

State Abandonment, Sexual Violence, and Transactional Sex

Sarah was infected with HIV when the PMV she was taking from Mendi back to Tari was held up at gunpoint by a group of Nipa men, and the female passengers were raped. This was a painful, stumbling interview because she was sullen and glum, and my desire to interview her clashed with my urge to console her. One of the youngest of the women I interviewed, she was also one of the most despondent, asserting that she couldn't imagine marrying or having children, because she couldn't imagine having sex or anyone wanting to marry her. She described her own HIV-positive body as abject, and she was revolted by the idea that she might marry a man who was also living with HIV.

She had been sent by her mother to buy betel nut and wholesale cigarettes to sell back in Tari. People often preferred to buy goods in Mendi or Mt. Hagen because they were cheaper there than in Tari; even taking the cost of a PMV round trip into account, a bit more profit could be made. Her mother didn't go herself because she suffered from chronic back and leg pain and didn't feel she could undergo the jarring trip on a hard wooden bench over a rutted dirt road. The region being thick with interethnic ties of marriage and friendship, within days word got back to Sarah's family that her rapist was rumored to be HIV-positive. By that time, MSF had a well-established project providing clinical care and counselling for survivors of sexual violence, and Sarah didn't live far from Tari hospital; however, she hadn't sought care from them and said that she had never heard of them.¹ Two years after the incident, Sarah was still angry that her kin had not demanded compensation or retaliated for the attack. "One of my brothers—a drug-body (i.e., a marijuana smoker)—raped a Nipa woman who came here to sell betel nut. He said it was for retaliation. I don't know. Then they got married. That's all that happened," she muttered. In fact, the PMV holdup itself had been retaliation for the murder of a Nipa man in Port Moresby, so it is possible that Huli leaders didn't want to escalate the conflict any further. For Sarah, the decision not to seek revenge rankled.

Sarah's might seem like a clear-cut case in terms of where to allocate blame for her infection—the Nipa men who held up her PMV and raped her and other female passengers—but, in fact, Sarah asserted that her mother was the primary *tene* (root or cause). Unpredictable outbreaks of hostilities with the Nipa were the way of the world, she suggested, but her mother should have known—did, in fact, know—that Sarah was too young to be sent on a daylong journey on a route that was plagued by crime: “I told her, ‘It is your fault that I have this sickness. You were the one who did this. You were the one who told me I had to go to Mendi and buy those goods. It is because of you that I was on the road going back and forth and I found this sickness. What are you going to do about it?’” (Here Sarah was implying that her mother should give her compensation.) Furious, she had briefly left her mother's household and moved in with her father's kin, who were threatening to take her mother to village court and demand compensation. The charge would have been something like reckless endangerment that not only put Sarah in harm's way, but also diminished her value, since few men would knowingly marry an HIV-positive woman, and her father's kin might thus never receive bridewealth for her. In the end, her father decided that he would only pursue a compensation case against Sarah's mother if Sarah died, and since she was thriving physically on ARVs, this didn't seem likely.²

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The armed robbery of Sarah's PMV occurred in 2011, a period in which such incidents were diminishing, largely because of the increased police presence on the road between Tari and Mendi intended to protect drivers and cargo destined for the LNG (such protections had not been there in the past). The late 1990s and early 2000s were a far more dangerous and tumultuous period, and in this chapter I examine that earlier era, a time of sociopolitical conflict, pervasive crime, and governmental abandonment that produced HIV vulnerability through increases in both sexual violence and sex work, as well as much reduced health services.

A FAILED ELECTION AND ITS AFTERMATH

Until 2012, when it was officially cut in two, with the western half becoming Hela Province, Southern Highlands Province was Papua New Guinea's most populous, and one of the largest by territory. There had long been tensions between east and west, at least since 1980, when the Huli provincial premier, Andrew Andaija, died in a plane crash, and many Huli alleged that ethnic groups in the east had used sorcery to bring down the plane. Many people trace the tensions further back, however, insisting that Michael Somare, the prime minister at the time of Independence in 1975 (and again from 2002 to 2011), had broken his promise to the Huli that they would receive their own province, instead creating a province that did not accord with their own understanding of the proper boundaries and its

cosmologically ordained ethnic composition. The position of provincial premier (and later governor) of Southern Highlands Province had therefore long been hotly contested between the Huli and the Mendi, the other large ethnic group in the province, with everyone assuming that a Mendi governor would bring development to the Mendi and allow the Huli to languish, while a Huli governor would do the opposite. Long-simmering tensions boiled over in 1997 after Dick Mune, a former governor belonging to the Nipa, a Mendi sub-group, died in a car accident. This time, Nipa people blamed Anderson Agiru, the Huli governor who had succeeded Mune, alleging sorcery. The only road between Tari and Mendi, the provincial capital of Southern Highlands Province, goes through Nipa territory, and Nipa people were determined not only to rob Huli vehicles, but to prevent any and all goods and supplies from reaching Tari.

