

A QUESTION OF MORALITY: SORCERY AND CONCEPTS OF DEVIANCE AMONG THE KABANA, WEST NEW BRITAIN¹

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Abstract: For the Kabana of New Britain, deviant behaviour is essentially the advancement of self-interest untempered by self-regulation such that the individual infringes on the ability of others to pursue their own self-interest. Social labelling is applied to deviant behaviours, but no permanent stigma attaches to individuals. Reactions to deviance include shame, gossip and ridicule, proceedings before the village magistrate and sorcery. The performance of sorcery, a major cause of death, is a complex and ambiguous event, insofar as a sorcerer's threat may both inhibit deviance and mediate conflict, but the actual enactment of the threat is itself a deviant act. In cases where a victim's illness is attributed to sorcery, a moot may be held to discern the motives of sorcery and identify the sorcerer. In a particular case, which is examined at length here, failure clearly to identify the sorcerer was followed by the victim's death.

Résumé: Chez les Kabana de Nouvelle Bretagne, les comportements déviants sont largement le résultat d'une poursuite d'intérêts personnels non-modérés qui empiète aux autres la possibilité de poursuivre leurs propres intérêts. Il existe un système d'étiquetage social vis-à-vis des comportements déviants, mais cela ne marque pas les individus. Les réactions à la déviance incluent la honte, le commérage, la ridiculisation, comparaître devant le magistrat du village et la sorcellerie. L'acte de sorcellerie, étant une cause importante de décès, est une occurrence complexe et ambiguë. En fait, une menace provenant d'un sorcier peut soit décourager la violence soit agir en tant qu'agent médiateur; par contre cette menace est elle même un acte déviant. Dans les cas où la victime est malade par cause de sorcellerie, une assemblée peut être réunie pour déterminer pourquoi la sorcellerie a été utilisée en plus de découvrir l'identité du sorcier. Cette étude examine en profondeur un cas particulier où une victime est morte parce que le sorcier n'a pu être identifié.

In the study of what we now recognize as “deviance” in Pacific societies, the work of Malinowski is central. Vincent considers his treatment of sorcery, in particular, to be “pathbreaking.” In the Trobriands, sorcery was *both* a criminal practice and a method of administering justice. Which it was in any particular case depended on who was practising it on whom and when he was doing it. On the one hand, sorcery was

the main criminal agency (Malinowski 1926:85); on the other, the Trobriand chief used sorcery to punish offenders. . . . Thus he concluded that where there was no *formal* code or administration of justice, it was very difficult to draw a line between the “quasi-legal” and the “quasi-criminal.” (Vincent 1990:165-166)

The line was usually drawn in some public arena.

In this early view, sorcery may be either deviance *per se*, or it may be the *control* of deviance. This treatment is compatible with the labelling theory of deviance that has developed since Malinowski wrote, especially in its focus on reactions to deviance rather than deviance itself. Indeed, the earliest statement of labelling theory by Becker (1963:10-11) included a lengthy citation of one of Malinowski’s cases from *Crime and Custom in Savage Society* (Malinowski 1967). Becker used this quote to differentiate between the relatively common commission of an act and the rare adjudication of the same act as *deviant by virtue of the reaction to it*.

In this paper, a similar analysis is applied to the Kabana of West New Britain, Papua New Guinea.² Labelling theory is used to call attention to the multiple levels of political negotiation that go into a decision about whether an act of sorcery is—or is not—deviant. In the process, the analysis leads us to an examination of the organizational complexity of labelling. In order to provide context for the analysis, I begin with a discussion of Kabana morality and then move to a discussion of lower, “pre-sorcery” levels of social control among the Kabana, and, finally, I examine Kabana notions of sorcery as a social sanction. With this background established, the paper then moves to an extended analysis of a particular case of alleged sorcery and the political negotiation that took place, when villagers tried to decide whether the sorcery was deviance or had been used as a means to *control* deviance. The case is a provocative and rich one, because the outcome of the negotiation was indeterminate. The line between sorcery as deviance and sorcery as control of deviance could not be drawn, and the case entered Kabana history as backdrop for some dispute that would arise later.

