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## Foreword

One of the blessings of the social sciences in Australia is that we are so close to Melanesia and occasionally engage with it. For social theorists like myself who aspire to claims of general import about the human condition, the terrifying complexity and difference of Melanesia is a sobering thing to confront from time to time. Sarah Garap points out in her chapter that there are 800 language-based culture groups in Papua New Guinea, Jean Mitchell in hers that there are 100 languages in Vanuatu.

This collection succeeds admirably in confronting us with the diverse meanings of violence in Melanesia. It shows that the nature and level of violence varies widely across different Melanesian contexts, with some of those contexts experiencing truly extraordinary levels of violence. Maev O'Collins reports contrasting studies from Bougainville showing comparatively low levels of domestic violence (pride by men in controlling anger) and from nearby New Britain where nearly all women expect to be beaten by their husbands.

The meaning of the very categories we use in Western law is challenged. Anou Borrey reports her attempts to talk about rape with elder women in a remote part of the Papua New Guinea highlands. All her efforts to discuss what 'rape' stood for were returned with stories of adultery instead. Forced sexual intercourse seemed to have no meaning.

Forms of oppression that were more important in the West centuries ago are still important in Melanesia—for example, Sarah Garap's description of Simbu 'witch hunts' when sorcery is believed to cause a death, and of the suffering polygamy can cause young girls enticed into it with the promise of relief from poverty. 'Polygamous "rights" and customs are re-constructed to suit the interests of swaggering, power-hungry and irresponsible men' (p. 162). Many of the stories of violence against women and children in this book are deeply moving, the poetry evocative—such as Jully Sipolo's *Wife Bashing* at the beginning of Afu Billy's chapter.

While the cultural patterns of violence are local and plural, there are also global currents. Glenn Banks explains to us that one transnational mining CEO claimed 'without a shred of irony' that his company was 'driving a spear of development into the heart of Irian Jaya'. Jean Mitchell explains how 'cultures of masculinity and violence' in Port Vila are defined by Western action videos, and shows the connection of the violent discipline of colonial plantation economies to reactive violence from people suffering the loss of a pre-plantation identity. While Mitchell does not push it this far, to comprehend such a violent political economy we need to understand the globalisation of

thinking in place 'violence must be understood within a context of the complex and specific intersections of the local and global' (Chapter 14:205). Not pining for the kind of Village Courts our restorative justice or feminist theories tell us we should have had, but making something of the dispute resolution Melanesia does have. To give a flavour for these possibilities I have referred to only some of the chapters. The full flavour comes from reading it cover to cover, which I commend to readers.

The conference organised by Sinclair Dinnen of the State, Society and Governance in Melanesia project of the Australian National University on which this book is based was one of those rich exchanges of ideas rarely experienced. It was so refreshing to attend an event where so many of the central contributions were from Melanesian women. This volume does that conference justice and moves beyond it. The upshot is not just a book for Melanesianists, but for all who are concerned about violence and healing it.

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