candidates contesting elections in Papua New Guinea, serious consideration should be given to alternative systems of voting" (Commonwealth Secretariat 1997, quoted in Reilly 1998, 138).

SOME POSSIBLE BENEFITS OF PREFERENTIAL VOTING

This is not the place for a detailed discussion of proposals for electoral reform, or for launching into a full defense of them.10 Suffice it to say that, based on his careful study of the way preferential systems have worked in Papua New Guinea before 1975 (compare Siaguru's quoted remarks), in Manus in 1993, and elsewhere in the world where they are in use (especially in ethnically divided societies such as Fiji and Sri Lanka), Ben Reilly has found that, as compared with the first-past-thepost system, the preferential one:

- increases the chance of election of candidates with wider appeal . . . ;
- encourages accommodation between competing interests . . . ; produces incentives for candidates to broaden support bases in search of a majority vote, and to collaborate during campaigning, thus reducing conflict and changing the nature of election campaigns . . . ;
- rewards reciprocal concessions between competing groups, thus encouraging conciliatory positions and moderate policies . . . ; negates the advantages of dummy candidates standing to "split" an opposition block vote, thus (presumably) resulting in lower levels of overall candidature;

- results in candidates being elected with a considerably higher proportion of the vote than plurality, thus increasing the legitimacy of the elected legislature. (Reilly 1<)96, 61-6z)

Other commentators, while not necessarily rejecting the arguments in favor of a preferential system, have pointed out that its successful implementation in Manus was facilitated by features unique to that province: its relative isolation, small population, high literacy, and ease of access by government officials to most Of its constituencies (Yaw Saffu, quoted in PNG Electoral Commission 1996, 3). William Standish, a long-time observer of PNG electoral politics who had previously favored the reintroduction of the preferential system, concluded after being present for I99z elections in Simbu Province (in the Central Highlands) that such a system "would be too complex for both the electoral staff in this province and the scrutineers and candidates" (1996, ;;zo).

Based on my own (more limited) experience of elections in the Western Highlands, I agree that a change to the preferential system would be difficult to implement there too-much more so than on Manus, for the reasons suggested earlier. But I am not convinced that the difficulties would be insurmountable. Though the parallel is not an exact one, a study of the 1987 election in Australia's Northern Territory, where the preferential system is used as elsewhere in Australia, offers some hope. Examining the results from four remote Aboriginal settlements, where the literacy rate is probably no higher than in the New Guinea Highlands, the researcher found that rates of informal votes (those that have to be discarded because of improperly filled out ballots or other irregularities) for the four communities straddled the average figure for rural polling places elsewhere in the territory: 7.8 percent (Loveday 1987).11 By way of comparison, the average rate of informal votes for the country as a whole for that election was 4.3 5 percent (Australian Electoral Commission, personal communication, 1998).

On the evidence it would seem to me that a necessary and sufficient condition for the preferential system to work in any part of Papua New Guinea would be for enough of the people there to learn (or recall) how it works, become convinced of its advantages over the present system, and have the will to make it succeed. To see why they might be amenable to it, and to provide a concrete example of how the system might work, I return to the Ku Waru case of postelection violence discussed earlier. Under the present first-past-the-post system, Laulku voters were placed in an inescapable bind. Each of them had to cast a single vote, which in almost every case was either for their "home candidate," Vincent Awali, or for Simon Noma, from their allied tribe Kopia on the other side of the Tambul Range. Because most of them chose the former option

and Awali won the election, the Kopia felt betrayed and retaliated accordingly, which ended the emerging makayl relationship between the two groups.

Under a preferential system, which in multicandidate electorates greatly reduces the chances of winning on the home vote alone, it would appear much less likely that both Sirnon Noma and Vincent Awali would have been running. But even if they had, the Laulku voters would not have been placed in such a bind, because instead of an all-or-nothing choice they could have given their first preference to one of the two favored candidates and their second preference to the other, in full knowledge that the success of either would depend mainly on the breadth of his support outside his own home area. Indeed, the two candidates might well have worked out an arrangement like the one recalled by Siaguru, where they would campaign together to secure for each the second preferences of voters in the home area of the other.

CONCLUSIONS

In this article I have tried to do two things. First, drawing on Ku Waru examples I have tried to clarify the nature of the relationship between the forms and processes of social segmentation that have arisen specifically in the context of electoral politics, and those that have given rise to groupings of longer standing such as Ko.pia-Kubuka and Laulku. Against the "traditional community vote thesis," I have tried to show that politics at these two levels *cannot* be organized entirely "along traditional structural lines" once fixed electoral boundaries are introduced, because these create an absolute, "top-down" frame of reference to which the formerly more relativistic, bottom-up segmentary structures must be made to conform.lz This is not to say that the new, top-down structures have simply displaced the older ones, but that neither form of politics can be articulated with the other without a substantial impact on both. In other words, pure "upward colonization" is not possible (any more than simple displacement of local traditions by the downward thrust of central authority).

The other, more practical point of the article is to bring the same ethnographic evidence to bear on arguments that have been made by others for a return to preferential voting in Papua New Guinea-in particular on the argument that it would help to reduce conflict over

elections-a claim that is supported by the Ku Waru evidence. My argument is not that postelection violence is an inevitable consequence of the present voting system, or that the system could operate without fixed electoral boundaries, or that violence is always the result of outside pressures. Rather, it is that, in the course of intergroup political life among the Ku Waru people at least, there are many situations in which people will generally choose the "path of peace" *(molupa kunsuyl kupulam)* over a more destructive course of action (see Rumsey 1999), and that the reintroduction of preferential voting would help to remove certain obstacles to that path.

