"Violence is not part of our culture:" Ruminations about violence, culture and gender

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Abstract

This paper is an excavation of some of the major theories about violence, gender, and culture: mostly from anthropology but also philosophy, sociology and feminist studies. Many are still taught in universities; some have moved into development circles and/or entered the mainstream; some undergird the logic for commonly-used phrases; and all provide the context in which more recent theories have emerged. Highlighting assumptions within them opens up the possibility of exploring why communities, development experts, and academics often seem to be talking past each other; in this case with regard to the relationship between culture and gender violence. An excavation like this allows for an assessment of the stakes involved when using the language from particular theories.

Keywords: violence, Taukei, culture, gender, development agencies

Introduction

For about a decade, iTaukei[2] chiefs supporting the elimination of violence against women and children in Fiji have maintained that violence is not part of their culture (e.g. Silaitoga, 2016).[3] The statements of men in public positions like these are immensely important for changing attitudes and behaviours that once condoned or implicitly supported gender violence. As inspiring as such statements are, however, they also indicate quite different conceptions of violence, culture, and gender from other views circulating in the development and academic worlds. In one instance for example, gender activists have argued that Fiji needs to stop maintaining a "rape culture" (e.g. Kanwal, 2015): a statement that suggests rape is cultural and that it can be stopped.

What does it mean, then, to say that a specific type of violence is or is not part of culture? Is violence instinctual and natural or does it reveal certain kinds of social and cultural expectations? What does an understanding of culture in its myriad forms reveal about experiences of violence and gender-based violence in particular? Can gender-based violence be eliminated as United Nations organisations propose (e.g. UNWomen, 2016)? And last, can analyses of these kinds of questions initiate strategies that will make a meaningful difference in changing attitudes?

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[2] The Fiji government shifted the term 'Fijian' from a marker of ethnic identity to national identity in 2010. As a result, the indigenous people are now known as 'iTaukei' (Newland, 2013).

[3] The idea that violence is not part of culture has also been maintained by at least one police officer in Papua New Guinea (UNWomen, 2015). While it is unclear where this phrase originated, its circulation in the development world by organisations like UNWomen indicates that it is becoming a useful catch-phrase.

taught in universities; some have moved into development circles and/or entered the mainstream; some undergird the logic for commonly-used phrases; and all provide the context in which more recent theories have emerged. Highlighting assumptions within them opens up the possibility of exploring why communities, development experts, and academics often seem to be talking past each other; in this case with regard to the relationship between culture and gender violence. An excavation like this allows for an assessment of the stakes involved when using the language from particular theories.

Theorising violence

The most popular explanation for violence is that it is natural or instinctual to human beings, although this kind of theory usually represents others as more violent than ourselves. Darwin's contemporary, Lewis Henry Morgan, was immensely influential with his theory of social evolution, which argued societies move through history in a unilineal progression from savagery through barbarism to civilisation (Accomazzo, 2012). His ideas became linked with existing notions about racial hierarchies in which indigenous people were commonly viewed as either Noble Savages living in an idyllic Eden or as primitive peoples whose violence was instinctual and impulsive. Pacific Islanders, for instance, were ranked largely on the basis of skin colour: the darker their skin, the more inclined to savagery they were perceived to be (Edmond, 1997; Thomas, 1992). Such views ignored the violence in white European and American societies, among others, and justified the colonisation of indigenous peoples across the world.

From the middle of the twentieth century, sociobiologists have focused their attention on the gene, arguing that natural selection has shaped human beings' genes to respond aggressively and automatically in particular settings (Whipps, 2009). Here, violence is the result of an instinctual and instinctive aggression, which is viewed positively because competition among men is assumed to be responsible for the survival of the human species (see, for example, Accomazzo, 2012). Aggression and gender are inextricably linked, with men being represented as naturally aggressive in ways that women are not.   Male aggression is constructed as an impulse that cannot be changed, let alone eliminated. It has to be controlled – but even then it threatens to overwhelm (e.g. Knox Dentan, 1991).

Two highly controversial anthropologists who used social evolutionary ideas were Derek Freeman, ethnographer of Samoa and critic of Margaret Mead, and Napoleon Chagnon, the ethnographer of the Yanomamö in Brazil. In arguing against representations of indigenous peoples as Noble Savages, both anthropologists represented the societies they studied as extremely violent. In doing so, they affirmed the idea that indigenous people were closer to nature than they were, to the extent that Chagnon claimed the Yanomamö are "the best approximation that we have in the ethnographic world today of peoples living in a…social system – that approximates as closely as you can find human beings today living in a condition – a state of nature, as it were – that is quite comparable to what must have happened during most of human history" (Chagnon, Pinker, Wrangham, Dennett and Haig, nd), a statement that effectively places the Yanomamö outside both culture and history.

