BARREN GROUNDS:

PRODUCTION, REPRODUCTION AND DEVIANCE

IN KILENGE[1]

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Deviance, as a phenomenon of research exploration and social manipulation, has never been the exclusive property of sociology; other social sciences and various corrective agencies share sociology's interest in the topic. That the concern with deviance crosses disciplinary limits should not surprise us in as much as deviance "is inextricably bound up with the social order of which it is a part, and ... one cannot speak about it in a meaningful way without also considering social order" (Scott 1972:17). Any discipline or agency which deals with social order must acknowledge social disorder and deviance. Deviance, which Prus (1983:8) defines as actions or qualities deemed "offensive, disturbing, threatening, or disrespectable" to some group, serves to define the normal in human behaviour, perhaps more so than an understanding of the normal defines deviance. Appreciation of the ability of deviant activity to specify the parameters of normal behaviour came early in anthropology (see, for example, Mead 1935). For a long period, however, anthropologists, like sociologists, have suffered "a sort of amnesia concerning their previous history, discoveries, and achievements" (Sorokin 1956:3). Theoretical development in many fields, including deviance, stagnated as each generation of scholars tried to atomize the theories of its predecessors (Warren and Johnson 1972). New theories, each based on the interpretation of particular ethnographic constellations, have failed to converge in a useful fashion.

For the last two decades, labelling theory has dominated sociological thought on deviance, and it has demonstrated its utility in studies outside the scope of traditional sociology (Erikson 1966). Its basic premise holds that deviance is a status "conferred upon an individual by other people" (Scott 1972:11): in other words, a deviant is not born, but labelled. Anthropologists, who intuitively appreciate the emic, or insider's, perspective on social structure and relationships, thus find that labelling theory "makes sense". Although a limited range of sociological concepts appeal to anthropolgists, labelling theory appears to be culturally relativistic, and hence acceptable. While the theory has come under stringent criticism on ideological (e.g., Fine *et al.* 1979), emperical and operational (e.g., Newman 1976; Gibbs 1972) grounds within sociology, it will probably find a comfortable home within anthropology. Certainly labelling theory can help systematize the analysis of deviance so that anthropologists can find means of comparing social process in diverse ethnographic contexts.

In this paper, we describe some elements of the social context of deviance in a community in Papua New Guinea. As Lindenbaum (1979) has shown, people see the possibility of physical extinction, particularly at the hands of socially inexplicable means, as a very real threat to their social order. People responsible for such threats, in-group members who work to destroy the very fabric of society and human existence, are

different than most: they are seen as deviants. Labelling deviants and deviance is the Kilenge response to activities which interfere with two processes essential for the survival of their society: production and reproduction. Threats to group integrity come through the actions of sorcerers who act without heed to social constraints. While it would be wrong to classify all sorcery as deviance (Zelenietz 1981a), deviance often finds definition in association with activities believed to be sorcery-connected.

In the following pages we discuss what deviance means in Kilenge society. We suggest that most often the accusation of deviance forms part of a process of dispute and conflict management. Few people carry the life-long label of deviance, but accusations of deviant behaviour often accompany community debates. Those who find themselves consistently labelled as deviant are those who have failed to reproduce (barren women) and those who choose to keep themselves apart from normal community intercourse by accepting the allegations that they have the power to interfere with the processes of production and reproduction (male sorcerers). While sorcerers may accept and even glory in their deviance, barren women argue their innocence: the differential gender acceptability of deviance reflects power politics in the village context.

Barren Gardens

Approximately 1,000 Kilenge people live in several contiguous villages stretching along 4 kilometres of the coastline of northwest New Britain. Villagers can gaze beyond the fringing reef across the Dampier Strait to see the volcanic islands of Sakar and Umboi rise above the waters. Mt. Talave, an extinct volcano, towers behind the Kilenge villages and dominates the landscape. Off to the east, hidden from Kilenge by the shoulder of Talave, the active volcanic vents of Langila sporadically spew steam and ash into the air. Flanked by the sea and the mountain, the Kilenge go about the business of their daily lives.