Kabana Morality

Among the Kabana of West New Britain, Papua New Guinea the framework of ideal social values and morals is grounded in concepts of human nature and the obligations inherent in the structure of human relations. It is this ethic of morality which provides a guide for individual action, and against which actions are judged. In this non-literate society, where the locus of individual experience is social, relations among individuals and groups do not exist in the abstract but always and only in connection with someone or something else. Given the extensive and overlapping network of Kabana social relations, there is an equally extensive range of behaviour that can be perceived as deviant to some degree and can elicit varying degrees of response from a particular audience. What constitutes deviant behaviour thus depends on whether relevant others perceive a certain act as a threat to the basic tenets of Kabana social life, that is, to the moral obligations which structure human relations.

Offended persons may select from a hierarchy of responses of increasing complexity to restore and restructure their interpersonal relations. Ultimately, social conformity derives from a fundamental principle of reciprocal self-interest which is based upon two related concepts: self-regulation and self-help. Self-regulation entails that all individuals are deemed to be in control of their own existence and, therefore, are accountable to, and responsible for, others. Self-help is the principle whereby individuals who perceive their rights to have been infringed upon may rightfully take retaliatory action against those who have infringed upon them (cf. Lawrence 1984:161). The interrelated concepts of self-help and self-regulation are, in turn, based on the Kabana belief in personal autonomy, that is, that all individuals have the freedom to empower their existence as a basic human right. For the Kabana, deviant behaviour is essentially the advancement of self-interest untempered by self-regulation such that the individual infringes on the ability of others to pursue their own self-interest.

The Kabana label behaviour but not individuals as deviant, and the imposition of negative sanctions in no way implies an intent to permanently discriminate against or stigmatize an offender. The aim of any sanction is to provide the culprit with the opportunity for expiation thereby limiting the consequences of the transgression to that single event. There is no intentional discrimination against, and no stigma applied to, offenders, for to stigmatize persons is to set aside and mark them permanently as incorrigibly different, thus denying them the opportunity to redress the imbalance in social relations caused by their offenses. By not allowing a person to rectify wrongful behaviour, others arbitrarily rescind that individual's personal autonomy, integrity and right to self-help, thus effectively reducing the individual to a non-

social (and, therefore, non-human) being. To label an individual permanently as deviant is to place him or her outside the pale of human relations as a social pariah. Ultimately, such action is tantamount to a death sentence, because in societies of this nature, no one can exist outside the context of social relations. The only options left to the stigmatized individual would be exile or suicide (cf. Counts and Counts 1984; Lawrence 1984:132).

Most reactions to deviance occur at the level of personal relations, though they may involve whole families. On occasion, however, reactions to deviance can be escalated to levels that involve multiple families within villages, and may even include whole villages. Sorcery events also involve their own levels of organization and styles of political negotiation.

In this chapter, after briefly delineating the range of responses to lower levels of deviance, I focus on a traditional village "court" proceeding which was convened in reaction to a particular sorcery event.³ Sorcery is the most pervasive and powerful regulatory device that the Kabana have for dealing with deviant behaviour. The practice of sorcery is not unambiguously right or wrong. As a negative sanction, sorcery is a legitimate form of social control, both an expected and accepted consequence of a breach of morality. Since sorcery is always potentially lethal, however, any act of sorcery, regardless of the circumstances, can be construed as a deviant act and thus be subject to negative social sanctions itself. The case history presented here demonstrates how the community reacted to the ambiguous nature of sorcery, when they attempted to determine whether or not one woman's imminent death by sorcery was a legitimate form of social control or a case of homicide, which, in turn, would require control.

Lower Levels of Social Control

All Kabana relationships are face-to-face relations and everyone is known to, and knows about, everyone else. Anonymity is impossible and no behaviour, albeit good, bad or indifferent, goes undiscovered. For the most part, a perceived breach of the ideal of reciprocal self-interest is couched in terms of positive criticism. Someone who ignores the rules of reciprocity is advised or reminded of the potentially negative consequences that could be experienced as a result of the impropriety. For example, a youth who avoids assisting his kin in cutting and hauling trees to make a garden fence may be criticized for his laziness and warned that when he needs the aid of these same kin in some venture of his own, such as the amassing of his bride-wealth, help may not be forthcoming. Continued failure to observe proper behaviour reduces a person's chances for success in other desired achievements, and, since it is in their own best interests to do so, most people adjust their behaviour in response to the pressure exerted on them to conform.

The Kabana do not equate simple non-conformity with deviance. Idiosyncratic personality types are marked, for example, by teasing or nick-naming. They may become the butt of jokes, be lampooned, criticized or otherwise disparaged, but there is no stigma imposed on them. When a person is recognized as having social or physical disabilities, others compensate for the idiosyncratic personality by lowering their expectations. Acknowledging individual differences defines the attributes of individuals who comprise a relationship, but the relationship itself remains unaffected, operating according to the level of expectations of all involved. Within the framework of lowered expectations, the idiosyncratic personality is recognized but not stigmatized in the sense of being negatively stereotyped or marginalized.

