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SAFETY NET OR DISINCENTIVE?
Wantoks and Relatives in the Urban Pacific

Michael Monsell-Davis

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by

Michael Monsell-Davis
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INTRODUCTION

This paper has come about as the result of a number of factors relating to the Kerekere system (in Fiji), or Wantok system, as it is known in Papua New Guinea. Fijians attribute their secondary status — in economic terms — in part to the Kerekere system (the rights and duties that kin entertain towards each other). It was said that Fijians could not run businesses 'because of the Kerekere system'. When youths with wage employment drop out of the workforce, they blame their action on the 'Kerekere system'. It has been said that the Kerekere system was invaluable in assisting individuals and households facing economic hard times, and Fijians such as Nacanieli Rika wrote lyrically of the joys of kinship (1986:189).

In Papua New Guinea, a similar ambivalence exists towards the so-called wantok system, with Papua New Guineans writing such things as:

\[ \text{[it is] the obligation towards one's relatives, clansmen, tribesmen} \]
\[ \text{... in good times and bad times, or when there is happiness and} \]
\[ \text{when there is sadness} \quad (\text{Kanau 1992}), \]
\[ \text{or} \]
\[ \text{the system brings comfort in times of sorrow, food in times of} \]
\[ \text{hunger and disaster} \quad \text{through the system, many urban dwellers} \]
\[ \text{find life a bit easy} \quad (\text{Wia 1992}). \]

Yet, they can also write that the wantok system is a burden of continual assistance to others:

\[ \text{for survival is a curse. It is an intolerable system ... fit only for} \]
\[ \text{village life} \quad (\text{Kamiali 1992}). \]

Over fifteen years ago Gerry Ward wrote:

\[ \text{One of the most important features in urban areas of Papua New} \]
\[ \text{Guinea ... is that the society is not individualized to the extent} \]
\[ \text{that people are left destitute. Reciprocity still operates: kinship} \]
\[ \text{and place of origin groups support those in need and income is} \]
\[ \text{spread through traditional-type channels} \quad (\text{Ward 1977:43}). \]

In a similar vein, Levine and Levine, in 1979, noted large numbers of people drifting in and out of jobs as the fancy took them, confident that they could easily go home to the village, or receive food and shelter from urban kin (1979:34).

In the popular romantic view, this remains true: the extended family — through the so-called wantok system (or the Kerekere system in Fiji) — still ensures that no-one goes hungry, and that no-one is destitute. This is the Melanesian way and everybody is looked after.
Yet, in the 1990s, significant numbers of people live in conditions very close to destitution. In October 1991, a young man of about twenty-one, married with one child, was looking for money to go to the hospital for treatment after his left arm and hand, and left leg were badly burned.

He had caused his own burns. In a fit of drunken despair he had stolen a bottle of petrol from the back of a utility, returned to the settlement, and swaying about near the fire, had spilled it over himself and his grandmother, resulting in both being badly burned — a spur-of-the-moment, half-serious suicide attempt.

While they were still in primary school, he and his two brothers had been abandoned by their parents. Although both parents were from Gulf Province, the father had gone to a village just outside Port Moresby, where he remarried, while the mother returned to the Gulf and remarried there.

The three boys were left in the care of their elderly grandmother. She had no income of her own, but endeavoured to look after them with the help of those of her sons (the boys' uncles) who were working. Unfortunately, there was neither the money nor any encouragement to stay at school, so none of the boys developed any skills to offer to the job market.

The young man's drunken speech as he spilled the petrol, amounted to a tirade against his uncles and aunts, who, according to him, should have been helping to look after the old lady:

"They just left us to look after her. Where are her children? They are working. They should be doing something. How can my brothers and I do anything? We're not working. Now we are going to die. Now I am going to die and this old woman is coming with me!"

Early in 1992, another youth, of eighteen, said in a mood of suicidal despair:

"I cannot turn to anyone. There's no one to help me. I'm going to kill myself. There's nothing else to do."

This boy's case was more complex and is documented (Monsell-Davis 1992). Essentially he was without education, job, family or village to which to turn. He had been in prison several times, and was making a genuine effort to change his life, but finding it almost impossible without help.