Geographically, Ongaia is the central Kilenge village, sandwiched between Portne and Kurvok to the southwest, and Kilenge proper (Ulumaienge, Saumoi and Waremo) to the northeast; the Ongaians hosted our research in 1977-78 and 1981-82. The population of Ongaia at any one time is around 250 people, with perhaps another 150 away from the village for schooling or work (see Grant and Zelenietz 1980).

Like other New Britain peoples, the Kilenge are subsistence horticulturalists. Their unfenced swidden gardens contain staples such as taro, cassava, sweet potato and a variety of other crops such as bananas, tobacco and European vegetables. Despite the abundant marine resources at their doorstep, the Kilenge look to their gardens for survival. Dangers to those gardens may generate accusations of deviance.

There are many threats to production in the course of the years: theft, marauding pigs (both domestic and wild), excessive volcanic ash fall, inclement weather, and crop disease. In the Kilenge world view, most of these dangers come directly or indirectly from human agents, and may lead to public accusations of anti-social activity. In such contexts people often vent allegations of deviance. Because garden production forms the basis of livelihood in Kilenge, the prime imperative must be garden success. Any individual who would thwart that purpose in any way must be deviant.

INAPPROPRIATE BEHAVIOUR THAT SHADE INTO

As in any society, here there are degrees of deviance. Minor thefts from gardens causes an intense, but fleeting reaction. While theft may be decried by all members of society, so is it practiced by all. Those victimized vent their anger in profanities and accusations, but soon return to their business as their ire dissipates. Minor garden thefts do not threaten the welfare of the victim, nor that of society at large: villagers tolerate them in the knowledge that people aren't perfect and may steal if they have the chance.

Normally theft does not mean deviance except possibly where it becomes compulsive and chronic. A villager arrested time and time again for the theft of money and other valuables in the village did come to be called 'robber'. His actions fell beyond the accepted limits of thievery and became deviant in the context

of the outside world, and accordingly the man spent many months in jail. In the village, however, the man took his place in production and did not find himself excluded from society; his deviance was tolerated and only qualified as unacceptable when authorities came to arrest him after he had expropriated the proceeds of someone else's productive efforts in the cash economy.

When the production of gardens suffer at the snouts of wandering pigs, then disputes inevitably ensue. Most often the damage comes from domestic pigs which, by local government edict, should be in an enclosure. A hungry pig can make quick work of a garden and can leave the gardener destitute. Should the pig be so unfortunate as to be caught in the act of pillage its fate is sealed; the garden owner has every right to kill it and dispose it. More often though, the offending pig has fled, and the IDENTITY OF THE PIG AND ITS OWNER BECOME PROBLEMATIC. Liability for ensuring the replacement of garden produce falls on the pig owner so no one wants to accept responsibility. Suspicions usually surface quickly, however, and a public dispute often ensues. In the context of such conflicts, accusations of deviance are not uncommon: either party may allege that the other wants to destroy elements of production, be it gardens or pigs. Old disagreements surface as each side paints a nasty picture of the other in an effort to shame them into conformity and compliance. In such disputes,

conflict seldom finds resolution. At most, village leaders and elders find some way to manage and moderate the dispute to arrange a compromise. Unless the pig owner admits some responsibility, however, he cannot be forced to compensate the victim. Dispute management depends upon the power of villagers to threaten that they might label the disputants as deviants if some resolution cannot be reached. Consensus on the "rightness" of the argument comes after many hours or even days of discussion. That consensus will then influence the actions of the parties to the dispute: if the disputants do not conform to the consensus in their future actions (e.g., if they don't compensate as directed), then they leave themselves open to be deemed deviant. Deviance means to fail to comply to those activities in the best interests of society, when production could suffer as a result.

Through cooperation and sharing, the community can survive the loss of one family's garden. But when all the gardens suffer because of weather, disease or ashfall, then the community feels threatened: then people face the spectre of famine.