Shaming, gossip and ridicule are extremely effective means of sanctioning deviant behaviour. The power of shame as an overt negative sanction derives from the discomfort of “an intrusion of one’s private self into public awareness and the reciprocal invasion of the self by public scrutiny” (Jorgensen 1983-84:123). Shaming and gossip expose the inadequacies of the individual and exert pressure on the target to behave according to commonly held values and to repair the imbalance in social relations. The balance between public and private, self and other, is restored through a process of negotiation and settled when the culprit presents a gift of wealth to those who have gossiped about or shamed the victim. The gift of wealth both relieves the culprit of the sense of shame and obliges the recipients to curtail their slander or risk censure themselves for perpetuating a situation that has been resolved satisfactorily.

At a higher level of response, theft, physical violence and adultery often result in the perpetrator being brought before the village magistrate by the injured party. More often than not, in communities of this type, “the culprit is condemned on the basis of ideal social values even by those who have been guilty of the same offense in the past” (Lawrence 1984:132). Again, since the Kabana label only behaviour, not individuals, as deviant, any sanction imposed by the public court allows the culprit the opportunity for expiation and limits the consequences of the transgression to a single event. Once reparation is made, usually in the form of a compensation payment, the incident is forgiven, although rarely forgotten, and the culprit resumes his or her usual place in the community. There is no intentional discrimination against, and no permanent stigma applied to the offender.

For the Kabana, observation of the moral obligations that structure and organize human relations can be, ultimately, a life-and-death matter. Persons who survive to an extreme old age are by definition those persons who have lived a morally correct life. Death from old age is a good death (cf. Counts 1976-77), a death which is the result of, and performs closure on, a

socially correct and moral life span. The Kabana observe, however, that, human nature being what it is, very few people survive to the culturally defined life span that culminates in a good death. With few exceptions, most people die a bad death as victims of sorcery (see Scaletta [McPherson] 1985).

Sorcery as Social Sanction and as Deviance

Sorcery can be defined as a form of esoteric knowledge bestowing personal power which the adept can use willfully to realize desired ends. While not everyone could or would acquire the knowledge and skill to become a sorcerer, all have access to sorcery as a mode of self-help by purchasing the services of a known sorcerer. Awareness of the fact that others can choose to exercise their right to self-help through sorcery serves to define sorcery as the primary deterrent to deviant behaviour. Victims of sorcery are assumed to be persons who have violated social mores and values thereby infringing on the rights of others.⁴ Because sorcery is notoriously difficult to control once unleashed, both the decision to sorcerize and the execution of that decision should result from corporate deliberation and follow certain other procedural rules. The injured party should discuss any intention to instigate redressive action in the form of sorcery with his or her kin. If one's kin are not in agreement with such measures, the whole matter is dropped or deferred. If there is sufficient agreement to warrant action, however, usually because others have complaints against the intended victim or because the offence is such that sorcery is the only appropriate form of punishment, then the services of a sorcerer are solicited.⁵ Sorcery is a male prerogative acquired through apprenticeship and arranged in the *lum*, "men's house." Once the sorcerer has been approached and all the details have been worked out, the sorcerer and his clients exchange equal lengths of the most highly valued category of shell-money, *bula misi*. This exchange of wealth "buys" both the sorcerer's services and the silence and complicity of those employing him. Since the men's house is a semi-public domain, there is no question that the business of soliciting a sorcerer has been witnessed by other men in or near the building, and the whole episode becomes a topic for discreet gossip, a public secret, and moves into a wider area of involvement.

The sorcerer's role may also be construed as that of a mediator hired to resolve a conflict between two parties. Acting on behalf of his client, the sorcerer leaves a "calling card" (Zelenietz 1981:105) which alerts the recipient that some action on his or her part has offended another party, thus jeopardizing their relationship. The calling cards of Kabana sorcerers can take a number of forms: a large basket, of the type only sorcerers carry, lodged in the rafters of the victim's house; a gutted frog pinioned on the

footpath the victim travels to the gardens; a bundle of croton leaves tied in a particular way and placed conspicuously where the victim will find it, and so on.