The situation only grew worse during and after the next national election in 2002. Agiru had been suspended as governor in 2000 on grounds of corruption and mismanagement of funds, and was not permitted to run, a ruling that many Huli found humiliating and described as national discrimination against them as a people. Haley and May note that in the lead-up to the election, candidates in Southern Highlands Province stockpiled weapons and distributed them to their supporters, and that one “prominent candidate flew in cartons of semi-automatic weapons purchased in China while on an official government visit, so that his supporters might usurp control of the elections on polling day” (Haley and May 2007: 12; see also Alpers 2004). There was widespread election malfeasance throughout the country, and, in Southern Highlands Province, ballot boxes were stuffed or stolen, a candidate was kidnapped and held for ransom, people were intimidated or forced into voting for specific candidates, and a few people were killed. The conflict was not only between the east and west of the province, but also between candidates vying for positions within electorates. The elections were deemed to have failed in six of Southern Highlands Province’s nine electorates, and no governor was elected, essentially leaving the province without a government until new elections could be held (Dorpar and Macpherson 2007). When supplementary elections were held ten months later, with two thousand additional police and soldiers sent in to maintain order, the process was still compromised by fraud and violence, even though a new governor, Hami Yawari, who was neither Huli nor Mendi, was elected.

The consequences of these ongoing conflicts, the failed 2002 elections, and the lack of a provincial government were profound and enduring. Nipa groups continued to hold up Huli PMVs at gunpoint, sometimes assaulting and raping passengers. PMVs and government vehicles carrying supplies for schools or health centers were often robbed, and throughout my six months in Tari in 2004, the hospital was usually without essential medicines and supplies. Stores had difficulty maintaining their stocks, and prices went up, because the only way to ensure safety on the road was to pay for a police escort, a cost that was passed on to consumers. Ongoing roadblocks and robberies also meant that fuel often

didn't reach Tari, and as a result, government employees, including the police, were sometimes unable to carry out their duties in the district.

Guns continued to flood into the area. Days before I flew to Tari in February 2004, EMTV, the national TV network, reported that the Port Moresby airport's luggage security scanner, which had been broken for weeks but was finally fixed, had caught two men trying to bring guns, ammunition, and bullet-proof vests to Tari. How many guns had been flown in before the scanner was repaired no one knew, and police checkpoints into the province were not much of a deterrent. With the deterioration of services, the lack of economic opportunities, bitterness about the election results, and the influx of guns, crime within Huli territory increased. It quickly became conventional wisdom that rural households had to have someone at home at all times or risk being robbed. I once met an elderly woman who had been designated to stay at home when everyone else was away, but fell ill and had to stay overnight at the hospital. When she returned home, "everything was gone, even the scrap of towel for cleaning the baby's bottom."

Crime in town also became flagrant. In 2002, for example, a gang looted Bromley's, the one large store in Tari, for three days straight. As described to me, the men kept armed watch while their female kin hauled out everything of high value, such as electronic goods. Outnumbered and outgunned, the police were routed after a brief shootout. Then there was a free-for-all until the store was empty. My friends recalled it as three days of terror and delight: everyone was afraid of what the gang might do next, but, in the end, they had distributed cans of meat, cartons of instant noodle soups, and boxes of biscuits to everyone. Many people felt that since they couldn't afford most of the goods in the store anyway, they didn't care if it was robbed; it was "the missionaries' store," they said, meaning it stocked goods that expatriate missionaries bought and that only they could afford (imported pastas, breakfast cereal, cheese). This store never reopened, and the one bank in town and the post office also closed because of armed robberies.

With no banking services in Tari, and the persistent threat of holdups on the road to Mendi, public servants were unable to access their pay. Soon teachers and health workers began to leave, which led to the closure of schools and health centers, which led to yet more departures. Public servants didn't want to stay in a place where they didn't feel safe, where their children were unable to go to school, and where they couldn't access their pay. In 2004, the hospital, which was supposed to have 97 employees, only had 15, and no doctor (which meant it didn't actually qualify as a hospital). The employees who remained often didn't show up for work; without the most basic medicines and supplies, there was not much they could do, and morale was poor.