Every year Kilenge must acknowledge the possibility of famine. During the dry season the staple taro wilts, and people have only less desirable foods. In some years even alternate crops have failed and the Kilenge have had to appeal for assistance

from the government. Late 1979 is a case in point. Usually, sporadic showers keep the ground moist and the vegetation green in the months between June and November; however, this period in 1979 turned excessively dry, with no rain falling for weeks on end. Jungle vegetation, as well as garden growth, became brown and dessicated. By November, people were not only short of garden food: freshwater streams that border the villages dried up, and villagers had no place to bathe OTHER THAN THE SEA (Abivo, et al. 1980; Bonnell personal communication). Government intervention supplemented traditional bush famine foods until the monsoons brought new life to the gardens in 1980.

As far as we know, villagers ascribed the 1979 drought to natural causes, rather than to the intervention of man. They do, however, believe that weather sorcerers exist in Kilenge, and some men claim such powers. The last major weather sorcerer died over a decade ago, and the remaining sorcerers lack his credibility: they may bring an occasional storm to ruin another village's ceremony, but villagers don't believe them capable of wholesale modifications of weather patterns.

Ongaians believe that Tave, who died in 1973, could perform massive manipulations of the elements, and that his dying act brought THE THREAT OF a major famine to the region. He was perhaps the first, and undoubtedly the last, of the Kilenge totalitarian leaders. In his person he centralized a variety of administration-introduced and traditional leadership roles (his career is

detailed in Zelenietz 1980), so that he was the absolute ruler of Kilenge and environs for twenty five years. In addition to his roles as Paramount Luluai (area headman, appointed by the Australian colonial administration), and premier economic entrepreneur, Tave also made himself controller of all sorcerers in the Kilenge Lolo area. Tave so monopolized power in Kilenge that he came to define the limits of deviance. When he decreed that sorcery would not continue it stopped. When he later decided it might prove useful to employ sorcery against his enemies, he organized the sorcerers whose activity he had formerly suppressed (Zelenietz 1981b). When a number of traditional hereditary leaders died during the 1960s, Tave allowed villagers to blame or credit him with having arranged the necessary sorcery. People attribute Tave's own death, too, to sorcery: the perpetrator's identity depends on the informant, and which of Tave's various social outrages he recounts. On his deathbed, Tave reputedly performed his final act of dominance and malevolance toward the people of Ongaia: they say he sorcerized their taro gardens. With Tave dead, and their gardens facing ruination, the Ongaians had to hire distant sorcerers to undo the spell. As they broke the spell over their gardens, so too they broke the spell that seemed to bind them to their now-dead leader.

Tave's career, in many ways, violated Kilenge expectations of how a leader should behave. In retrospect, we might allege that

Tave deviated from accepted norms operating in the villages. This would be a dangerously inaccurate assessment of the situation, however, particularly as it does not accord with Kilenge perceptions. True, Tave did things differently: he relied on his own physical force, organized the sorcerers, exposed sacred masks to public view , allegedly assassinated his rivals, and more or less usurped the title of traditional leader. But the Kilenge do not evaluate his behaviour from any absolute, timeless set of standards.

The quarter century in which Tave dominated Kilenge affairs (c.1945-1970) was a tumultuous one, a time of great change precipitated by the Second World War. In the face of uncertainty caused by rapidly changing political and economic realities, Tave led the Kilenge, gave them a sense of direction and purpose. The certainty he provided in daily life more than offset his excesses, as long as his policies bore fruit and allowed the Kilenge some measure of control over their own destiny. Although many of his actions threatened some aspects of the social order, people in the villages believed that his actions would preserve the *general* social order, and see it through a time of change. Thus they tolerated, perhaps even venerated him. And thus his final action, the sorcerizing of the taro gardens, was totally inexplicable to those who knew him. He had nothing to gain by the action, other than the exercize of sheer spite against increasingly truculent villagers. Blighting the gardens benefitted no one:

such wanton destruction served only to endanger the survival of the Kilenge people, to put them at the mercy of external forces (those capable of removing the sorcery, and those capable of providing food). Tave, who had laboured so long and so hard to preserve the Kilenge social order in times of change, as his last stroke sought to threaten that very social order. By attacking the gardens, the supply of food, the dying Tave attacked Kilenge society itself. On his deathbed, Tave became, for the Kilenge, a true deviant.