Kabana sorcerers also send calling cards in the form of ensorcelled stones that they throw onto or into the victim's house. The stone called *pamododonga*, carries a form of sorcery that causes the victim to become ill for an indefinite period of time. It is generally assumed that, during the illness, victims will examine their consciences, review their actions and deduce for themselves the nature of their transgressions. They can then take steps to rectify the situation by approaching those with whom they are in conflict and trying to negotiate a resolution to the difficulty. If a resolution is reached, they pay the sorcerer to rescind his spell. If they are unable to identify the locus of conflict, the sorcerer might approach them, inform them why they have been ill, remove the spell and restore health. It is more common, however, because sorcery is a non-confrontational social act, for spells to be removed as stealthily as they were applied. Then, a second stone, *angual*, is thrown on the victim's house. Sorcery of this type puts transgressors on notice that they should discover the source of the conflict and repair the rift in their relationships, before they develop into open confrontation.

Although sorcery is an expected negative sanction for breach of expected behaviour, the actual implementation of sorcery as a form of self-help is, in itself, a deviant act. Evidence of sorcery indicates that someone has succeeded in a private act of collusion. When sorcery is suspected, "the contradiction between autonomy and control is flagrantly exposed and every villager is witness to his or her own vulnerability" (Weiner 1976:223). Sorcery takes away from the victim all that the Kabana define as human rights: the right to self-help, personal autonomy and control over one's existence. To be a victim of sorcery is to be threatened with death, for one's "personal autonomy has collapsed" (ibid.:219). It is for this reason that death by sorcery is a bad death. It is a bad death not just because of the manner in which it occurred, but also because of the manner in which it was incurred. Death by sorcery entails a negative judgment upon the behaviour of the victim by relevant others, but does not allow the culprit to amend the situation in his or her own best interests. Personal autonomy is negated and the target becomes a victim of the power that others wield in pursuit of their own self-interest. Death by sorcery is a moral issue, and those who practise it are themselves subject to public disapprobation: "Individual power, the cause of all death, demands the display of group power" (Weiner 1976:226).

A Case of Sorcery

Jean had been seriously ill for three months.⁶ During this time, attempts to cure her had proved fruitless. Treatments at the local hospital and by local healers, and the attempts of a sorcerer-curer to heal her by extracting foreign substances from her body were all ineffective. From the beginning of her illness, Jean was convinced that she had been sorcerized, a conviction reinforced when all attempts to cure her failed. Only the sorcerer who inflicts the spell has the correct formula for rescinding it and restoring the victim to health. As her illness progressed, Jean became more and more incapacitated. She became a non-participant in the myriad conceptual and social minutiae that make life worth living. As an invalid, her social interactions were essentially passive. She was dependent on others to care for her, and she resented being powerless, the victim of someone's ill-will. There was no question in anyone's mind, least of all Jean's, that she was dying. Her family refused, however, to open the magic bundle containing her vital essence, *tautau*, and kept it in contact with her body to prevent her death. The final indignity, from Jean's perspective, was that she was denied the right to take control of the situation and end her own life. (See Scaletta 1985 for a detailed discussion of these events).

Given that illness or death caused by sorcery are the result of specifically inflicted punishment for a breach of socially expected behaviour on the part of the victim (or her family), Jean's condition created a climate of heightened awareness of a variety of social relations. Relations between Jean and other individuals, between her family and other family groups, between her hamlet and the other three hamlets in the village, and between her village as a unit and other villages, particularly the two villages where the majority of her cognatic kin lived, were all minutely scrutinized. There was constant re-evaluation and discussion of past events, interpersonal and intergroup interactions, in order to determine why, and by whom, she was sorcerized. Jean's personal crisis as an individual escalated to the level of an intervillage social crisis.

Jean added to the escalating tensions by making specific charges of sorcery against three men in the village. She accused Ken, her deceased husband's brother. His motive, she said, was revenge: Ken and his kin group were avenging the death of their brother by attacking his wife. The second man she accused was Lari. She had no specific reason for accusing him, except that he had renown as a powerful sorcerer, and was, at the time, under suspicion by everybody in the area as the individual responsible for the current drought.⁷ She argued that if Lari would create hardship in the whole area in his efforts to destroy a rival, then it was reasonable that he should attack her for no motive other than that it was in the nature of his disposition

to do so. The third man she accused was Tomi, her sister's husband. Tomi was obsessively jealous of his wife and resented the time she spent in Jean's company. By eliminating her, Jean reasoned, Tomi was eliminating a major competitor for his wife's affection.

