

*Resistance, Refusal and Global Moralities**

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I

I open with an imagined case, though one intended to reflect on what did happen.

A Fictional Account

The first setting comes from a work of fiction, then.¹ It is about a relationship between a mother and son. We encounter the son, Peevay, as a little boy puzzling over why, unlike everyone else, he has no mother and father. 'When I asked, I never got answers, but angry looks and sometimes'—as he says in the English which he subsequently learnt—'a grievous blow' (p. 49).

Never you mind, Grandmother would say with eyes like cuts. Grandmother was often angry with me. She was my friend, my protector, my family, but though she was kindly, her kindness was always a little hating ... Sometimes I got so angry I hated her right back and would go off and sleep just by myself on the other side of the fire. But she was my family, so in the end I always did return. When I came back she wouldn't say a word but gave me food just like before. (p. 49)

He is told about his mother:

Mongana was almost worse. He would say any poisoning thing just to cause me woe and spoil my dreamings, 'Where's your mother, freak? Don't you know? I'll tell you. When she saw how ugly you were she tried to kill you and then ran away to die.' (p. 51)

Then one day his mother reappears. And in the English with which the author imagines the man looking back on his boyhood:

So I finally saw her. She was never tall and beautiful like I thought, no, but was quite short with strong arms and legs, and quick eyes ready for some fight. Still I never minded. This was blissful and great good fortune ... She had come to find me after all. I did not wait but ran ... She never saw me till I was close. Then I grabbed her leg and shouted, 'Mother'. Then I got my worst grievous blow. Her eyes, which were gleeful before, turned cold like winter sea. Then she pushed me off, hard so my arms hurt, and turned away. Where she walked was

interesting, yes. She went over to one boy, smaller than me, with thin little legs so he looked good for hitting, and d'you know she took the heinous little shit in her arms, as if he was some finest wondrous thing. (p. 79)

That scene is played over and again. He is systematically rejected by his mother in favour of another child (p. 143). The wider picture builds up slowly, and the crucial character is his own father. He learns that his father killed the father of Mongana, the boy with the poisonous words. And that his mother has returned to them with one intention only—to get help to kill his father. She seeks revenge, and although she does not actually attack her son he feels attacked too. Yet the child continues to look for the ‘cherishings’ which are continually denied him.

Tasmania

This is Tasmania, set initially in the 1820s–1830s. So the reader knows the widely held belief about the fate of these people: extinction.² The obsession which Peevay's mother has with hunting down his father is a kind of play within a play: these people are, all of them, being systematically hunted down by white settlers with guns and dogs. Their territory shrinks, the survivors no longer walk over familiar land, and eventually the remnants are tricked by a settler who befriends them. They are—including Peevay because that is where he learns English—herded up and put onto a small offshore island.

Peevay's mother keeps up resistance to the end—she is portrayed as the person who organises the small band of Aborigines, and in helping her personal quest the others also for a while at least keep their own sense of purpose alive. She is an energetic, single-minded, defiant character whom everyone, including her son, admires. She also frightens them a bit. The person she is seeking is the white man who captured and raped her, and Peevay is the child of that first atrocity.

It is not just the settlers who are barbaric. So are a mad band of English travellers, who give their name to the book, including a clergyman who thinks Tasmania must be the garden of Eden, and a scientist—a surgeon and scholar—who thinks it contains clues about the races of man, labels everyone he meets, and is in search of specimens. Indeed it is the scientist's theorising about race that leads to one of the book's most gruesome actions. After Peevay's mother dies, the scientist steals the body, dismembering it in the process, and bags it up to be packed into one of his purpose-built specimen crates. Peevay's quest then becomes recovering the bits of his mother's body, an enduring act of piety and affection.

You may like to know—it is after all a novel—that everyone gets more or less their just desserts, and the scientist's bones get included among a whole set of exhibits so that he ends up (mistakenly) labelled himself.

Resistance

We have here, then, a familiar outrage—a rape and the birth of an unwanted child. It could have happened anywhere, any time, is happening at this moment. But there are also the *particular circumstances* of the way in which the Tasmanians were hunted down, shot and captured, which gave Peevay's mother her *particular tools of resistance*. She leads her mob to attack the settlers whenever they can, wielding a gun she manages to obtain. In captivity it is she who organises the making of spears with which to attack their captors. This is a special kind of resistance, and given a gender inflection through the fact that she

is a powerful woman whose rage is set against a largely male contingent whom Peevay persistently refers to in the Victorian slang he picked up as 'scuts'. What in the novel is portrayed as the mother's desire for revenge also becomes for the reader the resistance she and her mob put up to being mere victims of the settler's inroads. Her resistance keeps them alive—gives them the possibility of a future as themselves. A kind of defiant reproduction in the face of what the reader knows is to be truncated.

