"We only Get the Daylight Hours": Gender, Fear and 'Freedom' in Urban Papua New Guinea

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Traditional discussions of security are state-centric and ignore individual experience. Presenting a counter-perspective, this article extends existing literature about violence and insecurity by representing the perspectives of those for whom security is a daily concern: young educated Papua New Guinean women living in Papua New Guinea's towns and cities. Drawing on thirty interviews conducted between 2007 and 2013, I explore how young women in Port Moresby and Goroka talk about violence and insecurity. The article highlights the frustration they experience because of their limited mobility and the ways they are forced to manage their sense of security in these contexts.

Papua New Guinean women are constrained by fear on an everyday basis. In cities and towns, fear affects women who work at the markets, women commuting to work or accompanying children to school; and not least, women who sell sex.[1] It also affects girls. Indeed, "high levels of sexual violence in [PNG] have also been found to be a key factor affecting enrolment because girls are at risk of such violence while travelling and at school".[2] In conversations with women in Papua New Guinea, these issues are raised repeatedly, as is evident in the following quotations:

> Rape in the cities is … really really bad. This is the scariest place to live a life. I think it's the scariest city to live in the whole world and the crime rate's really bad.[3]

> Women are second-class citizens because we only get the daylight hours.[4]

The 2009-2010 Household Income and Expenditure Survey confirms the gendered nature of insecurity in PNG.[5] Nationally, 54.9 per cent of women

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[1] Holly Wardlow, *Wayward Women, Sexuality and Agency in a New Guinea Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006).

[2] United Nations Girls Education Initiative, *School-related Gender Based Violence in the Asia Pacific Region* (Bangkok: United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2014), p. 17.

[3] Jennifer, interview with author, 9 December 2007. All women are referred to using pseudonyms with the exception of Jacqueline Joseph who chose to be identified because of her role with Rugby League Against Violence.

[4] Sue, interview with author, 30 November 2007.

fear walking in the night compared with only 30 per cent of men.[6] Furthermore, women are more than twice as likely as men to avoid walking and shopping in the markets because of fear of assault and robbery.[7] There are two or three reports of sexual violence in the Port Moresby markets every day and 55 per cent of women in Port Moresby reported an experience of sexual violence in the market places during a twelve-month period.[8] While some commentators have suggested that men are more prone to other forms of assault, the data reveals that men and women are equally likely to report experiencing assault, stealing, robbery, and drug and alcohol related crimes.[9] Fear is especially pronounced among women under the age of thirty-one who are living in urban areas.[10] While domestic violence in PNG is well documented and discussed, public violence is a largely neglected issue that receives relatively little attention by comparison. The 'Safe Cities' project, a United Nations global initiative that focuses on enhancing women's safety in the market places of Port Moresby constitutes one exception to this neglect.

Women's experiences of insecurity in PNG are necessarily understood through reference to a broader context of insecurity. Not yet forty years old, 'the state' in PNG has a limited capacity to influence and govern. Commentators generally agree that while concerns about security in PNG were noted before Independence they have since intensified.[11] Rapid changes associated with the introduction of the cash economy and formal labour market and the impacts of globalisation co-exist with traditional clan-

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[5] National Statistical Office, *2009-2010 Papua New Guinea Household Income and Expenditure Survey* [henceforth *PNG HIES*] (Port Moresby: National Statistical Office, 2010).
[6] Ibid., p. 138.
[7] Ibid.
[8] UN Women, 'Safe Cities Global Initiative', <http://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/ending-violence-against-women/~/media/44F28561B84548FE82E24E38E825ABEA.ashx> [Accessed 27 May 2014]; UN Women, 'Safe Cities: Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea 2012', YouTube, 23 August 2012, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NRrGDERE3CI&noredirect=1> [Accessed 27 May 2014].
[9] Vicki Luker and Sinclair Dinnen (eds), *Civic Insecurity: Law, Order and HIV in Papua New Guinea* (Canberra: ANU E Press, 2010), p. 21; National Statistical Office, *PNG HIES*, p. 137.
[10] National Statistical Office, *PNG HIES*, p. 137-8.
[11] Luker and Dinnen, *Civic Insecurity*; Hank Nelson, 'Perspectives on Crime and Blame', in B. Boeha and J. McFarlane (eds), *Australia and Papua New Guinea: Crime and the Bilateral Relationship* (Canberra: Australian Defence Studies Centre, 2000), pp. 280-9.

based or ethnic loyalties and frictions, including conflict over land-use.[12] The disparate threads that make up the social fabric of daily life, including rapid population growth and "a steadily urbanizing, youthful society … disconnected from the social anchors of traditional authority structures" affect the daily experience of insecurity.[13]