In all these accusations, Jean portrayed herself as an innocent victim. At no time did she name anyone who may have had reason to resort to sorcery in retaliation for some misdeed on her part. In proclaiming her innocence, she was implying that sorcery was being practised arbitrarily and, therefore, that everyone was vulnerable unless it could be stopped. Jean's steady decline, the general unease generated by the active presence of sorcery in their midst, the increasing strain between her cognatic and affinal kin and the intervillage tensions arising from Jean's accusations coalesced one morning with the arrival of a delegation of Jean's male kin from her natal village. They came both to express their anger that someone was "killing" their sister and to demand that a meeting be convened to "break the talk," to expose and punish the sorcerer.

Breaking the Talk

To "break the talk" means to cut through the multitude of conjecture and gossip about why a person has been sorcerized and by whom. When the "talk is broken," it is exposed to public scrutiny so that its veracity can be analyzed and a logical sequence of events leading up the illness or death can be reconstructed. When the nature of the victim's offence has been determined, thereby identifying those who had reason to sorcerize her, witnesses can either refute or confirm the charges of culpability. The meeting to "break the talk" also provides a forum where persons who are associated with the illness or death, because of past disputes with the victim, can proclaim their innocence and clear their names, thereby avoiding the possibility that they might be sorcerized by the victim's avenging kin group. Ideally, this procedure culminates in a solid case of circumstantial evidence identifying the protagonists in the conflict, and leaves no doubt as to who caused the victim to become ill or to die. Any doubt as to the identity of the sorcerer is dispelled when those who witnessed the meeting between the sorcerer and the persons who employed him produce the length of shell-money they were given to "buy" their silence. Ultimately, the "talk is broken" when the silence surrounding the act of collusion is broken, thus publicly exposing those who participated in the decision to sorcerize.

A meeting to "break the talk" is a highly charged public confrontation and represents the most complex level of the adjudication of deviance in Kabana culture. At such meetings in the past, it is said, the end came with a fight and the killing of the exposed sorcerer. The sorcerer's death was con-

sidered compensation for the death of the victim, and obviated (in theory, if not always in practice) the need for retributive sorcery by balancing the losses on both sides of the conflict. The death of the sorcerer was a public statement to those who sought control over others that homicidal sorcery was an amoral act so heinous that death was the only appropriate social response.⁸

On the day of the meeting, all the adult males from the four concerned villages convened in the plaza in front of the "men's house." There were no women (except myself) or children visibly present.⁹ It was dangerous for them to be there. The meeting lasted for five hours, during which the discussion ranged widely. Several young men professed their lack of knowledge of sorcery, and called on their senior male relatives to attest to the fact that they had not instructed them in the ways and means of sorcery. Another man acknowledged that he had disputed with Jean and her sister over the ownership of certain sago palms, but said they had settled the problem, and that the altercation could not, therefore, be construed as a motive for sorcery on his part. Much of the meeting proceeded in this manner, the underlying premise being that unchallenged, public denials of guilt or involvement are sufficient to prove innocence. The most important contributions came from the three men specifically accused by Jean, and from Jean's brother.

The three accused took the opportunity to refute Jean's charges against them. Tomi, Jean's sister's husband, stated that he did not and could not know sorcery because he was associated with women (a consequence of his jealous obsession with his wife). This was common knowledge, he went on, for did not everyone refer to him as "first woman"? Sorcery is the business of men, and a man who spends his time with women would not have occasion to learn the art. Even if he did, his powers would be diminished by to his contact with females, who are "different" (Tok Pisin: *narapela kain*) from men.¹⁰ It was true, he admitted, that he had tried to purchase rain magic (a form of sorcery) from an old man in another village, but he had been refused. Tomi had given valid reasons why he could not know sorcery, and why, even if he did have some skill as a sorcerer, this skill would be minimal. He had admitted to being in the company of a sorcerer, given reasons for being there and revealed the outcome of the meeting, thus forestalling any misconstruction of his behaviour by others who might have witnessed the meeting. No one challenged what he had to say.

Ken, Jean's husband's brother, also denied her accusations against him. He pointed out that when she first became ill, she had come to him on her own initiative and asked him to use his skills to cure her. He had assumed she was suffering from the effects of "bad blood," a problem peculiar to post-menopausal women. He had prepared the appropriate cure, which proved ineffective. Because of this and her worsening condition, she be-

came fearful and accused him of sorcerizing rather than curing her. He also noted that she, and perhaps other members of her family, thought he might have attacked her in revenge for the death of his brother, Jean's husband. He denied the credibility of such speculations on the grounds that he was a member of the Catholic Church which forbade the practice of sorcery. He further denied the fact of sorcery, saying that sickness and death were not caused by human actors, but by God, as divine punishment for sins committed. Jean was dying, he concluded, because God was punishing her as a sinner.