Both anthropologists also affirmed the notion that, just as men in such societies were violent to neighbouring clans, so they were (naturally) violent towards women or – in the very least – successful with women because of their own violent natures.[4] While Freeman observed the high value of virginity in Samoa and surmised the equally high value Samoan men shared about taking

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[4] Micaela di Leonardo links Freeman more broadly with the neo-conservatism of the Reagan era and argues that Freeman's text offered the press 'proof' of "the inevitability of capitalist, male, white, Western, heterosexual dominance of the world" (Leonardo, 2003).

it away (Freeman, 1983), Chagnon used the Yanomamö to suggest that the more violent the men were, the more successful they would be in attaining wives, having offspring, and continuing their clans (Malik, 2000). However, the recurring assumption in their work that violence naturally and appropriately underpins gender relations provokes the question as to the extent that Freeman and Chagnon's evidence supported their ideas or whether they were simply unable to see any other possibility.

In 1991, Bruce Knauft published an analysis of violence that compared the sociality of several types of apes and monkeys with small-scale and middle-range human societies. Countering sociobiologists who extrapolate their conclusions about human behaviour directly from the behaviour of one group of apes or monkeys, Knauft showed the diversity in the behaviour of both apes and humans (Knauft, 1991). Yet, the paper also reflected some of the typical problems of sociobiological arguments, including a tendency to reduce marriage to the needs of male biology; give a unilineal account of social evolution from simple to complex societies; and overlook the history of colonisation, state militarisation and war (cf. Abler, 1991).[5] In spite of these shortcomings, however, Knauft's approach undermines the idea that violence is natural because he argues that, while violence is sporadic in egalitarian cultures, masculinity is shaped to encourage competitiveness and violence in hierarchical societies such as chiefdoms (Knauft, 1991). In effect, it is a by-product of culture.

The idea that the type of social organisation affects violence holds some equivalence with Marxist conceptions of violence. While Karl Marx argued that the capitalist system entailed structural violence that could only be corrected through class revolution (Marx and Engels, 1979), both Walter Benjamin and Louis Althusser theorised violence is not outside culture but perpetrated by the ruling class through the law, the police and the military quite deliberately in order to maintain a specific hierarchy and the ruling class's place in it.[6] If Marxist thought provided the possibility for critiquing state violence, it also created a space for rethinking colonialism. At least since Franz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks*, the violence of conquest and colonisation has become central to many studies in Africa, the Americas, Australia, the Middle East, Asia and the Pacific. Often the explorers and conquerors claimed that their violence was legitimate, sporadic, accidental or inconsequential, but equally often an analysis of the records shows something quite different. Rod Edmond refers to the violence between Cook's crew and Hawaiians, and between gold prospectors and the Huli of the New Guinea highlands, when he observes that: "Violence in colonial settings is never simply an unfortunate accident or a necessary means of self-defence, a mere blot on the landscape. It is systemic; integral to the process of contact and settlement" (Edmond, 1997: 57).

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[5] Although I cannot expand on all of the arguments here, the assumptions about marriage in this paper are still commonly reiterated and therefore need to be addressed, however briefly. There is now a vast literature in anthropology that demonstrates there is much more at stake to marriage than simply giving men sexual access to women, including: the shaping of expectations with regard to romantic love and/or companionship; the organisation of the reproduction of children; the reproduction of social and cultural knowledge including language and status in relation to others; the organisation of gender roles, household hierarchies, and the division of labour; the implementation of alliances; the transmission of property, kinship rights and obligations; and the fact that marriage is a focal point for religious, state, and international regulation (for a good overview, see Moore (1991)). The literature shows that while more often than not marriage is used to serve patriarchal interests by providing (some) men with access to women's bodies, it is always within socially and culturally defined rules, values and obligations which are not reducible to any simple formulation of male sexual desire.

[6] Althusser murdered his wife and then wrote a book about it, writing that he was just a proxy: his wife, Helene, had allegedly threatened to kill herself anyway. On reviewing his work, Gilbert Adair added that she was also "patently something of a virago and a trial to his colleagues" (Adair, 1992), in effect blaming the victim. Althusser's violence and critics' treatment of it illustrates the way in which gender-based violence can be compartmentalised, rationalised, and normalised, even by those who should know better.

In this way, Marxist and post-colonial theorists argue that violence is political, based in social systems rather than instinct. State and colonial violence – or the threat of it – is a strategy through which elites can maintain their authority. It is legitimised and normalised under the name, 'law and order' to the extent that is only called 'violence' or, worse, an act of terror, if it lacks legitimacy (Strathern et al., 2006: 5-7). People subjected to violence, whether state sanctioned or not, undergo trauma which is then communicated through their communities. This trauma becomes part of their imaginary, a world of socially circulating ideas and images that forms the lens through which personal experience is interpreted.