Refusal

But there is another story here as well. The woman's refusal to be a mother, or one kind of mother anyway. We are invited to see her through the child's eyes, of course, and the child is forever looking for the 'cherishings' that get bestowed only on his fully Aboriginal half brother. He gets nothing but scorn, anger, at times even palpable hate (until right at the end of the book).

That great good fortune about Mother, though, was that she never did despair. No, our ruination even seemed to make her stronger. . . . Sure enough, as soon as she was strong again she started going into huts of others who spoke our language, for secret talkings. Several times I would ask her what was her design, though she would not tell me one word.

'White scuts are your friends', she would taunt. 'Go and talk to them.' (p. 230)

The refusal to 'cherish' reminds me of another account, though not fiction this time, told through a daughter's eyes. I refer to the stark portrayal of parenthood by the historian Carolyn Steedman.³ Her mother, she says, was someone who refused reproduction. She did not want to replicate herself, had not liked herself enough as a child to want children.

Now that moment of not-liking oneself becomes—as Peevay's mother's hatred is turned towards both her rapist and the child—articulated in terms that make cultural sense. Peevay elicits his mother's anger just by his appearance, and every time she sees him, it seems, in being reminded herself she reminds him of the abuse she suffered. Steedman's mother, we are told, saw burden in the child—her daughter was constantly reminded that children were 'a financial burden'. Whereas Peevay's mother wanted to be released from this perverse reproduction that had forced her into such proximity with the whites, Steedman's mother—if we are to believe the daughter—nurtured a wished-for refusal to reproduce at all. She had not wanted to perpetrate her manner of relating to her world.

But both women did have children. With poignancy, Steedman describes how her mother's refusal took the form of *refusing to mother*. Her only recourse was not to behave according to the rules of good mothering. The daughter adds a comment on how few means, social or psychological, women had in the early years of the twentieth century to act out such a refusal.

Moralising

So neither of these two women were examples of good mothering. In taking the only route of denial open to them (refusing to mother) they would hardly meet the standards of 'parenting skills' being promulgated at the time when Carolyn Steedman wrote her book. But that would be a bit anachronistic to apply to Peevay's mother. What we know in her case is that about the same time (the 1830s), on mainland Australia, well-meaning attempts by government and missionaries were trying to deal with the 'problem' of

Aboriginal families.⁴ Aborigines needed to be saved—including from marauding white men and the vice of interracial sex. They need to be saved physically and spiritually, and the means were to show them how to do menial tasks, cultivate the soil, have their children baptised. Sporadic efforts were made in this direction by their eventual captors when Peevay's people were held on the small island. But the problem was that the Aborigines had no fixed abode, no internal hierarchies onto which new structures of authority could be grafted, and above all the absence of anything which could be called 'home'. They simply did not have a family life that the settlers could recognise.

Possibly there is an echo of this attitude in the management ethos of the 1980s and 1990s⁵ that in Britain endorsed a kind of professionalism towards parenting. But while the judgement on the absence of family life, as well as the moral impulse to reform, may have been similar, the targets were different. The early nineteenth-century mission that addressed itself to problem families did so in order to civilise the savage; the late twentieth-century drive wanted to turn parenting itself into something of value.

In late twentieth-century Britain, workers providing community health and social services to families with young children, beset by all the consequences of high unemployment and reliance on benefits, saw that at least one way of providing support was to encourage parenting skills. In the words of one health visitor:

I'd like these parents to enjoy their children, because if they enjoy their children, they'll get the best of [being] parents and [get their] children to fulfil their optimum development.⁶

The more a mother knows about the development of her child, the more strategies she is able to use in managing it.

In a complete turnaround from earlier theories, as might have comforted Steedman's mother's daughter, where too much attention was thought bad for little children, cuddling and stimulating their children ('cherishing' was Peevay's word) supposedly showed an understanding of 'parenting skills'. These skills have to be learnt—which is where the health and social workers come in. The skills turn out to be concerned largely with managing babies, children and the household, and are thus heavily gendered. The mother is regarded as the principal person to wield them, and to be the one who hands them on to the next generation. Either the skills or the lack of them can be passed on. In the words of one social worker: 'Poor parenting—basically in that case because the parents themselves haven't had any parenting so obviously you're getting a cycle of deprivation coming through.'⁷ Poor parenting skills include over-chastisement, failing to perceive a child's need, neglecting the physical needs of the child for food, warmth and affection. It is axiomatic that a young mum without a role model is going to be at a loss.

