



UNEDITED SCHOLARSHIP

The mediation of emotions

On aspects of dispute settlement and violence in Hagen

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This account dates from 1985, originally a companion piece to “Discovering ‘social control’” (1985), but not published in this form then. The ethnographic milieu is Hagen, in Papua New Guinea, under the colonial regime of the 1960s and 70s, and the Australian version of an “imposition of law.” In an attempt to get out from under then current presuppositions over the nature of law in relation to constructs of society, it embarks on describing the two modes of Hagen sociality that were to figure in *The gender of the gift* (1988). Two circuits in the circulation and reception of emotions channel the way in which people deal with conflict; while they are irreducibly distinct, they are asymmetrical in their influence on general social life, such that affairs conducted through one circuit may damage those of the other. One consequence is quite a blunt description of certain aspects of power relations.

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In a full-length analysis of the language of dispute in a Highlands society (Huli), Goldman (1983) describes how “evaluations of talk and action in disputes are couched in the codes of pollution and sickness.” Above all, female sexuality stands for the possibility of things out of control, and Huli men invoke “the syndrome of female heat in relation to concepts of anger, dispute, sickness, or other manifestations of deviance” (1983: 100). Dispute settlements are rituals of sanitation, in Goldman’s phrase. The behaviour which causes disputes is a contamination, like an illness which strikes people’s bodies. Talk in a disordered form contributes to this affliction but in an orderly, public form offers a mode of “control” through exchange: “talk as an item of wealth should, in these circumstances, parallel the movement of pigs” (1983: 203). Because illness “is the dominant metaphor for disordered relationships,” then the “mechanisms of compensation and resolution are conceptualized as ‘healing rites’” (1983: 99). Finally, he notes that compensation payments may be directed to restoring the balance of health in afflicted individuals rather than to reconciliation between the parties (1983: 285–86). This challenges the cliché that the function of dispute settlement “is to restore relationships, to maintain a balance or equality between the litigants” (1983: 282).

Huli metaphors of illness and sickness should not mislead one into thinking that the concern is with metaphysics rather than politics. On the contrary, their formulations are highly relevant to understanding the nature of group violence in Highland dispute settlement procedures. Goldman’s analysis is an excellent starting point for reconsidering aspects of the management of violence in Hagen, a society with a very different political structure.

At first blush it might seem that Huli conceptualise the ordering functions of talk and compensation as a species of “social control,” that is, as devices for the restoration of social order.¹ If so, then Goldman’s material contradicts a recently argued position of my own (M. Strathern 1985)

1. Goldman appears to make such an extrapolation when he argues: “situations of breach, defilement, and disorder are expressed in the lexis of female pollution. This is the meta-language of *social control* which attempts to defile and deal with *asocial* actions” as manifestations of “deviance” (1983: 100, my emphasis). The social control model, derived from bourgeois legality (see Fitzpatrick 1984), describes “society” as made up of people who can be transformed—educated, socialised, reformed and generally



that we should jettison descriptive metaphors which present public dispute settlement procedures as implementing “control,” “repairing” the social fabric, and such like. The kinds of conversations by which men create order out of disorder, as they might conceptualise it, are not analogous to those postulates about human behaviour which conceive “society” (through “social control”) as regulating “asocial” acts. These postulates find expression in many assumptions underlying Western social science, and have led to an extensive anthropological literature on the topic of social control. The argument was presented for Hagen, in the Western Highlands Province, but was based as much on a critique of standard anthropological assumptions concerning dispute settlement as it was on Hagen ethnography. By implication, therefore, its findings should be generally applicable to the Highlands. Yet if the Huli in the Southern Highlands Province themselves hold so dramatically to metaphors of dispute as sickness, settlement as healing, and to the necessity to exercise control over disorderly phenomena, then clearly my criticism seems out of place.

As his own remarks about reconciliation indicate, however, Goldman does not suggest that Huli “order” lies in restoring relationships to some proper, normatively defined state.² Rather the Huli notion of order is

moulded, in the same way as they can be improperly influenced, led astray, seduced, etc. There is the idea that the institutions of society can direct and channel individual behaviour in such a way as to change it: bad citizens can be made good ones. The argument for Hagen identifies mechanisms of transformation for one area of social life only, and that is not the area of public “dispute settlement.” This latter area, by contrast, is involved in value-switches which I call conversions. It should be noted that I thus compare a relatively holistic account of Hagen with a partial (bourgeois in Fitzpatrick’s terms) set of Western ideas. However, it is these ideas which have been most influential to the development of social science in its non-radical forms, in which much of the anthropology of law participates.

2. Thus, overt compensation payments put a stop to overt expressions of hostility. But the parties are not necessarily “thereby reconciled, only the state of sickness of each litigant is construed to have been affected.” He adds: “it is the relative balance of physical health in each individual that concerns the Huli, not necessarily any notion of restoration or reconciliation between the parties” (1983: 285–86). What is at issue in court hearings, then, is the effectiveness of male display; hence the relevant indicator is the relationship a man manages between his private and public affairs.

the order of display, and Goldman draws out the parallels between exchange relations, self-decoration and public speech making. The display consists in the arrangement of “pigs, paint, and parlance,” which indicate “conceptually interchangeable and equivalent modes of behaviour that are, in their transactional states, amenable to open and public assessment” (1983: 280). These are all substances which men use in “coming outside” to present themselves through display (1983: 102). One may add that they also are thereby media for scrutiny and evaluation (cf. O’Hanlon 1983). Bringing talk into the open in the management of disputes aligns or measures men’s capacities, much as does the bringing of wealth valuables to a ceremonial ground. These capacities are not being subordinated for the sake of a social order which the disputes have disrupted. Rather, the challenge to men’s public displays is seen to lie in that area of activity defined by the Huli as of the “house,” “inside” or “private.” Disputes there have an effect on the health of persons, much as do domestic interactions resulting in sickness or (female) pollution. In the sphere of public transactions persons affect one another in other ways: here actions are “not only subject to the constraints of excess, but should conform to the axiom of reciprocity” (Goldman 1983: 102). Mechanisms of exchange define “public” interactions according to their own specific structures.

Huli politics does not entail the scale of organization in the confrontation of political groupings through warfare, ceremonial exchange or highly stylized oratory as is found in Hagen. The Huli rhetoric and oratory to which Goldman refers, for instance, apparently does not employ the same range of distinctions between types of public speech. Huli elaborate a divide between public and private speech, consonant with their elaboration of pollution idioms which set up a boundary between men’s and women’s activities. This boundary is also important in Hagen, and aspects of the form it takes there are discussed in this paper. Instead of suggesting direct analogues with Huli idioms of sickness and health, however, I base an analytical distinction on an exchange metaphor, in the contrast between mediated and unmediated interactions. Like a much earlier parallel distinction between the domains of “transaction” and “production” (M. Strathern 1972a), these are not direct Melpa idioms but my own summaries of a constellation of ideas.

For I wish to underline the rhetorical significance of equations between female sexuality and disorder. The Huli equation is one with which many Hagen men and women would agree. Yet I do not wish to draw the



analytical conclusion that, in representing “society” to themselves, men simply use the device of uncontrollable (female) sexuality to stand for all that is “asocial,” even “antisocial.”³ Rather, it is necessary to attend to the specific conversions and transformations at issue, and to the nature of the transactions in their potential to affect the quality of relationships between persons. The metaphors indicate the transformation of values which occurs when unmediated interactions (acts which have a direct effect) are translated into mediated ones (they are translated into equivalents such as talk, compensation). The unmediated attack may indeed be experienced as a direct bodily affliction. Affliction is deflected by those intermediary procedures which give it value in another currency. A component of this latter value (as Goldman makes clear for the Huli) is visibility in public. Sexuality by contrast connotes hidden acts; more than that, it connotes unmediated effects. As Biersack (1982, 1984) has suggested for the nearby Paiela, acts known only from their effects (the ability of women to “grow” or “pollute” their husband, ancestral favour, the conception of children) indicate an immediate, if covert, relationship.⁴ Mediated relationships by contrast entail overt transactions between the parties. “Female sexuality” thus stands for the class of (covert) unmediated actions which are the subject of transformation in (overt) “disputes settlement” procedures.

Female rather than male sexuality is the source of the idiom here since the open arena of public discourse is marked by voluntary exchanges of talk, wealth and blows between men.⁵ This appears true for both Huli and Hagen. In Hagen, furthermore, unmediated interactions are generally typical of men and women’s relations of domestic kinship. Transactions between them are not in the first place mediated by such exchanges. Here persons have direct influence on the bodily and mental states of others.⁶ This paper focuses on the relationship

between the management of emotions in this domain and in the domain of public discourse. It follows an indigenous (Hagen) separation between domains in doing so; however, it departs from male political rhetoric, which stresses the disruptiveness of domestic disputes in men’s affairs. By distinguishing the sociality characterizing transactions in these two areas,⁷ it is possible to appreciate the conversion or transformation from hidden to public talk as a switch in value (how effects are measured), not as a switch from an asocial or antisocial sphere to a social one.