There is a one-way relationship between. this argument about voting systems and the other, more theoretical one about "upward" versus "downward" colonization: the theoretical argument supports the practical one, but does not depend on it. That is, Reilly and I could be wrong about the palliative potential of preferential voting without thereby invalidating my more general argument about the impact of the state on local politics. But another lesson can be drawn from the Ku Waru case that pertains to both of these arguments: Outside observers of the New Guinea scene tend to regard law and order as something that has to be imposed from above by the state in order to suppress a local-level propensity toward violence-especially in the highlands. But from the examples discussed here (see also Rumsey 1999) it is clear that local-level peacemaking efforts by Highlanders have been confounded by a particular state instrumentality-a system of voting-that has been delivered to them from above. From a Ku Waru standpoint, what would seem to be needed are structural changes to that instrumentality to make it more compatible with the initiatives that have been taken from below.

Notes

₁Paney 7973; Standish 7973, 7994 Gordon and Meggitt 7985; Wormsley and Toke 7985; A Strathern 7977, 7984, 7992, 7993

₂Standish 1976, 7983, 7989, 7992, 7996; Burton 7989; Ketan 7995, 7996, 7998; Yasi 7996; Saffu 7996.

3 Its is not clear whether anyone has ever propounded this thesis in its pure form. Saffu (7996, 40) cited Ketan (7996) as its most "relentless" advocate, but Ketan's own formulations do allow for some reciprocal interplay between the two levels, as do most of Andrew Strathern's, including the quote from Strathern (7974), in which it is clear that "segmentary" cannot be equated with "traditional structural." Elsewhere Strathern has explicitly pointed out that "the very processes that link local clans to the state also produce within and between clans a heightened potential for conflict through competition for resources and political office" (7993 57). But the *emphasis* in the literature, and the thrust of the ethnographic examples chosen, has generally been more in the "upward" direction of this process than the "downward" one. And at least some of the formulations in the literature do seem to lend themselves to a unidirectionalist reading, as for example Strathern's claim that "[c]lans seem to treat the state, national, and provincial authorities as another clan and to direct their demands against all entities in the outside world in the exact way they do against their immediate neighbours" (7993 55).

4 For similar cases elsewhere in Papua New Guinea see Salisbury 7956; Healey 7986; Hide 7987, 18I-zO5.

5 See Merlan and Rumsey 7997: pages 50-55 for the land dispute; I-8 and Izz-I55 for the war; and z8-3o and i 5 8-I6o for the business ventures.

6 I say "at least" because, unlike our figures for 7982-7983, this one is not based on a complete census of Kopia, but merely on all the recent examples of such marriages that could be quickly recalled by a handful of Kopia informants (during a brief field trip to Kailge in 7998). It is possible that a new full census would turn up additional cases.

7 Merlan and Rumsey 7997, 207; compare Strathern (7977, 90) on the Melpa, and Meggitt (7977) on the Enga.

8 Some of this fighting will be known to some readers through its vivid portrayal in the film *Black Harvest,* made in the Nebilyer Valley by Bob Connolly and Robin Anderson in the late 798os.

9 The 7997 elections were also an occasion for new threats of violence, this

time involving guns. After saying he would run again for the Tambul-Nebilyer seat until well into the run-up period for the election, Simon Noma pulled out at the last minute, urging his supporters to vote instead for a Kulka candidate, Fred Kuman. Many of them voted for Kuman, but according to my informants, they actually wanted Thomas Negints to win, and voted for Kuman only because his Kulka supporters had threatened to attack them with their high-powered rifles if they did not. Leaders of the Kubuka line stood up to this threat and openly urged their people to vote for Negints, which they did, along with many people from the Tea-Dena and Kusika-Midipu lines. When Kuman lost the election, coming in fifth (behind Negints, who was third), some Kulka men put up a roadblock to prevent people from those lines traveling back and forth to Mount Hagen, and they were forced to use a less direct route.

io See instead recent works by Ben Reilly (yg6; i997a; z997b; z998)~

z r An additional factor is that in order to help make up for these Aboriginal voters' presumed lesser familiarity with voting procedures, "assisted voting" was allowed, whereby illiterate voters could be accompanied into the polling booth by a designated assistant who was allowed to explain the ballot to them and help them fill it out. But in Loveday's sample only one voter in five made use of this option.

r z As one of the referees for this article has rightly pointed out, attempts by the state to freeze land boundaries among segmentary groups have also been a factor in many of the conflicts that have arisen among them in Papua New Guinea as in other colonial and postcolonial regimes. This happens not to have been a factor in the case I have discussed here, because Kopia-Kubuka and Laulku lands are separated by a wide band of uninhabited montane forest (map z) and the "boundary" between them is unproblematical. In any case the government's ability to arbitrate land disputes in the Ku Waru region has been weak or nonexistent in the postcolonial era (see, eg, .Merlan and Rumsey 1991, 5 r), and there is no evidence for its having been a factor in any of the wars that Kopia-Kubuka people have fought over the past sixty years (Merlan and Rumsey 1991, 45-56)

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Abstract

Over the past quarter century there has been a resurgence of warfare in the New Guinea Highlands. Much of this warfare and other violence has occurred at the interface between electoral politics and more "traditional" forms of segmentary social organization: tribes, clans, and the like. It has been seen by some scholars as a matter of "upward colonization," whereby local political traditions have penetrated the state. Although this view is illuminating, it has its limits: in practice, state and local forms of politics cannot be articulated with each other without having a substantial impact on both. Here I illustrate this ethnographically, drawing on case materials from the Ku Waru region, Western Highlands Province. Tracing the history of marital and ceremonial exchange relations between two Ku Waru groups over the past two generations, I show how an emerging alliance between them was undermined by a conflict of interest over the r99z national election. Although such conflicts could never be avoided altogether, I argue that they could be reduced by a change from the present first-pastthe-post voting system to a preferential system.