Being Bashed: Western Samoan women's responses to domestic violence in Western Samoa and New Zealand

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Being Bashed: Western Samoan women's responses to domestic violence in Western Samoa and New Zealand

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ABSTRACT   *Given the large impact that domestic violence has on many women's lives, it is surprising that research in this area has largely neglected the ways in which women respond to this problem in different cultural contexts. This article examines variations in Western Samoan women's responses to domestic violence in three different contexts, in rural and urban Western Samoa and in Christchurch, New Zealand. The authors find that processes relating to the individualisation of social relations, changes in women's economic independence, and political mechanisms that provide formal support for battered women go some way to explaining variations in women's responses to abuse in the three contexts. However, the findings rule out any simple link between context and responses to physical abuse and caution us against the naive hope that changes in a single variable will reduce women's vulnerability to violence.*

Introduction

> Oo look at me—look at me, at her reflection in the medicine cupboard mirror with the silver starting to break up behind the glass and mould formed in the lower two corners. And this face—if you could call it a face—framed there, beaten to a barely recognisable pulp. And him the doer of this to me laying back there in bed—my bed—as if nothing had happened … The right eye puffed shut, nose broken—again—lower lip swollen with a deep cut about midway and leaking blood. Bruises all over. Beth sighed, shook her head in a kind of astonishment. You mad mad crazy bastard Jake … (Duff, 1995, p. 38)

This article is about domestic violence. It is about women like Beth so vividly described by Alan Duff of New Zealand in his award winning book, *Once Were Warriors*. Domestic violence in New Zealand, as well as elsewhere, is a pervasive and serious social problem and its incidence seems to have increased (Police Managers' Guild, 1995). In a recent study of violent men in New Zealand, over a fifth of the men interviewed admitted to physically hurting their partners over the previous year and over half had committed at least one act of psychological abuse (Liebrich *et al.*, 1995).

Feminist analyses recognise domestic violence not only as a form of physical abuse, but also a process of disempowerment. It is a mechanism of social control and part of a system of social order (Hanmer & Maynard, 1987; Hester, *et al.*, 1996). From this perspective, domestic violence is a feature of a social system structured by gender inequalities and patriarchal systems that operate to maintain inequalities in the division of social power. But, given that 'gender relations are constructed not only in socially and historically specific ways but also in spatially specific settings' (Little *et al.*, 1988, p. 2), it

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follows that we might expect the character of domestic violence to vary from place to place and with cultural change. However, research to date has largely neglected these issues. We aim to address this oversight in this article.

One way of exploring geographical and cultural variations in domestic violence is to examine how women respond to the issue in different contexts. This is the strategy we adopt here, focusing particularly on how women's responses to violence are shaped by the economic, political and social contexts within which they live. Our study is concerned with the experiences and attitudes of Samoan women to domestic violence in both Western Samoa and New Zealand.

The remainder of the article is organised into five sections. First, we elaborate on our approach to the study of domestic violence as a cultural construct. We then provide a brief review of Samoan culture both in Western Samoa and New Zealand, paying particular attention to gender relations and how these have changed. In the third section we discuss methodological issues crucial to our analysis, and in the fourth we examine empirical evidence gathered in three locations. Finally we discuss the key theoretical and policy implications of our findings.

Social Control, Local Context and Cultural Change

In the early twentieth century social control became one of the central concepts in urban sociology, particularly as an explanation of the maintenance of social order (or conversely its breakdown) in urban societies characterised by rapid immigration and cultural change. The classical sociological analyses of Durkheim, Weber, Simmel and Toennies, and later those of Park and Wirth of the Chicago School, first attempted to comprehend the results of such trends (Knox, 1995). Within this frame, social organisation was understood to result from effective social control, whereas disorganisation was understood as the product of a breakdown in control mechanisms.

This view has also influenced much work on domestic violence. In New Guinea, for example, the rise of domestic violence has been attributed to the breakdown of traditional cultures and values accompanying modernisation (Gillett, 1990). However, such theorising fails to acknowledge divergent forms of cultural change, or the fact that many urban communities are highly organised and are characterised by strong cultural norms. For instance, recent research on the lives of immigrant women in the USA at the turn of the century suggests that the violence they suffered at the hands of their husbands, rather than reflecting a collapse of the old social order, was viewed as a traditional, and legitimate part of gender relations. As Doris Weatherford (1986, p. 47) has stated:

> Wife beating had been sufficiently a part of life in continental Europe that neighbours frequently closed their eyes to it, considering it none of their affair. As long as the husband was not too severe, even the victim and her family were willing to consider it unfortunate, but nevertheless a male prerogative.

We will return to the links between urbanisation and cultural change later in the article, but first we suggest, following Henrietta Moore (1994), that rather than imagining violence to be a breakdown in the social order—something gone wrong—we might better understand the phenomenon if we see it as a sign of a struggle to maintain certain fantasies of identity and power.