The third man accused by Jean was Lari. As the person considered responsible for the drought and a self-acknowledged sorcerer, Lari defended himself on both counts. He argued that no one could claim they had actually seen him practising weather magic. Even though he had all the paraphernalia, which he then produced for all to see, without eye-witnesses, all the talk about him was nothing but air, insubstantial and without truth value. Did people think, he demanded, that he or a member of his family would be so "insane" (Kabana: *mangamanga*) as to attack this woman and run the risk of retaliation from her kin? They must look to the woman herself, he admonished, for the origin of her problem. From the time of their ancestors, he continued, there were two reasons why females were attacked by sorcery. They were sorcerized for being foul-tempered, malicious gossips, and for repulsing the sexual advances of males, or conversely, for engaging in illicit love affairs. (The seeming paradox of this situation is more apparent than real, but a detailed discussion is beyond the scope of the task at hand.)

Lari's point here was to prompt people to examine Jean's behaviour rather than continuing to look for wrongdoing on the part of others. He was, in effect, both denying the validity of the scenario that Jean had created in which she played the role of innocent victim, and situating the whole episode within the accepted explanatory framework — people are sorcerized for breach of social norms. It then came out that during the weeks of Jean's illness, there had been a great deal of discussion about her reputation for maligning others, particularly two senior women who were highly respected. There was also talk of her affair with a married man who was also a person of some renown. It was further reported that she had accepted a proposal of marriage, and the shell money that accompanied it, from a man in the Kove district.¹¹ She had later reneged on her promise to marry him, claiming that she wanted to remain a widow and live near her children, but had failed to return the shell money. The rejected man thus had motive — the loss of his shell money, not the broken promise — and the wherewithal to attack her, the Kove being notorious sorcerers. All agreed, that any one of the foregoing was a likely origin of her illness and, if so, that (1) she had gotten only what she deserved, and (2) that, if the sorcery originated with the Kove man, her

chances of recovery were slim because no one knew either the Kove techniques, or, consequently, the specific counter spell to effect a cure.

Discussion turned to the possibility that Jean was part of a long-standing vendetta to eliminate all the members of her family. In the past five years, sorcery had claimed the lives of Jean's father, her 20-year-old son, a classificatory son and her eldest son's wife. Everyone knew that her father had died of *mosi* "privately owned designs." Without permission or payment, he had used the traditional totemic designs of another kin group on a set of spirit masks of his own group. Death by sorcery was the expected and accepted response to such a serious crime; hence, there had been no "talk" or retaliation, and the incident was closed. Perhaps, however, the issue was not closed, and Jean was the most recent casualty of the offended group's unrequited anger for her father's transgression against them.

These observations focussed attention on indigenous ancestral laws, and Lari began a forceful harangue about the loss of traditional customs. In the past, he began, this meeting would have taken place inside the men's house, not in the open plaza. Now the men's house stood abandoned, and young men no longer gathered there to learn from their elders. Now men slept, not in the men's house, but with their wives and children in the women's houses. Even the practice of sorcery was no longer done according to tradition. In the time of their grandfathers, sorcery was always undertaken by two or three men with the sanction of their kin group. With these several people involved, it was possible to "break the talk," discover who worked the sorcery and why, and thus permit resolution of the situation. This was no longer possible because sorcery was being practised on an individual basis, making it impossible to expose and control the practice of sorcery.

Jean's elder brother Karl, located at the outer perimeter of the assembly, had stood quietly throughout the foregoing, awaiting his opportunity to speak. When he had everyone's attention, he began by reprimanding people for listening to Jean's accusations. The ravings of a sick person should not be given credibility. Such talk is *mangamanga*, "hysterical," and based on fear. He went on to point out that those who brought up his father's death by sorcery were wrong to revive this incident, for it implied that he, or a member of his family, had avenged their father's death and that Jean's illness was retaliation for that second death. When their father died, he and his brothers had "put on the grass skirt" worn by women. Metaphorically, he was arguing that they had become like women, and thus did not know or engage in sorcery. The death of their father had nothing to do with his sister's dying, and such talk must cease, he emphasized, so that old animosities were not revived. He reiterated that they must look to Jean's own behaviour

as the cause of her dying, and, having nicely set the mood, he went on to elaborate what, in his opinion, that behaviour might have been.