Tribal fighting also increased during this period. Crime and tribal fighting are complexly tied together, and when one increases, the other tends to also; indeed, it can be difficult to distinguish between the two. One might assume that the armed holdup of a PMV should be categorized as crime, since passengers are robbed and assaulted, but the intent to harm may be part of an ongoing political conflict, as

between the Huli and Nipa (cf. Roscoe 2014). Conversely, crimes such as murder or rape may ultimately result in a larger violent conflict between clans associated with victim and perpetrator. For example, after the village court case regarding Tabitha's sexual assault (discussed below), a man from the alleged rapist's clan publicly maligned Tabitha and, with tempers high because the dispute was not yet resolved, men from Tabitha's side attacked him with machetes, nearly severing his arms. This precipitated tribal conflict, with the two sides burning down one another's houses.

Furthermore, ongoing tribal fighting may result in crimes, such as robbery, in order to raise money, either for guns to escalate the conflict, or for the homicide compensation payments to end it. Rather than a concerted attack, group conflicts sometimes take the form of a series of individual criminal assaults—for example, the murder or rape of someone from the enemy group—and retaliation for a crime may take place during tribal fighting. A public servant told me that he had saved for years to build his own house, but that the very expensive recently installed windows and solar panels had been stolen; knowing the young men who were responsible and aware that their clan was embroiled in warfare, he had paid young men from the other side to target them, their families, and their homes. “But bring back the solar panels,” I told them,” he said.

The small police force in Tari was unable to deter this vicious cycle of crime and warfare, and the district administrator was reluctant to request a police mobile squad detachment without a concomitant rebuilding of public services. He knew that some of the crime was motivated by anger at the profound deterioration of health and education services, as well as the failure to maintain roads or create economic opportunities, and he believed that the potentially brutal use of police to intimidate and jail people might only further antagonize the populace. He wanted to try to restore services before bringing in additional police reinforcements, but was engaged in regular discussions with Porgera Joint Venture management, some of whom disagreed with this strategy and wanted to send in more police immediately.

Porgera Joint Venture was in a position to exert some influence over this debate because the Porgera mine in Enga Province is powered by a natural gas plant located in Hides, seventy-eight kilometers south of the mine, squarely in Hela Province. Two hundred and twenty-eight enormous electrical pylons—known as the Hides transmission line—snake their way from Hides to Porgera. The mine is thus dependent on a source of power that is located in a different province among Huli who not only do not benefit from the mine (i.e., receive no royalties or preferential employment), but also do not receive electricity from the transmission line. Without this electricity, the mine cannot operate, and in 2002, Huli men sabotaged thirty-eight of the pylons, closing the mine for three months.

Toppling Hides transmission line pylons in order to express complaint is, in fact, a long-standing tactic on the part of Huli groups: when I first arrived at my field site for my doctoral research in 1995, I beheld the charred remains of still smoldering houses, burned by local police. Reportedly acting on instructions from PJV,

they had resorted to violent measures, including beatings and house burnings, in order to coerce local leaders into turning over the young men who had recently felled two of the pylons. In 2004, Huli friends and PJV staff told me that the 2002 pylon sabotage was intended less as an expression of resentment of PJV and more as a message to the government that the lack of services had become intolerable. With their elected representatives unwilling to visit Tari to hear their grievances, they had shrewdly decided to target an important source of revenue for the state, its second-largest gold mine. They correctly surmised that this sabotage would quickly and effectively get the attention of both government and corporation. As Alice Street has pointed out, governmental neglect can motivate people's increasingly desperate attempts to "force the state to recognize its obligations towards them" (Street 2012: 3). During this period, roughly from 1999 to 2004, the state was experienced by Huli less as a monolith deploying technologies of legibility and discipline (Scott 1988), and more as an absent entity that people had to compel to see them, to recognize their miseries and needs.