Performance

You might observe the translation of the relationship between parent and child into a performance of sorts. One could almost read off the *indicators* of 'good parenting'. Note that the rationales are not in terms of the obligation or duty that either had towards the other, but lie in the self-evident appeal to the mutual enhancement and well-being of each party. Note too the underlying morality attributed to management: the workers are conscious about the withdrawal of the welfare state, and in the face of automatic expectations of support try for the sake of these people to plug the gap by equipping people themselves with the means to cope. They need to become good managers of themselves.⁸ Morality can in turn be translated into the language of *rights*. A proposed

amendment to an Education Bill at the time (1993) suggests that parents have the right to receive support in their role as the child's first teacher.⁹

Before I come back to these, let me comment on something else. The health worker who says that parents who don't know how to parent in effect pass on lack of knowledge of how to parent¹⁰ is talking about reproduction in a wider sense. The issue is how values learnt by one generation are passed to the next. The Australian missionaries knew this very clearly. They deliberately set out to break the cycle of reproduction, but used the insight to different effect—not to bring parents and children closer but to set them asunder. If they could get the children away from their uncivilised parents, then the children would make better progress,¹¹ and they searched for infants and small children to herd into the dormitories they set up. It is a familiar colonial story.

What the missionaries and the social workers have in common is a theoretical presumption which no doubt facilitates reform programs but goes against other kinds of knowledge, such as that portrayed by Kneale and Steedman. *The assumption is that like reproduces like*. Up to a point, yes, and I don't have to rehearse the literature on deprivation traps: poverty leads to poverty, neglect to neglect. But it is not the whole story. If neglect leads to neglect, how come Carolyn Steedman cares about her mother, writes so movingly about her? But then the older woman did actually carry out her tasks, however minimally and mechanically, and at least in public concealed her neglect. We don't know if Carolyn would have preferred to be taken into care.

At this juncture, let me make a response through Peevay. Let me cross-over my two cases, otherwise so separated in time and space, and thereby remind ourselves that both are contained in narratives that look back from the present. They are written with knowledge from our own time. The question about like reproducing like, then, is: how come Peevay, despite his mother's hatred and (we might surmise) self-disgust, puts such effort into recovering her?

Peevay's Response

Time and again Peevay's mother had rebutted her son's attempts at reconciliation. However often he tried to shine in her eyes, she either turned away or hit him. But after her death his fantasies of being cherished are finally put to rest by a real act. He steals back the bag that contains his mother; the fact that she is in fragments is of no moment—he makes the identification through what is attached to the bag, which is itself a container in which his mother had kept something of his half brother's bones as a charm. Peevay gives her a proper cremation. Listen to the nineteenth-century words the novelist puts into Peevay's head:

As she went I pondered life she got. This was woeful, yes, just fighting and seeking to endure, but I supposed that for this time she lived—most hateful one that there ever was—she did it well. No, she did not get her dearest wish to vanquish num white men, and make them go away, because this was some impossible thing, but she had her mob, and fought her war, and lived bravely and never cared what anybody else said, which was some wonder. Truly, I wished I was more like her. (p. 401)

This is no *Star Wars* novel: he never gets to confront his father because the white man has already, insignificantly, died. When he reaches his father's homestead, Peevay finds instead a mob of half brothers and half sisters, people just like himself.

Now Peevay's mother is not just someone who does or does not offer good mothering. She is his mother. She remains a fixed point in the narrative. What comes through the narrative is the power of *the relationship* between mother and son. And it is by virtue of that relationship that she is of huge inspiration to him. So what did she pass on? Resistance and defiance is what she passed on—not the performance of a parent–child relationship, not practices of management, not 'parenting skills'—but 'fighting and seeking to endure'. *The relationship is a particular one*; for while a person's skills might be taught by others, the relationship is learnt only through those who are party to it.¹² At any rate, Peevay takes on himself the obligation¹³ to fulfil her desire for revenge.

In other words, *like does not reproduce like*. Perhaps Peevay and Carolyn are extraordinary people, but they show that one can't predict what the child will learn. Peevay learnt the resistance not the hatred—and resisted to the end his mother's treatment of him, for he never stopped looking for affection. Carolyn learnt the refusal not the neglect; indeed, in her own care of her mother she refused, so to speak, to be neglected. What was important in both cases was the fact of relationship. Between parent and child: each person remained a focus of attention for the other.