Some years before, Jean and her husband had contracted a marriage between one of their sons and the daughter of Rio and Sandra, a couple who have considerable prestige in the area. During a ceremonial feast at another village, Jean's son had an affair with another woman. The young people were discovered, and, when confronted with the options of either paying fines to "buy their shame," or with getting married, the two said they wished to be married. With this public declaration of intent, they were married *de facto*, and the betrothal previously arranged by the young man's parents was nullified.

When the jilted girl's parents heard this, they were furious and confronted Jean and her husband. While venting her anger, the girl's mother assumed the stylistic stance associated with throwing spears during battle, and called down the name of her personal protective spirit upon Jean's head, an effective and sometimes deadly curse. She berated Jean for breaking the marriage contract, thereby shaming both her and her daughter. Jean claimed she had nothing to do with the situation, and had heard of her son's behaviour and marriage only after the fact.

Two days after this confrontation, Jean sat on some wood shavings on her verandah, and, several days later, her legs became swollen. It was assumed that Jean had been sorcerized by the offended parents through the medium of wood shavings. She was treated by a curer familiar with that type of sorcery, and the condition was removed. It now appeared that the sorcery had not been neutralized, but had lain dormant in her body these past years, and was only now manifesting itself as her current illness.

Karl's speech was extremely effective. He had discredited Jean's accusations against others as the ravings of a sick and frightened person, thus soothing the anxieties of the accused; he had denied that her illness was a continuation of the conflict that resulted in their father's death, thus avoiding the possibility of old animosities resurfacing, and he had described a specific breach of moral obligation — the breaking of a marriage contract. At the same time, he had left it an open question whether or not Jean was responsible for the breach. (Everybody knew that nowadays children made up their own minds about whom they would or would not marry.) His suggestion that specific, known events and individuals might be responsible for Jean's illness helped defuse the tensions that had built up around people's fears that sorcery was being practised arbitrarily. The individuals implicated had been away from the village for the past year, living in urban centres, and so were not on hand to give their interpretation or to defend themselves. No one else present hurried to defend them either, possibly because one of them was already considered responsible for other recent, and unresolved,

sorcery related incidents. At the conclusion of his speech, the meeting was brought to a close. Karl had provided an acceptable explanatory framework for Jean's condition, thus redressing the "threat of disorderliness" that a motiveless death implies (Zelenietz 1981:9). The consensus was, however, that the meeting had not been totally satisfactory. They had been unable to "break the talk" and prove conclusively the validity of the reconstruction. No one had come forth to bear witness against the sorcerer whose behaviour threatened Jean's life and the moral infrastructure of social order. Because the situation was not totally resolved, there was little hope that Jean could be cured.

Three weeks later, Jean died. When the funeral rites and period of mourning were finished, life in the village reverted to the status quo ante; the crisis created by Jean's dying and death might never have occurred. When I inquired of my informants what steps, if any, would be taken to avenge her death or punish the sorcerer, I was advised that we ought not to discuss such matters. Others might hear of our talk, assume we are plotting vengeance and take steps to protect themselves by striking first; we could be sorcerized. Circumstances surrounding her death are not forgotten. The entire experience will be woven into the fabric of ongoing personal and social relations where it will affect people's motives and behaviour in the future.

Conclusion

This analysis of sorcery and deviant behaviour in Kabana society shows that the generic processes noted in labelling theory can be applied to the cross-cultural study of deviance, even in a society in which deviants are not specifically "labelled." Certain kinds of behaviour, under certain conditions, are reacted to as deviant in Kabana society, and there are rules about what constitutes a socially acceptable response to deviant behaviour. The Kabana data show that, regardless of the level of community involvement, the reaction to deviant behaviour does not result in the typing of individuals as permanently deviant, or in the differentiation of people into groups defined as "normals" and "deviants." Given the egalitarian ideology and lack of stratification in Kabana society, the creation of a class of deviants is unlikely, and, in Kabana terms, philosophically untenable. Rather, deviance is a highly negotiated, highly complex phenomenon which occurs in an interpersonal network. Sorcery is an interesting case in point. While it is inherently neither deviant nor a normative sanction for the social control of deviance, it may be negotiated as *either* according to the specifics of any particular case. It may begin with individual relations and end there; it may rise to the familial level and end there or escalate to even more complex levels before it is publicly mooted. In the moot, sorcery may be judged to be

a device for the legitimate control of deviance, deviance in and of itself, or the problem of what it is may prove to be insoluble. *Whatever* the outcome, the case remains in the cultural memory of the groups involved and forms part of relevant knowledge that will be brought to bear in subsequent cases of sorcery or other trouble.