Feminists have argued that social controls operate at all levels of society and are fundamental to understanding how gender relations are culturally constructed in

different places. Writers such as Sylvia Walby (1990) and Marianne Hester (1992) have identified a variety of forces that can be arranged on a continuum of controls affecting women in every facet of social life. Some of these originate from cultural norms such as the sexual objectification of women through pornography or verbal harassment (Gagne, 1992); others operate through mechanisms such as housing and labour markets (Johnson 1990a, 1990b), or within the rules and ideologies of sport (Hargreaves, 1986) and hotel patronage (Pittman & White, 1991). Violence is clearly about the power to control, be it personally, institutionally or collectively, and as Michael Kaufman (1987, p. 15) has suggested, it is 'probably the clearest, most straightforward expression of male power over women'. In this context we find valuable Michel Foucault's (1980) argument that violation takes place when a social system lays claim to space by refusing to recognise the legitimacy of particular voices: it expresses tyranny in the silencing of voices that might oppose the dominant authority (Elshtain & Cloyd, 1995).

For logistical reasons this research focuses just on domestic violence. Following Jacquelyn Campbell (1992), we define this as serious physical violence which is injurious or potentially injurious to the health of an intimate partner. It is an activity mainly used by men to maintain their socially structured 'right' to control women. As Dobash & Dobash (1979, p. 242) state, 'the use of physical force against wives should be seen as an attempt on the part of a husband to bring about a desired state of affairs. It is primarily purposeful behaviour and not the actions of deviants or aberrant individuals'. In practice it may range from family sanctioned violence to retain economic hegemony (Hegland, 1992) to beatings of Somali women with a ritual whip on their wedding night (Summerfield, 1993), to the culturally ingrained views of some Nicaraguan women who might say, 'well if you love me you beat me' (Lopez, 1991, p. 56).

As these examples suggest, forms of patriarchal social control vary cross-culturally. However, as Jacquelyn Campbell (1992) points out, there is no simple linear correlation between female status and rates of wife abuse (see also Summerfield, 1993). Rather, we need to see violence as bound up with the very constitution of cultural forms. For instance, in a study of domestic violence in rural Fiji, Christina Toren (1994) argues that violence is a constitutive part of Fijian notions of kinship. She found that most of the Fijian women she interviewed *expected* men to be violent and while they viewed beatings as abhorrent, tended to accept them as part of marital relations. Similarly, in her case study of women in Ocongate, a South Andean village in Cusco, Peru, Penelope Harvey (1994) showed that adults generally considered the use of force to be legitimate. She argued that beatings were understood as an expression of relationships of respect and broadly reflected local cultural rituals that emphasised submission and dominance, together with affinity to supernatural powers of the landscape, the feeding of which had once resulted in the sacrificial offerings of young virginal women. In this 'kind of culture femininity is strongly associated with conquest and masculinity with domination, leading Penelope Harvey (1994, p. 86) to argue that:

> given the strength of these metaphors and the way in which they resonate with institutionalised norms of church and state which disempower women in terms of patriarchal values, it is very hard for women to effectively challenge the legitimacy of a beating; they protest yet their protests are defused by their reintegration into the very systems of meaning that allow such behaviours to occur.

Another important issue to consider concerns the impact of cultural change. Social theorists have generally concentrated on providing explanations for the persistence of

patriarchy (see, for example, Eisenstein, 1979; Giddens, 1984: Young, 1990). However, we argue that more attention needs to be paid to the dynamics of change. This can be conceptualised at two levels; at the *macro-level* in terms of how cultural change (notably urbanisation) leads to the emergence of new systems of social control; and at the *micro-level* in terms of the impact of changing cultural environments upon the pattern of women's responses. One means by which these dynamics can be illuminated is through investigation of the consequences of migration between rural and urban contexts, and transnationally. Interestingly, although there is now a good deal of research on various aspects of women's experiences of migration (see, for example, Pedraza, 1991; Larner, 1993; Buijs, 1993; Bystydzienski & Resnik, 1994; Gabaccia, 1994; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1994; Toro-Morn, 1995; Raijman & Semyonov, 1997), there is very little that considers questions of domestic violence.

In advancing an interpretation of domestic violence as a culturally varying dimension of patriarchal social control, we have paid scant attention to the particular attitudes and responses of individual women. However, such responses form the empirical material we examine later in this article and so we comment briefly on the ideas informing our interpretation of them. We do not assume a simple link between cultural forms, attitudes and responses to domestic violence. Within particular cultural contexts the resources—political, economic, social, psychological or familial—available to particular women will vary widely. We are not directly concerned with these individual circumstances. Rather, we interpret them as examples of the kinds of accounts available for women to deploy within their various contexts. In other words, we view their responses as representations of culturally constructed possibilities rather than as manifestations of personal attributes.