While Marxist and post-colonial theorists have focused on class, race, and otherness, others such as Jeffrey Murer and Thomas Blume, have analysed violence in urban environments. In his research on gang violence, Murer argues that violence is meaningful, performed under historical conditions in the process of creating identities. Members of groups use violence as a means of communicating their identity in order to acquire social capital. Violent acts reinforce violent imaginaries which unify groups in opposition to other groups (Murer, 2014). Summarising sociological theories on violence, Blume further points out that violence "is strongly associated with gender" as males commit more violent acts as a result of their socialisation (Blume, 1996: 15). Boys grow up with ideas about what it means to be masculine and differentiate themselves from girls. Blume writes, "Young men's stories revolve around potential if not actual violence, and violent episodes are a necessity if one is to really validate one's masculinity" (Blume, 1996: 15). Men tend to rape women in contexts where "cultural norms favoured violence, women's status was low, and men viewed women primarily as sex objects" (Blume, 1996: 15). In such contexts, violent sexual conquest is valued by men as a cornerstone to their masculinity.

Together, Murer and Blume highlight how young men express ideas, myths, and expectations through violent language and acts in order to command respect from other men and build particular kinds of identity that inform the way that these men act towards women. Such research shows the way that gender is imagined and how that imaginary is sustained and reinforced; how it becomes an assertion of masculinity. Their violence towards women springs from beliefs about what women are in relation to men and these are circulated and reinforced among men. In effect, women are objectified as a type of sexual currency in a way that recalls Levi-Strauss's theory that women are like words between men (Levi-Strauss, 1986), which sits uncomfortably for many women because it reinforces the notion of universal patriarchy.[7]

Until the 1990s, anthropologists and other social scientists rarely problematised violence occurring in families or towards women and children outside families. Yet, since Simone de Beauvoir published *The Second Sex*, feminist scholars have explored social inequities in the workforce, marriage, sexuality, state, and in ideology. Feminist anthropologists further questioned the extent to which hierarchies in the family are natural and whether gender roles were a result of women's bodies being closer to nature than men's, as often assumed at the time (for a good overview, see Moore (1991)). In the 1990s, familial violence and structural violence –

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[7] While Levi-Strauss theorised that women are used as words and gifts between men in marriage exchange, Gayle Rubin showed the interface between Levi-Strauss's delineation of kinship on the one hand and the phallic family of Freud and Lacan (Rubin, 1975). In these theories, culture is always 'phallic': it always supports masculinity at the expense of women's desires (although Rubin suggests these systems are not as infallible as they are represented to be). Women are required to acquiesce to these systems or they lose their rewards (which, in the psychoanalytic world, are represented as male babies and protection). Accepting these systems means accepting the expectation that relationships with other women, including their daughters, will be hostile. As such, women inside the system face a threat of violence from other women, but, if they move outside established norms or actively resist them, they will be punished by a withdrawal of male protection and the threat of violence – if not actual violence – from men, whether kin or strangers. Levi-Strauss's theory sustains this kind of patriarchy because his theory ignores any possibility outside of it.

the violence of everyday life – began featuring in life stories and ethnographic accounts, sometimes also turning up difficult truths about women's participation in such systems (e.g. Behar, 1990; Scheper-Hughes, 1992).

Since this period, feminists have also explored violence perpetrated against women and girls in major social and political disruptions, underscoring the way in which gender relations is entangled with – and vulnerable to – changes in religious and political relations. For example, one of the biggest disruptions in the modern era has been the Partition, when boundaries were drawn up between Pakistan (including what is now Bangladesh) and India in 1947 and entire populations were forced to move according to whether they were Hindu or Muslim. While somewhere between 12 and 20 million people were displaced, "one million were killed, and about 75 thousand women were abducted and raped on both sides of the border" (Bacchetta, 2000: 569-570). Paola Bacchetta describes how both Muslim and Hindu women were subjected to "stripping; parading naked; mutilating and disfiguring; tattooing or branding the breasts and genitalia with triumphant slogans; amputating breasts; knifing open the womb; raping, of course; killing foetuses" (Bacchetta, 2000: 571). Women were also killed by their own families to protect the honour of the husbands and fathers, and they suicided with men's approval by taking poison, using swords, throwing themselves into fires, or jumping down wells or off bridges. Bacchetta argues that this violence against women was deemed permissible because "female bodies were equated with notions of home, their respective religious 'communities', nations, and national territories" (Bacchetta, 2000:571). In effect, women's bodies were used to assert religious identities and communicate a multi-faceted anger between communities led by men. The outcomes suggest that the immense social disruption caused by the Partition intensified and, for those affected, in some way seemed to justify, the terrible violence that ensued. Women's bodies were not only signifiers of men's ideas about masculinity, but also about honour, religion and territory.