Suicide, or threatened suicide, is unusual (but not unknown), among Papua New Guinean youth, unlike in other parts of the Pacific (Hezel 1989; Oliver 1985; Rubinstein 1992). These instances, therefore, are suggestive of growing social problems.
David King (1992), analysed a comprehensive, 1987 Household Survey in Port Moresby, and noted a large proportion of households in both low cost and self-help areas which experienced real poverty; and Sister J.P. Chao, following research at 9-mile Settlement, suggests that thirty-eight percent of Toaripi households at the settlement had a cash income of K20 or less per fortnight. These households often go without food for days at a time, and the worst-off households (notably those of widows and disabled men) suffer from hunger almost continuously (Chao 1989:91-92).

These examples, and we could multiply them, are surely evidence of destitution. They suggest that the extended family and the wantok system are no longer able to act as a safety net for all those in trouble. And it is examples such as these, coupled with the constant complaints about the pressures that wantoks impose on each other, that have led to this paper.

THE WANTOK SYSTEM

The late Fr. Francis Mihalic S.V.D., in his Dictionary and Grammar of Melanesian Pidgin (1971), defined 'wantok' as 'one who speaks the same language, one who is of the same nationality, a compatriot, one who is from the same country, a neighbour'.

This is very broad, and indicates the range of people who might be included under the heading 'wantok' at any one time, but it says nothing about the relationships between such people. This has been described as a 'kin obligation' (Wia 1992); face-to-face relationships (Augerea 1992); and as being built around reciprocity (Lane 1992).

Vincent Warakai argued that it:

has its base in the social and economic relationships which accompanied the development of capitalist relationships on plantations where many labourers were isolated or separated from their immediate kinsmen. Thus they were forced to find enduring friendly relationships from very distant relatives (or indeed strangers) who spoke the same language, or dialect ... [or a neighbouring language with which they were familiar through traditional trading links] (1989:45).

Sam Kajumba, an African sociologist, attempted a Marxist interpretation. He wrote:

the social reality to which the term refers, and the term itself, are both as recent in the history of Papua New Guinea as the pidgin language... they are products of the same material, social and ideological forces (1983:1).
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In contrast to Warakai, he rejected the idea that the term 'wantok' refers to a shared indigenous language, suggesting instead that its reference is to shared Pidgin, arising as it did on the plantations. Noting that the colonial situation gave rise to two distinct social categories of people — the colonial masters and the indigenous oppressed — a dichotomy not previously experienced in Melanesian societies — he argued that Pidgin and the ideology of wantok arose in response to this novel situation.

From Kajumba's perspective, Pidgin and the term 'wantok' served to set the workers off from the masters and reinforce their separate identity. He wrote:

> it refers to the interconnectedness of the patterns of behaviour and actions expected of a wantok ... egalitarianism is one of its ideals. Commitment and concern [for] the welfare of wantoks as well as reciprocity and mutual respect are basic values of the system (ibid.:10).

(These are relationships and values which contrast markedly with those that the workers might have expected to establish with plantation owners and colonial officials.)

Whatever its origins, the term today can be used very broadly indeed. Kajumba commented on the 'infinite elasticity of the system so that the further away one is from one's home village the more wantoks one acquires' (ibid.:3).

Warakai (1989) and Levine and Levine (1979) both referred to 'safe' relationships. Warakai wrote:

> There is no distinct 'local' or 'social' group from which a wantok is drawn. What matters here is a perception of a 'safe' relationship which ensures security. It provides for mutual support and cooperation within mutually acceptable rules of social and economic behaviour (1989:45).

In difficult situations, one can count only on wantoks for assistance (Levine and Levine 1979:48-49).

Features of the wantok system, then, are the notion of 'safe' relationships — that is, people one can depend upon; its flexibility — so that one can draw an extraordinarily wide range of people into one's network of wantoks; and the notional importance of reciprocity — it is a mutually 'safe' relationship. Additional features are notions of prestige and dependence.