This affords a comment on the nature of violence in Hagen “settlements” as well as in “disputes” themselves. Public dispute settlement procedures do not “control” violence. Reactions to assaults are differentiated by the relationships between the parties, a cliché one might wish to retain. Insofar as political relations between men are concerned, the effectiveness of such assaults may be held to stem from hidden plans and intentions on the part of others; they are unmediated attacks. Overt political confrontations transform such interactions into mediated exchanges. Whereas between kin or spouses the important aim may be to re-establish the complementarity and dependence which lies between them, in political confrontation what must be asserted is equality and formal reciprocity. Violence must be balanced: the Hagen stress on equality in part constitutes the structure of a specific polity. As Marie Reay (1974, 1982) has long observed for the neighbouring South Wahgi, disputes are definitively public relationships out of balance. The connection between subsequent re-alignments and the satisfaction of the parties involved is inherently ambiguous. Hageners do entertain notions of restoring persons’ physical states to health, but these notions characterize possibilities of adjustment typical of domestic relations. It is ironic that their political rhetoric can borrow images from such domestic interactions to depict public dispute settlement procedures (they talk of putting people’s

3. Though I have in the past made this argument myself (see M. Strathern 1981). A Hagen image of something broken occurs specifically in the context of territorial boundary, where a delict is a penetration which “breaks down” a metaphorical fence.

4. Biersack’s work (1982, 1984) indicates a general relationship for Paiela between hidden, silent actions and the ability to effect growth (both human and horticultural).

5. Cf. Brown (1979) on the interchangeability of gifts and blows; also Josephides (1982: 30).

6. A mind/body dichotomy is not intended. The state of mind is bound up with bodily health. I must add that I

am simplifying the contrast here. Exchanges do not take place between close kin, but when they do are “involuntary” and in the context of asymmetrical rather than symmetrical relations.

7. See Lederman (1989). This is part of a larger argument presented in *The gender of the gift* (1988) where I acknowledge its source in the works of several others. That work deals with differences in Highlands societies with respect to emphasis on mediated and what I there call “unmediated exchanges”; one would expect the transformations of dispute settlements to vary also.



hearts and minds into a “good” state). The irony lies in the potential damage which political confrontations inflict on relationships structured according to domestic principles.

Background and context

It would be a paradox to state that the more disputes are settled the more they erupt. Yet this might be one conclusion to draw from events in the Papua New Guinea Highlands over the last two decades, where the development of an introduced judicial system and subsequent modifications to it have taken place in the context of increasing violence. After a peaceful interlude the 1950s and 1960s, central Highlands areas have since erupted in what is dismissively called “tribal fighting,” a continuing focus of grave concern for the Papua New Guinea government. This has happened despite strenuous efforts by Highlanders themselves to settle conflicts through compensation procedures and other mediated means. The situation is a challenge to conventional interpretations of such “dispute settlement” processes.

Put baldly these remarks might seem to suggest that such procedures have “failed” or that Papua New Guinea is handicapped by a “tribal” past. Nothing could be further from my intention. On the contrary, I’m interested in the way outside observers (and anthropologists must be included here) have misread the character of central Highland systems. There’s an enormous amount to be learnt from societies where the conduct of relations between men is in Western terms institutionally egalitarian. Yet even in attempting to describe this egalitarianism, Westerners tend to import unacknowledged hierarchies, specifically the notion that some parts of social life are controlled by others. It is not helpful in the understanding of the character of indigenous social life to perceive a social order regulated through dispute settlement mechanisms on an analogy with the operation of legal systems of Western society.

Many of the essays in this volume will be concerned with recent events in the Highlands and with the repercussions of national policy on local politics. My own information belongs to the pre-Independence era, referring to the conditions as they were before the “outbreak” of tribal fighting in the 1970s. I am not in a position to comment upon current affairs; this distance also means that I cannot monitor the possible political implications of my remarks.

The same innocence could not be claimed for the time when I was working on unofficial courts in Hagen

(M. Strathern 1972b). Then I was concerned to counteract what seemed to be a widespread misinterpretation (in the press and among Europeans generally) of indigenous judicial activity. From the point of view of the Administration, increasing violence in the Highlands was taken to indicate a lack of order; exactly the same thing was also imputed to people’s attempts to settle disputes through unofficial courts. Hageners who set up their own forums, modelled on the Local Court, were lawlessly “taking the law into their own hands.” In that context, I argued that far from lacking a sense of law and order, Hageners were trying to “borrow” power from legal sources. The unofficial, technically illegal courts were part of their accommodation to the administration and its demands, and indeed for a time gave the new regime legitimacy in their eyes. They certainly interpreted the aim of the regime as government, and this aim could only be accomplished through attending to the political balance of clan and tribe groupings. As Andrew Strathern observed (1974), a return to violence on a large scale subsequently filled what was perceived to be a gap in the official processes of dispute settlement.

This examination of local reactions to introduced judicial procedures concluded that it was a mistake to see Hageners lacking an appreciation of “law and order”; rather we were witnessing their attempts to assimilate new institutions to the reality of local politics. They were working out their own kind of order. How useful that argument was at the time is now beside the point. I merely know that it was helpful then to participate in the law and order model of social control; by comparison I do not expect the present exercise to be of much immediate help. It is written in a political vacuum. However, given the extent to which law and order problems continue to erupt in the Highlands, perhaps some more distanced set of comments has a place.⁸

Western suppositions about the behaviour of law rest on specific premises about the nature of society and of human life. All social mechanisms may be regarded

8. By the same token, my remarks are not to be taken as criticism of the courageous way in which the Law Reform Commission of Papua New Guinea has approached the issue of compensation (e.g., as in their report on “Customary compensation,” No. 11, 1980). The context of the Commission’s role is not the context for this present paper. The excellent collection of essays edited by Scaglione (1981) comprises a good example of politically sensitive scholarship.



“regulating” behaviour, and all of society to have a homogeneous function in this regard. Whether there is such an analogue to social order in Hagen social representations is highly questionable. The principles of collective life to which Hagen men give voice are only very partial depictions of society as such.⁹

In Western thought, law is sometimes regarded as a second-order commentary on the rest of social life, a distillation of the regulatory forces diffused through other social institutions. The commentary promotes a basically non-conflictual model of society.¹⁰ Where, however, settling disputes is seen as patently part of social life, and cannot be extracted from it, its procedures cannot be an independent description of it. This I think is the case in the Papua New Guinea Highlands. Attention must therefore be paid to indigenous models of political activity between groups. For these give violence special place in social affairs. Those (non-radical) Western models which regard society as ordered through social control mechanisms discriminate between violent and non-violent public behaviour. However coercive in fact, the rhetoric of state sanctions may suggest that through its judicial systems non-violent “law and order” is imposed on violent “lawless” elements in society. “Peace” settlements, in the same way, are seen to terminate “warfare.” Such a model naturally fails to account for the character of recurrent episodes of peace and violence in the Highlands. It may also run the danger of ignoring the repercussions of peace and war in areas of social life which lie outside the subject matter of public rhetoric.

The type of Hagen dispute settlement procedures with which I am concerned comprises the public management of issues through verbal confrontation and negotiation. In the 1960s and 70s, these invariably took

the form of unofficial courts. In the companion paper to this one (1985), I have argued for Hagen that such dispute settlement processes cannot be considered to offer adjudicatory descriptions of behaviour in a general sense, or of society in general, like the second-order commentary on issues defined separately from the dispute settlement activity itself. My interest there was in drawing a parallel between the way in which anthropologists discover “social control” as a counterpart to “law,” which both regulates (something other than itself) and describes (something other than itself), and the very activity of describing or representing what we take to be society (as something other than representations of it). That paper was concerned with representations largely on the part of anthropologists. Goldman’s provocative presentation of the indigenous Huli material compels investigation of the extent to which dispute settlement in the unofficial courts—both what is said about it and the way it operates—*does* afford a description of representation in Hagen life. Specifically, “dispute settlement” promotes a particular representation of male collective activity and the power/value men create for themselves in this domain, not embracing but as opposed to other classes of relationships.

I therefore set the character of court confrontations against the sphere of domestic kinship where people impinge upon one another in a relatively direct way. The difference, it is suggested, corresponds to that between “transaction” (exchange involving mediated, detachable items) and “production” (unmediated appropriations of labour). They each produce what I call a distinctive emotional circuit. Moreover, what is enunciated through exchange transactions does not provide an independent description of what goes on generally (including in the domestic domain), but specifically subordinates the interests of that domain to the interests of mediated transactions. Thus, the reciprocity which characterizes men’s dealings in exchange is not the same in its effects on interpersonal relations as the reciprocity which characterizes relations between close kin. When affairs of kin are transformed into public, debatable issues, they become a different order of event.

