Bena Bena

The area known as Bena Bena is located east of the town of Goroka in the Eastern Highlands Province. In 1930, when Leahy and Dwyer first trekked into the Bena area, they found a densely populated, relatively isolated mountainous geographic region. In the eastern part of the Highlands, the 'perpendicular' mountains had been shorn of their forest by the warring population. The Goroka Valley was composed of an open grassland with individually owned and planted casuarina trees and bamboo. Gardens of sweet potato stretched up the steep slopes of the mountains, but the bulk of the population lived in the flatter grasslands of the Valley.

Social Organisation

The eastern region of the Highlands and particularly the cultural groups of the Goroka Valley (including Asaro, Gahuku-Gama and the Bena Bena peoples as well as others) have a remarkably uniform culture although there are some minor variations in language and cultural patterns (Read 1954b, p. 11, Langness 1967, p. 161). Read, the first anthropologist to study the eastern Highlands cultures, asserts that the Gahuku-Gama behaviour patterns appear to be 'typical' of the eastern Highlands region (1954b, p. 24).

The people discovered in 1930 by the Leahy expedition were described as 'cannibals, all armed with bows and arrows, and using stone axes' (Clune 1951, p. 329). They lived in villages with barricades made of split slabs of timber (if available) or of cane stalks that served as a protection against enemy groups (Leahy 1936, p. 229). The adult men and the initiated boys slept in the men's house and the wives slept in their own individual houses along with their children and pigs. Men guarded the women as they worked in the gardens (usually located directly outside the stockaded village) and, armed with their weaponry, they followed the women as they returned to the village at night (Langness 1967, p. 164).

The Bena Bena divide themselves into approximately sixty-five separate tribes. Each tribe consists of two to five patrilineal exogamous

clans (Langness 1967, p. 164). The clan is the most important political group within the Bena Bena social structure. Each clan is autonomous and controls some territory and is usually situated on a ridge top and composed of one to three villages. Clans may help each other in warfare if they belong to the same tribe but where there is some suspicion of sorcery between clans that affects their relationship. Loyalty is always given to one's own clan first and this takes precedence over relationships established outside the clan.

A clan is divided further into several sub-clans who trace their ancestry to one of the sons of the clan founder (Langness 1967, p. 165). The sub-clan divides once more into lineages that are effectively extended families. Internal cooperation within this unit is most significant, although exceptions do occur.

Some trade occurred between neighbouring tribes, but the bulk of trade took place with distant societies. Trading expeditions were dangerous and consequently were taken only occasionally. Trade relationships were established between individuals, not groups (Langness 1968, p. 193).

Leadership

Leahy and Crain (1937, p. 109) wrote that 'there seemed to be no chiefs or persons of recognised authority' amongst the Bena Bena. Leahy's exploration party dealt mainly with the elder men, but noted that the elder's authority over clan members was not absolute since the younger men did not always follow their orders. Although a man would strive to mobilise as many of the group for warfare as he could, it was almost impossible for him to recruit all male members of the group for raids. He usually managed to muster forces from the ranks of his relatives and friends or from those who had some grievance against the targeted group. Only a Bigman ('gipina') could enlist a sizeable group of supporters and it was the gipinas who instigated the larger wars. Yet these wars were often motivated by the 'gipinas' own subjective interest in personal revenge.

Bigman status was achieved through ability as a warrior and not by heritage. As a 'gipina' (Langness 1968, p. 191):

> . . . a man had to be able to organise a successful raid, to attack and take a village, to command a knowledge of terrain, strategy and weapons, and to be knowledgeable in the ways of war in general. Gipinas are said to have been able to send men out to scout and to detect weaknesses in an enemy barricade. They also deployed men in battle. They alone seem to have made decisions as to when the enemy was vulnerable or weak . . . The only other important context in which gipinas are described has to do with pig exchanges. But these exchanges are held to pay back for help in warfare, which the gipinas were responsible for in the first place.

Feil (1987, p. 99) refers to leaders in the eastern Highland cultures as despots who had followings not based on the manipulation of wealth (as in the western Highlands) but as a result of 'domination, intimidation and audacity'.

Langness (1968, p. 191) notes that oratorical ability was valued. 'Gipinas' typically practised polygyny to a greater degree than other men in the clan and consequently owned more pigs and gardens (since more wives meant more labour and therefore more wealth). They positioned for power amongst other gipinas and rarely left clan territory unless at war. This was because they were often the targets of sorcery, subterfuge and attack from enemy groups. Clan security was the main concern of the gipinas and this was dependent on the success of the relationships of 'power and influence' they managed to build within the sub-clan, the clan and within other clans of the same district as well as with outsiders. Leaders would, 'recruit members, maintain ties with affines and cognates, maintain trade partnerships, help others in battle and give gifts and bribes' (Langness 1968, p. 194).

Various clans and districts would only act together when threatened by an outside group which had the capacity to threaten their aggregate welfare (Langness 1968, p. 190). Nevertheless, these were temporary alliances held together only for the duration of the perceived threat.

The Position of Women

General

Generally, the position of women in Bena Bena society was one of subservience. Men viewed women as dangerous and 'weak, more sexual, less intelligent, more inconsistent, dirtier, and in almost every way inferior' (Langness 1974, p. 191). They could be 'strong' in the sense of 'firmness of position' and 'influential' in giving opinions, but a woman could not have political power and played no role in decision making.

Bena Bena and Gahuku-Gama belief systems regarded men as having the primary role in procreation rather than women. The Bena Bena do not believe that men can be sterile and when a woman is childless, she is blamed since men suspect that women secretly practice contraception and abortion (Langness, 1974, p. 202).

Men's institutions and their effect on the role of women

The societal values and attitudes towards relationships between the sexes can be seen within the male institutions of the Bena Bena and Gahuku-Gama. The attitudes of male solidarity, superiority and 'rigid separation of the sexes' were necessary values in their struggle for survival (Feil 1987, pp. 174-5; Langness 1967, p. 163). Langness (1974, p. 208) gives the reason for this as being the survival of the group.

Men's control over women's labour and their bodies was absolute (Langness 1974, p. 205). Women worked in the gardens, looked after the pigs, collected firewood, did the cooking and looked after the children. Without their labour, men's prestige and group survival would both have been threatened. In order to ensure women did these necessary tasks men needed to control their activities. The male institutions of the men's house, initiation rituals, and the 'nama cult' taught the attitudes which perpetuated that control.

Initiation

The central institution for the development of male aggression in the Bena Bena society was the men's house. From here all ceremonial activities, decision making, and initiation rites were conceived and organised. Male superiority and solidarity were stressed in order to counter the instability caused to society by the relentless fear of annihilation, and to ensure that the men be in perpetual readiness for warfare. The young boys of the same age group (called 'age-mates') were required to go through a series of initiation rites, the first of which occurred when the boys were approximately 5 years old (Langness 1967, p. 165). At this age, they were taken from their mothers and ceremonially had their ears pierced. At age seven, their septum was pierced. The final stage of initiation occurred when the group of boys were between ages twelve to eighteen. Male superiority and the oppositional relationship with women was emphasised throughout the long initiation period (Read 1954b, p. 25; Langness 1967, p. 165).