Although there appears to be no precise equivalent term to 'wantok' in any vernacular language, there can be little argument that we can look for features of the system in traditional society. Perhaps the nearest equivalent terms are words which translate as 'clan', 'sub-clan', 'residential unit', 'village section' and so forth such as the Tolai *runataru* (Epstein 1969:122) or the Motu *iduhi* (Groves 1963).
The Wantok System

Groves has demonstrated, for the Motu idulu, the ambiguity concerning size, genealogical span and territorial dispersal of the group or category of people to which the word may refer at any particular time. The reference may be to the entire dispersed clan at one extreme, to a single village section at the other, or to some intermediate aggregate of people (ibid.:17). (As he noted, one can point to similar multiple references in the English term ‘family’.)

There are, nevertheless, clear rules about who should be included in the idulu, but they are flexible enough to allow male affines or other ‘strangers’ to be absorbed, and, in time and depending on their degree of participation in idulu affairs to become primary members in their own right (ibid.:20-21). Genealogies, wrote Groves, freely display such accretions (ibid.:21; see also Monsell-Davis 1981 on Roro itulu).

It is not intended to suggest that the kinship structures of village society are entirely synonymous with the wantok system, simply to follow others in noting that both the kerekere and wantok systems draw upon and extend features of traditional kinship structures: the flexibility of kinship that permits strangers to be absorbed into the descent groups; and the mutual obligations for assistance and comfort that are enjoined on individuals in such relationships (Sahlins 1962; Levine and Levine 1979; Kajumba 1983; Warakai 1989).

As Levine and Levine noted:

one may analytically distinguish between kinship, ethnicity and friendship ... [but] ... at the level of personal network formation these bases of social relationships are all used simultaneously as part of what Papua New Guineans call wantok ties (1979:70).

This is a category of primary relationships, regardless of principles of recruitment (ibid.:61) that effectively combines kinship, ethnicity and friendship in a new, persuasive, urban social idiom (ibid.:70).

THE KEREKERE SYSTEM

In Fiji, these rights and duties that kin entertain towards each other were institutionalised in what has become known as the Kerekere system. Sahlins, whose analysis was described by Belshaw (1964:127) as ‘by far the best’, suggested that kerekere was the prevailing form of economic transaction among kinmen as individuals (Sahlins 1962:203-214).

Deriving from kere, ‘to request’, in economic context kerekere means ‘to solicit a good, resource or service, or the use of a good or resource’. Almost anything may be solicited: food, tapa, mats, canoes, whales’ teeth, cloth, tobacco, money, pigs, and so on. The institution rests on need and sentiments of mutual aid, and in its strict form one should kerekere only from kin and only when in genuine need. The significance of kinship is that kin ethics — the obligation to
give support, aid and comfort — dominate the transaction. The economic or
utilitarian aspect is subordinated to the social or kin element (ibid.:204).

The 'idea' of kin, can be extended through classificatory devices, and
through the notion that all Fijians (indeed, all of humanity, notes Sahlinis) have a
common origin. The possibility of employing kerekere can thus be extended
almost indefinitely (just as the notion of wantok can be extended), and it is this
unlimited extension of kerekere that is popularly known as the 'kerekere system'
today, rather than the controlled kinship relationships described by Sahlinis.

The sentiments of obligation and reciprocity make it extremely difficult to
refuse kerekere, and as the institution brings together the haves and have-nots,
the predominant flow is from the wealthy to the poor. Although there is an
underlying understanding of ultimate reciprocity, the donor may choose not to
kerekere in return. There is an implication of weakness, an inability to provide
for one's family, if one is forced to request help through kerekere. Conversely,
there is an implication of strength and prestige in giving (ibid.:205-207).

This, of course, is at the root of many Melanesian exchanges. Reputation,
including moral and ethical superiority, is commonly based on access to, and
command over, resources and their distribution (Oliver 1955; Read 1959;
Malinowski 1968; Young 1971; Groves 1973). The expectation of reciprocity, and
the idea of prestige associated with giving (along with the concomitant fear of
being perceived as repudiating proper social relationships if one rejects a request
for help), are important elements of continuity in modern Melanesia. And it is
these which make it difficult to refuse requests for help.

Levine and Levine suggested that prestige in urban areas of Melanesia comes
not so much from an individual's high income or position per se, but from that
person's ability and willingness to help wantoks in one way or another (1979:91),
and in supporting village and church activities:

it is this that can make [urban dwellers] important people — not wealth
in and of itself, but how they use it to benefit the community (ibid.:129).