The companion paper extracted a particular type of dispute settlement (courts) to analyse. One may in any case wish to argue that dispute settlement is not a universal type of phenomenon, that is, is not just one type of activity (see Comaroff and Roberts 1981). However, I wished to point out that there *is* a special set of activities to do with talk and wealth which demands specific interpretation. They are continuous with other forms of

9. We can argue that this or that society does not describe itself as constituted through “social control,” but to whose representations then are we attending? Do we take the Western concept of “society” as equivalent to non-Western models of, and acting out of, collective, public life? The equation of (male) collective life with the Western idea of society has in fact led to enormous problems in the description of Melanesian societies.

10. This gave rise to critiques of bourgeois legality. The adversarial format of confrontation in criminal law reclassifies (“transforms”) conflicts of interest into a universal relationship between “the individual” and “the law” (law thus comes to stand for “society,” i.e., embodies the rules of society in their non-conflictual form).



politics but discontinuous with the kinds of internal judgments characteristic of domestic relations. In the context of public political transactions, men assess themselves in such a way as to measure the equality between them. Measurement is not appropriate to the sphere of production described by Hageners as operating through relations of dependence, division of labour and complementary effort. Josephides (1982) convincingly argues that we should see this ideological split between spheres as mystifying inequalities in production. Hagen men attribute equality and inequality, success and failure in ceremonial exchange to financial skill, a device, she argues, which covers up differential access to resources at the level of horticultural production. She thus raises a question about the underlying social inequalities which differentiate productive households. The “exchange sphere” itself, insofar as it transforms domestic/productive matters into the idiom of overt exchange, also has a profound influence on people’s effective equality. Public dispute settlements occur, as Fitzpatrick notes (1982: 233), in those spheres characterized by ceremonial exchange. In this context men perceive they have certain interests in maintaining relations but, not being materially interdependent, are not bound to do so. Dogmas of reciprocity help sustain these relations, and maintain the fiction of potential equality between exchanging partners. Ideas such as “reciprocity” and “equality,” then, are ones through which the actors think about aspects of public life. It is men, however, who so evaluate themselves. These concepts are applicable neither to their relations with women nor to any marked degree among women themselves.

It is arguable that here we have representational analogues to the Western view of social order: Hagen men depict a collective life structured through principles of reciprocity—of a positive or negative kind—between formally equal individuals or groups. Moreover, they thereby evaluate other areas of social life whose ends are rhetorically subordinated to the demands for collective interaction. But this political arena is not held to replicate all social interaction. The conduct which “regulates” relations between political competitors is not a microcosm of societal regulation at large. On the contrary, not only are women excluded from owning the currencies of exchange, wealth and talk, but men’s management of much of their domestic and kin relations avoids mediation through political exchange. I am not of course discounting the ideological nature that the boundary between “political” and “domestic” attains—indeed its contrived nature is essential to understanding what goes on in the unofficial courts.

Political life, with its ceremonial exchange, warfare and dispute settlement, certainly provides a set of rubrics about how individuals and groups with certain interests should conduct themselves. However, because there is no theory of universal human needs or of behaviour naturally requiring regulation, what goes on in this area is not generalizable to all social interaction. Hagen ideology points to a split between political behaviour (premised on equivalence and reciprocity) and non-political behaviour (involving complementarity and dependence) which cannot be accommodated by Western taxonomic hierarchies of the kind which classify, say, “family control” *as a type of* “social control” (Black 1976).

Political and non-political behaviour are not hierarchized in this way in Hagen. Western representations of certain areas of activity, as in resistance to or as “contesting” (Lederman 1989) others, would be more apposite. Anthropological accounts of Melanesian dispute settlement have been successful in their delineation of a whole range of social interests, bar those represented in violence itself.¹¹ Wealth exchange and talk are the mechanisms of “dispute settlement”; yet far from performing the law and order functions we may ascribe to them, it turns out that such public transactions are integral to the escalation of violence. All transactions of this kind, violent and non-violent, create specific expectations among men who are compelled to assert equality and reciprocity between themselves. The major difference between violent and non-violent action is in the manner in which they impinge on further areas of social life. Hagen political life includes public dispute settlement procedures; but one cannot equate Hagen “politics” with Hagen “society.” Lederman makes this point for Mendi. It has implications for the validation which external agencies give to indigenous political processes.

Wealth and violence

Hagen disputations are less concerned with the implementation of norm or rule than with the discovery of intention. Appeals to norms do not distinguish public dispute settlement from other activities. Rather, such settlements are distinctive as an overt effort to penetrate people’s intentions. Their procedures are concerned with how the revelation of intentions affects the mediation of

11. Though the topic of violence has been recently broached in the context of analysing male initiation ritual. See the collection of essays edited by Herdt (1982). For a wider Pacific context, see Rodman and Cooper (1979).



behaviour into this or that transactable form. The unofficial courts focused on translating issues into those which could be met through compensation with valuables (primarily pigs and money). At the same time, handing over wealth is a sign of men's efficacy. This is a male modelling of people's ability to impress themselves on others in which women have no part (cf. Meggitt 1977: 98–99). If it is an image of a collective order, then, it is of very specific scope. The ability to transact through various media constitutes a notion of power.

Snyder (1982) has queried the equation of “customary law” with indigenous law. This colonial category supposes that the former is a modified reflection of traditional rules. His concern is to show the way in which a notion of customary law, like the unofficial courts in Papua New Guinea, developed in specific historical instances as a response to colonialism/capitalism. To a large extent the Hagen dispute settlements witnessed in the 1960s and early 1970s, with their “courts” and self-appointed adjudicators (Councillors and *komiti*), were “customary” proceedings of the kind Snyder analyses for Senegal, part of the “ideology . . . that marked a specific phase in the development of capitalism” (1982: 119). They also marked a specific phase in Hagen men's claims to power following the suppression of warfare and the intensification of ceremonial exchange. These new models were facilitated by the already existing mechanisms for the mutability of values.

This mutability is intrinsic to the indigenous system. Settlement through compensation advertises the special competence of men as managers of public affairs. Time and again, orators (mediators, dispute “settlers”) comment that to exchange wealth is better than to fight. We can read this in various ways, but an underlying systemic premise is that the two activities are convertible. The one form of action can be converted into the other. Exchange enhances the visibility of big men; warfare enhances the display of clan strength. Their values are not identical—but in the pursuit of inter-group competition, each sustains the other as an alternative. Dispute settlement is thus a form of collective activity which mobilizes support and contributes towards a definition of inter-group relations predicated on reciprocity (cf. Feil 1979). Reciprocity is to be understood as “equalizing” relationships, and thus providing a measure of men's respective strengths.

I make brief reference here to the argument already presented (M. Strathern 1985). Western observers are accustomed to regarding the mediation of conflict through wealth exchanges (compensation) of the Hagen sort as

non-violent solutions to potential or actual violent eruptions. I suggested that mediation, which establishes the mutability of values, must also be seen as an instrument for specifically political interaction between clan groups; it defines relations between such entities as a matter of reciprocity. Reciprocity involves a constant strain towards balancing exchanges to the point of competitive equivalence. Rather than embodying the capacity to surrender confrontation to the social interests of peaceable resolution for its own sake, such mediations display men's capacities to objectify and transact with the value they have for one another. One cannot simply describe Hagen ceremonial exchange, for instance, as “promoting social control” or as being “a positive integrating force” (Feil 1982: 291). Moreover, the circulation of wealth allows the inflation of emotions to collective dimensions; it thus sustains the circulation of violent as well as non-violent interchange.

Similarly, public dispute settlement processes as they occur in Hagen cannot be read as implementations of a separately constituted “social order.” Such processes are continuous with the events they “comment” upon. In addition, they operate as specialised instruments of conversion: they do not only uphold the circulation of values to which I have referred, but for men transform issues which arise in the context of differentiated kin dependencies into political currency.

What is true of wealth exchanges is also true of talk, that other activity which characterised the unofficial courts. Goldman pointed out for the Huli that the orderly talk of public disputation operates as an item of exchange. It is one of the media into which events and acts can be “converted.” Conversion is possible insofar as “the covert has been made ‘open’” (1983: 104). Hidden talk on the other hand is characteristic of close “internal” relations between intimates. There is nothing intrinsically disorderly about it; but for Hagen one could point out that it is in one sense intrinsically non-transactable. Hidden talk is shared among those who identify themselves as having interests in common, whereas public talk constitutes transactions between persons whose interests are socially distinct.

Normally the affairs of close kin are kept out of the public arena of open verbal confrontation. Hagen men have an interest in keeping separate these domains of action. When domestic matters are brought to the courts, they are normally not presented as issues to do with kinsmen or exchange partners, but become classified by men as “to do with women.” This classification is part of men's tendency to regard domestic issues that cause



“trouble” as inappropriately publicised. The problem the classification simultaneously creates is that there is no other way of conceptualising women’s public efficacy. Although I cannot present much detail here, reference to the phenomenon of talk in general is relevant at this juncture.