PJV responded this time, not with intimidation and violence, but by assuming some of the duties associated with an effective state. For example, it established a small Community Relations Office in Tari, staffed by a network of male community liaison officers from the various landowning groups along the Hides transmission line, and it used Papua New Guinea's tax credit scheme to maintain goodwill in the area by building schools and maintaining roads and bridges.³ With discretionary funds available to them for community projects they deemed worthwhile, expatriate PJV managers in Tari gave money and other assistance to sports teams, women's groups, and youth groups ("youth groups" in this context consisted mostly of young men who had formed a group for the sole purpose of being hired for PJV projects, such as cleaning Tari town of litter or cutting the grass on the air strip). And families who owned land on which an electrical pylon had been erected were given a "security" payment—a new payment every six months of K650 per tower provided it had not been vandalized. PJV also sometimes attempted to "turn" known saboteurs, deliberately recruiting some of them to be community liaison officers. The main goal of all of this, of course, was to keep the towers up so that gold could continue to be excavated. In 2004, the PJV community relations office was the only source of economic opportunity in Tari. Every weekday there was a twenty-five-yard or longer line of petitioners outside the ten-foot-tall gate hoping to gain an audience with a PJV staff member who might help with transport to a functioning hospital, funds for school fees, letters of introduction or recommendation, or supplies to begin a chicken project or some other income-generating endeavor.

STATE ABANDONMENT: "TARI IS A NO-GO ZONE"

Seeking to "unsettle conceptualizations of the state as a singular, rational, and stable entity" (Pinker and Harvey 2018: 17), anthropologists have examined the

state's ontological nature with renewed vigor, often citing a seminal paper by Phillip Abrams (1988) questioning the reality of the state and arguing that it is best understood as an ideological project. Christopher Krupa and David Nugent observe that "one of the most enduring conventions of state realism is a centrifocal imaginary. That is, state power is regarded as something that is concentrated in various bureaucratic-administrative centers, from which it radiates outward across national-territorial space" (Krupa and Nugent 2015: 10). Eschewing the narrative of "state realism" and attempting to disrupt this centrifocal imaginary, they argue that an ethnographic approach to the state should investigate how "the state as phenomenological reality is produced . . . in local encounters at the everyday level" (Aretxaga 2003: 393) and "conjured into being in the context of the minutiae of everyday life" (Krupa and Nugent 2015: 9). In other words, what specifically do people experience in their daily lives that enables them to imagine and construct the state in particular ways?

Some scholars who have adopted this phenomenological ethnographic approach have observed that state power typically extends beyond the places and agencies in which it is officially located, making the state "unsiteable" (Navaro-Yashin 2002: 3). In other words, while the state may be imagined as embodied in particular offices or institutions, its practices and representatives can in fact exert power outside and beyond these. Moreover, the state often exists most powerfully through its "affective life"—that is, through "the ways desire, hope, and fear may simultaneously invest us in projects of state" (Krupa and Nugent 2015: 14). The state thus comes to exist for and in people, not only through internalized state discourses, but also through people's aspirations and utopian hopes. Moreover, "attending to affect . . . provides insights into how the state interchangeably materializes and disappears—contingently yet consequentially—in everyday interactions," Mateusz Laszczkowski and Madeleine Reeves argue (2018: 10). In other words, the state can be experienced as an unreliable affective interlocutor, sometimes present and attentive, sometimes distant and oblivious. Investigating the land claims of South Africans dispossessed of property during the apartheid era, and the onerous forms that claimants were required to fill out, Christiaan Beyers calls this dynamic an "affective deficit" and suggests that the state creates cathexis in people by building up their affective desires, but can then unexpectedly seem to vanish from the relationship; there is "a large discrepancy between the desire manifested in narratives inscribed on claim forms and what the claims process yields . . . the sense of anticipation in filling out forms is met with flat nothingness over time. The dialogic flow of affectivity in language meets a dead end," and although the state's affective deficit—and its failures to provide effective restitution—can lead to cynicism, in many cases, it "is itself productive in a sense, since the desire for recognition is sustained by its deferment" (Beyers 2018: 77–78). In other words, the state creates itself as an entity by producing longing, unfulfilled desires, and intimations of future improvement.

In Tari, during this tumultuous period, the Papua New Guinea state was affectively present (in people's fear and anger) largely through its disappearance—that is, through the sites and institutions in which people expected it to be, but it no longer was. It was “unsiteable,” not because it exceeded the sites it was expected to occupy, but because it had evacuated them. One afternoon in 2004, for example, I carried out participant observation at the hospital in an empty outpatient area, an area that five years before and five years later, was easily packed all day long with hundreds of patients. I sat for hours with a handful of patients, and nobody came. I then wandered through the empty old maternity ward, spattered with bloodstains and littered with rusted equipment, and then through the empty “new” maternity ward, which had sat unused for years, because it was never connected to the water supply, its pink curtains gathering dust and dead insects. Similarly, only a few police were posted to Tari in early 2004, and a question that queasily made its way through town every day was whether any of them were in the station. No police meant that there might be more robberies at the main market or holdups of PMVs.