The boys were secluded in the men's house for the duration of the final stage and underwent several painful rituals that included nose bleeding and vomiting rites designed to purify the young warriors from the polluting and weakening influence women would have on them throughout their lifetime. These rituals were modelled on the menstrual abilities of women since maturity in women was clearly marked by the commencement of her menstrual period and by the enlargement of her breasts (Read 1954b, p. 27; 1955b, p. 162). Boys had no equivalent signs of physical maturity and were thus forced to fabricate symbols of their journey into manhood and, therefore, their full acceptance into the social order.

Nama cult

During initiation, the youths were introduced to the spiritually sacred 'nama' flutes. Each sub-clan owned a pair of bamboo flutes called 'nama'. The sub-clan also owned a tune that was only played by their 'nama' flutes. The flutes, when not in use, were stored in the men's house carefully wrapped in banana leaves. They had a major role to play during initiation ceremonies but were also used during other festivals. The flutes were shrouded in secrecy and when played were covered with branches

and grass so that women and the uninitiated were unable to see them. The men explained the tunes of the flutes to the women and children by saying that they were the voice of the 'nama', a mythical bird. As the flute procession passed through the village, women would look away. If a woman were to see the actual 'nama' flutes she would be killed instantly (Read 1952b, p. 5). Once during initiation, the 'nama' flute players would go to the village and visit the women's houses demanding gifts of food. Hidden behind the doorway of her home, the woman blindly offered her gifts. As she did, her hand was scratched with a piece of bamboo made to look like a claw (Langness 1974, p. 195).

Near the end of the initiation period, the women took part in an attack on the men and the boys as they neared the village. It was not a 'mock' attack because the women used real arrows and seriously attempted to injure the men (Langness 1974, p. 195). If a woman was successful in spearing a man, she was paid back with an arrow shot into her thigh. This act symbolised the antagonistic relationship between men and women.

Both Read (1952b, p. 8) and Langness (1967, p. 174) agreed that the women knew that the flutes were played by the men and not by the 'nama' bird. Both Read (1952b, p. 8) and Langness (1974, p. 209) argue that by agreeing to the charade, the women were implicitly accepting their inferior status within the society and accepting men's dominance and control over them. In stressing women's dangerousness, the cult aimed to eradicate the divisive powers women could have over men and therefore to prevent the possible threat to the group by the division of loyalties (Langness 1974, p. 208).

Male/female antagonism

Throughout their induction, the initiates were continually impressed with the notion of male superiority and the danger of spending too much time in the company of women (Langness 1974, p. 207). If a man erred in this fashion, he would become weakened; his abilities as a warrior would suffer; and he might even die. A man who chose to spend too much time with women would be sanctioned by the men of the village with ostracism and ridicule (Langness 1967, p. 172). The taboos taught were numerous and included the following: a woman must not touch a man's head or hair; she must not enter a garden nor cook food for her husband when menstruating; she must seclude herself in the tiny and cramped menstrual hut for its duration; and she must not step over a man (Langness 1967, p. 165). A man had to ritually purify himself after his wife gave birth to his child. Once a woman conceived, she was to abstain from sexual intercourse until the child cut its second tooth. The husband, however, was permitted to have sexual relations with his other wife or wives during this period.

At the same time, the youths were told of the virtues of family, marriage and having children, especially male children (Langness 1967, p. 166) They were schooled in the techniques of attracting women and

were told that polygyny brought strength and prestige not only to the young man but also to the clan. A young man could not become a full fledged adult until he married since the status of adulthood necessitated the ownership of gardens and pigs (Langness 1969, p. 40). In order to achieve adult status, a man required a wife to assist him in the process of accumulating pigs and gardens. These were necessary for producing food for distribution at ceremonies. Hence, a man could not fulfil his social obligations without a wife. However, the older men continually impressed upon the young initiates that 'women were nothing', 'they were unclean', 'untrustworthy' and that the initiates were to have an ambivalent attitude toward women (Langness 1967, p. 172).

After the initiation ceremonies were complete, the age-mates resided in the men's house and lived secluded from female influence for six or seven years. They had few responsibilities and spent their time together, 'venturing off to court (women), to raid and fight, to steal pigs and, if possible, to steal women' (Langness 1967, p. 166). They often persisted in courting women until they were between 25 and 30 years of age even if they had already married and had started families.

During this time, their families searched to find a young woman for the initiate to marry. These betrothals would often break down due to differences in maturity and the long avoidance period while a bride was found for all the age-mates. The avoidance rules were strictly enforced by jealous age-mates: 'Sexual jealousy and antagonism are present even in the relationship between age-mates. A youth, for instance, who neglects the rules of avoidance which are enjoined during his period of betrothal is considered to have affronted his age-mates, and the latter may retaliate by killing the girl he expects to marry' (Read 1954b, p. 23). None of the boys could reside with their brides until all of the group had been married. After two or three attempts at finding a bride for the young man, the older men left the responsibility for finding a wife up to the young initiate (Read 1954a, p. 868). The young girls, like the boys, had no freedom in choosing a husband and often ran away after the wedding when they had to live with the groom's family (and remain abstinent) while he remained in the men's house (and continued to court) (Langness 1967, p. 169). After several failed attempts, the youth began to feel that the young women were against him and that they had become a major obstacle in the way of him achieving full status as a man.

Despite the belief in their own superiority, men believed that women were discontent with their position and unless they kept them in their place, the women would challenge the men's position. Gelber (1986, p. 85) suggests that Highland men demonstrate their own prestige, showing off to other men, by being brutal toward their women. In this, she (1986, p. 85) argues that:

> The treatment of women seems to be an important means of publicly demonstrating irascibility, the potential for violence, and the threshold of tolerance for others behaviour. Brutality toward women may be a kind of implied threat toward other men.

The men also believed that women did not like having babies and learned both magical and contraceptive means of preventing or terminating pregnancy. Both Langness (1967, p. 175) and Read (1954b, pp. 25-6) have found that there is truth in this belief. Women revealed to Read that childbirth hurt: '[i]t is like dying, for how do we know we shall get up again?' (1954b, pp. 25-6). He further states that women: 'admit practising manual abortion and claim a knowledge of pharmacological specifics to induce sterility' (1954b, p. 26). This kind of action or suspicion of it often lead to conflict within marriages since: '[a] young man whose wife has not conceived is told by the older men that her mother and women friends have persuaded her not to have children. At their instigation he frequently challenges her and beats her, or he has recourse to magic' (Read 1954b, p. 26). Traditionally female infanticide was practised, although not assiduously (Langness 1967, p. 166). This meant fewer eligible women of marriageable age when it came time to locate brides for age-mates (Langness 1964a). The people took the pragmatic view that females would not become warriors who could protect them but would only grow up to move away into their husband's lineage and would, therefore, play no role in supporting them in their old age.