In the development world, feminist concerns led to the UN General Assembly adopting the Convention of Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1979, but it was not until 1995 that Violence Against Women (VAW) was identified as one of the twelve critical areas for urgent action in the Beijing Platform for Action. Here, VAW was used to refer to "physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women" in both the family or in public life, "perpetrated or condoned by the state", in armed conflict and sexual trafficking, and with regard to contraception, forced abortion, and female infanticide (Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, 1995: 76-77). In this document, violence is construed as socially and politically motivated – even when it occurs in the family. Indeed VAW "is a manifestation of the historically unequal power relations between men and women, which have led to domination over and discrimination against women by men and to the prevention of women's full advancement" (Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, 1995: 77). Further, VAW is supported by traditional cultures and extremism, and exacerbated by absence of educational material; women's lack of access to information, aid or protection; out-of-date laws and a lack of implementation when relevant laws exist. Lastly, the writers note the role of the media and particularly of pornography in provoking VAW (Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, 1995: 77-78). Since it was written the document has been immensely influential in the development community, resulting in widespread programs aiming for the eradication of VAW and, more recently, Gender-Based Violence (GBV).[8]

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[8] Gender-Based Violence (GBV) was intended to be wider in scope than Violence Against Women (VAW) in order to include both male and female victims, whether adult or children. In practice, however, because most familial violence is focused on women and girls, GBV tends to be used in the same way as VAW.

While it has taken a long time for mainstream discourses to accept the idea that there should be some equity between men and women in any given society, the Beijing document articulates troubling questions about the relationship between culture and violence – which are of especial concern for feminist anthropologists. Culture is, after all, central to the traditional anthropological enterprise just as equality or equity[9] with men in all areas of social life is central to feminism; but, in this document, 'traditional culture' is represented alongside extremism as perhaps always and universally anti-woman – and equality is viewed as the only cure. 'Traditional culture' takes the place of biology and instinct, but appears to remain both endemic and resistant to change. It is somehow contained, maintaining its boundaries in the face of incoming influences. Such a conceptualisation of culture needs to be interrogated.

Like 'violence', culture and tradition have complicated histories in popular discourses but their conceptualisation has been axiomatic to anthropology. The discussion below must be schematic due to space considerations, but it gives an indication of the implications that conceptions of culture and tradition have for analyses of violence generally and gender-based violence in particular. It also shows the limitations to the idea that violence can be eliminated.

Theorising culture

The word 'culture' is usually associated with the idea that humans are primarily social beings who learn how to relate to others in communally accepted ways. Anthropological text books usually begin with E.B. Tylor's definition that "Culture…is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, law, morals, customs, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man[10] as a member of society" (Kottak, 2009: 27; Leinkit, 2009: 28). Definitions of culture can also include: traditions, habits, and the fact that it is learned, symbolic, shared, all-encompassing and integrated into systems. Clifford Geertz's theory that culture is a coherent whole comprising symbolic systems anthropologists can interpret through thick description has been influential for nearly fifty years (Geertz, 1973). Due to anthropologists like Margaret Mead and Clifford Geertz, culture tends to be represented in mainstream anthropology and, indeed, in popular discourse as a discrete and neutral whole.[11] Because of this, culture is often used to refer to a homogenous group of people in such a way that it is roughly coterminous with the concept of 'race', which reduces difference to biology. This results in two contradictory but related positions. On the one hand, culture is opposed to essentialist notions of 'nature'/'race'/'biology' in that practices and attitudes are learned rather than instinctual, but, at the same time, the concept maps over the same discursive areas, and its associations of naturalised characteristics and dispositions within defined boundaries – the habitus, perhaps – is popularly attributed to an innate and unchanging heritage.

Although the opposition between nature and culture has been debated in mainstream anthropology at least since the foundation of cultural anthropology in the US, feminist anthropologists in the 1970s and 80s interrogated this opposition precisely because, in gender theory, the stakes were so high. In English, 'nature' and 'culture' are strongly associated with

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[9] The relative merits of the terms 'equality' and 'equity' have been debated extensively and used by feminists and critics in very different ways. Unfortunately, there is not the space to discuss this here.

[10] The term 'Man' is no longer used to describe humanity because it is part of an ideology that makes men the reference for social and cultural life, excluding women and children.