“For the majority of Papua New Guineans . . . the state exists primarily as an absence. . . . The decrepit condition or lack of state infrastructure such as roads, schools or health centres suggests to those living in rural areas that they have been forgotten or betrayed by politicians,” Alice Street notes (2012: 16). One might thus characterize much of rural Papua New Guinea as experiencing a perpetual “affective deficit” (as well as a services and infrastructure deficit) in relation to the state. In Tari, however, the state was experienced, not simply as an affective deficit or absence, but as a terrifying and punishing abandonment. Not only did government workers abscond, but the state's physical infrastructure also began to disappear. The mattresses at the hospital were stolen, for example. And at night I was often woken by the sound of men prying sheets of metal roofing off of the abandoned courthouse nearby; little by little, the metal roofing disappeared, then windowpanes, then wooden beams. Segments of the Tari airport fence went missing, and people began using the runway area for grazing animals during the day and drinking parties at night. With sheep and beer bottles littering the airstrip, Air Niugini ceased its flights.

The situation was not merely a case of Tari being geographically or discursively located in the “margins of the state,” conceptualized *inter alia* as “the peripheries seen to form natural containers for people considered insufficiently socialized into the law” (Das and Poole 2004: 9). There is no doubt that the Huli have been, and continue to be, seen by government elites as not just insufficiently socialized into the law, but as arrogantly rejecting it. Nevertheless, the concept of marginality, with its suggestion of languishing neglect or irrelevancy, does not quite capture the active abandonment that was taking place at this time. On a visit to Port Moresby, I was told by staff at the National AIDS Council (NAC) that Tari had been unofficially declared “a no-go zone”: fearful of being abducted and held for ransom, politicians refused to visit it, and NGOs refused to send their employees there.⁴ In

hushed tones, staff at the NAC and at some NGOs said that the province was being “punished”: if the people couldn’t learn to participate in an orderly democratic process, they wouldn’t get any governance at all. And one PJV manager informed me that he’d heard politicians in Port Moresby say they wished they could build a wall around the province and forget about it.

One consequence of this was that the HIV prevention programming that was taking place in other provinces was not implemented in the Tari area. I would make the occasional trip to Port Moresby and learn from NAC staff about innovative youth group or peer education projects happening elsewhere, but no basic HIV awareness, let alone more creative or targeted interventions, was planned for Tari. Similarly, condoms were almost completely unavailable. Some enterprising men occasionally went to Mendi or Mt. Hagen, stocked up on condoms there, and sold them to other men back in Tari for a profit, but they were not available at Tari stores. Health facilities that had them only provided them to married men who said they needed them for family planning purposes, guided by the theory that refusing to distribute them for other reasons would discourage pre- and extra-marital sex. I therefore brought large cartons of condoms back from the National AIDS Council and gave them to my four male field assistants and male PJV staff to sell or distribute as they saw fit.

In April 2004, the Papua New Guinea state reappeared in force. Forty mobile squad police were sent to Tari in response to two events. First, the district administrator’s truck was burned, which was interpreted as a direct assault on the government. Second, the gang responsible for much of the more flagrant crime in Tari abducted two PJV employees (they let them go after using them to gain entry to PJV facilities so that they could refuel).⁵ The police chased after them, and their leader, David Agini, and most of the members died, either shot by the police or killed when they crashed their truck. Government officials feared that Agini’s kin and supporters might retaliate by attacking the police or burning down government buildings, and so a mobile squad was sent. As noted in chapter 1, given their reputation for thuggish behavior, mobile squads are often feared. In this case, however, they were respectful, and their presence successfully brought peace to the area for the duration of their stay. When they left a few months later, hundreds of people lined the roads through and out of town, and wept as their trucks drove past. The state was given palpable affective life with tears shed as it disappeared yet again.

The governmental abandonment of this period, from the end of the 1990s until the mid 2000s, exacerbated HIV vulnerabilities in Tari, not only through the state’s failure to carry out HIV awareness and prevention activities, but also by creating a social environment in which violent, coercive, and transactional sex inevitably flourished. I divide the following discussion into two rough categories, sexual violence and transactional sex. In some cases these two categories are clear-cut: the rape at gunpoint of Sarah and other female PMV passengers involved no “transactional” give-and-take, only violent seizure. But some instances are less easily classified: one woman I interviewed in 2004 spoke of risking the road to Mendi because



FIGURE 5. Clipping from the *Post Courier* newspaper about David Agini, February 5, 2004. Photo by author.

she desperately needed to call her brother, and there were no working phones in Tari (mobile phones did not arrive in Tari until 2008); once there, she agreed to sex with a public servant in exchange for the use of his phone. This episode raises the question: when men have the power to act as gatekeepers to needed goods and services, and demand sex in exchange for access to them, is this a transaction or violence? In short, even as I use the categories of sexual violence and transactional sex to analyze the sexual entanglements fostered by state abandonment, it is important to bear in mind that Tari itself, governmentally forsaken, had become a more brutal place, one that made these distinctions problematic (cf. Burnet 2012).