In summary, we suggest that there are a variety of links between the socially constructed nature of domestic violence and women's responses to it. With this in mind, the following section briefly discusses the changing nature of gender relations in Western Samoa and New Zealand. We then turn to a discussion of research methodology and our findings of how Samoan women have responded to domestic violence in these two contexts.

The Context: urbanisation, cultural change and gender relations among Samoans in Western Samoa and New Zealand

Western Samoa is a small Pacific island nation of 161,000 persons (1991) located in western Polynesia. It is dominated by one city, Apia, which is home to one quarter of the country's population. This largely agrarian society provides a good example of a culture where, traditionally, women have had access to economic and political power, but where European contact in the nineteenth century has precipitated an intensification of gender inequalities for many sectors of the population.

Writers such as Noumea Simi (1991) consider pre-contact Western Samoan society to have been characterised by an equal distribution of status between men and women within a particular sexual division of labour (Schoeffel, 1983). For example, the bond between brother and sister allowed women a complementary degree of power, and women were important in upholding the dignity and prestige of the extended family. Women were also important in the political arena in forming and maintaining alliances between families and villages.

As a result of missionary contact in the nineteenth century, however, village life began to change. Missionary influence discouraged women from entering the political arena, introduced divorce, outlawed polygamy, and reoriented the status of women from a

position of complementary equality as sisters, to the Biblical role of wives (Sirni, 1991). The status attached to women's role within the extended family was diminished and, as a consequence, most women currently only enjoy limited participation in political affairs.

This is evident within the traditional village context, where the extended family is the most important social unit. The strength of the family depends not on the individual but on how effectively the family performs collectively (Baker, *et al.*, 1986). All individuals operate as the internal organs of a greater body (Shore, 1982), with all decisions regarding family affairs made by an elected family chief, or *matai*, as the 'brain' of the body. Most (95.1% in 1990) *matai* are men (Simi, 1991). The *matai's* power base lies in the allocation of communally held land to family members, the organisation of the family's labour resources (including the appropriation of any cash incomes since, in extended families, money is a communal asset) and the distribution of produce. The *matai* (and their inter-village council or *fono*) are also an important mechanism of social control for, although the police may be present, the enforcement of law and order is left largely to traditional, village-based mechanisms. Police only become involved in the case of 'serious' crimes such as murder, rape or disputes between villages (Cribb, 1995). The importance of the extended family as a form of social control, therefore, is paramount in the village and is part of the very core of *fa'asamoa* (the Samoan way of life) (Baker *et al.*, 1986; Muse, 1991). Although village economic and social relations have been altered as a result of the introduction of capitalist relations, communal subsistence production under the direction of *matai* still remains important, with 80% of the land still held under this customary tenure.

In contrast, Apia is a distinctive mix of traditional and modern forms. The city is composed of villages still operating under traditional *matai* structures and freehold land. Freehold dwellers may retain links to their *matai* by visiting their villages, but increasingly they are rejecting traditional structures. Most urban households, whether part of an urban village or not, contain a large number of extended family members. Although some family members work for wages, the money they earn is viewed as an extended family resource. Women who earn an income will often experience a rise in status and be allowed to contribute to family decisions (Fairbaim-Dunlop, 1995). However, while some women gain new avenues to power and increase their status, many others are becoming marginalised. Women in Apia, like elsewhere in the developing world, are more likely than men to be unemployed or underemployed. Because employment opportunities are so limited they have increasingly looked elsewhere for work, especially to New Zealand.

Western Samoans have been entering New Zealand since the turn of the twentieth century (Pitt & MacPherson, 1974). After Western Samoa gained independence in 1962, a Treaty of Friendship established an annual quota system and entry into New Zealand was guaranteed for a selected number of migrants provided they were able to secure accommodation and employment guarantees. Although limiting numbers overall, the new policy was selective in that it deliberately encouraged Samoan women to come to New Zealand because they were seen to be undemanding and hard workers (Larner, 1991).

However, securing employment has not been without its costs (Larner, 1991). Although more Samoan women are employed than men, the monetarist labour market reforms of the early 1990s have resulted in a workplace environment where the predominantly female casual and part-time jobs are less secure and wages and working conditions less attractive than previously (Krishnan, *et al.*, 1994). Furthermore, despite

the fact that increasingly women are the main income earners in Samoan households, men are still recognised as the 'head' of the nuclear family, the dominant patriarchal form.

Migration to New Zealand has immersed Western Samoans in a different cultural context. They have responded to change largely by substituting the church for the village system. The New Zealand Samoan church acts to preserve *fa'asamoa*, maintain order (Pitt & MacPherson, 1974; Hendrikse, 1995) and, as in other deprived communities, help the disadvantaged (Pacione, 1990). Within this transplanted community the church has also assumed the role of *matai* and *fono* (a traditional village council composed of *matai*). Despite their financial input, women are excluded from political power within the church structure, with church teachings portraying them solely as wives and mothers. Women's Committees, which correspond to a feminine equivalent of the *fono*, give women a limited political voice but only within traditional power structures. The church, therefore, entrenches women's subordinate position and magnifies the claim of male elders to traditional *matai*-based authority.