Marriage

There appears to be no causal relationship between marriage and warfare within the eastern Highlands cultures since war was waged with most groups within their range of contact. Langness (1969, p. 50) argues that marriage within the Bena Bena had no political functions since women were considered chattels, and were bought and sold without regard for 'equivalent exchange' as was the case for wives further west (Reay 1959). The primary function of women was to have children, especially male children who would grow up to be warriors and help make the clan strong. Wives were most usually found amongst trading partners, allies or amongst groups with whom they sought refuge after being forced to leave their destroyed villages.

Women, after marriage, had little or no contact with their natal group, were considered to be clan property and were thought to have loyalties only to their husband's group. The main objective in Bena Bena marriage was not to establish permanent allegiances between groups, but clan solidarity and independence. This was necessary so that maximum protection and security could be maintained and the clan would grow powerful (Langness 1969, pp. 51-3). Langness (1969, pp. 51-3) further notes that relationships that were established between groups were

between men and remained unaffected by issues concerning women. Even in the case of divorce, these relationships were left intact, contingent upon the payment of brideprice, since children resulting from the marriage were considered the property of men.

The theme of dominance and submission permeated the marital relationship. This was symbolised in one of the rites practised once the elders permitted a married couple to cohabit. The bride sat on the ground with her head turned away as the groom entered the village in full decoration. Armed with his bow and arrow he shot his wife's thigh with an arrow to symbolically express his dominance and authority over her in their new relationship (Read 1954a, p. 867). With her thigh exposed and her head turned away she expressed her willingness to obey and submit to him.

Polygyny was prevalent in traditional times. Langness found during his research with the Bena Bena village of Nupasafa in the 1960s, that between 25 and 30 per cent of the men had polygynous marriages. He attributed this to the great numbers of pigs owned by these villagers. This in turn he related to ecological factors (Langness 1969, pp. 47-8).

A man could obtain additional wives by gathering enough wealth to pay brideprice in the same way that he purchased his first wife. Nevertheless, most men were unable to pay the high prices asked for single women the second time round so would attempt to minimise or avoid the cost of brideprice by encouraging a married woman to abscond from her husband and come away with him (Langness 1969, p. 47). Additional wives could also be obtained through capture in battle.

Polygyny was often the cause of much friction within Bena Bena marriages (Langness 1969, p. 48). Fighting amongst co-wives was very common and often became violent. Langness (1967, p. 171) reported that:

> Quarrels between co-wives occur in Nupasafa clan at the rate of about one per week and are often violent. The women attempt to tear off one another's clothing, bite, strike each other with fists and clubs, sometimes enlist the aid of their friends, and so on. They rarely kill one another but are often painfully injured. Men usually stand around laughing, unless the struggle becomes too violent, when they intervene.

The women were also known to use sorcery against co-wives to cause them to fall from their husband's disfavour. Whatever means used, the taking of a second wife by the husband, or even an attempt, caused first wives much agitation and resentment.

The incidence of divorce in the Bena Bena tribes was very high (Langness 1969, p. 49). The grounds for divorce included adultery, infertility, and negligence in the performance of the duties expected of a wife. The latter cause was most often cited as reason for divorce (Langness 1969, p. 49). Divorce involved no formal procedure. A woman usually ran to another man to divorce her husband, and a man wishing a divorce would often 'neglect his wife until she (took) some action'

(Langness 1969, p. 48). This usually involved looking to others within the clan for assistance. Because she was considered clan property, the issue of her divorce was viewed as a public affair. It also meant that, without a man to protect her, other men would begin to take an interest in her as a potential wife, and would often interfere with her work in the garden by attempting to seduce or even to rape her. This often caused undesirable conflict within the clan since those who were involved in her purchase wished her to remarry and remain as clan property. If a man did not look after his wife properly, the rest of the clan would want her to take a new husband within the clan so that the clan would not lose her. The negligent husband's father often pressured his son to keep the woman and this created tension between them (Langness 1969, p. 49).

Social Control and Dispute Settlement

Inter-group control—warfare

Berndt (1964, p. 200) believed the precipitating causes of warfare throughout the Highlands region included ' "blood-revenge", women, pigs, insults and sorcery accusations, and disputes about ownership of land or food resources (such as pandanus nuts and edible fungi)'. Langness (1968, p. 184) found similar causes of warfare within Bena Bena society. Berndt also noted that 'warfare was bound up with the struggle for power and prestige'.

A clan reacted as a single group if it found itself attacked by an external force. Once a group of intruders broke through the village barricade, they headed straight for the men's house, which was constructed with tunnels and special blocked doorways in an attempt to prevent attacks. Attackers set fire to the men's house after securing its entrance to prevent escape. Those that did escape were shot as they evacuated the building. As soon as the men's house was sufficiently destroyed, next in line were the women's houses. There was no concept of 'fair play' since the stated objective of the attack was to annihilate the enemy 'en masse' including women and children and to destroy the village's means of sustenance (Langness 1968, p. 192; Feil 1987, p. 69; Read 1955a, p. 253). Leahy (1936, p. 242) noted that in addition to the destruction caused to the village and gardens: '. . . the invaders do not consider that they have destroyed the village properly until they have ring-barked the trees (casuarinas) . . . '

The constant state of warfare ranged from small attacks by members of one clan or sub-clan to large scale wars with several districts joining forces in opposition to a common enemy (Langness 1968, p. 188). The small attacks, (called 'hina' by the Gahuku-Gama) were feuds following some dispute within the tribe (Read 1954b, pp. 39-40). These involved the ubiquitous notion of redress. The expected result of 'hina' was a return to friendly relations after some form of compensation was paid. The large

scale wars ('rova') involved a perpetual state of warfare between traditional enemy tribes (Read 1955a, p. 253). 'Rova' was never-ending and evidence of these continual wars was seen in the burnt gardens and villages passed by the Leahy party en route (Leahy 1934 Diary in Langness 1968, p. 188; Leahy 1937, p. 109). Defeated groups would work toward their eventual revenge by making the necessary alliances and sometimes this required attacking the group that had given them refuge after their original defeat.

Intra-group social control

Retribution was a recurring theme throughout the Melanesian societies and the Bena Bena were no exception. 'Payback' was required in this system of justice in response to an injury. An individual or a group was always held responsible for injury or death. There was no such thing as 'natural death', and it was considered a social obligation to avenge a kinsmen's death. Leahy (Leahy Diary 1934 in Griffin 1978, pp. 183-4) wrote in his diary that if a man did not die in war, but died a natural death:

> . . . at the eating of his pigs and accompanying singsing (ceremony) the names of his known enemies are called and one of them is decided upon as the person who caused the death of their tribal mate. Then it's the duty of his relatives to get this [man] and, although he is possibly unaware of their decision, he will surely get an arrow in his back if the opportunity presents itself. In the event of plain murder the whole village of the murderer is then placed on the black list and parties of natives are always on the lookout to avenge the killing . . .

The themes of physical aggression and violence also underpin the traditional Bena Bena and Gahuku-Gama treatment of disputes and conflict within the clan structure itself. 'Dominance and submission, rivalry and coercion' were the predominant characteristics apparent in many inter-personal relationships (Read 1954b, p. 23).