[11] In the USA, the culture concept has been critical in distinguishing cultural anthropology from biological anthropology. In British anthropology, the concept of social structure was more widely used until the 1970s but it also tended to be seen as something whole and fixed. With the emergence of the United States as a world power and Mead and Geertz's popularity across disciplines, 'culture' became part of the vernacular in a way that 'social structure' did not.

female and male respectively and are often assumed to be universal. They represent an ideology which has had damning repercussions for women's legitimacy in the public sphere. However, anthropologists, and particularly feminist anthropologists, showed that all of these terms (culture, nature, femininity, masculinity) and the relationship between them differ substantially from one group of people to another, and, indeed, that they also change through a person's life (e.g. Moore, 1991). Such analyses revealed that culture is not neutral but is the way through which men and women and, sometimes, third genders are organised into different roles and identities. Further, most if not all cultures in most situations normally oppose men and women in order to privilege men over women in formal or public settings, albeit in very different ways.[12] As such, culture is constituted through power relations that separate and legitimate the actions of most men over most women. As a concept, culture is used to describe specific sorts of imaginary imbued with vested interests. Whether lived or whether used as a descriptive concept or theory, culture is inseparable from hierarchy: and gender appears to be foundational. If this is the case, a society where men and women are equal in all aspects appears to be impossible to reach.

For explorations into people's relationship with hierarchies, Michel Foucault's analysis of power has proved critical because it elucidates the way in which power produces particular kinds of subjects through institutions such as military barracks, prisons, hospitals and schools (Foucault, 1980). Likewise, Pierre Bourdieu's concept of habitus is an exploration of how attitudes, ideas, and actions are internalised, normalised and habituated to the extent that they become taken-for-granted dispositions which operate as a microcosm for orthodoxy (Bourdieu, 2010). The habitus is, in the first place, the result of a complex long-term interaction between a community and its past and present elites: created and sustained through submission, compliance, consent or negotiation, contestation, rebellion and revolt. Communities come to embody collective habits and enact them through space and time: whether it is the appropriate time that one enters the market-place or goes to prayer in a certain space; or the style of dress that one considers appropriate for a particular context. Although such habits are produced by the structures of power, they become symbols of order, and, as such, are felt with the full force of communal morality behind them. Gender hierarchies are particularly carefully nurtured and normalised, whether in the separations between men and women at churches and in mosques, in gendered clothing such as the veil or bikinis; or in the assumption of who has authority both inside and outside the household. When the habitus is shared across a community, it can reinforce collective norms and ideals so that they appear to be shared by many generations, consolidated in architecture and the arrangement of communal space. Given that practices tend to produce subjects who think and act in specific ways, the question is whether and how subjects can produce change, what kind of change this might be, and whether gender relations can be effectively transformed.

The deterritorialisation that takes place in times of major disruptions from natural disasters or the outcomes of industry, war, poverty, or migration could be expected to catalyse radical social and cultural change in such a way that it would reconfigure gender relations, but Bacchetta's analysis of gender violence during the Partition discussed previously seems to imply that it has the opposite effect. Arjun Appadurai observes that deterritorialisation can generate enormous pressure on the local rhythms and identities summed up in the word 'culture', which in turn results in cultural reproduction being politicised in the most intimate of spaces, including husband-wife and parent-child relationships. Young men without influence or agency learn to express a machismo influenced by fantasies of gendered violence in B-rate movies. While women juggle work in progressively difficult settings alongside familial expectations, "the honour of women becomes increasingly a surrogate for the identity of embattled communities of males"

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[12] A body of literature shows the way in which women exert influence through 'informal' channels. Unfortunately, there is not the space to discuss this here but see Moore's summary (Moore, 1991).

(Appadurai, 1996: 5). Appadurai's comments suggest that deterritorialisation does not transform gender relations but intensifies men's dependence on women for their own image. Culture here is expressed through a politicised habitus representing male interests imported from the homeland, and violence is used as a threat against women who do not accept their roles. For women, there appears to be no way out. Even in a strictly social world undergoing massive change in social and cultural relationships, there is no room for change in gender relationships but rather an intensification of the same. Gender relations appear to be the last frontier that must be defended at all costs. Radical social change as a result of deterritorialisation does not appear to be the ground for positive change in the quality of gender relationships.

If notions of 'culture' seem resistant to changes in the gender hierarchy, notions of 'tradition' appear to be even more so. Both concepts have compelling associations like a tidal surge, carrying the unstoppable force of the past into the future. However, theorists of 'tradition' have perhaps better tackled the problem of change. Notably, historians Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger coined the concept of 'invented tradition' to mean "a set of practices" that operate like rules through ritual and symbolic means "to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition" (Hobsbawm, 1983: 1). Such sets of practices use established ideas and symbols to legitimate and persuade, and they are repeated until they become part of a person's habitus. Tradition is, in this sense, invented, constructed, imagined[13] – and therefore it is continually changing, even though, on the surface, to speak of tradition is to make the claim that everything is as it always was and will be.