Paradoxically however while 'security' has tended to be discussed in relation to the threat unstable states may pose to neighbouring countries, those for whom matters of personal security are a daily concern are frequently excluded from discussions about security. Globally, traditional security discourse tends to be masculinist and state-centric, focused for example on transnational crime, policing borders and ever vigilant about the prospective emergence of local terrorist cells.[14] Such discussions occlude human-centred understanding of how violence actually plays out in everyday interactions. By ignoring individual experiences of security, the mainstream security literature also dismisses the importance of context, human agency and identity, all of which are integral to 'bottom up' definitions of security that articulate victimisation and agency as two parts of a reality that must be addressed in concert, rather than as opposites.[15]

Alongside the mainstream literature on security and serving as a counterpoint to it, is a growing body of feminist research that examines issues of human security from a gendered perspective. This includes work on gender, peace and conflict, which considers peace from a gendered perspective as well as work on gender and political economy.[16] Such writing offers new ways of thinking about the utility of gender approaches to debates about human security, including the importance of documenting resistance as enacted by women who live in insecure contexts. As Hoogensen and Stuvoy, for example, note:

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[12] John Frankel, 'Myths of Pacific Terrorism', in J. Henderson and G. Watson (eds), *Securing a Peaceful Pacific* (Christchurch: Canterbury University Press, 2005), p. 120.

[13] Greg Watson, 'Conflict Overview', in J. Henderson and G. Watson (eds), *Securing a Peaceful Pacific* (Christchurch: Canterbury University Press, 2005), p. 453.

[14] See Linda Basch, 'Human Security, Globalization and Feminist Visions', *Peace Review*, vol. 16, no. 1 (2004), pp. 5-12; Gunhild Hoogensen and Kirsti Stuvoy, 'Gender Resistance and Human Security', *Security Dialogue*, vol. 37, no. 2 (2006), p. 211.

[15] Ibid.

[16] Jacqui True, *The Political Economy of Violence Against Women* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012); Aili Mari Tripp, Myra Marx Ferree and Christina Ewig, *Gender Violence and Human Security: Critical Feminist Perspectives* (New York: New York University Press, 2013); Cynthia Cockburn, *Antimilitarism: Political and Gender Dynamics of Peace Movements* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012); J. Ann Tickner, *Gender in International Relations: Feminist Perspectives on Achieving Global Security* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992).

> Gender theory claims that security must be linked to empowerment of the individual, as well as to the capabilities to create positive environments of security. … Practices of resistance … are present in all social contexts. Such a perspective on security directs attention to the practices of agents and provides a basis for exploring contextually dependent insecurities and securities.[17]

Arguably, an ethnographic approach is the best way to illustrate both the 'contextually dependent' nature of security and insecurity and the ways in which resistance and agency are practised.

This article extends existing literature about violence and insecurity by representing the experiences of those for whom personal security is a daily concern; young educated Papua New Guinean women in PNG's towns and cities. My ethnographic analysis of local Melanesian women's experiences of personal 'security' is intended to challenge and augment traditional state-based security thinking, which dismisses the experiences of those for whom security in PNG matters most. Drawing on thirty interviews conducted between 2007 and 2013, I explore how twenty- to thirty-year-old women living in Port Moresby and Goroka talk about violence and insecurity. Highlighting the frustration they experience because of their limited mobility and the ways they are forced to manage their sense of personal security in these contexts, I demonstrate the importance of focusing on the lived experience of personal insecurity in discussions about security in PNG.

This 'bottom up' perspective echoes the approach taken in much feminist work on human security. Offering valuable insights on questions about which feminists working in international relations, peace and conflict and security studies are well aware, but which conventional security scholars continue to ignore, the article emphasises the unique value of ethnographically informed analysis. Bringing grounded evidence to a discussion that is all too often characterised by abstract debate, the article builds on feminist critiques of security studies while emphasising the benefits of ethnographic analysis for understanding security in the daily lives of women.

Heeding the voices of these women also enables us to see how women employ their (albeit constrained) agency to navigate their insecure lives. As feminist critiques have highlighted, such local survival strategies are not visible when a gender-blind, state-centred security approach is adopted and when violence and female agency are referred to only in abstract terms. Illuminating these strategies may enable the development of more effective approaches to personal security than have hitherto been articulated in this context.

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[17] Hoogensen and Stuvoy, 'Gender Resistance and Human Security', p. 207.