II

Resources

One could think of hundreds of sad and dreary counter-cases, but I have chosen these two rather optimistic examples through which to turn to the developing world. It is to make a rather simple point about Western or Euro-American expectations and about the resources that people in the developing world we know today have at their disposal. We should not underestimate the resources that people can draw on, and I have used the parent–child relation because I want to point to *relationships* as one kind of resource. Relationships flourish in different ways. Problems arise when such resources become targeted for improvement. I see that in certain otherwise thoroughly laudable global movements to reform.

But why have I given so much weight to a fictional account set in a world seemingly far from the present one? I don't mean to say that Euro-American accounts of the developing world are fictions—I do wish to point to the role of *description* in how this world is imagined. I deliberately chose an account, then, in which the distance in time makes us alert to the fact that it is constructed through the eyes of the storyteller. The reader is constantly aware of the contrast between the present epoch and that of early Victorian colonisation. Much of the power of the novel comes from hindsight about what happened to the Tasmanian Aborigines. And, of course, of how the Human Rights movement has fashioned present-day sensitivities.

Descriptions

The simplest of all messages: we have to be aware that we—each of us—describe the world from our own place in it. Because (one aspect of) what we call globalism is the condition of forgetting or denying that. This is also why I wanted to point to certain continuities with the past.

I do not want to criticise the extremely important work that health and community workers do in Britain. But they were in my narrative precisely to remind us to be wary of how we describe the resources people have. We should, I think, pause when we start

recognising the characteristics of a particular Euro-American, neo-liberal way of reckoning resources: when we start describing performances amenable to indicators/or moralities of self-management/or rights as the repository and measure of right-doing. These are all parts of a package that these days has global currency. Above all we should be wary of the doctrine that like leads to like. What people take from their circumstances simply is not as morally predictable as this package would suggest.

Compliance?

I turn to a case I have dwelt on several times,¹⁴ but which still troubles me. It concerns a woman and her father and brothers; although her own father is dead, these are her men of her clan. The scene is a post-colonial, globalising, Papua New Guinea in the 1990s. We could say it is in part about attempts to resist certain global moralities. But the resistance takes the form of *compliance* to local ones. We run instantly into one of the features of current global morality: resistance is by and large a positive term, and compliance a negative one. (Compliance suggests neither indicators of performance nor the assertion of rights.) Compliance to local moralities in turn involves the woman's compliance with the wishes of kin who attempt to impose their will on her. It is not at all clear that this should be dismissed out of hand, although in the views of the outside world, the woman's problem is that she does *not* refuse them.

Miriam's Story

The woman's name is Miriam. The time is 1996–1997, the place the Highlands (Minj) of Papua New Guinea. She became something of a cause célèbre in the national Papua New Guinea press, and at the back of it was the way in which Papua New Guinean practices were judged against international expectations of justice and humanity.¹⁵

Her father, Will (Willingal), had already been killed by the time the newspaper narratives open; indeed, his death prompted the retaliation which led to Miriam's media fame. No one was going out to seek revenge (they couldn't—he had been shot by a policeman) but he had left behind aggrieved kin. People there differentiate between kin traced through female links and kin claimed through male ones. The dead man's maternal kin has a claim against his paternal kin. This was expressed in group terms—Will's mother and father came by necessity from different clans, and the two clans belonged in turn to quite distinct tribes (I use the term 'tribe' as contemporary Papua New Guinean for an order of political grouping). So there was a confrontation between representatives from these two groups.¹⁶

The mother's side claimed that the father's side had not protected their 'child' properly. This was at once a particular accusation (they had been responsible by causing the police to venture deep into their territory), and a general one (they had failed in their care of him where the maternal kin had not). For each side had had responsibilities for Will in their own way, and was thus liable towards the other. To restore the situation, the aggrieved kin harked back to the original reason for the alliance between them. Will would never have existed and lived to contribute to the prosperity of his own clan if they had not sent *his* mother in marriage in the first place. But what the killing had done—which his own paternal clan had been so negligent in preventing—was truncate that line. It severed the reproductive relationship between the two clans. Indeed, when his maternal clan claimed that they had watched over Will's life and health, given it divine blessing and enabled him and thus his clan to prosper, they were also pointing to the flow of nurture whose road was

created by that initial marriage and was now cut. Other marriages had followed, for instance, and the balance had been much to the benefit of Will's paternal clan. The point of that, in turn, is that the flow of wealth they anticipated receiving in recognition for their nurture and benign influence was also cut off by the death.