From this perspective, tradition is not a neutral set of disparate practices but a system cobbled together from existing ideas and practices in order to support the ideology of a particular group. Although the meanings of specific practices may be multifaceted or ambiguous and may, indeed, have been used to justify very different courses of action in the past, they are maintained by elites only if they can be given relevance and legitimacy under the existing order or, at the very least, tolerated if they do not interfere with the existing order's undertakings. If deemed suitable, the existing elite will co-opt practices to show that tradition is on their side. Alternatively, practices may be maintained as a form of resistance or to simply keep the ways of the ancestors. In any of these situations, despite the fact that symbols are notorious for their breadth of meanings and emotions, tradition must appear consistent and systemised and, indeed, as the only option. When used this way, tradition is a contemporary claim to wholeness, a way of unifying a community through an expression of shared values that have, in fact, been chosen and redefined by a specific and contemporary regime or group. Indeed, the very idea that culture is constituted by systems indicates that forces in the community have successfully co-opted symbols and practices to their own ends.[14]

If tradition is ideological, what is left of culture? According to Herzfeld, "[c]ulture like religion is a floating signifier the moral status of which is historically contingent and unpredictable" (Herzfeld, 2004: 200). Yet, given its moral status is riven through with the relations of power, it is not completely arbitrary; being differently valued according to what political purpose the term serves and the position of the person using it. In this way, while Fijian chiefs, like the leaders of many indigenous groups, view culture as positive and life-affirming because it represents a

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[13] All of these concepts have different philosophical histories and intersect in interesting ways. Unfortunately, I do not have the space here to examine them.
[14] Geertz viewed ideology as one cultural system among many and argued against culture as ideological on the basis of the multifaceted meanings of symbols and practices (Geertz, 1973). Yet, to ignore the question of how cultural systems come to exist over and above the multifaceted meanings of their elements is to ignore the role of hierarchy in the systemisation of culture. If hierarchy is part of cultural systemisation, it follows that all cultural systems are born in ideology.

unified community under male leadership, documents such as the Beijing Platform for Action cast the notions of 'culture' and 'tradition' as negative specifically in relation to the treatment of women. Yet, given that community leaders are constantly selecting and reframing aspects of 'tradition/culture' that appear to help them respond to contemporary issues, they are not necessarily against women's issues in any simple or static way. Traditional culture as lived is not in any sense pure and bounded culture that has existed frozen in time for millennia, somehow surviving modernisation and globalisation, but rather a re-presentation of older ideas and practices in a new context. There is, then, nothing essential or innate about the idea that the terms 'culture' and 'women' or 'tradition' and 'women' are opposed, even while communities frequently respond to wide-sweeping changes by intensifying their conservatism, and becoming more closed and defensive about a way of life from which they perceive themselves as benefiting. Recent events in the Western world that might serve as examples include the vote for Brexit in the UK and the election of Trump as President in the USA.

On the one hand, theories about universal patriarchy and deterritorialisation appear to suggest that gender relations in societies do not change: that male domination is embedded into the cultural roots of a people. On the other, United Nations organisations aspire to the ideal that violence must be eliminated as if culture can not only change, but that change can be directed by specific strategies aimed at giving women equality to men such as changing the law and enabling women representation in parliament. In the last decade, development agencies have also sought to increase support services and to raise awareness (e.g. Australian Aid (AusAID) Office of Development Effectiveness, 2008). Given the results of programs and initiatives of the last few decades, these programs appear to have improved women's rights and lives in some areas but can also provoke resistance which can surface unpredictably in other spheres of social life – especially where there are men who stand to lose control over women, their children and their resources. The fact that cultures are not homogenous but built from complex relationships involving a habitus full of multi-layered elements means that the ultimate direction of change, while influenced by power relations, is unpredictable. How, then, have theorists tackled culture in relation to gender violence?

Culture, gender violence and development agencies

Theories discussed earlier in the paper show that the intensity of violence increases in contexts where it is considered legitimate – indeed, normal – and where violent images and stories are in circulation, whether through everyday metaphor, stories, or depictions of violence in the media. The types of violence considered legitimate changes through time according to the power relations within a culture and between cultures.[15] For instance, the arrival of missionaries in Fiji brought colonial hierarchies and orders supported by the British navy that signalled the end of local practices such as cannibalism and wife-strangling (Henderson, 1931: 125). In effect, one set of violent practices was outlawed and made illegitimate under the threat of another.

A common thread in recent literature focusing on gender violence in the Pacific is the extent to which gender violence has been normalised.[16] Margaret Jolly, for example, argues that gender

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[15] Given my previous arguments, culture here is used as shorthand to refer to a group with some identification with a shared imaginary; with porous boundaries that change over time; and subject to power relations which elites attempt to corral and which may be resisted or crosscut with the power relations of other cultures.