Tave, Ongaians said, used a fair amount of sorcery during his career as paramount Luluai in Kilenge. We have indicated that they did not regard all of this sorcery as deviant: some, in fact, was quite socially acceptable.

The relationship of sorcery and deviance has received extensive anthropological treatment. The discussion has not been phrased explicitly in terms of deviance; rather, the issue discussed as been the "legitimacy" of sorcery. There are those who hold that sorcery is, of necessity, "illegitimate" (e.g.,Marwick 1967); that is, when evaluated from the emic perspective, sorcery violates conventional norms and hence is deviant. Elsewhere, Zelenietz (1981a:104) and Lindenbaum (1981) addressed this issue in an attempt to show that the people involved in systems of beliefs and practices of sorcery contextually define the legitimacy (acceptability) or illegitimacy (deviance) of sorcery. It is dangerous

to overgeneralize, but the rule of thumb seems to be that when a practitioner directs sorcery outside of his group, chances are that his own group will see sorcery as legitimate, a socially acceptable way of pursuing conflict between groups. When a practitioner turns sorcery against members of his or her own group, then the sorcery threatens members of the group itself and their evaluations of the practitioner's actions are likely to change. Sorcery, in such contexts, becomes illegitimate, or deviant. It threatens the social order.

When Tave attacked the taro gardens of his own villagers he undermined their social order. The same action against an enemy group might have made him a hero, but against his followers it made him a deviant.

The political fragmentation which followed Tave's death resulted in a leadership vacuum in Kilenge, the ramifications of which extended even to the gardens. Under Tave, all villagers made their taro gardens in one location; now there are taro gardens in several locations as villagers gather around the men vying for leadership. In 1981, there were two major taro garden locations. The older men followed the senior hereditary leader's advice to make their gardens in one place, while younger household heads travelled further up the mountain to a spot they dubbed "Top Town".

The distance to Top Town apparently made the gardeners reluctant to go up as often as they should: weeks and months after they planted the lower taro gardens, the village committeeman still urged the Top Towners to finish planting their new gardens. As the gardens developed, it readily became apparent that something was wrong. The newly planted taro grew slowly. As 1981 drew to a close, people discussed the issue with some urgency, testing several explanations for the failure. One popular theory held that the gardens were too high up the mountain. At the altitude of Top Town, the young taro plants choked under a heavy ash fall from Langila. Other people argued that the soil at Top Town was incapable of supporting taro growth. A couple of men in their mid-fifties said that they remembered their fathers trying to plant there before the war, before Langila erupted. Even those earlier gardens failed, and so the older men left the ground in fallow. They condemned the younger men for ignoring advice: implicit was the suggestion that intransigence got them in trouble. The penalty for deviance, in this case not heeding the advice of senior producers, can be famine.

As 1982 began, a rumour emerged that radically revised people's estimation of the situation: the gardens failed not because of a failure in nature, but because of the intervention of man. At first, these suspicions surfaced in village conversations, as people debated the merits and drawbacks of sorcery explanations for what happened in the Top Town gardens. Within a matter of days

the Top Town gardeners had convinced themselves, if not the other Ongaians, of the validity of their interpretation; the garden owners believed that someone, somewhere, wanted to ruin their livelihood. They did not, however, know who was responsible for the sorcery. If they had suspicions at this point, they were careful not to voice them. Confronted with a nameless, faceless sorcerer, the garden owners began to appeal to their fellow villagers for relief.