Methodological Concerns

Researching domestic violence is a difficult and sensitive process. Our approach to the topic is to focus upon women's *reactions* towards physical abuse. These include both past reactions, for those already affected by violence and, for those who had not been affected, how they perceive they would react if physically abused. Samoan women were asked the question, 'If your husband was beating you what would you do?' Based upon the narratives of the women interviewed, we attempted to identify women who were either more or less likely to tolerate violence in their lives. Our definition of violence is a limited one and we are aware that others working in this area have called for broader definitions encompassing physical, sexual and emotional abuse (Dobash & Dobash, 1992). However, our choice was deliberate given the difficulties of measuring emotional abuse and because of the greater likelihood that physical violence would produce clearly identifiable responses on the part of the women interviewed.

In order to compare patriarchal relations and women's responses to domestic violence in three different contexts we adopted the following research design. First, three case study sites were selected to maximise contextual differences, which we thought were likely to be important in women's responses to domestic violence. The first site was Papa, which served as a rural baseline. Papa was selected because it is a remote and small village (with 302 residents) operating under a traditional *matai*-based structure in which traditional beliefs about health and social practice prevail (MacPherson & MacPherson. 1990). Located on the southern side of the island of Savai'i, and distant from any tourist trails, Papa has limited contact with Apia and indeed with the rest of the world. The second site selected was Vaivase Tai, a suburb of Apia. This area is characterised mainly by individual households inhabiting free-standing dwellings on privately owned sections with limited space for cultivation. In contrast to Papa, most households rely on cash incomes and include several wage earners who work in Apia's businesses and government departments. The disruption of traditional arrangements is also evident in the presence of fewer extended families. Compared to Papa, where all villagers recognised *matai* leadership, extended families with a recognised *matai* structure accounted for only 46% of social arrangements, while those with no *matai* or village affiliation accounted for a further 21% (Cribb, 1995). The third case study was conducted in Christchurch, New

Zealand. This site was selected because it is an example of a Western Samoan migrant community which has transplanted itself into a Western cultural milieu.

Within each of the three study contexts three research strategies were used. First, formal interviews were conducted to collect insights from those in positions of power, that is the main agents of social control within the respective communities. In Papa these included leaders of the extended families, the *matai*; in Apia, urban *matai*, various government ministers and other community leaders; in Christchurch, church ministers and agencies involved with the Western Samoan community. Secondly interviews were undertaken with a total of 90 women using a standardised interview schedule. In Papa access was gained through an interpreter. The interpreter's sister was married to Papa's Samoan Congregational Church Minister who called a meeting of the Village Women's Committee to help facilitate the execution of the case study. The Chairwoman of the Women's Committee organised her members and interviews were conducted in Samoan by Jo Cribb together with three interpreters, who were all women from Apia. In Vaivase Tai local women were interviewed in English with selection based on age categories from the 1991 Samoan census. In Christchurch the selection of respondents was more complex than in the other two case studies. In order to obtain a representative portrayal of Samoan women in the city, women were selected in three different contexts: in the church, in a workplace recognised as a large employer of Samoan women, and in a Christchurch secondary school with a large number of Samoan senior students. The third strategy was one based on participant observation. Jo Cribb lived in Papa and Apia for 3 months as well as immersing herself within the Christchurch Samoan community. Immersion within the research context, and personal experience of the issues considered, has been a vital component of the ethnographic nature of the research.

The strategies chosen were not without their drawbacks. We will briefly mention three important issues that are highlighted in feminist considerations of ethnography (Stacey, 1988) and epistemology (Edwards, 1993; Maynard & Purvis, 1994; Nast, 1994). First, we are conscious of the fact that domestic violence is not an easy subject to broach. This is evident in the serious underreporting of violence, especially in middle-class communities (Stets, 1988). Similarly, women from ethnic minorities, if subject to violence, may still regard their families as a haven from other forms of oppression and will seek to keep their family lives private from the enquiring eyes of researchers (Edwards, 1993). In practice we found the openness of discussion in all three case study sites surprising in view of our own cultural experiences. This may reflect the strictly gendered division of space in Western Samoan communities combined with the fact that discussions with Samoan women took place in women's places away from men. Alternatively, it could be an outcome of the particular way we attempted to elicit responses to violence, namely our focus on what women *would* do if physically abused by their partners: we did not enquire about past events in women's lives and so their responses did not necessarily carry the same sensitivity as direct experience.