The writings from the 1960s and 1970s of authors such as Oram, on the Hula
peoples (1977); Ryan, on Toaripi (1977); Salisbury, on Siane (1977); Strathern, on
Hagens (1977); and Rew's study of workers in an industrial organisation in
Port Moresby (1974), suggest that most urban dwellers spend a good deal of time
fulfilling kinship obligations, even though they might grumble mightily about
them.

Oram (1977), for example, noted that urban Hula were not motivated by a
desire to live a European standard of living, rather they aimed to play a notable
role in the system of exchange relationships in which they were involved: they
sought prestige and a good reputation among their fellow Hula — both those at
home and those in town. Oram was writing about his observations in the 1960s,
but in 1992, a student from Hula commented to me that this was still absolutely
true (student, personal communication).
We should not confuse the so-called kerekere system with the traditional uses of kerekere and extended family obligations; nor is it intended to argue that the wantok system parallels traditional Papua New Guinean kinship rights and duties. It simply emphasises the continuities: the creation of primary relationships, the reciprocity, the 'safe' relationships, the imperative to respond to requests, and the underlying values of prestige and reputation.

Today when people speak of kerekere or wantok in negative terms, they are usually referring to the sometimes intense and continuing pressure of demands being made on them by others — requests for help for things as small as bus fares or food, and the larger issues of school fees, to the even larger ceremonial matters such as marriage and mortuary payments and contributions to church funds.

SAFETY NET OR DISENCENTIVE?

A popular myth both within and beyond the islands, is that the extended family and wantok system still act as a safety net for individuals and households facing economic difficulties. And indeed, for many people, it still does. Gounis and Rutz showed how in Suva, the Fijian social system provided a form of social insurance which succeeds 'in spreading both the risks and the benefits' deriving from participation in the urban labour market (1986:79).

They argued that real unemployment among Fijians ranges from sixteen percent to over thirty percent (despite official figures that suggested a rate of about 6.7 percent) (ibid.:56) and estimated that more that eighty percent of urban Fijians have average incomes which did not meet the minimum requirements of the housing authority (ibid.:79-80). Households thus needed to evolve strategies such as multiple incomes per household, or alternative (squatter) housing arrangements.

Gounis and Rutz stressed that:

Normative obligations are reiterated again and again and reaffirmed in conversations around the [kava] bowl: "If I have no food I go to that house or that house (pointing), because we Fijians help each other. If my brother or cousin or uncle comes to ask me for food or anything else here, I give it to him. I would not refuse." [This describes] a normative system of reciprocities that link persons and households to each other (ibid.:82).

These norms are embedded in kin relationships, but today, especially in the urban milieu, they can extend to neighbours, classmates, friends and co-workers (ibid.:83), with constant transfers of beer and kava from the employed to the unemployed. 'Urban conditions and high costs have altered the moral imperative from all contributing, to the imperative that those with money should contribute what they can' (ibid.:84).
The result is that the unemployed frequently eat at the homes of employed kin and friends; the employed frequently give money for bus fares, taxis, lunches and so on to the unemployed; they take the unemployed to dance halls, nightclubs and movies; and goods such as clothes, watches, sports equipment purchased by the employed pass into the hands of the unemployed (ibid.:84).

Such 'normative obligations' naturally make it easier for individuals to survive than households. Individuals, after all, can migrate from household to household, whereas a whole household cannot move in the same way.

The key factor to the system is reciprocity, so that a benefactor today expects that sometime in the future when he needs assistance, he should to be able to turn to those he has helped for reciprocal help.

Sahlins suggested that on Moala, as a result of the system, those 'inclined to be lazy are encouraged to remain so: they can never go without so long as they have relatives, and they are never without relatives' (1962:213). But Belshaw noted a man with whom he was acquainted who had a reputation for laziness, and from whom reciprocity was effectively withdrawn. He was always asking for help, but always avoiding his share of work and responsibility. He was despised and rejected. When he asked for help to rebuild his house, it was put on the official work programme. Dates were repeatedly set, but no-one turned up for work. The men, meanwhile, built other houses in the village, and in neighbouring villages (Belshaw 1964:121).