Several Ongaian men reputedly knew the magic to remove sorcery spells from a garden. The oldest man in the village, Panga, learned garden sorcery years ago, but he was too old and feeble to venture up to Top Town. Tangis, a man approaching sixty, was the next choice. His father had been a powerful garden sorcerer, but Tangis denied knowledge of the spells. Besides, Tangis was ill, not having been up to the gardens for over a year. The search for a man capable of remedying the garden problem continued. The concerned gardeners approached men whose close ties to either Tave or Panga suggested that they might have acquired the appropriate knowledge, but despite assurances that if they possessed the knowledge they would surely help, all the men denied knowing what to do. Why? As one of them privately explained to us, even if he had had the knowledge to cure the taro gardens (which he didn't, he said) he could never admit to it and save the Top Town gardens. Implicit in the knowledge of curing taro sorcery, he continued, is the knowledge of <u>causing</u>

taro sorcery. To announce that one would remedy the situation would be to admit that one might have caused the situation. This, he concluded, was why he had never learned to counter-act taro sorcery in the first place: if people knew that he could do that, they would always suspect him of being the sorcerer who ruined the gardens.

As Zelenietz notes (1981b: 109), sorcerers may gain materially through their activities, but they lose socially as villagers exclude them from daily affairs. A man who acknowledges his power as a sorcerer sets himself apart from his fellows. The man who denies any ability to sorcerize, even though he may believe himself to have such power, remains part of the community. In sorcery it is in part the act of self-definition that makes a deviant. Sorcery is not inherently good or evil; it may be either depending on the intent. But sorcery should not be acknowledged: he who admits to being a sorcerer sees himself as a deviant.

Towards the end of January 1982, tensions within the village increased as tactics to handle the problem changed. Pleas for help diminished and accusations against specific individuals bubbled to the surface. The first accusation left us rather confused: it was made by a woman, against a woman. The accused, Ako, was a widow in her fifties, and we were puzzled as to why the finger of suspicion would point her way. Until that time, all

instances of sorcery accusation that we recorded had been directed against <u>men</u>: although women could, in theory, sorcerize their husbands, all suspected sorcery homicides and threats to group survival that had come to our attention were FROM men. Ako was not a decrepit crone, a person marginal to society. On the contrary, she was an active gardener, in apparent good health, always described as a strong woman. She vehemently denied the allegations, and countered that she had no reason to want to damage the gardens.

A few days later, new accusations began to clarify the picture. Once again a woman accused a woman. The accuser remained the same: Bima, the wife of the village constable. Just before she left the village for a visit to Rabaul, she accused Ako's younger sister, Vira, of the sorcery. Both Ako and Vira denied knowing taro sorcery, and maintained they had never even been up to Top Town.

At this point we recognized that the sorcery accusation REFLECTED a power struggle between men: on the one hand, the village constable's wife stands as accuser; on the other hand the traditional village leader's wife stands as accused. The two accused women are daughters of the old man Panga who knows garden sorcery, hence the accusations against them may seem reasonable. In fact, though, the attempt to make them appear deviant serves the political purpose of undermining the leadership of the one woman's husband. If

villagers accepted that she acted in a manner designed to obstruct production, then they could not possibly continue to support her husband's leadership.

Tempted as we were to stay on to see the management and resolution of the conflict, our ship arrived and we reluctantly departed. Letters from Ongaians in the subsequent months and years indicated nothing of the sudden, intense concern over the taro gardens in 1981 and 1982. The matter appears to have subsided as rapidly as it arose. Such things happen in village life: people do not dwell forever on the events of yesterday. Conflicts that arise dominate people's lives for a short time, and then quietly melt away as shifting personal alliances change with the generation of new issues. Old quarrels are forgotten for months and years, to arise again when people feel they have something to gain from resurrecting the past, and when the constellations of power regroup in their old patterns. The taro accusations are forgotten for now: five or ten years hence, they very well may fuel another fire. Our previous research has shown us that to inquire about old matters is to risk raising them again as an issue. The role of the anthropologist is to observe events, not to create events to observe. Perhaps, in the future, we may discover what happened after our departure. For the time being though, our questions must remain unanswered. We do know though, that 1982 was a difficult year for the Kilenge. The Top Town gardens never recovered, Langila dropped a great deal of ash, and the government had to provide relief supplies to prevent famine.