More significant, perhaps, was the problem of power relations between the interviewers and those being interviewed. A major tenet of feminist methodologies is the recognition of the relations of power in the research process (Stacey, 1988; Dyck & Kearns, 1995). This became particularly evident during the course of the Christchurch study, where the selection of one group of respondents was mediated through a church minister. Even though women were given the option of whether or not to participate, in reality their choices were limited because the minister actively encouraged involvement. In Western Samoa, Jo attempted to reduce the hierarchical nature of power relations by immersing herself to a greater degree within the Papa and Vaivase Tai communities.

Here she was perceived less as an objective scientist but more as an extended family member, church participant and friend. However, Judith Stacey (1988) cautions that this approach may place the women being researched in a position open to researcher manipulation. Although we attempted to avoid such situations, they still occurred. This was evident in that some women's responses, such as 'you tell her I said whatever the *right* answer is', were clearly a reflection of a desire to please the interviewer (Cribb, 1995). Thus recognising and being sensitive to power relations does not necessarily remove them (England, 1994; Gilbert, 1994).

Thirdly, another problem that arose concerns speaking for others (Alcoff, 1991). This issue is at the heart of epistemological debates throughout the social sciences (Walter, 1995) and is an important challenge in culturally sensitive research (Kobayashi, 1994; Kearns, 1997). However, given that an important aim of this study was to turn research *on* into research *for* Samoans, a vital ingredient of feminist research, *praxis*, was achieved (Stanley, 1990; also see Andrew, 1995). This was accomplished by sharing the results of the research and working with a new women's group, called *Mapu Soga*, which has recently formed in Western Samoa to address women's issues associated with increased domestic violence. Rather than Samoan women just being the subjects of our research, we thus became part of theirs.

Urbanisation and Changing Responses toward Domestic Violence

Papa—a traditional rural village society

In Papa most women (80%), if confronted with domestic violence, stated that they would leave their partners and return to their extended families. In traditional Western Samoan village settings extended family networks are important escape routes for women with violent partners (Simi, 1985). Rather than seeking any form of legal redress or other forms of assistance, of which there are none, women are encouraged to seek shelter and support within the home of their extended family *matai* or village church minister. Domestic violence is also an extended family issue because violence by males against females is considered to bring shame upon the whole family. Violence between family members is punishable by the enforced surrendering of large numbers of pigs or cattle to the village. This brings disgrace upon the extended family and acts as a deterrent to aberrant behaviour.

The role of the extended family in providing a safeguard against domestic violence is further demonstrated by an analysis of the characteristics of the minority (17%) of Papa's women, whose responses suggested that they were more likely to tolerate domestic violence. These women were less integrated into Papa's village structure. To a large extent this reflects their reliance on cash incomes (80% of women more likely to stay with violent partners had cash incomes compared to only 4% of those who stated that they would leave). Withdrawal from the communal labour pool of the village isolates the household's economic activity and alters the power structure of social relationships from the extended family to the household level. The significance of integration into the village structure is also indicated by the fact that those less likely to leave violent partners tend to have higher levels of education and were more likely to have visited Apia or travelled overseas. Theirs was a less localised world compared to that of other women in Papa. They also had fewer children. This also reduces integration into the village since fewer children means fewer marriages to facilitate linkages between families.

It is significant that women more likely to stay with violent partners were usually the main income earners in their households. As capitalist opportunities increase in Papa it is women, and not men, who are able to obtain waged positions. Most opportunities for wage earning are in jobs commonly seen as women's work, notably school teaching, nursing and cleaning. Given their changed economic status, it may seem surprising that these women were less likely to leave violent partners. This can be explained in three ways. First, as mentioned earlier, women employed in the cash economy are more likely to have withdrawn from the communal labour pool of the village. Traditional escape routes are therefore not readily available to them. Secondly, cultural factors remain important. Contemporary gender roles are based on a division of labour prescribed by missionary influences, which assigned women to the role of wifehood, a role which is supportive of the husband as the main provider: Papa women often remain subservient to male 'heads' of households even if they are the main income earners. Finally, women in waged employment are more likely to be members of nuclear families, which limits the availability of 'escape' routes.

In summary, the context in which this minority of women consider what they would do in the face of domestic violence illustrates how the weakening of the power of the *matai* and extended family structure, resulting from the introduction of capitalist forms, is eroding informal mechanisms of social support. Further, the increasing economic involvement of women in a cash-based economy has not resulted in increased power to escape violence because of the persistence of gender relations based on the missionaries' masculinist ideals. These processes become even more apparent in Vaivase Tai.

Vaivase Tai—the emergence of class based divisions

Compared to Papa, women in Vaivase Tai were less likely to oppose domestic violence directly: 57% indicated that they would dissociate themselves from violent partners. The actions they would take fell into three types.