A Note on Class

For the purposes of this article, which focuses on the experiences of educated, employed women living in Port Moresby and Goroka, it is important to note that 'class' affects experiences of fear and insecurity. Deborah Gewertz and Fred Errington discuss the emergence of class in PNG against the backdrop of a country with a long history of egalitarianism.[18] Although their pioneering study is not yet twenty years old, the construction of social groups along class lines is by now firmly entrenched in PNG. Despite their blunt nature, categories such as 'elites' and 'grass roots' have become part of everyday vocabulary. Indeed, as John Cox notes:

> it is common to hear the term 'elite' applied to almost anyone who has completed their secondary education. This loose popular usage includes many who are not at all 'elite' in the sense of being wealthy, politically powerful or culturally sophisticated.[19]

The idea that education confers privilege is widespread, despite the obvious limitations of such assumptions in a context in which only one in eight school leavers gain employment.

The young women whose perspectives are represented in this research are tertiary-educated, urban-dwelling and employed. As such, they constitute what many in PNG refer to as middle class 'elites'. Yet "[s]implistically categorising the PNG middle class as 'elite' fails to capture their experience of economic precariousness".[20] The women whose perspectives are represented here enjoy only moderate levels of privilege. Most live at home with their parents, siblings and in some cases other family members. Only a few own cars and most contribute a significant portion of their income to the households in which they live, helping to cover education costs for younger siblings and other relatives or both. Like their wage-earning parents before them, these young women are regularly called on to contribute to the costs of weddings and funerals. While most express a desire to pursue individual goals such as further study or buying a house, the requirement to share their income with others and the high cost of living, particularly in Port Moresby, mean that, for most, such aspirations are unlikely to be realised, at least in the short term.[21] While some of the women may rise through the ranks to

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[18] Deborah B. Gewertz and Frederick K. Errington, *Emerging Class in Papua New Guinea: The Telling of Difference* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

[19] John Cox, *"Grassroots", "Elites" and the New "Working Class" of Papua New Guinea*, SSGM Discussion Paper 2014/6 (Canberra: ANU Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies, State, Society and Governance in Melanesia Program, 2014).

[20] Ibid.

[21] For a discussion of middle class women see Martha Macintyre, 'Money changes Everything: Papua New Guinean Women in the Modern Economy', in M. Patterson and M. Macintyre (eds), *Managing Modernity in the Western Pacific* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 2011).

wield more influence in the future, their youth, gender and status as recent university graduates mean that they possess only a limited capacity to exert personal or institutional power in the present. Among those with whom I have spoken, the majority are the children of earlier generations of educated public servants who populated various government departments, schools and hospitals in the 1980s. Thus while they would be construed as 'privileged' in comparison to the majority of Papua New Guineans, it is erroneous to describe these young women as 'elites' with all that this over-utilised term entails.

Nevertheless, when 'middle class' women travel or walk to work or go shopping in the markets of Goroka or Port Moresby, their clothing marks their privilege and difference from the majority of Papua New Guineans. There is ample anecdotal evidence to suggest that this difference may make them particularly vulnerable to various forms of assault.[22] As I have argued elsewhere, the antagonism directed against young educated women reflects the insecurities of men and women in PNG who feel themselves to be disenfranchised from power.[23] Construed as traitors to their sex for transgressing their gender roles, educated women, especially those who are single, are susceptible to abuse, including violence in the streets, markets and on buses. Such antagonism needs to be understood through reference to class as well as gender inequities.

This article explores some of the particularities of young 'middle-class' women's vulnerability in order to gain insight into the factors that underpin and permeate how personal security is experienced and threatened in PNG. Focusing on this group enables unique insight into the experiences of a small but significant group who, because they are simultaneously privileged and marginalised, have tended to be invisible to researchers. There are various ways to explain this gap in the literature. Firstly, because tertiary educated professional women in PNG are in a minority, research and writing about them is not seen as a priority. Another related reason is that focusing on such relatively privileged women constitutes what anthropologist Laura Nader calls 'studying up', a focus about which many researchers are wary

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[22] Laura Zimmer-Tamakoshi, 'Nationalism and Sexuality in Papua New Guinea', *Pacific Studies*, vol. 16, no. 4 (1993), pp. 61-97; Laura Zimmer-Tamakoshi, 'Wild Pigs and Dog Men: Rape and Domestic Violence as Women's Issues', in C. Bretell and C. Sargent (eds), *Gender in Cross-Cultural Perspective* (New York: Prentice Hall, 1997), pp. xx; Richard Eves, 'Exploring the Role of Men and Masculinities in Papua New Guinea. How to Address Violence in Ways that Generate Empowerment for both Men and Women', Report for Caritas Australia, Alexandria, 2007; see also Gewertz and Errington, *Emerging Class* and Wardlow, *Wayward Women*.

[23] Ceridwen Spark, 'Gender Trouble in Town: Educated Women Eluding Male Domination, Gender Violence and Marriage in PNG', *The Asia Pacific Journal of Anthropology*, vol. 12, no. 2 (April 2011), pp. 164-79.

because they may be accused of class bias.[24]   Yet, many among those I have spoken with have benefited from overseas education and other training opportunities.   As such, they may be better equipped than their less educated counterparts to make change and so it is important to understand the ways in which they continue to be constrained despite their international connections and exposure to global perspectives on issues such as human rights and gender equality.