Problematic intentions: Talk in Hagen

The notion of intention (*noman*: will, mind) cuts across the Western divide between self-referenced and socially-oriented determination (see M. Strathern 1968; A.J. Strathern 1981b). The state of the mind is voluntarily revealed through transactions with others (gifts, blows) or through self-display (as in decoration, a direct invitation to the minds of others insofar as it solicits their estimation). An element of contrivance and monitoring of “revealed” intentions is also present in the formal oratorical speech-making which accompanies such events. What is made overt is subject to the conscious decisions (their further intentions) of the performers. However, it is also thought that revelations of a less voluntary nature may be made under a range of conditions—visitations of sickness, omen-taking, idiosyncratic behaviour. Here one would also include public but non-oratorical talk. Non-oratorical talk includes informal conversation and casual remarks; it can offer inadvertent clues to people’s intentions. I would also include here the kind of talk which characterises unofficial courts. It is non-oratorical in its diction, but has formal elements. There is deliberate management of the information which is displayed by the speaker, but, in addition, a public probing of other people’s words. Goldman has underlined some of the implications of the question/answer format which Huli Village Courts adopt.¹² I remark here apropos Hagen that

12. Goldman (1987) develops an interesting contrast between the diffuse, posed questions typical of traditional Huli moots and the direct interrogative sequence of modern Village Courts. In the former case the speaker offers a range of alternative suggestions from which his hearers can “choose.” In the latter either/or questions may be put directly. The latter force respondents to say one thing or another, but it is interesting to note that it is the speaker putting the questions who offers the information (did you do *x* or did you do *y*). (For a Hagen example in an unofficial court, see M. Strathern 1972b: 3237). There is a parallel here to some traditional procedures of divination insofar as alternative pieces of information are presented to inscrutable spiritual agencies who yield a sign at the right juncture.

whereas Hagen oratory, like wealth transactions, elicits a response from the audience but does not ask direct questions of them, non-oratorical talk in courts, like omen-taking, draws directly on interlocution.

With the cessation of warfare after pacification, and the atrophy of ritual concerned with divination and omen-taking, non-oratorical talk may well have assumed a new significance for the estimation of intentions. It certainly came to define the public “settlement” of disputes. In the political arena public speech of either an oratorical or non-oratorical kind is a highly ambiguous activity, its revelations simultaneously raising questions about what it conceals. It certainly cannot be placed in any straightforward manner at the non-violent end of a simple violent/non-violent continuum.

Oratorical speech assumes a collective dimension to men’s activities. Its veiled form (A.J. Strathern 1975a) incorporates certain understandings about clan interests, past conflicts, future intentions. From the mouths of individuals (orators) came versions of group activity to be interpreted only through tacit understandings about clan or tribe strategy. The accompanying actions put the words to the test—how much wealth had been revealed in ceremonial display, who in fact took revenge, and so on. Mobilization for warfare in the past was one such constant test of loyalty and solidarity. Among the things put to the test was the extent to which group claims were matched by personal engagement. The magical means which accompanied people’s attempts to predict success or failure for their exchange or fighting ventures were often directed specifically toward the participation of individuals. Overall success depended on the internal co-operation of every constituent member, and it was individual fortunes which omen-taking searched out, even as it was individual disloyalty that was searched out through torture in times of war. We can see non-oratorical talk as matching this search.¹³ It is concerned with the particular acts of particular persons. The difficulty of the dispute settlement situation is that it attends to what normally remains closed to scrutiny. Intentions are guessed from what people do; they can never be known with certainty. Public talk simply mediates—provides a medium for—selected information. At the same time, therefore, while disputation is concerned with individual acts and, as far as possible, with individual intention, it performs an important political filter function. Public hearings sift the implications of events—giving notice,

13. Cf. the Huli emphasis on such talk being “open” or “straight” (Goldman 1979).



as it were, as to whether the events in question can be taken at face value, contained between the parties to the dispute, or whether they lead to repercussions which have to be settled by other means. How far the intentions of individuals have meaning for the collective interests of the clan or subclan to which they belong is always an open and for Hageners an ever-fascinating question.

Dispute hearings thus deal, through non-oratorical talk, with individual motivation and intention. But motivation, which normally remains hidden within a person, becomes of general public interest only as an indicator of efficacy in relationships. Who made whom do what? In response to what group interests did so-and-so act? It is always possible that a person acted only out of self-interest. Yet this tends to come as a rather uninteresting discovery. The actions of women are often put into this category.

Here we can see the significance of those disputes which apparently fail to be settled. It would be short-sighted in the Hagen case to regard such failure as arising simply from the relationship between the disputants, although this is the way in which failure is often interpreted within the social control paradigm. Some of Gulliver's observations afford an instance. The context is his challenge to the usefulness of regarding disputes as always ending in the finality of a "settlement." Outcomes vary tremendously, he writes (Gulliver 1979: 78–79), and it may be only some time after negotiations have taken place that the outcome of a dispute is known. Nevertheless, he regards relationships and interaction in general as "guided by the generalised, customary standards current in the society" (1979: 74). Although relationships may contain disagreement, it is when the parties are unwilling or unable to resolve their disagreement, he suggests, that dispute occurs: disagreement will arise from the pragmatics of the ongoing relationship, shaped but not determined by these standards. Relationships normally involve problem-solving mechanisms, he argues, and for the dispute to develop implies a crisis in the relationship which cannot be handled within its terms alone. Thus, although Gulliver allows that a whole range of procedures and manipulations should be taken into account in the assessment of negotiation and other judicial procedures, at base he seems to see such dispute settlement as solving in a public arena "problems" between themselves that parties to the relation cannot solve alone in the ordinary course of events. Gulliver suggests that by going into the public domain people may be able to appeal to the interests and norms of the community (1979: 75), as Fitzpatrick (1982: 235) also argues is an el-

ement which reveals Melanesian legality. This leads to a further assumption in the social control paradigm. In the dualistic thinking which characterizes Western approaches to "law" in general, "norms" and their like are seen to afford an independent description of social processes and can be "applied" to particular events. This produces a dichotomy between "action" and "talk about action." The latter is taken as a reflexive, evaluative (adjudicating) process. In Hagen, talk is not represented as an alternative to action. Rather, it is a type of action seen as an alternative to keeping silent, or to fighting and brawling. It is preoccupied with the elucidation of people's intentions; but it is a mistake to see it as an after-the-event evaluation. Talk contributes to and participates in the events it also scrutinizes.¹⁴ As Goldman (1983: 36) reports for Huli: "saying and thinking . . . are not quiescent states but modes of 'doing'"; "words are not said to be 'translated' into actions." They do not have an intrinsically summarising or adjudicatory function. Hence Fitzpatrick's quotation from Counts and Counts (1974: 120): "It was often difficult for us to determine whether agreement had been reached. We were told that we could know if things were settled only by watching the future behaviour of the 'litigants.'"

A similar indeterminacy is crucial to the operation of Hagen non-oratorical talk. Even though all disputants are in particularistic relations with one another, it does not follow, then, that the course and resolution of a dispute is reducible simply to those relations. What an incident means, a theft, an insult, a rumour, shifts and changes according to reading of previous incidents or subsequent realignments. I suspect that it is not knowing this which leads to a certain carelessness—not all disputes brought out into public have to be "resolved." Counts and Counts make much of the inconclusiveness of Kaliai disputation (1974: 121–22), as does Tuzin in

14. It is often tempting to treat dispute settlement as commentary on social action which has taken place elsewhere—since the "settlement" is constructed as about prior events. But numerous writers (Comaroff and Roberts 1977: 80ff. put the case well) have had to recognize the social/political dimensions of the proceedings themselves as enactments. See Koch (1974: 26): disputes "are a normal part of social life." What is true of disputes is also true of war incidents in the Highlands. Thus Meggitt (1977: 113) states explicitly for the Mae Enga that neither wars nor the subsequent peace-making are self-contained events of a unitary, disjunct kind.



his analysis of conflict in Ilahita Arapesh. In Hagen, however, there seems more to it than “the practical impossibility of revealing and reconciling the diverse interests in a case once and for all” (Tuzin 1974: 319). Disputants often have incomplete socio-historical information available to them, and this includes incomplete information on the range of people who will be affected, and on the future. It is from not knowing what will happen next that discussions sometimes trail away, people appear irresolute, action is judged premature. During the course of non-oratorical investigation, people are, as it were, watching the effects of various actions, and some of these may not yet have taken place. If actions are scrutinised for the intentions they reveal, events are known by their effects. These premises do not lend themselves to adjudicatory decisions on the character of the occurrences.