Despite the protests of today's romanticists, this is not an unusual situation: Yoni Ryan (personal communication) has noted oral traditions in Fiji referring to similar issues, and in Papua New Guinea, Chowning (personal communication) and Monsell-Davis (field notes), among others, note instances of neglect of the elderly and rejection of the lazy. However, in the majority of cases, the elderly and disabled are fully provided for by relatives and neighbours.

In urban areas, the poorest households are commonly not in a position to practise reciprocity. As noted earlier, Sister J.F. Chao's work at the 9-mile Settlement in Port Moresby shows that thirty-eight percent of Toaripi households are commonly without food for days at a time. The poorest of these households have lost the ability to reciprocate favours. Such households may go for a week without food, parents telling crying children simply to drink more water. Commonly after a week, a neighbour, unable to bear watching the situation, might give them some left-over food (1989:91-92).

Very poor families such as this are sometimes disowned by close relatives because of their inability to reciprocate gifts which express relationship and affection (ibid.:94).

Although Sister Chao does not mention it, I suspect the gifts she is referring to are not necessarily return presentations of basic food, but the contributions to life-crisis ceremonies that reflect ones enduring commitment to kin and affines.

From personal experience in Port Moresby, there are testimonies to the agonies and the traumas that individuals, or households go through, to find
something to contribute to a family, particularly close kin or affines, that has suffered a death, for example. There is deep shame if one does not contribute anything, because it suggests that one is uninterested in kin, and means that one will not receive assistance in a similar situation in the future:

"It's a big disgrace if you don't contribute", a middle-aged Motuan man commented to me. He was referring to the continual round of bride-price, church contributions, mortuary feasts and so on that he felt the need to participate in. "It is a burden," he added, "nearly every fortnight. But we get it back. They're going to help us when its our turn" (Tai Vetali, personal communication).

Persistent failure to contribute can lead to families being cut off altogether, as Sister Chao notes, and as some material collected from Port Moresby suggests: when attempting to identify alternative courses of action for one youth in difficulty, he said, "We cannot go to our aunties. Our parents quarrelled with them and they cannot help us. We cannot go and ask for anything." The reason for the quarrels was not established, but other anecdotal evidence suggested that it was connected with a failure to contribute to life-crisis ceremonies on the part of the youth's family.

Actual figures for households bordering on this situation are extremely hard to obtain. MacPherson, examining the social effects of structural adjustment policies, noted the wholly inadequate data collection by government agencies in Papua New Guinea, but he suggested that forty percent of the population of Port Moresby was living in self-help and makeshift housing, and thirty percent of the population was vulnerable to the effects of adjustment policies (1990:14 and 75). During the 1980s there was a fall in the proportion of the adult urban population with regular cash incomes (ibid.:77):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Population Group</th>
<th>1980</th>
<th>1985-87</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>all ages 15+</td>
<td>52.70%</td>
<td>41.86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>age 15-29</td>
<td>52.08%</td>
<td>36.50%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There seems little doubt that class is emerging as an element in the social and political organisation of present-day island states. One manifestation of this is the suggestion that households with a reasonable, steady income are prepared to assist similar households in times of need, but the poorest households are being left to fend for themselves as best they can. Noting a high incidence of poverty in Fijian villages, Barr suggests that 'the ethic of sharing in villages tends to be horizontal (at the same economic level) rather than vertical (from top to bottom)', but he notes that traditional structures tended to 'demand obligations of giving from the bottom to the top of the hierarchy' (Barr 1990:121).
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One constantly hears of the 'burden' of continual assistance to others, and of families being cut off from close relationships if they are lazy, uncooperative, or tend to depend on others (Lane 1992). And one hears complaints about the house being filled with visiting relatives who decide to stay too long (Sabah 1992).

Following the 1987 Household Survey conducted in Port Moresby, King recorded the mean population in high cost housing as 7.0 people, low cost housing as 7.6, and self-help housing as 7.5 people. The average household of just over seven people, consists of husband, wife, three children and two other relatives, usually closely related as brother, sister or parent to the husband or wife. 'Clearly', writes King, 'the households of Port Moresby are not inundated with 'wantoks' (King 1992:6).