The Gahuku-Gama and the Bena Bena cultures traditionally did not appeal to abstract moral principles. Instead they 'emphasise[d] the practical consequences of moral deviation' (Read 1955a, p. 255). Thus, it was understood by all that if you did not assist your fellow clansmen they would not assist you and no attempt was made to abstractly evaluate the act of helping others in a general sense. Moral rules applied only to those with whom one had a social relationship, and therefore to those to whom one had social obligations. The social context within which any act of deviance had been committed was the measure of 'rightness' or 'wrongness'. It made little difference how people outside of the group behaved unless that behaviour had some negative effect upon the community. Accordingly, it mattered not how one behaved towards members of another group or towards their property unless that conduct had an adverse affect in the form of retaliatory action. Within the tribe, Read suggests that there is a 'distributive' quality in the moral system.

Thus, an individual has a greater or lesser social obligation towards an individual depending on whether or not he is a member of the same sub-clan of the same clan or a different sub-clan of the same clan. There is less social obligation in the latter case than in the first although there is more obligation in the first case than if an individual was from a different clan altogether. Morality within the Gahuku-Gama and the Bena Bena was based on 'tribal morality'. This was required for the survival of the group, and was not based on the 'universal' morality taught by Christianity (Read 1955a, p. 256, Langness 1987, p. 15). The contextual nature of moral obligation can be illustrated by examining various acts of deviance and noting the varying ways they are dealt with according to the would-be victim's relationship to the perpetrator.

Theft   Theft was considered a wrongful act in itself. Yet, it was not considered an act of theft if the owner was a member of the thief's own sub-clan, and he was informed of the matter afterwards (Read 1955a, pp. 263-4). If a kinsman failed to inform the owner that he had borrowed the item, the act was still not treated as a theft, but was tolerated even though the owner may have been angry. Thus, the wrongness of the theft was considered to be greater or lesser depending on whether members of the same sub-clan were involved; or members of different clans but of the same tribe; or members of clans of different tribes considered allies; or a member of a group with whom the sub-clan had no recognised social ties.

Read (1955a, p. 264) reports that traditionally, pig stealing from enemy groups was an accepted practice and a blind eye was shown to pigs and goods obtained from other clans of the same tribe or from those groups with whom the clan had friendly relationships.

Lying   The act of lying also had varying degrees of wrongfulness attached to it contingent on the circumstances in which the lie took place. Read (1955a, pp. 263-4) found that no one expected or even considered it necessary to confess guilt if the accuser was a member of another clan. Likewise, clan members did not presume that other clans would reveal the truth in the case of a dispute or conflict, especially if there was some advantage to be gained by the other group in masking the truth.

Homicide   The Gahuku-Gama and the Bena Bena believed that it was wrong to kill a member of one's own tribe, but found it 'commendable' to kill a member of another tribe (Read 1955a, p. 262). Given the 'distributive' quality of morality, this latter act was, however, dependent on whether or not the victim was a relative. Avoidance of maternal relatives in combat was the observed behaviour; however, other members of the clan were not expected to avoid another man's kinsmen.

The wrongness of a homicide committed within the tribe was again evaluated according to the social relationship the murderer had with the victim. Murdering a member of one's own clan was strictly prohibited, but

the murder of a member of another clan, although considered wrongful, was believed to be less wrongful than the former case.

Rape   Langness' research among the Bena Bena revealed this same 'distributive' morality for the offence of rape depending, once again, on the social ties the rapist had with the woman involved. He found that the fellow kinsmen of a man who raped a woman from another clan found the incident 'more humorous than criminal' (Langness 1987, p. 15). Unaccompanied women in the pre-contact period were considered vulnerable to physical and sexual attack. Women simply did not go anywhere outside the village alone (Langness 1987, p. 15; Berndt 1962, p. 166).

Berndt discusses the phenomenon of gang rape (he calls it 'plural copulation') in the eastern Highlands cultures. He asserts that traditionally most sexual relations involved elements of aggression and this aggression was considered pleasurable (Berndt 1962, pp. 147-78). His analysis maintains that (1962, p. 163): ' . . . sexual violence or collective copulation may be employed deliberately as a punishment or may appear simply as enjoyable acts of aggression (for aggression, here, has this pleasurable quality)'. Read (1954b, p. 23) agrees with Berndt in this: 'The infliction of pain is an important element in sexual behaviour. Erotic play between husband and wife includes practices that are frankly sadistic'.

Berndt describes an example of a married woman who suggested to a young man that they run away together. The man was afraid that their elopement would precipitate retaliatory action from the woman's group, and he therefore declined the offer. Later, when the woman persisted in suggesting the elopement, the young man found himself tempted. His father advised him not to elope but to 'Copulate with her and let her go' (1962, p. 168). Arrangements were made to meet in the bush later that night. When the young man arrived at the prearranged location, he was accompanied by several other men. All of the men copulated with the young woman and then returned her to her village, her husband remaining oblivious of the night's events. Berndt argues that although the young man would not elope with the woman due to his fear of reprisal, he was unable to resist copulating with her. However, he brought along the other men who also copulated with the woman so as to share the responsibility of the act. With the other men's complicity 'repercussions resulting from it, if any, (were) likely to involve all the men concerned' (1962, p. 168). In other words, there is safety in numbers when faced with retaliation. Berndt also suggested that there was an element of punishment involved since the young woman was considered promiscuous and she therefore, required punishment. Within the district women were sometimes gang-raped as punishment for 'promiscuous behaviour, for attempting to run away (back to her village, or in elopement), for failing to comply with the wishes or demands of her husband, and so on, the punishment having the

sanction and approval, and sometimes active participation, of the husband . . . ' (Berndt 1962, p. 173).

Adultery   Adultery outside the clan was not acknowledged as a serious problem. Concealment was considered necessary, but Read (1955a, p. 264) found that men often boasted about the various affairs they had outside the tribe.

Inside the clan, adultery was considered morally reproachable since it caused much animosity and acrimony between clan members and threatened the solidarity necessary for clan survival (Read 1955a, p. 264). Strong sanctions applied to those who risked clan solidarity by committing adultery with members of the clan. It was believed that women were naturally promiscuous if they were given the chance (Langness 1974, p. 204). This promiscuity threatened male power and control and therefore made it necessary to control female sexuality. Read (1954b, p. 23) illustrates the severity of the men's attempts to control women's promiscuity in the following:

> The punishment of wrongdoers characteristically includes public beatings and vicious humiliations. Women suspected of adultery have sticks thrust into the vagina or, stripped naked, they are tied to a post while men throw dirt and urinate on them. Beatings across the breast and shoulders with lengths of rattan cane are common for less serious offences, the man selected to carry out the punishment performing a dance while he belabours as many as six women in turn.

Adultery with a woman of the same tribe, but outside the clan, was behaviour that hovered in the moral middle ground. It was not condemned with the same force as adultery committed within the clan, but it was not treated as lightly as the same act with a woman from another tribe altogether (Read 1955a, p. 264).

Administration Influence

Until Leahy and Dwyer, motivated by the prospect of gold, trekked into the eastern part of the New Guinea Highlands (including the Bena Bena region) in 1930, the indigenous people had never been exposed to European culture. They reacted with a mixture of fear and awe, believing that these pale skinned men were the ghosts of their ancestors returning to visit (Connolly & Anderson 1987, p. 6).