As in Papa, the most common reaction would be to escape by using the social support mechanisms of extended family networks. Women mentioning this strategy were, for the most part, young, well-educated persons who had always lived in Western Samoa and who could easily move between the traditional prescriptions of *fa'asamoa* and Westernised ideas. The status placed on Westernised skills in the Vaivase Tai cash economy also means that their educational achievements provide them with considerable prestige. This, combined with their strong links to traditional culture, facilitates their utilisation of traditional social structures to escape domestic violence.

A second group also indicated that they would use their extended family, but as an economic sanction against the threat of domestic violence rather than as a refuge. If physically abused, their response would be to tell their partners to leave. All women mentioning this alternative were part of wealthier extended families headed by a *matai* who was either a father or uncle. The situation of husbands living within a wife's family was not encountered in Papa, where little difference was recorded between household resources, and where wives generally moved to their husband's families. However, the evolution of class-based differences in the Vaivase Tai context has transformed traditional patterns of marriage mobility. If the wife's family is more prosperous, her husband often relocates there. Thus, the mediating factor of class differences gives women of wealthy families considerable status and protection since a violent partner can be asked to leave and access to the resources of the wife's family can be denied.

The third and smallest group proposed to escape domestic violence by utilising Westernised institutions by either complaining to the police or by divorcing their husbands. Women mentioning these strategies differed from the other two other groups. They were more economically independent and had higher levels of education, which they had usually received outside Western Samoa. Because of their skills and experience they are able to take advantage of, and have confidence in, the support provided by Westernised institutions in Apia.

Compared to Papa, more women (43%) in Vaivase Tai offered responses to the prospect of domestic violence that did not involve leaving violent partners. Most of this group indicated that they would react to domestic violence by crying or feeling sad, while others would make no reaction at all or would apologise to their husbands. Compared to other women in Vaivase Tai, these women tended to have more limited education and employment prospects. Most had always lived in Apia in extended families and were likely to acknowledge the legitimacy of *matai* leadership. However, living in an extended family arrangement under an urbanised *matai* structure is very different from the traditional rural context. Unlike the situation in Papa, where women contribute to communal income and gain access to it, in Vaivase Tai women not involved in wage earning are forced to negotiate with their partners or their *matai* for access to cash. Consequently, two forms of social control relations are experienced simultaneously by such women: the extended family-based controls of *matai* structures, and individual relations characterised by women's dependence on men's resources. With these doubled layers of social control, male power is more firmly entrenched. In such situations many women perceive that they have no option but to accept their fate and remain with their partners even if domestic violence occurs. Retreat to other households in Apia is unlikely to be an viable option for such women, and their low status and economic dependence means that *matai* intervention on their behalf is also less likely. Nor are legal sanctions likely to be very effective (Buzawa, *et al.*, 1995). In principle, criminal law may be invoked against a spouse for common assault or assault occasioning actual or grievous bodily harm. However, in practice few women seek legal redress by complaining to the police and prosecutions are very rare. Indeed, analysis of Apia police records indicated that *no* prosecutions were made in response to 53 complaints of domestic violence recorded for the year ending February 1995. Instead, the police, when called upon, prefer to act as a substitute family *matai*, visiting the residence of the complainant and attempting to resolve the matter through discussion. However, since no legal, material, or social sanctions are involved, this process is often ineffective.

In summary, it appears that the urbanisation process in Western Samoa reduces the scope for women to escape from domestic violence. To a large extent this reflects the weakening of the extended family and its social support mechanisms. It also reflects the economic marginalisation of large numbers of unskilled women in the Apia economy, the absence of effective political or voluntary social support mechanisms, and a more Western cultural context, which is likely to reinforce patriarchy in a variety of ways. However, such trends are moderated by some of the effects of growing class divisions and by the increased economic independence of a minority of women. These themes are also evident in the third, and final, Christchurch case study.

Christchurch: different cultural paths

Compared to Vaivase Tai, Samoan women in Christchurch were more likely to oppose domestic violence directly: two-thirds indicated that they would respond to such abuse

either by contacting the police or by using other formal support organisations such as women's refuges. More Christchurch Samoan women mentioned these as options than their counterparts in Papa and Vaivase Tai. A substantial proportion of women— 37%—also mentioned that they would leave their partners and evade violence by utilising extended family networks, but this is a smaller percentage than in Papa or Vaivase Tai.

Women who indicated that they would respond in these ways tended to be younger and better educated (usually in New Zealand) and were also less likely than other women to be part of a male-headed nuclear family. Although many had been born in Samoa and tended to be involved in Samoan church activities in Christchurch, they were less likely to acknowledge *matai* leadership than other women. These women can be seen to be moving between two cultures. Their involvement in church groups means integration and acceptance in the Christchurch Samoan community. Knowledge of *fa'asamoa* provides them with a cultural heritage and large extended kin networks to utilise. At the same time their New Zealand education gives this group many of the skills that enable them to operate confidently in the *palagi* (or Western) world.