[16] While cultures across the Pacific may share linguistic, social, and technological similarities, they can also vary enormously, having different kinds of polities and being subjected to different forms of colonialism. For example, while both PNG and Fiji are considered Melanesian, Fiji's central and eastern islands have long been home to chieftainships as opposed to the 'big man' political system in PNG (Sahlins, 1963, although Sahlins placed these systems into a social evolutionary model). Fiji's colonial experience was different from PNG in that the diversity of land and political systems were condensed and legislated into one model at colonisation (France, 1969) and in the

violence in Papua New Guinea "is often seen as a customary, collective practice …and… normal" (Jolly, 2000: 3). Girls and boys among the Barai of West New Britain are socialised to accept violence, especially that of adults over children and of men over women, through the use of origin myths that have also operated to maintain the boundaries of men's sacred spaces with the threat of rape and murder. Jolly adds that the "patriarchal authority of ancestral religion and charismatic Catholicism here combine to legitimate gender violence, 'to make violence look, even feel right'" (Jolly, 2000: 3). She further observes that violence between husbands and wives is obviously gendered as the victims are predominantly women, but is also gendered in that a man's assault on his wife is justified more easily than a woman's assault on her husband (Jolly, 2000: 4). Similarly, Philip Gibbs records that violence among the Gende in Papua New Guinea is seen as a normal and justified way of resolving conflict or expressing anger and "many men see their manhood as dependent on their control over women and they use violence to achieve this" (Gibbs, 2016: 129). Gibbs held a workshop in which men noted that arguments arose over money, discipline of children, the demands of relatives, and occasions when the wife returned home late: all of which were likely to be exacerbated by the stresses of urban living, social clubs, and alcohol. Taking control, even if it was violent, made a man feel good. The men asserted their right to monitor women's behaviour and to punish them. Peer pressure was viewed as critical in reaffirming men's conceptions of their rights and they attempted to shame any man who helped his wife, in order to make him conform (Gibbs, 2016).

In Fiji, Mensah Adinkrah's research into homicides between 1982 and 1992 illustrated the way that violence is associated with masculinity is culture-specific. For the most part, the two major ethnicities in Fiji, iTaukei and Indo-Fijians, continue to live in very different conditions and maintain very different imaginaries.[17] Despite the fact that tensions between the two communities were high during Adinkrah's research period, the highest number of cases of murder in this period involved men killing men in their own communities. Further, cases of men killing women in the Indo-Fijian community were nearly double those of iTaukei community and in most cases the wife was the victim (Adinkrah, 1996: 58-9). Out of ten murder suicides in Adinkrah's ten-year study, only one involved iTaukei (Adinkrah, 1996: 72).[18]

Yet, although culturally specific in expression, violence against women is endemic in both communities in Fiji, with one survey suggesting that two-thirds of women can expect to experience violence from an intimate partner at some time during their lives (Australian Aid (AusAID) Office of Development Effectiveness, 2008). In both communities, strong gender hierarchies have been maintained by vastly different religious codes (Christianity, Hinduism, Islam) and continue to be observable in expected modes of dress, behaviour, and spatially within and outside houses. Urbanisation has added pressure in situations where extended families stay for long periods in order to complete school and find work, and children move from one

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importation of Indian indentured labour. On the other hand, some indigenous peoples of PNG and Fiji have historically shared cultural elements and were subject to similar forms of Christianisation and European and Australian colonial systems. Therefore, comparison is immensely complex and the above material only sketches a few general trends in attitudes and practices.

[17] Most iTaukei continue to live in villages headed by chiefs, although some live in squatter settlements and some live independently in urban areas. Some Indo-Fijians owning or working in business live in urban areas, but, until around the year 2000, most Indo-Fijians were tenant farmers. However, mass lease expiries led to mass-evictions and many Indo-Fijians emigrated to Australia, New Zealand, the United States, and Canada.

[18] Adinkrah also suggests cultural difference is reflected in the choice of weapons. Knives tend to be associated with Indo-Fijians, the majority of whom worked on the cane-fields before 2000 and used cane-knives on a daily basis. By contrast, iTaukei men view the use of knives as cowardly and Indo-Fijian men as effete (Adinkrah, 1996: 68-70). Cultural values around weapons are reflected in the homicide statistics, although they do not fully determine how men from the two communities actually use them. From 1982 to 1992, 40% of Indo-Fijian homicide resulted from stabbing, 23% beating and 15% arson or burning; while 65% of iTaukei homicides resulted from beatings and 16% from stabbing (Adinkrah, 1996: 68).

household to another. Both iTaukei and Indo-Fijian women complain about possessive husbands who are always checking on them and punishing them if they are not where they were supposed to be. It is not uncommon for husbands to shut down women's businesses (Newland and Boodoosingh, 2016). Yaqona/kava consumption in both urban and rural areas, increasingly in combination with alcohol, is also a factor not only because of substance abuse but also because of the time these drinking circles take away from time spent with the family (Newland, 2008).