In 1932, an airstrip was established in the Bena Bena area to make it the base-camp for gold exploration (Leahy, D. 1989, pers. comm., 6 October). During this time, the 'Bena Bena region' strictly referred to those people residing around the airstrip. Later, the Australian Administration expanded the Bena Bena area to incorporate all the people who spoke the same language (named the Bena Bena language).

The Leahy team soon established that there was little gold in the area and they moved further west (Leahy, D. 1989, pers. comm., 6 October). Also in 1932, the Australian Administration Officer, James Taylor, established the first patrol post in the Highlands (Leahy & Crain 1937, p. 137).

Entry into the Goroka area of the Highlands was restricted and Administration control was not achieved until after World War II when regular patrolling of the area began (McRae 1974, p. 16). In the Bena Bena Census Division regular patrolling was not established until the 1950s (Patrol Report Bena No. 3/1968-69).

The Administration had a significant impact on the cultures of the eastern Highlands when it forbade inter-tribal warfare. The pattern of unrestricted warfare practised by the Bena and Gahuku-Gama ceased (after a period) and the methods by which leadership was established within these warring groups was changed (see Feil 1987, pp. 274-5).

Traditional methods of achieving leadership status (involving demonstrated strength in warfare) were replaced after contact by the accumulation of wealth and exchange (Feil 1987, p. 276).

The Administration established new ways of achieving economic success through their policies encouraging agricultural projects and the introduction of cash-cropping (coffee) into the Highlands. Coffee production became and remained an individualistic venture and it eventually produced for some Bena people a good cash return for a minimal amount of work (Patrol Reports Bena No. 4/1957-58; No. 2/1961-62; No. 3/1968-69).

The Administration found it difficult to interest Bena men in contract labour. In 1956-57 only 16 per cent of the Bena male population was away at work and most of them were filling short-term casual positions within a day's walking distance from their village (Patrol Report Bena No. 2/1956-57). They were noted to be more reluctant to change from their traditional ways than any other group in the Goroka District (Patrol Reports Bena No. 4/1957-58; No. 4/1959-60; No.1/1962-63).

The Administration provided opportunities for some village men (often village bigmen) to participate in the western system of social control by appointing luluai and tultuls. The luluai often made decisions which supported his own group no matter what the circumstances of the dispute. The luluai's behaviour became part of the extension and continuation of old hostilies and enmities in extra-group relationships. Fowler (Patrol Report Bena No. 3/1953-54) recorded:

> Throughout the area petty disputes were numerous, and concerned mainly pigs and women; it was evident that many of the disputes should have been settled by luluais, but once a dispute reaches the extra-hamlet or village level, officials appear to lose whatever sense of justice or fair-play that they might of had, and become only interested in gaining a victory for their own people. To the native, the victories and defeats of yesterday are not to be forgotten to-day; enemies of the past are enemies of the present, and the fight is still being

carried on, in a somewhat less brutal, if no less civilised manner. The law has replaced the spear, and can be wielded no less skilfully in the hands of an astute official. When a decision is given against natives of one village, they will not be satisfied until they have gained a similar victory, not with the thought of obtaining justice, but as another spear thrust.

This attitude toward the introduced social control was again noted in a report in 1962-63 (Bena No.1/1962-63): 'Revival in the CNA (Court for Native Affairs) of old forgotten disputes that might lead to 'scoring a point over the neighbour and enhance my prestige' was noticeably common throughout the Patrol'.

The effect of pacification was also felt in the relationships between men and women (Langness 1974, p. 210). Since there was no longer a need to produce strong warriors who abided by the strict code of solidarity among clan men, there was less need for the men's house, initiation ceremonies, or the nama cult practices which acted to symbolise male solidarity (Read 1982, p. 73; Langness 1974, p. 210). The last initiation took place amongst the Gahuku-Gama between 1950 and 1952 (Read 1982, p. 73). The Bena were more 'conservative' in making their changes but they too abandoned the 'nama cult' in the 1960s (Langness 1967, p. 175). Bena men began to abandon the men's house and to sleep in houses with their wives (*see* Patrol Report Bena No. 2/1953-54; Langness 1967, p. 175). This, they claimed was the wish of the Administration but it was in fact suggested by Bena local government councillors (Langness 1967, p. 175).

Most disputes were customary disputes (that is payment or return of brideprice; adultery; land disputes; or small disputes over the return of money or property; and pigs) (Giddings, R. 1989, pers. comm., 6 October). After pacification it became the practice for groups who had previously been forced off their land through warfare to migrate to their previous holdings of land and this sometimes lead to disputes with those who occupied the land (Patrol Reports Bena No. 6/1945-46; No. 8/1951-52). Another effect of pacification on land which inevitably led to disputes was the gradual encroachment onto the traditional no-man's land between tribal boundaries. These no-man's land areas had previously surrounded tribal land and acted as a buffer between enemy groups. These sections of land were unused by either group due to 'the danger of attack, fears of sorcery and the necessities of defence' (Patrol Report Asaro No. 3/1952-53). Since pacification people began to slowly make use of this no-man's land by cultivating gardens and gradually extending their boundaries into this previously unused area. Disputes resulted and the Administration tried to resolve the problem by getting the groups to plant trees around the borders of their tribal land (Patrol Report Asaro No. 3/1952-53) and by selling these border areas to Europeans wishing to start coffee plantations (Read 1952c, pp. 442-3). This latter course eventually led to dissatisfaction and to further disputes (Patrol Report Bena No. 5/1954-55).

Disputes which were difficult for the luluai to handle or where the parties were dissatisfied with the luluai's decision were passed on to the kiap. Most dispute settlement was accomplished through mediation. Both parties would come before the luluai or kiap to tell their side of the story. Each side readily appeared before the kiap to explain their version of the incident since they were afraid that the other party would 'winnim kot' (win the court) if they did not attend. There was little formality within the Court for Native Affairs and the final decision 'informally sorted itself out as court went along' (Giddings, R. 1989, pers. comm., 6 October).

Women were rarely the complainants or the defendants in disputes. However, they were often the issue which caused the dispute to arise (Giddings, R. 1989, pers. comm., 6 October). Disputes between women usually involved one woman accusing the other of encroachment onto her fallow garden land. Arguments between men were often over women, usually in relation to adultery or enticement. Most disputes involving women could be easily settled at the village level through negotiation and mediation between the parties involved. Men's disputes could result from women's disputes but at that stage they usually became disputes between men. If an argument between women became large enough then the men would involve themselves. At this stage they usually brought the matter before the Court for Native Affairs but it was represented as a dispute between men with the involvement of women merely as accessories. Disputes over money increased over the years but involved only men since men controlled access to money. If a woman did manage to get access to money and then loaned it, usually to a member of her own family and a dispute arose, it would be treated as an internal dispute, and would rarely be taken either to a luluai or a kiap since the traditional code ruled that internal disputes must be settled quickly to maintain group cohesion (Giddings, R. 1989, pers. comm., 6 October).