Independence and Vulnerability

In 2007, I interviewed Eare in Goroka. She was twenty-five years old and had recently returned to PNG for the first time since leaving for secondary school in New Zealand at the age of fifteen.   A year earlier Eare had completed her tertiary studies in Australia and subsequently gained employment at a government institution in Goroka. Having grown up in Port Moresby and then travelled to New Zealand and Australia on various education scholarships, this was Eare's first experience of living in PNG away from family.

When I met them, Eare and her three colleagues were living in cramped conditions in a tiny house provided by their place of employment. The young women had moved there after a frightening ordeal in which a group of men had tried to break into their previous house in North Goroka. During this terrifying experience, the security chain on the door was all that held the would-be attackers at bay. Through the crack in the door, one of the women bashed the men's hands with a shoe, while shouting at them that the police were on their way. Her brave act seemed to play a role in deterring the men who gave up and left shortly after she began to retaliate.

At the time of the attack, all the women in the house were single, educated and employed.   As discussed above, in PNG, this combination makes women vulnerable to the charge of being *bik hets* (arrogant, show-offs). It also means Eare and her colleagues were seen as demonstrating a level of independence from men that is viewed as inappropriate for women.[25] Having come to Goroka for work, all the women were living away from their families and as such, were perceived as vulnerable by virtue of having no male kin to defend them. One can only surmise that in the eyes of their attackers, they were 'asking for trouble'.

Maggie Cummings' observations about the meanings of trouble (*trabol*) in Vanuatu are pertinent here. Cummings writes: *"Trabol* is a catch-all term for the social ills associated with rapid urbanization and modernization; it is also

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[24] Laura Nader, 'Up the Anthropologist: Perspectives Gained from Studying Up', in Dell H. Hymes (ed.), *Reinventing Anthropology* (New York: Pantheon, 1972).
[25] Wardlow, *Wayward Women*.

a euphemism for sexual assault and violence".[26] In the case of Eare and her friends, it was precisely their independence, their evident refusal to be "under the legs of men" that rendered them vulnerable.[27]

Before the attack, the young women had experienced increasing levels of verbal, sexualised abuse in the street outside their home. Afraid for their safety, they asked their workplace to provide alternative accommodation. They were construed as demanding and so were belittled and ignored. After the attack, when the young women again sought support from their workplace, several senior staff in the organisation, including both men and women, suggested that Eare and her housemates were to blame. For instance, Eare says they were told:

> to rethink our clothing choices and that wearing a meri-blouse wasn't so bad because it diverts the attention to others who are perhaps wearing more revealing clothes. And mind you, we never wore jeans. I think the closest I came to wearing jeans was loose fitting pants, but even so, this apparently was inappropriate unless we wore big tops or meri-blouses to cover our bottoms.

Despite their significant concessions to local conservatism—i.e. "the closest" Eare came to wearing jeans was "loose fitting pants", it was the women and their clothes—and not the men who terrified them in their home—who were perceived as being to blame for the attack. This response demonstrates that men who administer 'trouble' will not necessarily be seen as acting outside societal norms. Conversely, women who 'display' autonomy through their clothing, behaviour or obvious financial independence are perceived as 'asking for it'.

The link between clothing and vulnerability is also highlighted in the following account:

> In Port Moresby, I have had experiences ranging from incidents of bag-thefts and attempted pick pocketing in buses as well as waiting at bus stop areas or walking from bus stop areas. I was once held-up at knife-point by group of boys demanding for my bag and money, and have being on the receiving end of uncalled for heckling, jeering and name-calling either because of the way I was dressed or just because I was a female walking passed a group of guys. I deal with this by ignoring all and walking by as though I have heard nothing. I have witnessed women and girls dressed differently to ones in meri-blouses and lap lap or oversized outfits getting heckled and insulted, sometimes abused verbally in Port Moresby.[28]

Class tensions and a hatred of *meri universiti* as symbols of "all that is wrong with contemporary Papua New Guinean society" only exacerbate the

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[26] Maggie Cummings, 'The Trouble with Trousers', in R. Eves and L. Butt (eds), *Making Sense of AIDS; Culture, Sexuality and Power in Indonesia* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2008), p. 145.
[27] Wardlow, *Wayward Women*.
[28] Vera, personal correspondence with author, 31 March 2014.

widespread belief that women like Eare and her colleagues *deserve* to be punished because they are betraying societal expectations that women should be subservient to men.[29]

Strategies for Survival

One way some young women seek to diminish threats to their personal security is by forming a partnership. However, high rates of domestic violence in PNG mean that forming a heterosexual partnership in no way eliminates the threat to personal security (consequently many young women now avoid marriage).[30] However, there are some instances in which relationships can provide a form of protection against violence by strangers. This was certainly the case for twenty-eight-year-old Sue.