So what did they do? They demanded recompense. A death payment is more than redress for a lost life; it involves a whole set of suppositions about the way people are involved in one another's lives. In finding recompense for this now blocked path, the paternal kin would be helping to redress an old imbalance. The final settlement comprised 24 pigs, the principal domestic animal, each worth several hundred pounds, and K20,000 in money (then c.£10,000). But they also wanted something else. To help redress the imbalance they demanded a 'return' for Will's mother be sent them in marriage. Miriam, the dead man's daughter, seemed the obvious choice.

It was not just that she was the only marriageable woman available.¹⁷ The arrangements echoed past marriage obligations (male-speaking), where a granddaughter would be returned to the kin group who had originally sent the grandmother—as an acknowledgement of reciprocity and a renewal of ties.¹⁸ So it was not any, generic, woman who would satisfy the maternal kin's demands. A particular relationship was singled out: she should be someone linked through the appropriate ties of substance. In this case the criterion would be met by someone standing in the relation of granddaughter to the woman earlier sent in marriage. At any rate, Miriam agreed to be part of the 'head payment' or death compensation for her father.¹⁹

Miriam was poised to go: the pigs had been handed over, and the rest of the settlement would have gone ahead—but for the intervention of a local non-government organisation called International & Community Rights Advocacy Forum (ICRAF).

Developing Country

ICRAF is a body that exists to educate people in understanding their human rights and legal entitlements as enshrined in the laws of Papua New Guinea. It was Miriam's position that drew its attention. The grounds on which ICRAF assumed responsibility were that, regardless of local custom, trading in women could not be allowed because it was violation of fundamental human rights. They pursued the principle by seeking a series of orders from the National Court in Mt Hagen to enforce Miriam's constitutional rights. The international and the national context here become one. Papua New Guinea's constitution embraces fundamental human rights, and Justice Injia, adjudicating, found that this particular compensation payment for the life of a human being was inconsistent with the National Constitution and repugnant to 'the general principles of humanity'. It was a clear matter of national law taking precedence over 'traditional customs'.

Here the 'developing country' status of Papua New Guinea is relevant. The judge in fact had some words for ICRAF, saying that precisely because the issue of fundamental human rights was enshrined in the Papua New Guinea constitution the courts could act from their own platform. But what is contained in the constitution clearly speaks to what is presumed to be accepted on a worldwide basis, a global morality at its heart: Papua New Guinea's constitution was certainly drawn up with the rest of the Western world as much in mind as itself.²⁰

While Justice Injia could see no objection to payment as such, and said that customary compensation practices involving 'money, pigs and other valuable personal items' were no problem, but when the payment takes 'the form of single young women' that is another matter.²¹ As he described it, 'Living men or women should not be allowed to be dealt with

as part of compensation payment under any circumstances.²² One of his concerns was with the exercise of agency: how voluntarily had Miriam agreed to the settlement? He concluded that she was coerced into giving her consent, finding for ICRAF on the several issues they had raised.

Obligations?

Thinking of the image of the wealth (bones) in the bag, what does one do about obligations embedded in the relationships one has with others? This is a highly general and universally relevant question which could be asked of anyone. The Minj case offered a particular version.

Miriam's predicament is all about the nature of obligations and how people meet the debts they perceive, although men and women are differently positioned here. These obligations derive from people's general connections to one another (respect owed, say) as well as from their own history of interactions (what happened last time). There were, in addition, many strands of relationships, of personal and clan histories, past events and old debts being brought together in what would be the 'one' transaction. Now that transaction was in turn to be composed of diverse items of wealth, pigs and money, collected by several individuals, where each contributor to the compensation payment would, of course, find himself faced with competing demands on his resources. 'Choices' had to be made (focusing on one out of multiple ways of acting). If acting requires choosing between alternatives, these are basically choices between relations. Here one arrives at an understanding of agency rather different from those enshrined in the human rights determinations of personal liberty. *Agency is evinced in the ability of people to (actively) orient themselves to or align themselves in particular relationships. This is not the same as free choice.*

Miriam implied that she initially agreed to the compensation settlement out of the concern and responsibility she felt for her younger sisters who might be asked if she refused.²³ In her affidavit, she said that she was willing to be part of her father's 'head pay', but not willing to marry immediately or to marry just anyone.²⁴ Whatever one might think about her predicament, whatever pressure she was under, and whatever the imbalance in men's and women's freedoms in the matter, we are left with the fact of relationship: how to take into account the obligations which they entail, one person's dependence on another.