The kiaps sometimes punished men when they practised custom against women. J.R. McArthur (Patrol Report Goroka No. 8/1951-52) ordered a husband who was trying to hide from his age-mates the fact that he was already married, to return to his wife. The wife had sought a divorce through the Patrol Officer after her husband refused to accept the food she had brought to him at the men's house. J.R. McArthur ordered the husband to 'relinquish this unnatural practice and the couple told to try again the married state'. Another example of kiaps siding with women over men in regard to custom was observed by Read (1965, pp. 212-46). Read describes a dispute between a man and an elder woman where the matter had been settled in the village according to tradition. The woman, dissatisfied with the result which favoured the man, took the dispute to the kiap's court where she was given the benefit of the doubt and the man was given a gaol sentence for three months for assault.

Overall, the Bena people were observed to have maintained their tribal customs much more than other areas in the Goroka District and consequently the Administration found that they arbitrated most of their

disputes on their own and only rarely took them to the Patrol Officer or to the Sub-District Office in Goroka for settlement (Patrol Report Bena No. 4/1963-64).

Returned contract labourers had an impact on the stability of marriages. It was reported (Patrol Report Asaro No. 8/1952-53) that '50 per cent of the women married to labourers away on the coast are unfaithful, and marry another man during their husband's absence'. Similar findings (50 per cent) were recorded in the Goroka District (Patrol Report Goroka No.18/1952-53). In the Bena, some returned labourers refused to pay brideprice (Patrol Report Bena No. 5/1954-55). This had the effect of nullifying the marriage in the eyes of the Australian Administration as men discovered when they tried to charge their wives with adultery and to bring them before the kiap's court. If they had not paid brideprice, the marriage was considered invalid and no charge of adultery could be laid (Patrol Report Western Goroka No. 3/1954-55).

Polygynous marriages continued in spite of the mission attempts to eradicate this practice. I.A. Holmes (Patrol Report Bena No. 2/1956-57) recorded a total of 402 polygynous marriages and 2,151 monogamous marriages in 1956. He noted that a substantial proportion of the polygynous unions were practised by returned labourers. The incidence of polygyny was higher amongst 'patri-lineages with superior prestige and wealth' and amongst groups where there was a higher number of women compared to other groups.

Prior to contact adulterous wives were in danger of being severely beaten with a stick by their husbands and their respondents killed, but after contact, husbands merely accepted a pig as compensation from the adulterous man although they still might physically abuse their wives by slapping them around the face and ears (Patrol Report Asaro No. 16/1953-54; Fore No. 7/1953-54).

Women began to have more freedom in choosing their marriage partners after contact and this was supported by the Administration. I.A. Holmes recorded in Patrol Report (Bena No. 2/1956-57) that:

> The gradual breakdown of traditional discipline manifested by a growing non-acceptance of elders and parental dictates, is to date fortunately limited to a relatively small proportion of the adult population, but must be expected to increase, particularly amongst the female sex. Indeed, the number of young women who requested me to upset planned unions (marriages) was surprisingly large.

He noted that the practice of brother-sister exchange was prevalent but that 'females are obviously being accorded an increasing freedom of choice, particularly in areas near Goroka'.

In the Asaro area however, much more rapid change was being experienced, P.V. Dwyer (Patrol Report No. 10/1960-61) recorded:

> Women are beginning to rebel against old customs such as forced marriages, and the forced adoption of children by the father's relatives. Marriage appears to be regarded by the women as a temporary affair, and consequently they change partners whenever they have the urge to do so. Although many men brought complaints regarding runaway wives there was little that could be done to help them, as they admit that such action constitutes divorce in their area when the woman refuses to return. Negotiations for the return of bridal payments are a constant source of trouble, as often such payments have changed hands several times in connection with later marriages . . . One woman, aged about 22, who was brought before me, admitted to having had nine recognised husbands, and innumerable lovers.

The kiaps did not approve of child betrothal since these children were being 'deprived of a certain amount of liberty and the ideal whereby they can choose their own husbands' and attempted to influence change in this practice (Patrol Report Bena No. 16/1962-63). One Patrol Officer recorded that he purposely ridiculed the young men who had entered into such marriages by suggesting that it was 'unmanly to marry a girl so young' (Bena No. 16/1962-63). He noted that his method proved to be effective since two of six such marriages were terminated through divorce prior to his patrol leaving the area.

Due to increased contact with other groups, which traditionally they would never have met, more women began marrying outside of their villages (including marrying non-Highlands men) (Patrol Report Bena No. 10/1968-69; Asaro No. 1/1969-70). These marriages were tolerated by the elders as long as brideprice was paid. However, when the wife moved to her new husband's village, the fact that prospective children would not belong to the wife's parents (as was the case traditionally) was a source of some discontent (Patrol Report Bena No. 2/1956-57).

The major reasons for divorce amongst the Bena people were 'cruelty, neglect, adultery, and failure to observe the marriage customs of the people' (Patrol Report Bena No. 1/1962-63). In the Asaro, women were noted to have become 'more assertive' especially in situations where they believed that they had been taken advantage of by a man. They began to reject the tradition which permitted the husband to take custody of any children produced in the marriage (particularly male children) and refused 'to relinquish children and will themselves bring the matter before a CNA [Court for Native Affairs] for a decision' (Upper Asaro No. 10/1954-55). J.R. McArthur, in another Patrol Report (Lower Asaro No. 11/1956-57) observed that there 'was the increasing tendency of women to speak for themselves, and to oppose the village males, in (child custody) cases for example one female refused to yield her child to her father, who strongly wanted it. She said her father had nothing to do with its creation and had undergone no pain in its production'.

By 1969 the Bena people were experiencing further breakdown of the traditional custom. Patrol Officer, M. D'Abbs (Bena No. 14/1969-70) observed that 'some girls were taking up the occupation of prostitutes.

These girls are apparently either living in town or plying their trade along the road'.

Langness (1967, p. 176) noted that women were no longer committing suicide once their husbands died or were killed, as they had done traditionally. The incidence of crime (especially in the Upper Bena which had less contact with the town of Goroka) was noted to be negligible, apart from 'a lot of petty stealing, which is quite common throughout the Highlands anyway . . . ' (Upper Bena No. 25/1969-70). This finding was not that much different than in 1959 when the Patrol Officer reported that: 'Crime is not wide-spread throughout the Bena and most cases brought forward involved fights over land, pigs, gardens and wives' (Bena No. 4/1959-60).

In the Asaro Census Division, Patrol Officer, D. Read, (Patrol Report Asaro No. 1/1969-70) noted that:

> The traditional social structure is breaking down with controls and sanctions not having the same effect as they would have had 15 years ago. The change is happening more rapidly in the Highlands than on the coast and is almost a generation change. Father and mother are finding communication with sons and daughters more and more difficult.

This difference in the rate of change between the Bena and Asaro groups might be attributed to greater access to roads and the influence of outside areas through contract labour. Yet, in the Upper Asaro region, (where the road system was less developed) it was found that: 'Women, generally, are being left way behind their male counterparts and are still the work horses that their grandmothers were' (Upper Asaro No.6/1962-63).