Sue worked in Goroka at the same organisation as Eare. When I spoke with her in 2007 she explicitly addressed the difference between her own experiences as a newcomer to Goroka and those of Eare and the other young women who had been attacked in their home. Sue spoke sympathetically about the way Eare and her friends were treated by their workplace while pointing out that as single women they were anomalous in PNG society:

> It's hard to remain single in Papua New Guinea. … when you're a single woman, there's sort of no male attached to you, especially if you are living away from home. And sometimes women who are single are more vulnerable than women who are in a marriage relationship. And I mean vulnerability in that sense that you have no one to stand behind you if anything happens.

Sue illustrated the protection her relationship provided, comparing her experiences as a single woman in Goroka with her experiences after meeting John, her partner, who was from Goroka and whose family lived nearby:

> My relationship with John gives me another family and with that family comes protection, people to speak on my behalf if anything goes wrong, people who will support me. You know, like for example when I was still single I was, I had my bag snatched outside of Best Buy and it was one of those … it was really horrific, I was … I was crying, I went to the police station all by myself, I had absolutely no support. But if something like that happened now, John's whole *hauslain* [extended family] would be behind me. The security and the sense of support that comes with a relationship, it's different.

Sue's words indicate the ongoing significance of adult women's relationships with their families, particularly male partners or kin.

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[29] Zimmer-Tamakoshi, 'Wild Pigs and Dog Men', pp. 555-6.
[30] Spark, 'Gender Trouble in Town'.

Young women also seek to manage their personal security by communicating through their modest deportment and silence that they are not being 'disrespectful', particularly towards men. Bernadette who lives in Goroka, describes her strategies below:

> Another thing that I do whenever I'm in public places is that if I hear people, guys especially whistle or say things to get my attention, I never respond in a way that would disrespect them. I just pretend not to hear anything and I keep (brisk) walking. I know in the back of my mind that sometimes these guys may be on drugs. Also it's a small town, they know my routine and where I walk so if I annoy them, they might kidnap me and rape me (seriously … it happens) (Bernadette, 25 years, student, Goroka).

As Bernadette's account demonstrates, any perceived "disrespect" on her part puts her at risk of punishment by rape. This powerfully exemplifies the link between ideas about how women should behave and men's attempts to control this behaviour through the threat or enactment of violence.

When they do venture into public spaces such as the street, markets or to catch buses, young educated women feel vulnerable because of their visible difference from other Papua New Guinean women and because of the widespread vilification of women who are perceived as 'elite' by virtue of their education or employment.

Because of this, these women endeavour to protect themselves by walking with others when they do go into the streets and markets. They also rely on lifts from friends and relatives, catching taxis or, where possible, using work cars rather than taking the bus. As a consequence of being robbed at knifepoint near a bus stop, Vera no longer catches the bus. She says:

> I have avoided that at all costs. I will not venture out even to the shops if I do not have transport. My taxi drivers are limited and I have been the using the same two drivers since 2005 and where required I ask them to accompany me past a crowded public areas, especially entrances to offices in Port Moresby. I will not wait outside an office building even in the downtown area of Port Moresby if a taxi driver is not within the vicinity of where I am. I do not walk anywhere in POM unless in the company of an adult male relative or a large group of relatives.

Another strategy young women use to protect themselves is waiting in hotel lobbies or at shopping centres for family members to collect them. For example, Bernadette says:

> I make it my business to always be home by 4:30pm, no later than 5pm. If I'm running late, I wait at the Bird of Paradise [Hotel] and call for one of my family members with a car to come pick me up.

Hotel lobbies and shopping centres are staffed by security guards who decide whether or not approaching Papua New Guineans 'qualify' to get in. Their decisions are based on appearance. The access educated women have to these secure spaces derives from class-based judgements about

their status as educated professionals. The women who sell *bilums* at the market outside the Bird of Paradise hotel in Goroka or the Holiday Inn in Port Moresby, for example, would not be allowed to wait inside the lobbies of these hotels. Even being collected by a family member involves a degree of privilege for there must be enough money in the family to own and maintain a car and purchase petrol.

Public Violence and Powerlessness

In this section, I explore young women's accounts of 'everyday' violence in Port Moresby and Goroka. For the most part, the young women related stories about instances of public violence they had witnessed, rather than ones in which they were the victims. This suggests that despite their increased vulnerability when they do venture out, middle-class women may, by virtue of some of the strategies described above, be better positioned to protect themselves from some forms of public violence than their 'grass-roots' counterparts. Highlighting the gap between these young women's ideas about and invocations of human rights discourses and the state's capacity to uphold these rights, I endeavour to contextualise and explain why young women often feel powerless to make change despite the anger they feel about their own and other women's vulnerability.