The sympathetic judge took all this on board in his response. But the fact of obligation worried him. Justice Injia found that *obliging* a woman to be part of a 'head payment' was an infringement of her constitutional rights, for example to play an equal role with men in the development of the country. Her right to equality of treatment was violated because the custom targeted only eligible women and not men.²⁵ Moreover, while an open request placed an obligation on any of a clan's girls, the closer the relationship then the greater the pressure. But the question of 'pressure' is interesting. Locating the issue of obligation as an obligation owed to a group, the tribal groups and clans envisages a community whose interests were clearly against those of the individual. If the human rights concern focuses on the way in which groups bring pressure to bear on individuals, then obligations start looking like cultural constraints, and cultural constraints somehow belong to the domain of tradition and custom. Tradition becomes oppressive.²⁶

Yet when Miriam herself talked she had in mind specific individual kin. She was in this sense an agent in the matter. It was in 'thinking on' (Pidgin idiom) or being oriented towards her kin that her agency was manifest. During an interview with the Port Moresby *Post Courier*,²⁷ she said she was fearful about the way her clanspeople would interpret 'the

law' (the judgement which had been given a few days earlier). She was reported as wanting her people to really understand the court's decision: her worry was that '[h]er people think the court has given her "freedom" from a traditional obligation and this could take away her tribal support'.

We are dealing with claims that bear in on the actors as immediate reasons for their actions, based on the fact of their relationships with one another. Yet to acknowledge claims as 'obligations' in the context of kinship looks to modern eyes as perpetuating dependency, control and coercion. These are conditions that certain kinds of human rights discourse would otherwise have us resist and refuse.

Global Morality

One of the issues here is that the Euro-American neo-liberal package of performance indicators, self-management and right-doing imagined as a question of asserting rights is also part of global consensus. I mean global in terms of its justification (that is, the morality is applicable anywhere). There is something more going on here than just the entrenched assumptions of a colonialism bringing civilisation to the backwoods.²⁸ Particular cultures and local places are not a foil to globalism, they pose no threat to it: rather, they are its potential market. But the reason I have run different epochs together in my account is to observe that there are particulars that matter. And the phenomenon of certain relationships—though I have been dealing with relations of a rather special kind—is a case in point.

These may all be local examples but they are examples of a thoroughly trans-local social fact. What about the non-optional aspects of relationships? People are nowhere 'free' to create relationships. This is true in a double sense: (a) conceptually, relationships have a momentum and character of their own, that is, each must take the form of a 'relation' and thus embody a particular image of itself; (b) processually, each relationship involves other parties, at a minimum in sustaining the relationship, and these are always *specific* people. To put words into Miriam's mouth that one might want to put into anyone's mouth, and that the novelist put into Peevay's, perhaps she would like to be able to fulfil her obligations.

This is a question, then, not about refusal or resistance but about compliance. Or it would be about compliance in the Euro-American-speak that also generates performance indicators, seeks for personal enhancement, and so forth. I have also sketched another set of connotations taking off from the Papua New Guinea material but finding echoes in both Peevay and Carolyn, about orientation, about alignment with others, about inhabiting relationships. I could end there—on a note of certainty at least about the question. If I add a postscript in closing, it will no doubt be to get myself into trouble, but think I should.

Some Feminist Pointers

The question receives some endorsement from new work on feminist legal theory and political philosophy, though I do no more than flag this.²⁹ Stephanie Palmer, for example, talks of the paradoxes 'inherent in building a theory and practice that combines respect for individual freedom and recognises the social nature of human beings'.³⁰ She asks how feminism is to deploy the concept of human rights to achieve its own objectives, and points to tests of discrimination as one arena in which the value of specifically female life

experiences tend otherwise to be marginalised. Not surprisingly, rape is one of the testing grounds.

In the same volume, in an essay on violence, ethics and law, Nicola Lacey distances herself from the idea that all one need do is offer richer and more complex contexts of understanding or narrative. She says:

it sometimes seems to be assumed that if we were to broaden the ways in which the legal subject is contextualised—bringing in a wider array of social relationships, bodily attributes or states, emotional experiences as relevant evidence . . .—we might break down the association of the legal subject with the masculine . . .³¹

Another example of the same thinking comes from pleas for alternative forms of dispute resolution, to increase the law's capacity to respond to particularity (p. 128). Her principal problem is that what she calls the utopian strategy of contextualisation—bringing more into consideration—conceals the law's violence. For the law's violence we can read the violence of global morality. The violence, she argues, lies in the fact that the law 'carries within itself no account of its own legitimacy', can 'generate no explanation for its own foundations and hence has to be understood as a distinctively institutionalised system of force' (pp. 117, 118).

Perhaps this is (the violence of) what I have called global morality. As I said, we have to be aware that we—each of us—describe the world from our own place in it. Because when projects of enhancement or reform have a common currency to trade in, their global reach is precisely the condition of forgetting or denying that.