Yet, it is not simply 'traditional culture' at work here. At the national level, the repercussions of successive coups have had a deep impact in Suva, the capital city, sometimes with reverberations throughout Fiji. Men from the military, which is constituted almost completely by iTaukei men who grew up in the villages and who gained their experience from peace-keeping in the Middle East, have entrenched themselves in government. They, along with rugby teams, hotels and cultural centres endorse and actively promote an imaginary that reflects selective aspects of iTaukei tradition: in particular, the image of the spear-wielding warrior. Further, masculinist ideals about men's relationships with each other and with women are reinforced by international images and experiences: whether the expectations of tourists and rugby fans to international military operations, conservative religious connections, and violent images of gender relations on electronic media. Perhaps most concerning is the use of pornography downloaded on to mobile phones, even by young boys who appeared to be influenced into thinking that rape was a part of normal gender relations (Newland 2016).

In this way, multiple networks of international relationships are producing and reproducing images that influence local expectations, sometimes in pernicious ways, with regard to how gender relations should be construed. The idea that 'traditional culture' is at the base of patriarchy is too simple a reading of the way that contemporary gender hierarchies operate to reinforce each other. Nor does it acknowledge that changes in cultures do not necessarily occur in a direction that benefits women and children. This becomes clear when dealing with gender equality and gender violence.

In line with the Beijing Platform for Action, the ratification of the Convention of Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in Fiji in 1995 and its subsequent five reports have led to a focus on a review and enactment of laws aiming towards women's equality with men. Regional aid organisations have provided non-government organisations (NGOs) with significant funding to advance women's equality in the workforce and in the police and court systems. However, there is little indication that it has reduced the occurrence of gender violence in the home.

In PNG, Richard Eves and Joanne Crawford argue that the relationship between gender violence and women's economic empowerment is ambiguous. While economically autonomous women have greater power to bargain at home and to focus household expenditure on food and children's education, they also have a greater workload. At the same time, men are likely to assert their control over them, perceiving their wife's economic independence as a threat to their masculinity (Eves and Crawford, 2014), which suggests that programs aiming only for equality are not enough. Men's conceptions about masculinity and peer groups, particularly with regard to control over women, need to be tackled at the same time.

Academics working in development, such as Sally Engel Merry, have suggested that local traditions are either disappearing or have been reconfigured in order to better cater for women's needs (Merry, 2004). My own research suggested the opposite, especially with regard to the bulubulu, a ritual of atonement often used in iTaukei villages. Briefly, iTaukei women's short-

term escape route from their husbands' violence is to return to their parents' or older brothers' houses. The husband, accompanied by his clan, must then take gifts – sometimes as little as a packet of cigarettes or some kerosene – to the household and negotiate with the father or brother. However, it is not adequate for dealing with gender violence because it is not concerned with addressing the victim's needs but is, rather, focused on ensuring that men's relationships with each other remain harmonious (Newland, 2016). Therefore, although traditions change with every enactment of them, they are not likely to change organically in a direction that is going to aid a transformation in gender identities and relationships. Further, the bulubulu is far from disappearing as its basis is repeated throughout iTaukei ritual life.[19]

Clearly, gender violence has complex causes and is reinforced through peer groups and also through a constant stream of international influences. Since the 1990s, the government and non-government organisations (NGOs) in Fiji have promoted gender equality in numerous programs, introduced laws to punish perpetrators of domestic violence, and undertaken numerous other initiatives (see, for example Newland 2016), but gender violence has, for the time being, remained endemic. Addressing inequality is clearly not enough.

Concluding note

The quote used by iTaukei chiefs, 'Violence is not part of our culture', construes violence as neither natural nor cultural. Instead, it operates aspirationally, with the intention of de-legitimising violence through excising it from ideas about acceptable or normal behaviour. It is an important beginning to unpicking notions that violence is an acceptable way of responding to any situation. However, one of the big obstacles to eliminating gender violence is that ideas about gender are not simply reinforced by local traditions but are also influenced by international flows of ideas and practices, often in pernicious ways. The complexity of the interaction between the maintenance of local ideas in peer groups and hierarchies and incoming international influences undermines the notion that violence, and especially gender violence, can be eliminated in any simple or directed way.

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[19] However, it is a mistake to think that iTaukei women are passive in the face of such hierarchies. Some iTaukei women have found ways to use cultural traditions to their own advantage and transmit them to other women. For example, I knew of a case where an iTaukei woman advised another woman whose husband who was only likely to be violent after he had been out drinking to stay with relatives who the husband is tabooed from visiting on nights of potential violence. Although this is a pragmatic and creative response, it places the onus on women to predict their husbands' behaviour rather requiring husbands to alter their behaviour. It does not change culture or men's attitudes towards women, but is simply a tactic for survival.

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