Tuzin (1974: 332) describes the role of divination in Ilahita dispute settlement. But, as in other contexts where people take omens, Hageners are future- as well as past-oriented. That is, they do not construct an event as simply having “occurred.” Any one event is only ever an incomplete revelation of people’s intentions and effects on others. This uncertainty means in turn that most settlements are provisional. They cannot be isolated in time. It follows from this that issues cannot be subsequently rearranged to restore a situation as though the event had not happened. Hagen interchanges are indeterminate. Conflicts yield information about what people think, and settlement also yields information, but only by adding to what people think about one another and what they think people are thinking. The manner in which the settlement is conducted augments information: it does not seek to negate or obliterate the incident at issue. There is, I believe, no sense of restoring things to a prior state.¹⁵

In addition to the inconclusiveness of much dispute “settlement” is the retrospective interpretation of such settlements as themselves “events” of a sort. Thus, Moore (1977: 159) refers to the proceedings of dispute settlement as “ceremonies of situational transformation.” Situations are created in the enactment itself. Jill Nash (personal communication) reminds me of the significance of talk in this regard. Talk in Nagovisi is in itself an event, and to turn actions into talk may constitute a cause for dispute. Her observation is close to Chowning’s,

that in Senseng some of the emphasis on the importance of dropping a quarrel “seems to reflect personal fears of being called to account for slander if the evidence is examined further” (1974: 161). In Hagen, the word for talk (*ik*) embraced both the fact of dispute or argument and the cause of dispute or the necessity to have an argument. It may thus be glossed as “trouble.” Reference to talk is brought into a public arena in such a way that further action becomes necessary.¹⁶ Not only does too much talk jeopardise interests in information control (M. Strathern 1974), but public talk as such indicates that a dispute exists. During the period of unofficial courts in Hagen, people tried to limit the ramification of what was said during open court hearings to its implications for the court proceedings itself. Yet it was also the case that the action of going to court could give offence: that is, taking a matter to court and publicly talking about it could be used in a punitive or retaliatory or provocative way. The suspicions to which talk give rise are well documented from elsewhere (e.g., Gordon observes of Enga that words “fashion a reality which the listeners always suspect” [1983: 207–208]). Talking out problems in public is not somehow inherently peaceable.

Public discourse of either kind, oratorical speech, non-oratorical talk brought into the “open,” operates among other major conversions, notably wealth exchange and warfare, to register the effects of men’s actions upon one another. The disputants are differentiated by social interest. Enemies are not to be transformed into peaceable neighbours. On the contrary, enemies are always enemies; but if the relationship is conducted in that political zone where minor (as opposed to major) enemies are also allies, men with whom they exchange as well as fight, then the currency of interactions may be converted by events. Talk is another mode of interaction, and like the gift may be a vehicle to inflame or soothe.

Such conversions test the “value” of the relationship to the respective parties. The underlying structure of reciprocity implies that their interests are sustained as discrete. The interests of separate political units may be aligned, as allies are, but are not to be merged. The outstanding question is always in what ways one such set of persons can influence another. Thus, it is important to stress that Hageners are not concerned to find

15. Relations are re-defined in the light of the incident in question. This may be a question of re-establishing a particular kind of reciprocity, but the re-established relationship does not *exclude* the dispute: the type of adjustment is part of its re-definition.

16. Alan Rumsey (personal communication) comments on the phrase *ik petem* (Melpa: “talk lies there”); the Nebilyer counterpart to the verb specifically connotes things which are latent or concealed, still in the ground to be dug up.



out (through talk) what a person “really” thinks, as a matter of that person giving vent to self-expression. As elsewhere in Melanesia (e.g., Young 1974: 65), no one knows or wants to know what is in others’ minds on personal grounds. What they do want to know is such intentions that lie there as will affect themselves, that is, those intentions which will dictate future action. Disputations may trail off, not only because settlement is blocked by inadequate information about the past, but because there is not enough information about the future, about what it will have turned out to mean.

Non-peaceable repercussions then, need not simply be the “failure” of peaceable settlement efforts. More to the point for Hagen, violent reprisals may be engineered as a means to gain more information—to provoke a response—to alter the registration of a previous offence, a kind of acting on the future. Several things may be tested: in the victim’s responses, in the aggressor’s strength, in the help either side can expect, and so on. Where warlike reprisals are taken after a death, the aggressors reassure one another of their internal good intentions, as clan mates, or whatever. They have to reassure clan ancestors also. They may be “testing” their own as well as their opponents’ capacity and strength. The display accompanying peace settlements thus often contains explicit omen-taking elements (reassurance as to internal strengths) as well as overt messages of competitiveness (O’Hanlon 1983; cf. Rappaport 1968). They are simultaneous revelations of internal states (solidarity or not, as the case may be) and external effectiveness.

Although comparisons may be made with other Highlands societies, different strings of conversions occur, that is, different sequences are followed through in re-evaluating (altering the value of) particular events. Within gross conversions from wealth exchange to talk to warfare, there may also be internal cycles. What may from one point of view be registered as continuous open fighting, can also entail several re-registrations of conflict. Vayda (1976: 35–36) remarks of Maring warfare that the cause of entry into one phase is not necessarily the cause of entry into another; escalation does not proceed in linear measurement, nor is escalation inevitable from the outset. Or, again, talk which may be revelatory in one context may be a concealment in another. There is an interesting contrast here between Hagen display on ceremonial exchange occasions where men “cover” the revelation (revelation of wealth is only ever partial) with oratory, and the description O’Hanlon gives for North Wahgi (1983: 331) where effectiveness of display depends on a prior revelation of talk: talk (dispute) that

is not revealed lodges within the dancing group as internal betrayal, and damages their display.

The substitution of talk for fighting or wealth exchange for injury bears analogy with currency conversions, as my vocabulary implies. Acts conducted in one medium are converted into another medium. Speeches, blows, and valuables thus circulate between men to sustain (mediate) a balance in their relations. They do not work to transform these relations as such. A bout of fighting may be brought to a conclusion, but not the enmity between the two sides. Insofar as wealth exchanges contribute to this political activity, they contribute to the strenuous defence of equality. Each act of conversion thus sustains the convertibility of the media. This is the sense in which the more disputes are “settled,” that is, mediated, the more they will erupt.

Such was basically the conclusion to the companion paper to this (M. Strathern 1985). But here I emphasise ambiguities in that analysis. The terminology of conversions was employed in order to underline the contrast with Western idioms of social control. The point I have labored is that in their structuring of competitive relations between political units, different types of public action are interchangeable in their mediating effects. However, as Alan Rumsey reminds me (personal communication), the act of conversion indicates that there is a difference between the terms; different acts are not identical or isomorphic and, in that sense, do not have completely equivalent “values.” Thus, there are contrasts to be drawn, as Hageners draw them, between wealth exchange and fighting. The advantage of wealth exchange, as we know (see A.J. Strathern 1971), is that among other things it creates an arena for the displays of big men. Moreover, whereas wealth exchanges always mediate relations between persons, that is, provide a visible medium for their display of intentions towards one another, the affliction of bodily injury by contrast has the additional advantage of creating a direct effect. It is in this sense that violent reprisals may be used to probe the reactions of others.

This leads to a further comment on violence. Violent and non-violent interactions are interchangeable in their implication for the balance which political units strive to sustain between themselves. But unlike the exchanges of public talk or wealth, injury which has its effect on the bodily “feeling” of the victim can, I think, also be taken as similar to unmediated action. The blow may mediate the feelings of the aggressor, but is suffered by the victim as a direct injury to his or her person. Domestic violence between spouses, one may note, is normally



kept hidden. Between political enemies, such inflictions of injury are reckoned to be most successful when they are also effected secretly (through poisoning or other ways of bringing on a group's downfall).¹⁷ Pressing such an advantage, or claiming superiority, creates asymmetry in the relationship, though it cannot be claimed in public without the injured party asserting it does not exist. Occasionally in the past, allies combined to make such a claim stick, rounding on and perhaps even driving out a common enemy. They thereby forever altered their relations.

I say this because of the parallels which Hagen idioms seem to draw between public arenas of dispute settlements (through their courts) and the management of emotions between close kin. This is a piece of rhetoric—courts do not necessarily bring about a different internal state of feeling, even though they are said to make people's hearts good. It may sound a little far-fetched to further suggest that when men assault one another through physical attack they also have in mind the kinds of unmediated interactions which characterise close kin relations. In an otherwise egalitarian polity, however, it is from this area of relationships that one finds models of asymmetrical relations, dependencies and inequalities. In Hagen, these accompany the idea that persons can have unmediated effects on one another's welfare. Reference to violence as an unmediated assault therefore requires closer scrutiny of those relations which are not structured through formal reciprocity of an equalising kind.

Mind and emotion

The concept of transformation, rather than conversion, applies to the management of affect and emotion, insofar as Hageners suppose that events have repercussions on people's feelings in such a way as to *alter* them. It is particularly close kinsmen who are felt to impinge upon one another's states of mind. Much of the rhetoric of wealth compensation between groups is also conducted in terms of making people's hearts (minds) feel good. Yet it is in face-to-face interpersonal relations, as between kin, where various mechanisms exist for adjusting the impact of people's emotions upon one another. The

mechanisms work insofar as such persons are regarded as bound to one another not through reciprocity based on their equality but through a complementarity of interests based on their interdependence.