Mission Influence

Lutheran missionaries followed the Administration into the Asaro and Gahuku-Gama areas in 1932 (Read 1952a, p. 232; Simpson 1954, p. 60). The Catholics entered the Asaro District in 1935 (McRae 1974, p. 23). The Seventh Day Adventist Church and the Lutherans also set up mission stations at Bena Bena during this period (Read 1952a, p. 232).

McRae (1974, p. 23) notes that the evangelists played a significant role in making contact with the Highlands peoples in the Goroka valley. The people were attracted to the missionaries initially because of the trade items they could provide. The missionaries provided medical attention and the effect on diseases such as framboesia was quite dramatic causing the people to give them their respect (McRae 1974, p. 24). Yet the missionaries experienced frustration in that after their first decade in the area little had been accomplished by way of Christianising the locals (McRae 1974, p. 24). Simpson (1954, p. 69) notes that the 'natives' found the missionaries baffling as they assisted them with medical aid but did

not demand to be given pigs as compensation. However, the missionaries did ask for a form of compensation when they insisted that the villagers send their children to their schools.

The Lutherans were the most established and had the strongest influence on the Bena people (Patrol Report Bena No. 11/1945-46; No. 6/1951-52; No. 2/1953-54; No. 1/1962-63). They used 'native' evangelists from the Finschafen or Lae training centres on the coast of the New Guinea mainland (Read 1952a, p. 233).

The Lutherans forbade singsings (dance celebrations), traditional dress and polygyny (Patrol Reports Bena No. 10/1944-45; Goroka No. 6/1950-51). As a public demonstration of their Christian faith, new converts had to divorce all of their wives except for one (Patrol Reports Bena No. 11/1945-46; Goroka No. 6/1950-51; Upper Asaro No. 10/1954-55; Upper Asaro No. 6/1962-63; Bena No. 1/1962-63; Read 1952a, p. 234). The Seventh Day Adventists also forbade polygyny (Patrol Report Asaro No. 9/1953-54). Before a man could be baptised he had to be practising monogamy. This had a significant social impact on the lives of the women who were sent away, along with their children, without any compensation or means of support. The women's families were traditionally no longer obliged to take them back into their care (if they were to take them back they would be obliged to return a portion or all of the brideprice, something most did not wish to do) and they were often left to their own wits and means to maintain their survival. The discarded women were often older women who had minimal chances of remarrying (Patrol Report Upper Asaro No. 10/1954-55). Cases of these divorced women were frequently brought before the kiaps whose disapproval was evident in the Patrol Reports.

The evangelists informed the men practising polygyny and who wished to be baptised that polygyny was against the law, and that if they obeyed the law, they could take back the brideprice for the women they had divorced (Patrol Report Upper Asaro No. 6/1962-63). The kiaps sometimes ordered these men to accept their 'divorced' wives back, since often the wife's relatives had not returned the brideprice, therefore they were not considered divorced in the eyes of the Australian Administration nor in the eyes of their own traditional customs (Patrol Report Upper Asaro No. 10/1954-55). In response, the kiap issued court orders for maintenance and desertion (Patrol Report Bena No. 1/1962-63; Upper Asaro No. 6/1962-63).

However, the Mission's efforts were not entirely successful. Although the incidence of polygyny did decrease, one Patrol Officer noted that: 'many baptised natives are again contracting polygamous unions' (Patrol Report Bena No. 2/1956-57).

The Missions also objected to the courting practices of the eastern Highlands peoples which allowed groups of young men and women to lie side by side in the women's house at night and engage in kissing practices. This 'institutionalised love-making' only sometimes led to more

promiscuous behaviour (Read 1952a, p. 234). The villagers complained that the cessation of these courting practices led to declining morals in women. Patrol Officer B.J. Kneen (Patrol Report Upper Asaro No. 6/1962-63) noted that:

> . . . consequently . . . the young women's morals have now deteriorated to the extent where more basic acts are practised in isolated pig-houses. Older men tell me that immorality was very rare when the young women entertained as a group in their own communal house.

This same observation was made in the Bena region (Patrol Report Bena No. 6/1966-67):

> It seems that traditionally these single girl's houses were common. They apparently gave a person a chance to find a satisfactory mate and hence a better chance of a satisfactory marriage. With the coming of the different mission activities, this practice died out. The Patrol was informed that when this happened, many marital problems came into the fore and an attempt is being made to overcome these problems [broken marriages etc.] by returning to the traditional.

A side effect of the change in morals amongst Bena and Asaro young people was an increase in 'illegitimate' children. In the Bena, the rate of children born outside marriage was estimated to be as high as 75 per cent (Patrol Report Bena No. 6/1966-67).

The abandonment of nama cult was also influenced by the missions. An incident in Asaro in 1950 occurred directly after some recent converts returned from church one Sunday. They burned their group's nama flutes in public. Reaction from neighbouring groups was incredulous and hostile (see Read 1952b, p. 9).

The people saw this action as a 'threat to male superiority' (Read 1952b, p. 9). Although Read acknowledges the impact of the missions on initiation ceremonies, he argues that a more significant influence on their demise was the fact that many young men were away as indentured labourers when their time for initiation ceremony was due. However, the missionaries seemed to have targeted the nama flutes as a concrete symbol of the traditions which they regarded as pagan (Read 1982, p. 73) and even though they were unaware of the meaning of these flutes they required them to be burnt as a public demonstration of the villagers newly found faith (Patrol Report Mount Michael No. 1/1952-53). These public burnings were conducted in front of women although the men objected. In 1953 in Asaro, recent female baptised converts were shown the nama flutes. Again this was met by disapproval from villagers and village officials complained to the kiap (Patrol Report Asaro No. 9/1953-54).

In education, Bena women lagged behind. Female attendance at school was poor although the overall attendance of Bena youths was considered to be 'quite good' (Patrol Report Bena No. 10/1968-69). In 1970, the Patrol Officer commented (Patrol Report Upper Bena

No. 25/1969-70): 'The poor proportion of girl students is indicative of the traditional attitude of the Bena people to the standing of women in the community, and no amount of persuasion can sway them at present'.

Village Court

The Village Court system was introduced in Eastern Highlands Province in January 1975. There are eighty-eight Village Courts and 875 officials (Annual Report Village Courts Secretariat 1988). Most offences involving women are dealt with by the Village Court (Giddings, R. 1989, pers. comm., 10 October). Although women are free to take advantage of the Local and District Court system they usually end up in Village Court. This is due to the woman's financial constraints (it costs money for the bus fare into the town of Goroka where the District Court is located and it costs money to issue a summons), to her lack of knowledge about the Court system, to the attitude of some District Court Magistrates who would refer the matter back to the Village Court if it relates to custom, and to the fact that family disputes are considered to be the concern of the clan and there is internal pressure to settle such matters within the group.

Senior Court Magistrate Rick Giddings noted that women generally succeed when appealing against Village Court decisions to District Court. This is especially so in cases concerning the custody of children following a divorce. The Village Court will usually give the man custody of the children in accordance with custom. Today, women are not so willing to accept this and will appeal the Village Court's decision in order to get custody. The Local or District Court will often allow the appeal since the western system adopts the premise that the children's interests are best safeguarded with the mother.