While the ability to use a wide range of cultural options allowed most of the Christchurch Samoan women interviewed to posit direct rejection of domestic violence, the remaining one-third envisaged rather different responses. Most (60%) of this latter group indicated that they would make no reaction if physically abused or they would apologise for their behaviour. Responses in Christchurch were similar to those in Vaivase Tai, the main difference being that more Christchurch women reacted to violence as 'their lot'. Those considering violence to be 'their lot' were all older women (over 40) living in nuclear households, and most acknowledged *matai* leadership. These women operate in an exclusively Samoan social world surrounded by extended family members. They speak Samoan most of the time, wear brightly coloured Samoan attire and eat traditional Samoan food. They have a narrow cultural repertoire restricted mainly to knowledge of *fa'asamoa* and have only very limited access to the *palagi* world. Urban women relying solely on the institutions of *fa'asamoa* have few avenues open to them if their partners become violent. Although Samoan women in Christchurch play a major role in providing for their families (in all but 6% of the sampled households women were in paid employment) and gain a certain prestige from managing family budgets (80% did so), this does not translate into greater economic independence. Regardless of their employment status, men are still considered to be the 'head' of the family. Thus, cultural, rather than economic, arrangements would seem to explain the responses of this group.

In the traditional village structure, women are not expected to endure domestic violence and would utilise family networks and *matai* structures to remove themselves from violent situations. The New Zealand Samoan church, as a substitute for traditional village structures, does not, however, offer the same support for women experiencing domestic violence. The Samoan extended family in New Zealand is no longer cen-tralised as it is in the traditional village. Members may be in different suburbs, cities or countries, leaving women with violent male partners isolated in nuclear families. Domestic violence, therefore, occurs in private behind closed doors. In New Zealand it is something that is not openly seen by the community nor widely discussed. In this context, Samoan women are reluctant to tell their substitute family head, their church minister, of any family business.

Urban women relying solely on the institutions of *fa'asamoa* as a source of support, therefore perceive that the church can offer only limited support. Moreover, they do not

perceive that the refuges, to which younger, more Westernised women are likely to turn, offer an escape route they can utilise, as the following comments by workers at the Pacific Island Refuge in Christchurch suggest:

> New Zealand born Samoans are more willing to believe that Refuge has something to offer while older and Island born Samoans tend to feel we don't understand and that our culture doesn't value marriage. (Spokesperson, Pacific Island Refuge, 1995)

> New Zealand born or New Zealand educated Samoans don't accept domestic violence as the norm or acceptable. Island born women do. The difference is that they [New Zealand born or educated] feel free to admit there is a problem. Unfortunately there is a reluctance to go to their community. Some of the reasons given for this are 'my people are nosey', 'my personal life is not kept confidential', 'the whole world knows what's happening'. (Refuge worker, Pacific Island Refuge, 1995)

Discussion

This article has examined women's responses to domestic violence in different cultural contexts. Responses varied between the three contexts: Samoan women in rural Papa and Christchurch were generally better able to deal with domestic violence than women in Vaivase Tai. To a large extent these variations appear to reflect key economic, social and cultural influences within different milieu. Of particular importance are processes relating to the individualisation of social relations, changes in economic relations, and cultural responses to these changes, which influence access to formal mechanisms of support for battered women and their families. Each will be discussed in turn, highlighting the main findings of the research.

First, the individualisation of social relations, especially in terms of the availability of support of kin, is an important factor affecting female vulnerability to male violence. The importance of social support was particularly evident in Papa. Here most women, if subjected to abuse, would leave their partners by utilising extended family networks. As social networks weaken, the ability to use such networks to escape violent partners is diminished. Furthermore, as extended family arrangements are replaced by nuclear households, leading to an increased social isolation of women, it is difficult for communities to apply sanctions against violent men. Also, as the Christchurch example shows, family activity occurring within this social form is private. This finding is in line with existing research which suggests that male aggression toward women is more common when female alliances are weak. Such bonds give women support and sometimes economic independence (Levinson, 1989). Barbara Smuts (1996), for example, shows that wife beating is less common when women get support from natal kin who are both willing and able to protect them from their partner's attacks.

Secondly, changes in economic relations, themselves related to the individualisation of social relations, are also important in explaining variations in the way Samoan women responded to domestic violence. Much evidence suggests that when their economic dependence on men decreases, women are more likely to defy male attempts to control them (Miller, 1992; Baxter & Kane, 1995; Lim, 1997). David Levinson (1989), for instance, notes that across cultures a significant association exists between male control over the products of family labour and the frequency of wife battering. However, the evidence presented here suggests that changes in the economic status of women alone

will not necessarily produce a reduction in domestic violence. In both Papa and Christchurch, women who envisaged staying with violent partners often tended to be the main income earners. In Papa, the most important mechanism of social control was the maintenance of traditionally prescribed gender roles, a legacy of missionary influences of the nineteenth century, while in Christchurch, political and cultural arrangements of the Western Samoan church and community have continued to ensnare women within traditional power structures. Economic or employment status is not a good measure of autonomy because employed women may not control the fruits of their labours. Again this finding is in line with other research. Rital Gallin (1992), for instance, found in Taiwan that although women's economic status had increased, this alone was not sufficient to challenge patriarchal structures of authority. Similar trends have been noted with respect to Bangladeshi women, especially where they had been brought up in the UK while their husbands had been brought up in Bangladesh. The women expected to keep at least part of their wages, but their husbands often insisted that their earnings be given to them or their families (Summerfield, 1993).