There is an irony in this, since actions which characterise the political relations at once set them apart from and entail repercussions for those relationships.¹⁸ The political sphere, distinguished by reciprocity and equality between the participating groups, is the sphere in which both wealth and talk function as simple conversions. But the circulation of talk/wealth exchange/fighting is not completely insulated from the rest of society. The enactment of such "politics" has severe repercussions on areas of social life constituted on quite different premises. Whether talk/wealth exchange/fighting is violent or non-violent in nature does not really affect the equalising actions of political units. It does profoundly affect the functioning of domestic kin relations.

It is possible to separate out two emotional circuits.¹⁹ The first comprises the domain of conversions upheld by reciprocity, where public talk, like public gift giving, is said to inflame as well as soothe people. Politics involves a constant circulation of messages between formally independent groups who seek to balance out their fortunes and misfortunes in relation to one another. They may exchange aggressive acts, or friendly ones, or take pleasure for themselves in inflicting pain on others. That feelings can be mediated through injury or through wealth transfers facilitates this circulation. The only measure of satisfaction lies in the claim to have equalled or bettered one's rivals. In it is an overt measurement of these feelings which is sought. Dispute settlement procedures, as I have argued, feed into this circulation.

17. We may perhaps thus regard as provocative the elements of speech which bore a secret character. Thus, formal oratory was full of allusions to whose meanings only a few would be party. Rumsey (1986) emphasises this aspect of oratory in the Nebilyer.

18. Cf. Langness's (1967) argument along similar lines for Bena Bena. The rhetoric of restoring good feelings happily resonated with the (pre-Independence) Administration's rhetoric of law and order.

19. Analogous to the two circuits of mediation described by Modjeska (1982: 102ff.) for Duna. Very roughly, they underlie the indigenous Hagen division between "transaction" and "production"—where the former refers to a sustained flow of items between exchanging partners, and the latter to a cycle of growth, nurture and death affected by a person's specific kinship placement. An indigenous commentary on the competitive nature of corporate exchange is made by the Kafaina women's movement in Chuave (Warry 1985). The female collectivity women have developed in response sets up a different patterning, but along same-sex lines.



But where through mediated transactions court hearings attempt to create “good feelings” between disputants who ordinarily register their feelings in unmediated ways, they participate in a second circuit. This is predicated upon dependency relations. This second circuit may work without the mediation of wealth or public talk. As far as shame, anger and sympathy are concerned, one emotion can be transformed into another. The capacity to respond and evince such emotions is evidence of fully functioning “minds.”

In reference to the first circuit (conversions), all three states of feeling can in fact be blown up to collective proportions: thus, a group of dancers may feel shame in public (A.J. Strathern 1975b; cf. Epstein 1984), whole clans may be mobilized to seek revenge through anger, and allies are moved to sympathy with one another. But the structural context of their expression is reciprocal relations between formally equally social entities. Mediation is necessary because collectivities do not have minds; there has to be an instrument which will set the individual minds of its members on a common course. When by contrast these emotions are experienced in the context of complementary relations between unequals, they are presented through non-competitive means which come closer to our understanding of sanctions (withdrawal of labour and display of sickness are two important ones). Lawrence’s term “self-regulation” (1984: 131–32) is apt here. These means offer unmediated information about the states of people’s minds. The problem then becomes to seek the specific cause of these states. Private, not public, “talking out” of the issues may be accompanied by sacrifice in extreme cases, as supernatural evidence that the disputants’ minds are now “clear.” Such adjustments do not depend on the facilitations of wealth exchange and public talk.

The relations at issue here are those of domestic kinship—not just household relations between spouses or between parents and children, but also ties between close kin who have an interest in one another’s welfare on an asymmetrical basis (especially ties between persons related through women). These are the relations on which Hagen horticulture is based.²⁰ Persons define their relations in terms of the differences between them.

20. Outside the defence of clan or subclan territory, there is a minimal collective dimension to Hagen horticultural arrangements. Work is divided up and produce allocated between persons invariably distinct from one another in their obligations as spouses, matrilineal kin or affines, men linked through sisters, etc.

But the differences do not refer to different interests as lie between formally equal political partners but to (unequal) differentiated, heterogeneous contributions to a common interest in mutual welfare. The division of labour between husband and wife is a marked example of the way consanguines and affines in general interact to sustain or injure one another. Whether to enhance a person’s health or to stunt it, the acts of close kin are based on complementarity rather than reciprocity. There is no ultimate squaring off in terms of losses and gains, as between political units. These kin are caught in a mesh of unequal relations, dependencies and lifelong debts. Wealth, when it circulates between them, does so on an asymmetrical basis.

I stress the kin-based nature of this sphere in order to underline that it involves men as well as women. This is not a “female” sphere but it is a frequently cross-sex one; that is, ties between persons are constructed through male and female links. Moreover, although I refer to “sphere” or “domain,” the issue is one of structure rather than different circles of relationship. In the case of clansmen or brothers, in particular, different contexts for their interaction will differently structure their relations, so that they may either be governed by reciprocity/equality or by complementarity/dependency. Cross-sex ties are less malleable. The domestic sphere is distinguished in the way people are held to influence one another by virtue of their prior relationships. This holds especially for that between mother’s brother and sister’s children, and in the adjustment of feelings between parent and children which is so significant for the latter’s welfare. It also applies to some extent to spouses; either has the mystical capacity, for instance, to assist or injure their partner through their joint offspring. Thus, relations of dependency also give rise to unequal power relations: people do not affect one another in symmetrical ways. Attention to the emotional states of close kin is made important by the close presence of ancestral ghosts who send sickness or health in response to the feelings of their descendants. Emotional states act as sanctions on behaviour insofar as they are translated directly into consequences for personal welfare. Failure to carry out one’s obligations is an unmediated assault on the other party’s welfare.²¹ The second sphere to which I have drawn

21. This is very different from political relations between clans (say), who are under no obligation to one another beyond those established through contract (as allies, if that is the case).



attention thus shares a number of characteristics with interactions typical of what Lawrence calls a person's "security circle" in Garia. Lawrence argues that a person "restricts his sense of moral obligation to members of his own security circle" (1984: 133). The sense of obligation is expressed primarily through the idea that close kin "think on" one another. It is to this sphere that he applies the concept of "self-regulation." Constant adjustments are necessary in people's relations with one another.²²

Within this sphere certain emotions circulate with asymmetrical effect, as in the Hagen interplay between anger (*popokl*) and sympathy (*kaemb*). Kinsmen should ordinarily feel *kaemb* (sympathy) for one another. Their interaction should culminate in this feeling. Independent political units, between whom there is no given relationship that is not negotiated through events as they take place can, as it were, "exchange" anger or "exchange" sympathy, either equally conducive to reciprocity between them; close kin, by contrast, try to transform feelings of anger into those of sympathy. Displays of self-affliction may contain appeals to the other party to change their feelings. A wife may become *popokl* (angry) in such a way as to avoid provoking counter-anger and instead move her husband to showing consideration for her (M. Strathern 1972a: 254). Rather than an exchange of anger, anger may thus be displayed to elicit sympathy. Shame is more complex. Its display may avert repercussions of various kinds, but does so through demonstrating an internal adjustment, within the person, between his or her own proper mind and his or her acts or experiences. The display is specifically for other persons, whose intervention becomes redundant.²³

22. Lawrence's account has been a stimulus to my argument. It should be clear, however, that I must depart from his equation between self-regulation and "generalised social structure" (1984: 127). The sphere of such self-regulation as I would identify it in Hagen is a specific one, insofar as the "self" is dependent for his/her identity on others. The competitive "regulation" of political interaction, by contrast, is not in this sense "self-regulation."

23. The display is outside ("on the skin"), as a display of the person's right mind (see the discussion in Epstein 1984: 3233). The notion also entails the ideas that people may deceive others by putting on displays for their own sake. However, the display, in saying something about a person's state of mind, is supposed to avert interference from others.

Many of the issues adjusted between kin employ this circuit of emotions with sanctioning effects. The sanctions derive from those threats to relations directly embedded in the intervention of ancestors or in withdrawal or bestowal of labour. Here one may appropriately talk of mechanisms which "restore" relationships to their former independence, and "repair" them in this sense. When issues are brought into the public arena of dispute settlement procedure, however, they become translated into conflicts which require mediation. Emotions and feelings have to be translated into the media of public talk, wealth and blows. The long recriminations uttered by a despairing dispute-settler faced with overt conflict between father and son spell out in painful detail the difficult implications of one such translation (M. Strathern 1974: 276–83). For, once in the public arena, the issues become mediated through exchanges which diminish the component of asymmetrical dependency in people's relations and translate them into the rhetoric of symmetrical reciprocity. They also deflect interest away from the specific relationships under apparent scrutiny, and may be less than adequate in sorting out problems in the relationship.