When I met her in 2007, Glenys was twenty-three and had just completed her law degree at the University of Papua New Guinea. She expressed her desire to specialise in international law and human rights, describing how painful it is to hear and see other women getting beaten up, whether they are her neighbours or in the street:

> The person we share the same fence with, yeah he was just beating his wife up like and he was just like, ahh it really got to me and the next night, the neighbour next to him was doing the same thing to his wife and then I see it like, not only in the houses but you see it in the streets. People just do it in public and two weeks ago I was walking home and this guy he just stops the car and he started beating his wife and she was carrying a toddler, a baby and he just started really like smacking her up with the kid, the kid was screaming and then I was like, man, tears were coming to my eyes and like oh my gosh, how can men do this, animals, worse than animals, animals don't do that.

Other young women also discussed public violence they had witnessed. Cindy, an honours student in Port Moresby said, for example: "a family friend of ours … her boyfriend hit her at Ela Beach in view of everybody, no-one came to her aid, everyone turned a blind eye", while Jennifer, also from Port Moresby, described an incident in which a woman at the bus stop "got smacked in the mouth and then he started beating her up" and "no one did anything". The young women tended to depict themselves as powerless in the face of these public acts of violence. Some feel guilty about their inaction, including Veronica, who worked as a human rights officer in a non-government organisation in Port Moresby. Veronica said she was

"disappointed in [her]self" for not speaking up when a woman in the street was being verbally abused. Veronica says that the victim was herself declaring her 'rights' while being shouted at to shut up. Such moments highlight the anomalous nature of such invocations in the face of the state's limited capacity to uphold these rights.

Below, I consider three accounts of public violence as described by Beth, a 26-year-old woman who lives and works at an international non-government health agency in Port Moresby. Her accounts reveal that educated Papua New Guinean women appeal to abstract notions of human rights in their descriptions of, or responses to violence. Paradoxically, however, personal security challenges are more likely to be mediated through other means, including personal and local networks that have little to do with women's status as global citizens.

Beth told me the following story in order to explain why she no longer gets the bus:

> One time I was catching the bus and this woman was fighting, he was bashing the wife up, in the bus. No one did anything they were just looking at the man and he was holding this very long knife just doing this to her at the back [gestures thrusting with the knife]. I was like "oh my god this is not happening!" I stood up in the bus … I told him "you have no right to bash her, wife beating is a crime and you will be jailed if she brings you to the police station" and no one supported me. I got up and I told all these guys in the bus "look you guys you're just sitting down doing nothing shame on you, you know that wife beating is a crime, that's a law, that's a policy that you know men are not allowed to".

For all her bravery, Beth's words, "wife beating is a crime, … a law … a policy" depend for their discursive power on a functioning "culture of legality".[31]   In the absence of this culture and the mechanisms it would enable, there is a disturbing predictability about what happens next. Though Beth tried to exhort the driver to take the man to the police station, the driver instead threw both Beth and the female victim off the bus saying that it was a "family matter". At this point, Beth, unsupported in her attempts to protect the woman, encouraged her to go to the police station and report the attack. Beth seems to have been motivated by a profound sense that women have a right not to be beaten—a position many on the bus, including the driver, appeared not to share.

Another time Beth "rescued" a woman who was running down the street because the woman was being chased by a man with a gun. Beth, who was working for an international aid agency at the time, was in a work car and told the driver to stop and pick the woman up. When Beth asked her where

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[31] Jean Comaroff and John L. Comaroff, *Law and Disorder in the Postcolony* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), p. 34.

she wanted to go, the woman requested to be taken to her family. Beth did this but on dropping her off, told the woman:

> Go to the police and report the matter. And don't allow him to abuse you and chase you around with the gun. I mean you are a human being! Why would he be treating you like that? You're not an animal.