Such findings suggest that attitudes to domestic violence are strongly influenced by traditional values even under circumstances of cultural change. Barbara Smuts cautions us 'against the naive hope that changes in a single variable will reduce women's vulnerability to male aggression. Rather we must consider how numerous variables interact to increase or decrease the frequency of male aggression against women' (Smuts, 1996, p. 251). Patriarchal cultures, rather than being assimilated and modified by the dominant host culture, may be reconstituted in such a way as to preserve traditional cultural forms. The Samoan experience suggests that traditional forms may be perpetuated because of economic necessity, given that household income often supports relatives within the extended family, but also because of cultural imperatives to provide financial support to transplanted immigrant institutions, such as the church. Further, as both Iris Marion Young (1990) and Gerber (1995) have suggested, to assert one's autonomy may be perceived by some women as disturbing social codes and stepping outside the bounds of the cultural definition of femininity. Therefore, such cultural stereotypes may result in a reluctance by women to question traditional values.

The results also support findings by Barbara Smuts (1996) and others (McCloskey, 1996) of a curvilinear relationship between women's economic status and rates of domestic violence. In Papa women less able to resist violence came from families engaged in the cash economy, while in Vaivase Tai they tended to be marginalised women entrapped within an environment of doubled layers of subordination resulting from the interaction of traditional and nuclear patterns of social control. According to Shireen Lateef (1990), many women, when faced with the prospect of trying to raise children without male economic support, often 'choose' to remain in violent marriages. But there is no real choice because of the poverty that would confront such women if they leave their partners.

Finally, the results support other research findings to the effect that women from ethnic minorities and recent immigrant groups tend not to use support services provided in the community for victims of domestic violence (Ablon, 1971; Kotelchek, 1978; Kincaid & Yum, 1987; Bathgate *et al.*, 1994; Abraham, 1995). This may be because of the severe shortage of such facilities (Lawton, 1992; Charles, 1994, 1995; Malos & Hague, 1997), but more likely reflects cultural barriers, lack of knowledge or distrust. Instead of reaching out to formal support services, older Samoan women in Christchurch were more likely to seek the help of their church as a surrogate for the extended family. But as Anna Santiago & Merry Morash (1995) found in their study of Latino women,

such strategies are not always very effective, with the result that women may be pressured to remain in abusive situations because cultural or religious values place overriding emphasis on maintaining the family unit.

In the light of these findings we suggest three issues for future research. First, given the growth of female migration in the new international division of labour (McDowell, 1990), we need to develop a greater understanding of the stresses which migrant women face in new cultural contexts. Such questions are particularly significant given the cultural diversity of recent migrant streams (Harris, 1995) and because of the gender inequalities and social isolation that frequently accompany movement to new destinations (Gabaccia, 1994; Raijman & Semyonov, 1997). Secondly, given the reluctance of women from ethnic minorities and recent immigrant groups to use support services for battered women, we need to pay more attention to how women perceive their situation and the barriers they face (Rodriguez, *et al.*, 1996). Steve Pile's (1997) call for new ways of 'mapping the subject' is relevant here, pointing towards research on how women (and men) map themselves into socially-sanctioned regulations of body and self and how such 'maps' determine their eventual courses of action (Pile & Thrift, 1995). Finally, we need more 'action-oriented' research that engages directly with domestic violence programmes and explores their effects upon wider cultures of violence. This may help us to understand why it is so difficult to change ourselves and our world.

To conclude, we should come back to Beth standing in front of her bathroom mirror contemplating the results of the beating from her husband. Beth may blame herself and promise to try harder and be a better wife so as not to deserve her beatings. But as we have argued, her bruises must be understood in their wider context. Her bruises represent the effects of a deeply ingrained ideology that upholds patriarchal privilege by subordinating women and women's work. Beth's experience is not her fault, but extending support to women like Beth is difficult, just as it is difficult to change the wider cultural and economic forces that help give rise to domestic violence. However, change is occurring. In Western Samoa, *Mapu Soga*, an organisation whose full title translates loosely to 'support for women within the family', intends to address domestic violence by challenging dominant patriarchal attitudes. And in New Zealand we are confident that social agencies and researchers, like ourselves, will continue to work towards making appropriate resources available to assist, and to raise the consciousness of, all battered women.

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