This comes out clearly in disputes between husband and wife. The obligations and rights between them are intrinsic to their whole interdependency. If the one starts questioning the performance of the other, then the questioning introduces a rhetoric of reciprocity: who did what for whom, when. Much of the ambiguity surrounding the handling of marital disputes in the informal courts of the pre-Independence era lay in the problems of dealing with domestic interdependence in a forum whose recommendations were likely to be based on notions of formal reciprocity. Restoration of interdependency could only be done at home, as it were. The very act of bringing a dispute to court was a step towards its conversion into a mediated (political) conflict. Women's political intentions, however, were often nugatory. It was frequently a bored court which decided that in the end all they were dealing with was the woman's self-interest.²⁴ Court cases involving women thus tended to take a trivialising view towards their intentions.

One might point up the contrast between the structuring of relationships by saying that (1) in the sphere of conversions, interactions visibly register the quality

24. Or a punitive court. On the treatment of "women" as a special problem for "control" in the village courts, see Paliwala (1982: 22122). Much of this re-renders the account already given in M. Strathern (1972a).



of the relationship between the parties but by their mediated nature yield ambiguous information about their feelings; (2) in the sphere of transformations, no alteration is possible to the relationships, which are circumscribed by pre-existing connections of specific kinds, but people do seek to alter the dispositions others have towards them. They thus redefine whether or not someone is behaving as a true kinsman or whatever. Relations between close agnates and between spouses are susceptible to either kind of structuring. I note that domestic violence is generally restricted to spouses, and carries the threat of termination of their intimacy. It can also be noted (Lisette Josephides, personal communication) that people may deliberately ignore the complementary aspects of their relationship and stress their divergent interests, as when a father provocatively “courts” a son.

My argument is, then, that what went on in those public court cases is not a microcosm of social control. It is neither “social” in a broad sense, for it attends only to certain of men’s collective interests, nor is it a matter of “control” with the ordinary regulatory connotations of this term. The mediating principles definitive of court hearings convert one order of events into another. Significantly, as I have noted, men on the whole keep their domestic kin affairs out of public light; they also specifically encourage one another to contain (repress) personal anger arising from domestic interaction and interdependency in the interests of acting as effective clan members. Women have little interest in the conversion process itself, but no comparable indigenous arena in which to make public protest.

Women bringing disputes to the public arena of unofficial courts in the pre-Independence era posed problems for men. Such courts were interested in the social sources and social consequences of people’s actions in terms of mediative resolution. Women’s political motives were obscure or non-existent (cf. the long inquisition narrated in M. Strathern 1972b: 31–38), their “minds” a puzzle. The inscrutability of women reflected the structure of court hearings. These resulted in recommendations on specific, justiciable (mediatable, i.e., usually compensatable) points, not on generalised issues. Although people would seek personal satisfaction through compensation to make them “feel good,” in the end compensation payment was a medium for reciprocity. A person regained what had been lost. Yet items given to restore “good feelings” between persons *by their mediated nature* raised doubts about the donor’s sincerity. Good feelings towards another can only be evinced in the long term mutualities of unmediated relation-

ships. The kinds of cases which women took to court often turned on such relationships, ultimately workable only in terms of mutual dependency. Court hearings which could recommend action to create “good hearts” and “clear minds” could not fill those minds with sympathy.

This is a more complex matter than I can do justice to here. I comment on one facet of women’s involvement in the collective public life of men. Men all the time balance domestic and political interests; this evinces the proper functioning of their minds. When women succumb to political pressures which override their domestic loyalties, however, they may be said to be “out of their minds.” To introduce this point, some further commentary on mind and intention is in order.

Biersack (1982) describes the different scope available to Paiela men and women for the revelation or concealment of intention. Whereas all Paiela individuals may harbour internal thoughts, men display their minds on public occasions, in overt transactions. Women’s intentions are revealed after the event, in the health of those explicitly dependent upon their nurture. The opposition between what is transacted in the open and what is transacted secretly is echoed in the Hagen contrast between men who speak and fight in public, and women who act in private. Women do not participate in the public, collective occasions when men are seen to act with a single mind. In fact, the dogma of a “single mind,” the purposefulness by which Hageners distinguish men’s from women’s actions, could be read as the inevitable constraint of male public action. One either has to give or withhold; that is, actions have to have some unity, some singleness of form. A male person’s actions thus reveal what looks like, or is displayed as, a single intention, replicating the unified, homogeneous actions of his clan or subclan on public occasions (cf. Rumsey 1986). In private, a man harbours multiple thoughts and purposes, even as the clan is composed of diverse individual persons. A woman’s “many minds” are more consistently calibrated to the differentiated, heterogeneous social relationships of domestic kinship. One consequence is that whereas men can relate their actions to the ends of their clan, utilising a group rhetoric which assumes the primacy of group interests—a man is assumed loyal unless proved otherwise—women must individually demonstrate loyalty to diverse sets of kin and affines. Their social identity is much less helpful a clue to the intentions behind any single action. Indeed, when her actions have significant political repercussions, the woman may be regarded simply as an agent for men’s purposes.



Intentions must be credible; thus evaluations of behaviour are strained when a person acts in the face of primary loyalties. A.J. Strathern recounts a case in which a clan connection was disclosed between a male victim and male poisoner (1981a: 15). Men of the clan argued that the accused person must have been subjected to *wulya wulya* sorcery administered by his enemies in order to have poisoned a fellow clansman. The magic would have put him out of his right mind. No one with his full faculties working would otherwise have done such an act. Similar “madness” (*wulya wulya*) is also held to operate in cases where women are “persuaded” to poison their husbands. Here *wulya wulya* overrides the inherent uncertainty of a woman’s orientations. In fact, some women are said at their brothers’ behest to poison their husband on behalf of their natal clan without having to be put out of their minds. But others may waver between loyalties, and—to make certain—their minds are controlled through magic administered by the brother or whoever has an interest in the husband’s death. This practice is much more frequently reported in respect of women than of men. Belief in *wulya wulya* thus firmly establishes the social source of the deed (the brother or whoever administered the magic and thus instigated his sister’s actions). There is no transfer of liability (the woman is still harshly punished), but the deed is located in the collective realm of political male action, with very clear pointers as to its sources. By dislocating the woman’s “mind” from her “person,” intentions are relocated in the minds of other, more socially credible, actors.²⁵

Assuming that people are “out of their minds” (*wulya wulya*) thus reduces political uncertainty by relocating a woman’s actions within the sphere of men’s. The important point is that it works through overriding what is normally in the woman’s mind. In addition, then, it provides a commentary on the difficulty of translating women’s domestic relations into political ones: a *transformation* of the woman’s normal orientation has to

take place. This is because women lack instruments of mediation (wealth, talk, fighting capacity). Men in command of instruments of mediation have to hand the means of converting one set of events into another. They more effectively seal off the repercussions of non-mediated relations from the sphere of conversions which they control. They can balance interests against one another, and offer political or collective versions of domestic disputes for public appraisal. Men’s minds thus appear unitary, directed to definable (single) ends.

Conclusion

The Hagen idea that to pursue certain political goals a person’s mind may have to be overridden—that he or she will act only if out of their mind—is a resort in extreme circumstances. For the observer, however, it dramatizes the fact that political and domestic domains constitute two spheres of distinctive sociality; the latter is not subordinated to the former as somehow *less than social* in its orientation. There is of course no precise or permanent boundary between the spheres, which is why such loose metaphors are employed here. Boundaries are erected whenever “external” relations are contrasted with “internal” ones. Thus, relations between clansmen may be structured according to one or other type of sociality. However, there is a formal difference between relations, as among clansmen, which are potentially homogeneous in terms of gender, and those constituted heterogeneously, as among close kin linked by men and women. The single sex construct allows groups to be conceptualised as “one man”; as one man, their members may experience common emotions and give them unified expression. Heterogeneously based relationships, however, are constituted by the different positions from which the parties interact. Unlike the difference of interests which separate independent political units from one another, their interests are oriented asymmetrically to interdependence between them.

The boundary between the domains comprises the way men define their private and public activities. Dispute settlement procedures of the court type are among the public arenas of mediation. “Equal” men mediate their relations with one another by indirect means, by translating their emotions and intentions into fights, exchanges or whatever. In pre-Independence times, Hagen experimentation with unofficial courts extended traditional compensation payments into a regular form of mediation for a whole range of relationships. By contrast with the continuing management of inter-group

25. From this point of view, we should note the significance of social identity. This kind of identity which men claim (e.g., through clan affiliation) speaks to certain presumptions about their actions—there is a predictability to them. Clan identity gives meaning to their participation in collective effort, quite as much as vice versa. Men can thus act (autonomously) under the cloak of assumptions about how they will be expected to act (collectively) (cf. Gell 1975). The more their loyalty is taken for granted, the greater freedom exists to pursue personal goals.



relations through ceremonial exchange during that period (and later renewed fighting), these courts also specialised in issues which often had their origin in unmediated interactions between spouses or kin, as well as in disputes between neighbours.²⁶ Public, though non-oratorical, talk transformed the character of these issues into quasi-political (justiciable, mediatable) ones.