This statement needs reconciling with one's subjective knowledge of Port Moresby, and the complaints heard day after day:

"Why can't they leave us alone, just for a couple of weeks?"

"I come home after work and find more people at the house — I don't say anything. I just go into my room and sleep."

"Mike, I'm tired of requests! I'm tired, I'm tired, I'm tired ..."

"They keep coming here, but they don't do anything for us in the village."

"Everyday that fellow comes asking for bus fare. I'm fed up."

The figures cited by King are statistical averages, and some houses are inundated with wantoks. One survey of thirty-eight houses in a Port Moresby settlement indicated a mean population per house of 8.5, with a range of three to sixteen occupants. (Eight houses had twelve or more occupants, ten had five or fewer (Underhill and Monsell-Davis, field notes).)

Also, occupancy statistics do not take account of either the regular daytime visits from wantoks living in Port Moresby, or of serial visitations from the village — not very many individuals at any one time, but as soon as one group leaves, another arrives to take their place.

DISINCENTIVE

As a disincentive to initiative, we have already noted the manner in which the supporting mechanisms of the wantok or kerekere systems can encourage the lazy to indulge their laziness. The 'safety net' makes it relatively easy to give up paid employment, or not to seek such work too assiduously.
From another viewpoint, Sahlins noted how the system on Moala inhibited the accumulation of useful items: because almost anything may be obtained (or lost) through kerekere, it is not a good risk to invest in valuable items. Few Moalans, for example, considered building a boat a good risk. The time and money involved in purchasing the necessary materials and expertise was likely to quickly evaporate, because:

once finished, the punt will be used by outsiders through kerekere or will be solicited outright, for boats are scarce. Being used frequently, the boat will fall into disrepair rapidly, and the proprietor will be saddled with the maintenance costs (Sahlins 1962:214).

In the urban situation, too many demands being made on the income of young people in their first jobs become an intolerable burden. There are numerous cases from Suva and Port Moresby of young people abandoning jobs out of frustration, because they cannot even keep enough from their wages for the bus fare to get to work. There are some Fijian examples in an earlier paper (Monsell-Davis 1982; see also Barr 1990).

One such example is of a well-educated young man in Port Moresby. He had a good job with the Post Office that potentially could have led to a very well-paid position. This was his first job after leaving school, and he received K143 take-home pay per fortnight. Every single fortnight, however, his parents would turn up from the village to extract money from him, and the occupants of the house he was living in seemed to expect him to pay the full rent for the house, and to purchase much of the food for the household.

Because he was working, his parents slowed down their fish and vegetable marketing, which they did to collect money for school fees, expecting instead that their son would now take over the responsibility of the school fees for his younger siblings. He had to find nearly K900 for fees for his two younger brothers in 1992.

In the village, his parents and other relatives sometimes purchased items at the local store in his name, with the result that he was saddled with the bills when he visited home. Out of total frustration, he has now abandoned his job and lives off other relatives.

In another example, a youth of twenty from a settlement, not very well-educated, but with a casual job as an upholsterer with a furniture company, regularly expressed his frustration at never having any money to buy clothes, or for his bus fare to work. His spending over two or three pay periods was as follows: receiving approximately K90 on a pay Friday he commonly had only about K2 left by Saturday morning. By the time he had given some money to his mother for food for the house, made some other, small, but necessary expenses, and given small amounts to his brothers, there was no money left for the remainder of the fortnight. He did not waste anything, he did not buy beer (he did spend K4 on cigarettes), yet he had no cash. After a few months of this, he lost heart and dropped out of the work force (Barr 1990:100; Monsell-Davis 1992).
Youths such as these are further disheartened by decisions such as that by the Papua New Guinea Minimum Wages Board, recommending the abolition of the urban minimum wage (about K60 per week) and replacing it with a country-wide minimum wage of about K22.96 per week. In addition, the Board recommended the introduction of a youth wage (for those under twenty-one) of just K17.22 per week. Their argument was that lower wages will make Papua New Guinea more 'competitive', and would permit greater numbers to be employed (Post - Courier, 27 August 1992; and 9 October 1992).