With government and mission ready to intervene to prevent starvation and misery, garden failure today may be tolerable. People can buy rice when taro dies. Sorcery directed against gardens, against the food on which people subsist, is no longer the absolute threat against group integrity and survival that it once was. By producing cash crops, by calling for government assistance, villagers can divert the spectre of famine and group destruction. Still, it has not been long since garden failure could drive Ongaians to the very precipice of destruction, when they would have to mobilize all their talents, resources and trading links simply to stay alive. Anyone deemed guilty of causing such a situation, past or present, anyone who would put the very existence of society in jeopardy, is beyond the Pale. Such use of sorcery passes from the acceptable to the unthinkable. In the minds of fellow villagers, such an individual is well and truly deviant.

Barren Wombs

As the Kilenge recognize that the production of their gardens is vital to their livelihood so too they see that the reproduction of their members is essential to their society's persistence. Society cannot survive if either production or reproduction fail. Activities which limit the success of production are deviant; actions which unduly restrict reproduction are similarly labelled.

Traditionally the Kilenge restricted reproduction in a number of ways, and considered some limitation on the number of children reasonable. They do not, however, accept that women could be naturally barren; to be barren is to have chosen not to have children; to be barren is to be deviant.

In many societies, sexual behaviour is the focus of considerable concern about deviance. While the Kilenge do not encourage premarital sexuality or adultery, they see it as human weakness to fall prey to it. Adultery is a common cause for dispute, but it is not defined as generally deviant. While adultery may temporarily upset the social order among villagers, it does not have a lasting impact on the community.

Barrenness, though, is taken very seriously. For the people of Ongaia, not having children is as much a matter of choice as having children is in North American society. The Kilenge have no notion of natural barrenness or sterility. Every man is capable of siring children; every woman is capable of bearing children. Any woman who does not have children has done so out of choice.

Just as sorcery is always evaluated in some social context, so too is the practice of contraception. As the Kilenge label sorcery and sorcerers as acceptable or deviant, so too

do they label women who practice contraception acceptable or deviant. Women who have had several children and choose to have no more are, from the Kilenge perspective, normal: people understand the problems of having too many children to care for, of having too many sons for whom one must provide bride-price. The burdens of parenthood are clear. What people do not understand, what they label as deviant, are women who choose to have no children at all.

In precontact times, women limited their family size through contraceptives, abstinence,abortion and infanticide. Today they are Catholics, and they do not practice birth control. While, in theory, all hospitals in Papua New Guinea should provide family planning information and materials, in practice the Kilenge hospital is run by the Catholic mission and does not provide such services. Local women who want to control their fertility must have an outside supplier of modern contraceptives or attempt to find traditional contraceptives: they chew a tree bark which purportedly has contraceptive properties (although we have not been able to confirm its identity).

Traditionally, in the days before steel axes and Western health care, Kilenge couples limited themselves to two or three children. Given the technology of the time,this was the number of children a man could reasonably expect to support by gardening. A man

who had more children faced the prospect of having too many mouths to feed. People might call him an animal, unable to control his impulse to rut. Unrestrained sexuality, evidenced by a large family, was deviant, and could result in a man's self-destruction as he gave up his vital essence with his semen.

The new morality which accompanied Christianization undermined the image of acceptable family size and practices. Large families have become the norm, and while men should still restrain their sexuality, their definition of acceptable levels of sexual interaction has changed dramatically. Having four or more children no longer makes a man a deviant; it makes him average.

While the one extreme of family size has altered markedly with contact, the other extreme has remained totally unacceptable. Women who have no children could not find acceptance in traditional society, and they cannot in modern society.

In examining our data on married women in Ongaia village in 1977 and in 1981, we find that there are a number of women with no surviving children (see Table 1).