The two spheres of sociality differ in their constitution of interactions based on conversions and of interactions based on transformations. The same pair of terms can also be used to point out a difference in potential relations between the spheres.

Dispute settlement could be described as both converting and as transforming issues. When an injury had given rise to “talk,” wealth could substitute for it. Without such talk, there was no case.²⁷ Public talk was seen to be within the competence of men, not women (cf. Lederman 1980). Men would select mediatable aspects of the issues in which they were involved, making them open to conversion into other values. They would seek to insulate off other, non-mediatable aspects of the affair in hand. The ease with which men thus moved between spheres advertised their skills of conversion. This was not part of women’s competence. On the contrary, women represented the intractable nature of domestic relations, the impossibility of mediating asymmetrical relationships based on dependence through transactions predicated on equalising symmetrical ones. Transformation was required. Women reminded people of the effort this required. In Hagen, as in Huli and elsewhere in the Highlands, women were seen to cause much of the trouble with which courts had to deal.

The difficulty of transforming domestic into political relations was traditionally epitomised by the device of *wulya wulya* magic. It was an occasional and impermanent transformation. In the same way, since court hearings only dealt with those aspects of a case which could be subject to mediation, feelings were only ever incom-

pletely transformed by their procedures. Through talk, and with the prospect of compensation, the courts handled issues that would have otherwise erupted into violence. At the same time, they helped sustain the equivalences between the different acts, of which expression of violent feeling was one.

In response to the then Administration’s interest in “law and order,” Hagen dispute settlers at that time did appeal to people not to create trouble and themselves administered a special category of fine for “breaking the law.” However, this paper has re-examined such “peaceable” dispute settlements by considering indigenous principles of sociality. Much more has been made of what was earlier noted simply as a qualification on the rhetoric of restoring good feelings to the litigants (cf. M. Strathern 1972b: 28). I have thus stressed the political character of such dispute settlements, not by reference to the overt political interests of the parties (which may also be present) but in relation to the principles of reciprocity and equality to which they are oriented. Both fighting and peaceable methods of interaction, including the settling of disputes, draw on a single range of public forms and expectations. Fighting, quite as much as the exchange of valuables, appeals to the values of clan solidarity, pride, the defence of interests and the promotion of welfare, as it also appeals to desires for revenge and pleasure in the affliction of injury. These acts afford different advantages and disadvantages (see above). But from the point of view of the structure of political reciprocity, they are interchangeable or convertible.

From the same viewpoint, the accompanying Hagen ideology of collective action eclipses and subsumes other social behaviour in reference to itself. Men’s activation of political life depends on sustaining a flow of resources, events, items. But the values so mobilized define a specialized area of interaction which has its cost in other areas. Here there is a further dramatic distinction between the alternatives of wealth exchange and fighting. Wealth exchange might be a short-term drain on household resources, and might serve men’s violent ends, but in the long run men stimulate a counter-flow of wealth. In their own terms, women stand to gain as well as lose. Women can pursue certain interests (pork to eat, activated relations with kin; cf. Modjeska 1982: 103); the exchanges also draw attention to the productive base of wealth—women’s “work” is recognised. Women’s minds can be envisaged as directed toward wealth exchange, as are the minds of men. That prestations are a vehicle for male hostility and revenge as well as for peaceable intentions is irrelevant to the return which women might look

26. Though large-scale political confrontations—poisoning accusations, land trespass, theft—were also experimentally handled by the unofficial courts.

27. This makes intelligible the rather curious phenomenon observed in the early 1970s in Hagen: some local dispute settlers insisted that domestic matters be “reported” to them as they occurred, i.e., before they reached justifiable proportions. These reports were secret; the listener was expected to hear the talk but not otherwise take action. The “talk” was stored up for future confrontations.



for. But insofar as these exchanges contribute to men's descriptions (representations) of a collective life as involving conflict with like groups, they also contribute to armed and lethal confrontations. Apart from their own occasional involvement in political alignments, the advantages women glean from warfare are negligible. The cost is enormous. No wonder that homicidal acts on women's part might be attributed to their minds being separated from their persons.

Meggitt recalls how Mae Enga women detested the dislocation of war. He quotes a woman as saying: "Men are killed but the land [a frequent cause for fighting] remains. The land is there in its own right, and it does not command people to fight for it" (1977: 99). Land does not have the same place in Hagen disputation, but a comparable complaint arises over households having to find the resources to "pay" for offences which men commit. The antagonism between male and female interests here does not only set one sex off from another (cf. Langness 1967); to some extent, it also protects the productive base from the depredations of political competition.

For the real cost of traditional violence, one could say, was not damage to the "social" fabric, if by that we mean the ends of collective life. Individual fortunes might be irreversibly altered, but not the competitive premises of interaction. Collective life as fashioned by Hagen men was constituted by conflict quite as much as by other forms of interchange. Meggitt (1977: 182–83) is eloquent on Mae men's view here. I have argued that the mutability of values in the constant exchanges which men kept up between themselves meant that one kind of action (a dispute) could be converted into numerous others (armed combat, compensation); disputes did not "disrupt" an order resting on other principles.²⁸ The cost was not borne by an assault to the principles of men's public life, but by an assault on domestically based sociality.

Arrangements which secure the production and reproduction of subsistence and domestic relations are sometimes evaluated by Hagen men as only incidental underpinnings to their collective activities. By the same token, the continuity of domestic life gains nothing from intergroup violence. Warfare in the past was a cost without benefit in this sphere. It goes without saying that it was a cost to men's as well as women's domestic relations.

My distinguishing two emotional circuits was prompted by the fact that although unofficial court procedures, like other confrontations and talkings-out, are said to affect people's feelings, two contrasting structures exist side-by-side here. Many devices can be used to reveal people's intentions. But (and I follow Biersack) the nature of the evidence, and thus the nature of the revelation, can take either of two forms: On the one hand lie overt transactions in which the flow of wealth, words or blows mediates the relationship between donor and recipient. The social origin (the identity of the donor) is transparent, although in the end, Hageners recognise that they have direct evidence only for the act, and information about intentions remains indirect. On the other hand lies evidence presented in a person's bodily condition, where malevolent or benevolent intentions may be attributed to the unmediated acts or feelings of others. In some cases (e.g., illness), the social origin of the state of affairs may have to be sought, since it is the effects, not the source, which are immediately visible. (In the case of sickness, there are mediating agents, ancestral ghosts, but no overt transaction, which is why, as far as the parties are concerned, I refer to this mode of influence as unmediated). I offer the suggestion that physical assault may, as it were, imitate such unmediated interactions.

Insofar as unmediated afflictions such as sickness involve ancestral spirits, they have a sanctioning effect. That is, they cause persons to scrutinise aspects of their relationships with one another—the fact of the affliction is not, as it were, in dispute. Once in the public domain, however, the interpretation of injury may itself become a disputatious matter. Here, by contrast with the conduct of public affairs in a state system, there is no exercise of violence (as in judicial punishment) which is not open to dispute. I have used the term "violence" since it captures for outside observers, and for the concerns of the Papua New Guinea Government, an element of Highlands disputing which the state must bring under explicit control. Indigenous definitions, however, would have to give it a generalised connotation which stressed its continuity with all forms of affliction. Any alteration of a person's bodily or mental state (including his or her feelings about another) might be construed as violent, depending on the social interests thought to be at issue.

The discussion over the convertibility of values is not meant to imply that ceremonial exchange, dispute settlement and the like "encourages" warfare, such that if the former were to disappear so would the latter. On the contrary, the argument has to be that if ceremonial exchange and compensation payments were discouraged,

28. Non-radical Western models of social order contain their own mystifications of violence (violence is seen as exogenous to society, to be exercised within only the interest of putting down disorder).



then men's collective life would be channelled into other forms. The cessation of warfare in the 1950s and 1960s brought about an intensification of exchange. An immediate effect of discouraging exchange would no doubt be an escalation of war, or increasing competition along property lines. Meanwhile Highlands violence persists, and compensation procedures seem fraught with difficulties. There are many sociological reasons for the new difficulties (distortion of political boundaries, escalation in size, novel forms of competition), which I leave others to describe. But I have suggested that similar difficulties are part and parcel of the whole mediation process. The nature of the traditional polity is relevant: the causes of recent escalation must be sought in the new inequalities created by economic development and political patronage. It is not quite the cliché it sounds if one considers the principles upon which the traditional mediation of emotions was based.

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