But Lacey does not let us rest with any easy sense of what is or is not violent. She adds that the rhetoric of the law's violence itself falls prey to the same utopianist problems as contextualisation. Feminism must instead keep its feet on the ground, she argues, be utilitarian in deploying both critical and reformist agendas, see where the law can be used; in short, to be at once pragmatic and pragmatist. And if it is reluctant to give up its own project of reform, be at least self-conscious about its descriptive practices.

NOTES

* This paper concluded a series of open lectures on *Gender and the Developing World*. The paper is in two parts. The first makes no distinction between the developing world and anywhere else—an attempt at 'symmetrical anthropology'. I hope the examples will illuminate one another—they introduce what I mean by resistance and refusal. The second part points to ways in which, with these concepts in mind, we might find ourselves troubled by certain features of globalisation, and here the 'developing world' status of the material matters.

1. Matthew Kneale, *English Passengers* (Penguin Books) London, 2001, page numbers in text.
2. See, for example, Lyndall Ryan, *The Aboriginal Tasmanians* (Allen & Unwin) St Leonards, NSW, 1996.
3. Carolyn Steedman, *Landscape for a Good Woman* (Virago) London, 1986. My thanks to Frances Pine for introducing me to this book. See also Marilyn Strathern, *Property, Substance and Effect: Anthropological Essays on Persons and Things* (Athlone Press) London, 1999, p. 85.
4. From Annette Hamilton, 'Bond-slaves of Satan: Aboriginal Women and the Missionary Dilemma' in Margaret Jolly and Martha Macintyre (eds), *Family and Gender in the Pacific: Domestic Contradictions and the Colonial Impact* (Cambridge University Press) Cambridge, 1989.
5. Jeanette Edwards, "'Parenting Skills': Views of Community Health and Social Service Providers about the Needs of their "Clients"', *Journal of Social Policy*, no. 24, 1995, pp. 237–59. See also: 'A Post-modern State of Welfare', paper given to the Applied Anthropology Workshop, 2nd European Association of Social Anthropologists Conference, Prague, mss. 1992, reporting on an Economic and Social Research Council (UK) funded project, *The Management of Personal Welfare*. Thanks for permission to quote and cite.