Table 1. (Ongaia Village) Number of Surviving Children at Time of Census

	Age of Mother at Census (Approximate)					
	Under 30	30-39	40-49	50-59	60 & over	TOTAL
none	1	0	0	3	2	6
1-2	1	1	1	2	1	6
3-4	4	7	1	0	3	15
5-6	0	3	0	1	3	7
7-8	0	0	10	6	0	16
9+	0	1	0	1	1	3
TOTAL	6	12	12	13	10	53

Of the six women with no children, five are over 50 years of age; the one other was a pregnant newlywed in her early twenties. It seems unlikely that this older generation would naturally experience such a high rate of barrenness: five of the twenty-three surviving women over 50 years have no children. The women with low fertility (1-2 children) are evenly spread across the generations. The older barren women are accused by villagers of having purposely prevented themselves from having children, even though they deny it.

Taking a traditional contraceptive is a kind of sorcery. A sorcerer puts a spell on the bark and gives it to the woman to chew. It is an act fraught with danger. Too much of the bark can result in permanent sterility; a small amount can induce temporary contraception. For women with large families, a permanent closing of the womb may be welcome, but not so for young girls.

Judging from the high fertility of Kilenge women, little bark finds its way to the village today. Because information about chewing bark was so hard to get, much of the information we have is fragmentary and contradictory. Some informants maintained that the proper knowledge was not available in the Kilenge villages: only the Lolo knew the ins and outs of the bark. A few people contended that an older generation of women knew the spells: after they treated their daughters, they died, leaving their daughters incapable of having children. This explanation accounted for those women over 50 who remained childless. Other villagers suggested that some Kilenge men know the secrets of the bark, but the men named invariably deny it. Male possession of these secrets poses a problem for women: to limit or control their own reproductive capabilities, they must go to men, the very people who are most interested in exploiting that capability. Male-controlled the contraceptives may be, but it is invariably the woman who is blamed, by the men, for having no reproductive success. Since the notion of male sterility does not exist, in a childless marriage it is always the woman who is blamed for having closed her womb to its natural function. Such denial of nature's true course, such stubborn refusal to do what she should be doing, is beyond the norms of socially acceptable behaviour. A woman who has borne many children and then chooses to close her womb is understandable, acceptable. A childless woman who refuses to reproduce is beyond understanding: she is deviant.

In times past, such women challenged the integrity of the group: by denying the group the fruits of her reproductive capabilities, she posed a threat to the group. Being childless, she was not fulfilling one of her major roles, to maintain and increase the size of the group, and hence insure the viability of the group in a potentially hostile environment. The days of warfare are past, and for decades the mission and the government have provided health services. Although the danger of group extinction because a handful of women fail to reproduce is no longer present, the attitudes derived from such danger lingers on. To be childless, even today, is to be different, odd, even deviant.

The fact that there is a clutch of barren senior women in the village draws attention to the social problem. Those women, defined as deviant, suffer the consequences of their morally reprehensible actions: they grow old with no children to care for them. Younger women bless their own fortune in having offspring who will care for them as they grow older, but such solace is denied the deviant. She is seen as the author of her own misfortune and extended little sympathy.

Unless a childless person or couple adopts children from a fecund couple, there will be no one to help with the gardens, no one to help build a house. Kilenge ideology stresses the importance of the sibling relationship, even through adulthood.

In practice, however, older people rely on their children, and their children's children, for help and support far more than they rely on their siblings. The old attitudes towards childlessness, supported by the practicalities of daily living, have been reinforced by the doctrine of the Catholic Church, a doctrine which encourages reproduction and strongly discourages contraception.

Ongaians may label childless women and garden sorcerers as deviants, and see those two kinds of people as representing similar threats to the continuation and survival of society, but there the similarity ends. Childless women do not develop patterns of secondary deviance. They do not accept the label: they lead a relatively normal life. Instead of bearing children to create a family and help with work, they must adopt them.

In traditional times barrenness provided grounds for divorce, but now men must accept their lack of children since their religion does not recognize divorce. Villagers do not exclude barren women from daily activities, but the deviants' aberrant status can never be totally forgotten nor forgiven; it is an Achille's heel inevitably injured in the course of disputes or disagreements.