If people are discouraged on existing wages, how many more problems will they now face? These recommendations, we might note, came soon after the Parliament had implemented for itself a large increase in salaries and allowances. This was an increase, voted for in 1991, that stirred major student demonstrations, boycotted classes, and resulted in the cancellation of the second semester at the two Papua New Guinean universities in that year.

Another young man from one of the settlements (actually the brother of the youth who poured petrol over himself) said:

"All the boys, they don't want jobs. Well we want to work, but we want something in our pockets. There are too many families (relatives) so we've got nothing."

"I don't want to work. But I want something in my pocket. I'm gonna do something — they're selling home-made guns in Hohola ... I don't care if I go to Bomana" (prison).

This leads us to the recent work of Michael Goddard (1992) who interviewed inmates of Bomana Prison. He says that to argue that unemployment in Papua New Guinea leads to criminality is incorrect.

Many inmates were employed before they began criminal activities, but they were poorly qualified and their jobs were of low prestige, boring and poorly paid:

In discussion, the boring nature of their jobs featured prominently in reasons given by inmates both for getting into crime and leaving employment ... The work was dull and the pay was 'not enough'. The move into crime often began with opportunistic theft, which proved lucrative and relatively easy, with a low risk of being caught. ... Also, theft and burglary provided excitement which was lacking both in the work place and in the limited leisure activities of lower wage-earners (Goddard 1992:22; see also Monsell-Davis 1982; 1986).
A modest cash income often gives rise to kin-group expectations which can never be fully satisfied. The employed person becomes a channel for the flow of cash and commodities ... Thus he or she soon comes to feel that it is impossible to earn enough to satisfy the ... demands of dependent kin. Under these circumstances, theft and burglary, in particular, are attractive supplementary activities (Goddard 1992:22).

At much higher levels in the work force, these kin or wantok demands can also be of serious significance. In October 1991, the Minister for Correctional Services complained about the pressure from relatives and voters, and how this tempted Ministers and other Members of Parliament to misuse public funds.

"All the time", he is reported to have said, "there is someone coming to see me." Most demands were personal — for such things as airline tickets and pocket money, rather than for community projects.

"Just because we are Members of Parliament, people say we are 'big men', and so must have a lot of money. But the money we get is not enough [to satisfy all these demands] so many times politicians steal to help their relatives and people in the electorate" (Post - Courier, 15 October 1991).

CONCLUSION

The wantok system and kerekere system today are commonly spoken of as if they are synonymous with the traditional extended family and descent group. They are not, but there are important ideological or normative continuities between the two.

There is no question that the extended family is still an extremely important source of identity, and provides a sense of belonging and well-being. Nacanieli Rika (1986) is one Fijian who has documented this in lyrical terms and Roger Maaka has recently argued the importance of similar groupings to urban Māori (1992).

These kin groups and their modern extensions still provide a safety net for large numbers of urban dwellers who are in difficulties, but there is a growing category of people, particularly amongst urban residents, for whom the safety net fails. These are households in the poorest categories that are unable to contribute to the normal life-crisis ceremonies of other kin and affines, and as a result find themselves cut off from traditional sources of assistance.

Discussing Fiji, Barr commented, "the breakdown of traditional patterns of family caring and sharing ... is now strongly evident in the Fijian community" (Barr 1990:121 and 130; Lasaga 1984:29). But as Plange says, "for many people what is fading away is not the wish to care but the means to care" (Nii-K Plange, cited by Barr 1990:81 and 199).
It is also possible to argue that the pressures of the wantok system or the kerekere system are actually a disincentive to initiative and to steady employment, particularly for young people from poorer families in their first jobs. Furthermore, the intensity of the pressures can actually push individuals into criminal activity of one sort or another in order to supplement their income.

The question of whether the unemployed should be sent back to their villages is raised regularly. This is a solution for some individuals, but there are increasing numbers of people in urban areas of Papua New Guinea and the wider Pacific for whom this is simply no longer a viable option. The reasons for this could be the subject of another paper, but the point to reiterate is that there is a growing class of landless, jobless and place (ples)-less people, without a full extended family structure, or wantok system, to fall back on in times of difficulty.
REFERENCES


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References


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