Afterword

The events described above took place in early 1983. When I returned to the village in 1985, one of the first pieces of news that I was given was that Ken, Jean's husband's brother, had been ill for some months and was currently at the local health clinic for medical treatment. The public explanation for his illness was that he "had no blood" (acute anaemia, possibly leukaemia?); the *very* private explanation was that he had been sorcerized. In response to my queries about who had sorcerized him and why, people referred to the case of Jean and her accusations against her brother-in-law. I was also advised not to pursue this matter with "certain other people," lest those people infer that my inquiries were informed by the (malicious) speculation of the people who spent time with me, thus placing them at risk. It was clear that Ken's lingering illness was linked to Jean's death by sorcery, but people preferred not to make this connection a matter of public record or public moot. The feeling was that, if ignored, the attacks and counterattacks of sorcery would cease, and order and well-being would prevail. I respected these views and did not pursue the matter further. Ken died in 1986 after a prolonged and painful dying process.

Notes

1. This paper is based on 22 months of field research in the Kabana village of Kokopo, West New Britain, Papua New Guinea in 1981, 1982-83 and 1985. Funds for the research were provided by the Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada in the form of a Doctoral Fellowship and a Post-doctoral fellowship. Special thanks are due the Kabana, who not only took me in, but undertook to explain their world to me. Thanks also go to Drs. Rick Goulden, Bil Thurston, Richard Brymer and David Counts for their unstinting patience and critical commentary throughout the evolution of this paper.
2. The Kabana live in Bariai Census Division, a political and geographic district on the northwest coast of the Island of New Britain in Papua New Guinea. Rural Bariai is a relatively isolated and undeveloped area with a total population of about 900 people, the majority of whom speak Kabana, a Siassi Austronesian language. Although affected by their contact with the larger Western world system, the Kabana continue to depend for their subsistence on swidden horticulture and maintain much of their traditional world view and lifestyle. Kabana society is small-scale, unstratified and founded on the structure of human relations. The Kabana are fiercely egalitarian; the obligation to share, the redistribution of wealth in ceremonials and the threat of sorcery are effective levelling mechanisms for maintaining and enforcing the egalitarian ideology.

3. Local magistrates and village constables are appointed to enforce and adjudicate breaches of the law as defined by the introduced Anglo-Australian legal system. Sorcery was outlawed by the former colonial administration and sorcerers might be accused, tried and, if convicted, incarcerated. The "village court," discussed here, is a traditional precontact institution based on customary law, the "law of the ancestors" (Tok Pisin: *lo bilong ol tumbuna*). Although the village magistrate and constable attended this "court," they did so in no official capacity: they were concerned kinspeople, not representatives of the government.
4. Victims of sorcery are those who perceive themselves or are perceived by others as having been ensorcelled.
5. To become involved in sorcery is dangerous indeed. Individuals who initiate a sorcery attack put not only themselves but their families at risk from counterattack. The most effective way to destroy an opponent is to attack the source of his wealth and prestige — his family, especially his wife and children. For this reason, the decision to initiate an act of sorcery with its attendant risks must be taken as a group decision.
6. Although the persons referred to here will surely recognize themselves, I have used fictitious names throughout in the event that they may not wish to be recognized by others.
7. The 10-month drought during 1982 and 1983 affected the entire northern coast of the island of New Britain, and caused critical shortages of food and water throughout the area.
8. Such an outcome was the ideal of such a village moot, and accounts of them form precedent for current moots. They do not, however, often end so neatly.
9. As a female, it was equally dangerous for me to be there and, in fact, my hosts were very concerned that I might inadvertently become a victim of what they saw as indiscriminate sorcerizing. The villagers reasoned, however, that since it was my work to learn about their way of life (and death), it was important that I know and understand the process of "breaking the talk." For my protection, I was closely accompanied by six male members of my adopted family who later helped me translate my tapes of the proceedings and provided background information on the incidents referred to during the moot.
10. The implication here is that female essences, such as bodily fluids or menstrual blood, render males ritually and magically impotent.
11. The Kove are culturally and linguistically related to the Kabana. They inhabit offshore islands in the Kombe Census District, which covers an area east from the boundary of the Kaliai District to the western base of the Willaumez peninsula.

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