Both this story and the incident on the bus reveal Beth's reiteration of global human rights narratives and her apparently strong belief in the power of the state to ensure women's personal security. Nevertheless, when women turn to the arm of the state, namely the national police force, they experience the same prejudices that they experience in their communities while simultaneously coming face to face with the inadequacies of an under-resourced institution. "The police don't do anything" is a common refrain in PNG and one I have heard from many of the women I have spoken with. In some situations, police do not act because they lack the resources to respond—for example, there is no working car in which to attend an incident, because they are related to the perpetrator or because they see violence as a 'family matter'. Concretising Macintyre's argument that women in PNG may be informed but not necessarily enabled by human rights discourses, the bus driver's response reveals the incompatibility between Beth's invocations of abstract rights and Melanesian ideas about gender.[32]

Various scholars working in the Pacific have discussed the ways in which the global language of gender violence and human rights are taken up and translated in local contexts.[33] These analyses highlight the unexpected and sometimes unproductive ways in which global narratives are refracted in local contexts. As Sally Engle Merry writes:

> even though programs are translated into new contexts and framed in culturally specific ways, they are never fully indigenized. They retain their underlying emphasis on individual rights to protection of the body along with autonomy, choice, and equality, ideas embedded in the legal codes of the human rights system.[34]

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[32] Martha Macintyre, 'Gender Violence in Melanesia and the Problem of Millennium Development Goal No. 3', in M. Jolly and C. Stewart (eds), *Engendering Violence in Papua New Guinea* (Canberra: ANU E Press, 2012), pp. 239-66.

[33] John Taylor, 'The Social Life of Rights', *The Australian Journal of Anthropology*, vol. 19, no. 2 (2008), pp. 165-78; Margaret Jolly, 'Introduction: Engendering Violence in Papua New Guinea: Persons, Power and Perilous Transformations', in M. Jolly and C. Stewart (eds), *Engendering Violence in Papua New Guinea* (Canberra: ANU E Press, 2012); Rebecca Monson, 'Vernacularising Political Participation: Strategies of Women Peacebuilders in Solomon Island', *Intersections*, Issue 33 (2013).

[34] Sally Engle Merry, *Human Rights and Gender Violence: Translating International Law into Local Justice* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), p. 137.

The following story (in which Beth herself is attacked and she again seeks help from police) reveals the limitations of an emphasis on individual rights in this context:

> One time I was walking to the shops and someone just came and bashed me up for nothing, and … he said, "Go and stay at the house, why did you wear that shirt". [I said] "Oh my goodness you're not even my friend, who are you?" I went to the police station and the police didn't do anything and I called [name of large] security firm, at that time I was working with WHO [World Health Organisation] and they had this security thing so I called them and they came and we went and got that guy.

When Beth's attempt to seek justice through the formal mechanism of the law fails, she calls on her networks in an effort to ensure that justice is done. Interestingly, Beth, who is living away from her family in Wewak, sought help through her employment networks rather than her friends and family, as she may have if she were living in her home province. The security guards who act where the state has failed are fulfilling the function of mercenaries. While I did not discover what "getting the guy" actually entailed, Beth appeared to consider that justice was done. This outcome may be satisfactory from Beth's perspective, however taking the law into one's own hands is itself a reflection of insecurity, as the state system cannot be relied upon to uphold justice.

That Beth has access to the company security guards reflects her status within a large international organisation. Like the taxis and hotel lobbies discussed earlier, these forms of protection are not available to the majority of Papua New Guinean women. On the other hand, it would seem that Beth was attacked precisely because of her status as modern woman—i.e. she was out of the house and wearing the 'wrong' shirt. Her story thus supports the argument that middle-class women are both more vulnerable and also more able to access some forms of protection than other women.

Fear, Frustration and the Desire for Freedom

For many young Papua New Guinean women—perhaps especially those who have experienced a much greater degree of freedom in overseas contexts—the daily experience of containment and reduced mobility is an immensely frustrating aspect of life in the urban contexts of Port Moresby and Goroka.

When I asked Laura, a twenty-five-year-old accountant in Port Moresby, if there was anything she missed about Australia after returning from tertiary studies, she said: "being able to move around freely, yeah that would be the big thing I missed and having to be dropped every time I want to go … I have to go some place even though it's day time". Laura's response was echoed by the other young women, some of whom lamented for example that they could not go and get a pizza without relying on family members (Cindy, Port Moresby), they could not "walk across the street without looking behind

[their] back" (Jennifer, Port Moresby) and that they could not stay back late and complete work "because we can't walk home" (Kamalia, Goroka) after hours. As Sue said, women feel like prisoners in their own homes and live "like second-class citizens because [they] only get the daylight hours".

The young women also resented the need to rely on family members for a sense of personal security. Twenty-five-year-old Veronica, for example, said:

> So I live with my parents and with my brother who also can't afford to live on his own. I think that's quite common for Papua New Guinean people and I don't know what age that stops, I don't know and I find that quite a concern in general … I'm not hearing of a lot of twenty or thirty year old you know Papua New Guineans who are living on their own and I find that a real concern.

Consequently Veronica, who had studied and lived independently in the United States, says she wants to get her masters degree and live overseas.