Senior Probation Officer, Peter Worovi (1989, pers. comm., 4 October), noted that women prefer to use the imported court system for two major reasons; it is faster, and women feel that they will receive fairer treatment than they would before the Village Courts. It is often the case that the second wife will take the first wife to court after the public shaming incident for assault because she believes that she will have a better chance of receiving an order for a cash compensation. At the Village Court she would most likely receive an order for compensation to be paid in pigs and the women frequently prefer cash. Women take the other woman or wife to District Court for competitive reasons. The second wife lays an assault charge against the first wife, hoping that the first wife will be sentenced to a period in gaol giving her an opportunity to firmly secure her position with the husband while the first wife is absent.

Probation Officer for the Bena Bena, Elizabeth Passingan, observed that women from the Bena felt that the Village Court Officials were not objective in their decisions and most often sided with the man's relatives in disputes. Their decisions were of course supported in custom. Ms.

Passingan noted that many women who appeared before Village Court and were ordered to pay fines or compensation found it difficult to do so and ended up serving the default period in prison. Bena women faced community disapproval when they attempted to push for their rights as they were accused of failing to act like a 'proper' woman. Uneducated and unassertive women often accepted the decision of the Village Court. However, there were more educated women in the Bena nowadays and they were taking their complaints to the Local and District Courts. Two Bena examples will demonstrate the position of women before the Village Courts.

In 1985 a Goroka Magistrate was visiting the local prison, Bihute. A woman approached the Magistrate and complained that she had been charged by her husband with breach of custom. He had accused her of cooking his evening meal while she was still menstruating. According to custom, menstrual blood is regarded as dangerous and polluting by Bena men. The woman argued that she had completed her cycle and had therefore left the menstrual hut. The woman was found guilty by the Village Court, fined, and she later served five weeks in prison for fine default.

A woman was placed on probation for six months for assaulting her husband's new girlfriend whom he wished to take as a second wife. After the assault the husband threw the first wife and the children out of his house and she went to live with her parents. The first wife took her husband to Village Court to get a divorce and to claim maintenance. He then decided he wanted to take his first wife back. The husband opposed the divorce in Village Court maintaining his interest in having the two wives. Village Court did not grant the divorce. The first wife then took the matter to Local Court to ask for a maintenance order. Local Court ordered the husband to pay maintenance to his first wife (K6 per month per child —approximately A\$8.50 at August 1992). After he failed to fulfil the Court Order she took him to Local Court again where he was ordered to pay the outstanding money within a specified period. This time the husband paid the money but continued unsuccessfully in his efforts to persuade his first wife to return to him, often resorting to harassment.

Probation Service

The Goroka Probation Office which serves the Bena Bena District became operational in 1984. There are four Probation Officers providing probation services to the entire Eastern Highlands Province. In 1988 the Court sentenced 383 offenders to probation, of whom 70 were female (Annual Probation Report Goroka Office 1988). Of the 70, only one was breached for failing to follow the conditions of her Probation Order while in the same period 10 men were breached. The Goroka Courts have the most experience with probation in Papua New Guinea and are now

following a policy of placing all female assault cases under probation supervision (Yupae, N. 1989, pers. comm., 10 October).

Between January 1987 and October 1989, twenty Bena Bena women and twenty-seven Bena Bena men were placed on probation by the Goroka District Court. Of the twenty female cases, eleven were charged with assault, two were charged with using insulting language, one was charged for using threatening behaviour, one for adultery and five were charged for stealing. With the exception of the five stealing cases, the remainder involved marital problems related to the wife shaming the husband's girlfriend in public through assault or verbal abuse. One woman was placed on probation for committing adultery with a married man. Four of the five stealing charges involved minor shoplifting incidents. The fifth stealing case involved a woman who stole K1400 (approximately A$2000 at August 1992) from the coffee plantation office where she worked. Of the twenty female cases only four were assigned to be under the supervision of a Volunteer Probation Officer. The remainder reported to the Goroka Probation Office.

Naomi Yupae, OIC Goroka Probation Office, is from the Bena Bena culture. She noted (1989, pers. comm., 10 October) that the biggest problem women in the Bena face is assault related to domestic problems. Women are expected to fight over men and unless one of the women is in danger of serious injury no one will interfere. Traditionally co-wives were initially obliged to ritually fight with one another and then to settle down and cooperate with one another. The ritual fighting took place to reinforce the first wife's position and her accompanying rights. The fights were tolerated by the community and subsequently the women made peace. However, the community kept the fights between the women under control. Nowadays, women who follow this traditional practice are taken to court in order to seek a compensation order.

The counselling offered to the fifteen women whose offences were related to domestic problems consisted mainly of discussions surrounding the respective responsibilities of all the parties concerned. Husbands were counselled to fulfil their marital obligations, wives were counselled to attempt to resolve their marital problems without resort to violence and the other women involved were sometimes counselled to avoid the company of married men. In nine out of fifteen cases, Probation Service files indicate that through individual and family counselling the family problems experienced by the women were resolved during the period of probation. In four out of the nine resolved cases the women involved were the girlfriends pursued by married men. These four young women were persuaded to stay away from the husband of the complainant.

The circumstances surrounding the breach case seemed difficult to resolve. A woman's husband attempted to get rid of her and their child by telling other men that they could marry her if they wished. The woman's family pressured her to remain with her husband and would not accept her back, as they did not wish to repay the brideprice. It appears that this

woman had no support either from her family or from her husband and the Probation Service was unable to assist her. She was eventually charged with breach of probation and was sentenced to two weeks in gaol for failing to report to her Probation Officer.

In other cases, six women were ordered by the court to pay compensation to the complainant. (One other woman paid compensation even though there was no court order.) Five of these women paid their compensation and one was being considered for a breach charge at the time this data was collected because she was making no effort toward finding the money to pay her compensation. She was not receiving any assistance from either her husband or her family. The Probation Officer believed that the girl's uncompromising and obstinate attitude was the cause of the problem.

A male case from the Bena group serves to demonstrate the counselling efforts of the Probation Service. The man wished to take a second wife but failed to inform his first wife of his intentions. When his first wife found out that he had taken a second woman as his wife she confronted him. He denied her accusations and an argument ensued during which he assaulted her. She took him to District Court on a charge of assault. He was given a sentence of probation for one year. The Probation Officer attempted to counsel both women and the husband together in an effort to encourage him to give up his plans to marry the second woman. The husband continued to insist that he wished to marry the second woman and this resulted in his first wife returning with her child to her family who resided in Rabaul. The husband later asked his first wife to come back to him because he missed his child and was not altogether happy with his second wife. The first wife returned and the Probation Officer again counselled the three of them after which the husband said he would not assault his wife again. It was agreed that the second wife would return to her people and the husband would compensate her for the time she had spent with him. The second wife returned to her relatives. However, when her relatives discovered that she was pregnant they sent her back to him. Probation again counselled the three of them and they all agreed to live peacefully together. The Probation Officer noted that through counselling the first wife learned not to fight and to accept the second wife and the husband learned to accept his responsibilities. The Probation Officer acknowledged customary responsibility in her efforts to stabilise and maintain the family unit.