A man accused of sorcery which adversely affects the production of his group may respond to such accusations by becoming precisely what people label him. He may have been accused in the first place because his behaviour was not quite right, a bit different than normal. In any case, after one or more accusations, after feeling the bite of social isolation, he may display behaviour that accords with the image that people have of him. He may move away from the community, and live physically as well as socially isolated from his peers. He may make ambiguous statements, or capitalize on people's uncertainty. By fulfilling people's expectations, by exploiting the situation, he becomes a secondary deviant and reinforces people's perceptions of him. He becomes, in short, the prototypical deviant for the Kilenge.

Gender and Deviance

We have shown that women deny having taken the actions defined as deviant in Kilenge society. The barren woman sees herself as falsely accused of desiring sterility; her fellow villagers believe that she willfully limited her reproduction, to the detriment of the community as well as herself. For a woman the label 'deviant' could mean only exclusion, should she accept it, so she does not. The indigenous power structure denies women ultimate influence. For a man, though, deviance finds a place in the struggle for power.

Power can come from several sources: genealogical rank (seniority), traditional knowledge, skills, office-holding and sorcery. Men who lack some of the traditional requisites for leadership may compensate by developing a reputation as sorcerers.

Sorcery is not necessarily deviant. Lindenbaum (1981) distinguishes between exo-sorcery (aimed at a group's enemies) and endo-sorcery (aimed within the group). Sorcery which reduces enemies to ruin furthers community welfare and can indeed increase the sorcerer's prestige. Sorcery which undermines the group's integrity and productive ability, however, is deviant. Men who use sorcery in the pursuit of power run a fine line between leadership and deviance. Those perceived to have other requisites for power find their use (or implied use) of sorcery condoned; those seen as usurpers find themselves accused of the calamities which befall the community. Men accused of deviance have a choice which women don't: men can deny their guilt and argue that they are falsely accused, or they can accept the label and believe that deviance offers power. In some sense the admitted deviants are powerful: they definitely instill fear in their fellows. They can never be leaders, however, since they command little true respect. Hence their power is limited, and they influence only a small band of followers.

Human Failings or Deviance?

The Kilenge have many rules to follow. They have traditional practices, Catholic religious values, and government regulations to accommodate. Inevitably, people break rules, circumvent regulations, and flaunt values. Human failings are acknowledged, but only become deviant when they threaten the community. Adultery may be wrong and the parties to it may be punished, but the adulterers do not find themselves accused of deviance. Young people may criticize old customs and ignore the requests of their seniors, but their dissent is not deviance. There are limits which people can transgress without lasting stigma. As we have attempted to illustrate in this paper, when human activities threaten the survival of the community in any way, then those activities become deviant. It is within a forum convened to resolve a pressing concern to the community that accusations of deviance arise. The consensus reached within such public contexts allows the community to use the label "deviant" to attempt to control the behaviour of its members. Labelling theory, then, provides a useful perspective for the analysis of cases like those of the Kilenge. By understanding the process through which deviance is generated, we can come to understand that defining deviance can make deviance, and thus deviance can be changed.

Kilenge definitions of deviance do not come engraved in stone. As the social order changes, so do the reasons for calling people deviants. In 1977 when we visited Kilenge, business group activities posed a threat to traditional leaders; controlled by young men recently returned from town, or older men who did not participate in traditional exchange and ceremonial activity, the groups rivalled traditional groups for social and economic power. Village leaders urged their followers to consider the business groups deviant. By 1981, however, the traditional leaders played a pivotal role in business group management. Kinship groups had subsumed business groups, so the groups now supported community integrity and the young upstarts were put in their places (SEE GRANT, SAITO AND ZELENIETZ N.D.)

Newly perceived threats will engender new classifications of deviance unless and until the community can manage them. As Kilenge society weathers the storms of change, so will its notions of deviance alter as various behaviours prove to be beneficial or detrimental to community survival.

Note

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Addendum

Grant, J., H. Saito and M. Zelenietz n.d.
Development and business in a Papua New Guinea community. Submitted to Economic Development and Cultural Change.