SEXUAL VIOLENCE

The Prevalence of Rape and Its Causes

It is difficult to know the prevalence of sexual violence in Tari, because unless a woman is badly injured, cases of sexual violence are generally not reported to the hospital or the police. This is in part because rape is conceptualized primarily as an appropriative violation against a family, necessitating revenge or compensation, and not as a traumatizing violation of the individual that may require clinical or psychological care. Going to the hospital is therefore usually considered unnecessary, and reporting to the police is often avoided, because they might interfere with a family's intentions to exact revenge.⁶ Consequently, it is impossible to provide definitive numbers for sexual violence in the Tari area, its fluctuations over time, and how these fluctuations might correlate with political or socioeconomic changes.

That said, there is more information about this than one might expect, and it indicates very high levels of sexual violence in the Hela region during the early

and mid 2000s. For one thing, a survey that investigated households' experiences of various violent crimes (domestic violence, armed robbery, sexual violence, etc.) found that in Southern Highlands Province in 2005, 8 percent of households said that a member had experienced sexual assault during the previous six months. Of these cases, 89 percent were in the province's Hela region (Haley and Muggah 2006: 46). Furthermore, my examination of injury-related medical records at Tari Hospital in April 2004 also showed very high levels of sexual violence at that time, with seven incidents of rape involving multiple attackers during just the first three months of that year. I made a point of examining the hospital injury records because I had been shocked to learn of four village court cases about rape taking place just within the immediate vicinity of my guesthouse, and I wanted to ascertain whether data were available that supported what people overwhelmingly described as a frightening increase in sexual violence. The cases most often seen by the hospital staff were those described as gang or pack rapes, often because the female victims were more badly injured during such incidents.

I copied the following notes from the records:

1. F, 17, pack rape by 3 men. Traveling with mother and sister.
2. F, 16, resisted. Multiple pocket knife wounds to back and head.
3. F, 20, pack rape by 4 men.
4. F, 17, pack rape by 3 men.
5. F, 23, 7 men pack rape. Also axe wound to head and bashed by guns when she tried to resist.
6. F, 65, pack rape by 6 men, midnight.
7. F, 21, pack rape by 5 men, 9 am.

The reasons for this increase in sexual violence were multiple. First and foremost was the increase in political conflict and the concomitant increase in crime, including rape. A number of scholars have analyzed the pervasiveness of sexual violence in conflict zones, demonstrating that rather than being seen as a symptom of anarchy or the breakdown of moral order, sexual violence should be understood as a deliberate strategy for terrorizing and humiliating the enemy (Seifert 1994, Enloe 2000, Turshen 2001, Meger 2010, Burnet 2012). These analyses have some relevance for understanding the situation in the Tari area during this period: women belonging to enemy groups are typically not killed, but they may be targeted for rape, with the intent of humiliating the enemy, instilling fear, and hemming in an enemy group in order to limit their economic activity. Fearful of attack, women will either flee an area or not stray outside family territory; either way, unable to access agricultural fields or markets, their economic contributions to family and clan are usually severely curtailed. In this sense, rape is used as a weapon of war in the Tari area.

That said, much of the literature analyzing sexual violence in conflict zones is not very apt to the situation in the Hela region during this period. Women were

not abducted by enemy groups or forcibly impregnated by them, for example. And fighting did not necessarily or even often take place on a field of battle, but instead consisted of isolated and opportunistic acts: a male member of an enemy group might be killed while walking home alone after a night of drinking and gambling; a female member of an enemy group might be raped as she walked home from her garden at dusk. Individuals were sometimes chosen as targets because they represented powerful assets of the enemy—a trade-store owner or a highly educated man, for example. But they were also often chosen because they were vulnerable and easy targets; thus, women living alone might be chosen for home invasion and rape.