Other participants indicated that their families used concerns about safety to control their lives and behaviour more generally. Thus, aspects of life that they had come to accept as normal while living in Australia or New Zealand, such as going out for a drink with friends, getting dressed up, wearing make-up and staying out late, were taken as indications of moral depravity and thus were seen by the women's families as putting them 'at risk'. Like many of the young women I spoke with Joanne compared the "harassment" she experienced in Port Moresby with the freedom of life in Australia:

> In Australia, I could just wear anything, I can wear a bikini, all my bits are sticking out, you just you, you do whatever you want to do which is fun and just great because I felt more free and everything and coming back I just shut down and clothe up again.

Not content to "shut down and clothe up", many of these young women would prefer to live elsewhere given the opportunity to do so. As Glenys put it: "why should I stay in Papua New Guinea and be subjected to this? No, I'm too good for that, [I'll] just travel the world". The perspective of Glenys and others like her is captured by Dame Meg Taylor, PNG's first woman lawyer, who describes threats to women's personal security as a significant reason why young women aspire to work and study overseas.

> A lot of young professional women are leaving the country because they don't want to put up with it; they just don't want to live with the nonsense that goes on. They want to be able to go to work safely, come home safely, play their sports in a safe environment and do the things that a lot of young women … want to do and feel safe and they don't feel safe.[35]

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[35] Meg Taylor, interview with author, 9 August 2011.

Shortly after her unjust and upsetting experiences in Goroka, for example, Eare found work in Melbourne and has since gone on to become a permanent resident in Australia. Other educated women, perhaps less academically able or well connected, continue to lament their status as 'prisoners' in their own society, perhaps meeting with one another to discuss their frustrations, as Jennifer mentioned. Some will suffer long-term consequences, related to limited mobility, including reduced health and wellbeing. Such are the effects of personal insecurity in PNG.

Conclusion

In this article, I have explored the lives of young educated women in Port Moresby and Goroka in order to help unravel the notion that 'security' is about "externally inspired terrorist atrocities" or regional destabilisation.[36] This perspective reveals what many in the development world know all too well, namely that the experience of insecurity, as with violence, is profoundly affected by gender and class.

By registering the experiences of this group, we are reminded of the impact of insecurity in the daily lives of women in PNG. Importantly, hearing what these women say constitutes an implicit challenge to state-centric security approaches that neglect decades of work on gender in favour of an outdated and top-down paradigm. Speaking back to state-centric views of security that mask the nuances of how violence actually plays out in specific gendered and classed ways, this article acknowledges local (albeit constrained) agency and strategies for managing violence. Focusing on the daily experiences of these women demonstrates that they are not only victims but that they have some degree of control over their personal security, as a result of the various strategies they employ.

To conclude, I would like to focus on the words and activism of Jacqueline Joseph, a twenty-five-year old Bougainvillean woman who lives in Port Moresby. Together with a male friend, Jacqueline, at the age of twenty-three, co-founded the organisation, Rugby League Against Violence (RLAV). She chose to do so because she wanted to ensure that men, rather than women, were the focus of engagement with issues of violence. For her, it is important that men have the opportunity to be 'change agents' at the forefront of anti-violence campaigns and movements. Though RLAV started with a small grant, when I last heard from Jacqui she mentioned that the "equal playing field" program run as part of RLAV's work in schools is now being sponsored by the British High Commission. Such locally inspired activism may well represent the best hope for the creation of a more secure PNG. Rather than making women aware of their 'rights', Jacqui's approach, as embodied in the work of RLAV, emphasises the need for men to be involved in changing entrenched ideas about gender that perpetuate

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[36] Frankel, 'Myths of Pacific Terrorism'.

inequity. Challenging all those who maintain and perpetuate masculinist power relations, including the bastions of traditional security, such interventions address the root cause of personal security problems in PNG. As the British High Commission has done in this case, policy makers may do well to get behind local initiatives that focus on creating long-term societal change. Assuming the development of state institutions such as the police is not neglected, targeted support for local activism seems to offer much unexplored potential for enhancing the experience of personal security among women in urban PNG.

When I met Jacqui she identified "security" as one of the most difficult aspects of her life. Asked to elaborate on what security means to her, she said:

> In a personal sense security to me is having the comfort that all is well and that I am safe. ... I would say "being safe" is the ability of not feeling threatened or harassed and that one feels at ease to be who they wanted to be and simultaneously being able to do what one desires without having any reservations in mind. Not having to look behind my shoulders constantly is something I would like to change and I feel once more women confidently walk on the streets without fearing any harm to themselves [that] will be a growing sign of women's empowerment.

Her words echo those of Linda Basch who states that security must be defined "as freeing individuals and groups from the social, physical, economic and political constraints that prevent them from carrying out what they would freely choose to do".[37] Much needs to be done to realise Jacqui's vision. Taking it seriously, rather than dismissing it as irrelevant to the "real debates" about security, seems a good place to start.

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[37] Basch, 'Human Security', p. 9.