6. Edwards, 'Parenting Skills', p. 9.
7. Edwards, 'Parenting Skills', p. 14.
8. However, the stress on the individual's self-management in all this is consonant with the withdrawal of the welfare state in another way, as Edwards argues. While poverty is a major factor in what people can do, workers perceive problems to lie in their client's personal histories and disposition. It is not just lack of money which is 'the problem' but not knowing how to *manage* it. Improvement in the 1980s idiom can only be improvement in management skills. One Health Visitor: 'Poverty, poor housing, lack of education — when I use the word education, I mean in respect to bringing up a family, cooking, budgeting, child development. Lack of knowledge really.' As Edwards argues, this depoliticises the social conditions in which families find themselves.
9. Edwards, 'Parenting Skills', p. 3. The converse of this is 'protecting the interests of . . .' as in protecting the interests of the child. Peevay's brother is taken off and educated, to be protected from the savagery of his upbringing, one of the impetuses of missions in Australia at the time. In the story that means that on his return he is in turn rejected by his mother, and this (unexpected) rejection leads him to suicide.
10. Edwards, 'Parenting Skills', pp. 14–15.
11. Hamilton, 'Bond-slaves of Satan', p. 126.
12. As a child, mothered by his grandmother and others, he was 'dreaming' of his mother long before she appeared.
13. My extrapolation, not a theme developed in the novel.
14. From Marilyn Strathern, 'Global and Local Contexts' in Lawrence Kalinoe and James Leach (eds), *Rationales of Ownership: Ethnographic Studies of Transactions and Claims to Ownership in Contemporary Papua New Guinea* (UBS Publishers' Distributors) New Delhi, 2000; also in Marilyn Strathern, 'Losing (out on) Intellectual Resources' in Alain Pottage and Martha Mundy (eds), *Law, Anthropology, and the Constitution of the Social: Making Persons and Things* (Cambridge University Press) Cambridge, 2004.
15. Margaret Jolly, 'Woman ikat ract long human ract o no?', *Feminist Review*, no. 52, 1996, pp. 169–90.
16. Tangilka and Konumbuka tribes, in the Minj part of the Wahgi valley, Western Highlands Province. The father, who was killed by police, Koidam Willingal, was a Tangilka man; he was said to have been the bodyguard of a wanted man, a fact disputed by his kin. The aggrieved relatives came from his mother's clan in Konumbuka.
17. See the account in Deborah Gewertz and Frederick Errington, *Emerging Class in Papua New Guinea: the Telling of a Difference* (Cambridge University Press) Cambridge, 1999.
18. With Peevay's mother's bagged bones in mind (he remarked on how inappropriately light the bag that contained his mother seemed), I note that the practice is called in Minj giving 'a skull in a netbag' (Michael O'Hanlon and Linda Frankland, 'With a Skull in the Netbag: Prescriptive Marriage and Matrilateral Relations in the New Guinea Highlands', *Oceania*, no. 56, 1986, pp. 181–98), a reference to the male strength (bones) that the mother carries within her. When a clan sends out its women in marriage, it contributes to the prosperity of other clans; through these offshoots, maternal kin expand their own spheres of influence. Injury to these progeny is injury to something of theirs. In local idiom, the deceased's 'bones' or 'head', male wealth as appropriately given by the patriclan, should be sent back by the paternal clan to the maternal clan which had in its lifetime overseen his or her welfare (Dr John Muke, 'In the matter of an application under Section 57 of the Constitution: application by Individual and Community Rights Forum Inc. (ICRAF) in re: Miriam Willingal', National Court of Justice, *Papua New Guinea Law Reports*, Port Moresby, 1997, p. 132). When kin seek, as they sometimes did, an alternative to or augmentation of other forms of payment by requesting that a granddaughter of the woman be returned, they talked of returning the 'head' or 'skull' in a 'netbag', that is, in the form of a woman.
19. The metaphors that Wahgi (Minj) people use of body payments draw these various aspects together into one context. This referred to the strength or wealth (bones) of a woman's progeny in and within the form of another woman (the netbag), as Muke, *Papua New Guinea Law Reports*, p. 132, and O'Hanlon and Frankland, 'With a Skull in the Netbag', describe. The bones and the bag are reversed: here it is the mother who envelops the past and future strength of the males she will bear, the bones at once signifying male strength and the wealth that flows against it. People's 'bones' (*omblom*) strengthen their paternal kin, and these payments are offered in return for that strength. In the past, making such payments was once a regular part of clan intermarriage but did not necessarily accompany death compensation. 'Head pay' was the general name given to gifts that went to the mother's kin at death..
20. It is worth noting that the Papua New Guinea constitution provides for the recognition of customary law (which is what these compensation practices would have been perceived as) to the extent that it conflicts neither with constitutional law nor with general principles of humanity. Indeed, the judge paid considerable

attention to unravelling the intricate background to the compensation settlement, and warned about quick judgements from outside bodies—including the ‘modern courts’.

21. *Papua New Guinea Law Reports*, p. 130, see also *National*, 12 February 1997.
22. *Papua New Guinea Law Reports*, p. 151.
23. Gewertz and Errington, *Emerging Class in Papua New Guinea*, pp. 125–6.
24. She then went on to state that she felt pressured into probably having to make a quick match, and that the payment process left her feeling lost, humiliated in the eyes of others, ‘ashamed at being used as a form of payment’, *Papua New Guinea Law Reports*, p. 141. One reading of her affidavit (*Papua New Guinea Law Reports*, p. 141) is that it was the very fact that no one had been named as her future spouse, which made her feel she was being ‘used’ simply as a form of payment.
25. But are ‘marriageable men’ the social analogue of ‘marriageable women’? In the past, the circumstances of ‘initiable men’ afforded a closer parallel. (It should be noted that her kin claimed that the obligation to provide a spouse for a particular clan was different from forcing a girl onto a marriage partner, and that if she did not care for anyone, then a later marriage by someone else could always be counted retrospectively in lieu.)
26. See M. Jolly’s ‘Woman ikat raet long human raet o no?’ for discussion on this point for Vanuatu.
27. *Post Courier*, 20 February 1997.
28. The self-named civilisers in Australia were as appalled as anyone at the trafficking between white men and Aboriginal women, and was one of the targets of their reforms; see Hamilton, ‘Bond-slaves of Satan’.
29. Stephanie James and S. Palmer (eds), *Visible Women: Essays on Feminist Legal Theory and Political Philosophy* (Hart) Oxford, 2002.
30. Stephanie Palmer, ‘Feminism and the Promise of Human Rights: Possibilities and Paradoxes’ in James and Palmer, *Visible Women*, p. 92.
31. Nicola Lacey, ‘Violence, Ethics and Law: Feminist Reflections on a Familiar Dilemma’ in James and Palmer, *Visible Women*, p. 127.