In the absence of an effective police force that could work to prevent and punish sexual violence and other crimes, people increasingly relied on their own family resources, especially their young men. For example, I repeatedly observed older women use threats of sexual violence against other women in order to deter property crime. Suspecting a family of robbing her fields or stealing her chickens, a senior woman might loudly ask when she encountered women from the family, “Do you think we don’t have young men in our household? Do you think we won’t send them? Do you think we can’t take your pigs? Or your girls? Our young men are standing by.” As noted in chapter 1, although female solidarity is valued by Huli women, it is often fragmented along lines of generation or kinship affiliation. Thus, older women seemed to have no qualms about threatening younger women belonging to enemy families with retaliation by their own young male kin.

Often the young men would, in fact, be standing silently in the background as these threats of retaliatory theft and rape were made. And they knew that such threats were not merely tactics of intimidation. Men were expected to follow through when their family members were assaulted, and violent retaliation was understood, not only as punishment for others’ behavior, but also as a gift of revenge or protection to one’s own kin. When there were rumors that a gang had threatened to rob me, more than one young male friend of mine tried to reassure me by promising that he would rape the sister of any man who attacked me. Though taken aback, I came to understand these promises for what they were: what little a young man could offer, and was expected to do, for women he wanted to defend (which is not to say that sexual assaults didn’t also have other meanings in terms of male solidarity, masculine potency, and the re-inscription of sexual difference and male domination through sexual violence). And, in order to protect their families and property, older women were complicit in making and mobilizing these threats.

In short, during this chaotic period, sexual violence became a resource for punishing enemy incursions, and occasionally people even articulated a kind of calculus: in the repertoire of possible tactics for preventing or punishing encroachments by enemy groups or pilfering by bold neighbors, sexual violence



FIGURE 6. Two boys with a gun, faces pixelated for their protection. Photo by Kenneth I. MacDonald.

was worse than stealing pigs, but not nearly as bad as murder or armed assault. People deplored the increase in sexual violence and complained about young men “causing trouble,” but they also wanted to be able to deploy these troublesome young men when necessary. Young men were thus not always acting autonomously when they started “trouble,” and they were encouraged to maintain a state of masculine affective volatility, anger, and readiness for violence, including sexual violence.

Incidents of rape were sometimes highly polysemous in intent, however. Departing dramatically from the existing literature about sexual violence in conflict zones, where it has been argued that women from enemy groups are objects of hatred and that rape serves to further dehumanize them (Meger 2010, Seifert 1994), it was sometimes the case that a young man wanting to avenge the rape of female kin might choose to assault a young woman for whom he had romantic feelings, hoping both to meet others’ expectations of revenge, but also to bring about a marriage for himself, since marriage is one way of resolving sexual assault disputes. For example, when Tarali, a woman I interviewed in 2004, was in grade 8 in Koroba High School, some young men broke into the girls’ dormitory and raped her and a few other female students. Tarali became pregnant as a result and dropped out. In fact, Tarali knew the young man who had raped her, and she asserted that he had targeted her specifically because he hoped to force a marriage between them. He was trying to kill two birds with one stone, as it were. He was, with his gang, vandalizing the school and harming its students in order to express anger about the school’s failure to pay sufficient compensation to the nearby community for the land it was occupying, but he was simultaneously trying to acquire a desired spouse who would otherwise have been far beyond his reach. He hoped that her parents would see their union as a solution to the problem of the premarital sex that he had forced upon her. As Tarali explained:

The young man who raped me said that he knew I was a good young woman who did well in school and could marry an important, well-educated man, and so he chose me. [He knew you?] Yes, he knew me. . . . One of my sisters married a man from Koroba who lived very near the high school. He was her in-law. [So you knew him.] Yes, I knew him. We had stayed in the same house; we had eaten together. [So he knew you and he wanted to rape you?] Yes, he intended to rape me specifically. . . . My bed was in a room far from the door, and he deliberately came and looked for me. He chose me because he wanted to marry me. . . . But I didn’t want to marry a man like him with no education. And I didn’t want to marry someone who broke into the dorm and raped me.

Tarali was lucky: her family did not force her to marry her rapist, and when I interviewed her she was very happily married to a man she met a few years later. However, eight of the twenty-five women I interviewed in 2004 (including Tarali) were raped, five of them were forced to marry their rapists, and none of these marriages were happy.

Compensation Claims and Forensic Exams

The sexual violence during this period also led to a form of medical violence. While inquiring about the details of two village court cases concerning sexual assault (Tabitha and Madeline, discussed below), I learned about an unexpected development at the hospital: procedures for handling sexual assault patients had recently been created in order to meet demands for evidence in village court cases. Rape cases were being medicalized in the sense that victims were being brought to the hospital, when in the past they had not been unless they suffered additional injuries (e.g., broken bones, stab wounds). However, the medical treatment they received was not therapeutic. Rather, it was forensic, and forensically very specific to Huli concerns about premarital sex. In cases involving young unmarried female victims, the accused perpetrators had begun demanding that the victims be medically examined to determine (1) whether or not the young woman had been a virgin before the alleged assault, and (2) whether the alleged sex had been consensual or forced. Sometimes these examinations took place weeks after the incidents in question, since it often took that long for an incident to come to light, for the woman's kin to demand compensation, for a village court case to be scheduled, and for the alleged perpetrator's kin to respond by demanding the medical examination. Hospital staff either did not know that medical examinations cannot definitively answer the above questions, especially days or weeks after the event, or chose to proceed anyway, and thus the hospital records dutifully contained carbon copies of numerous letters like this one:

F/16. The above named has been examined . . . one week later from the time she alleges she was raped by somebody (a man). She says this was the first time she had sexual intercourse. She was menstruating at the time of this incident. A young girl of about 16–17 years of age. Not in distress, no signs of scratches or wounds to the private parts—vulva is normal and vagina open. Adult speculum easily introduced in the vagina. My two fingers introduced as if she is far experienced with sex. No signs of healing lacerations of the introitus or posterior part of the vagina. And therefore not a virgin at all.

In other words, the medical finding in this case, documented in a letter purchased for use by the perpetrator, was that, contrary to her assertion, the girl had not been a virgin before the alleged rape and that it was possible that her rape claim was also false since there were no visible scratches, wounds, or lacerations. Impossible not to notice, as well, is the affective tone of moralistic judgment, and perhaps even pleasure, emerging from the text, despite its being encoded in seemingly objective, clinical language (“My two fingers introduced as if she is far experienced with sex. . . . And therefore not a virgin at all”).

Setting aside the impossibility of reading facts about a woman's sexual history from a visual or tactile investigation of her vagina, it is important to understand how the “facts” produced from these exams were used. A young woman's kin

hoped that an exam would show that she had been a virgin and that her claim of rape was true; this would enable them to demand a large compensation payment. The alleged perpetrator's kin were hoping for the opposite result: if it was determined that she had not been a virgin prior to the incident and that the sex had been consensual, then they could refuse to pay any compensation at all, arguing that she was a "loose" woman and that it was impossible to know how many previous partners she'd had. (This was the initial outcome in Tabitha's case, discussed below.) If a young woman was determined to have been a virgin, but the sex consensual, one or both parties might propose that the couple marry, in which case the alleged perpetrator's kin would pay bridewealth for her. In some ways the most contentious outcome was that a young woman was determined not to have been a virgin, but the incident was a rape. The evidence used to arrive at this outcome seemed to be that the girl's vaginal opening was large and smooth, the hymen was not intact and did not show any evidence of recent tearing, but there were other signs of forced sex such as lacerations on the vulva or injuries to other parts of the body. In this case, compensation could be demanded, but the man's kin would argue that it should be reduced because "someone else had stolen her first," and her family should therefore hunt down the earlier perpetrator(s) if they wanted full compensation for her "theft."

In general, Huli do not prize female virginity as valuable in and of itself, and it is not associated with some notion of female purity. Rather, it indexes a young woman's proper care, socialization, and discipline by her family; it is an indicator not just of her individual character, but of the character of her family and how they have raised her. As important, young women are said to begin experiencing sexual desire after they have first had sex, not before. By "opening up" a woman, penile penetration is said to initiate desire in her, and this desire should be initiated by and directed towards her husband. Much as Veena Das observes for Hindu society, drawing on Claude Lévi-Strauss's alliance theory, "A girl's awakening into sexuality is considered not as the work of her own desire but rather the working of male desire, which in the code of alliance is most appropriately the desire of her husband. The sexual offence of rape against a young girl thus becomes an offence against the code of alliance" (Das 1996: 2416). In other words, rape perverts the proper course of female desire and is thus a violation against men, both the men of her natal family who have rightful custody over her and the men who might want to marry her.

Das's analysis of judicial discourse in Indian court proceedings regarding rape suggested that judges' questioning often sought to determine "whether a body previously unmarked by the impress of male desire on it ha[d] been 'sexualised' through the offence under trial" (Das 1996: 2416)—that is, did the assault bring about a change in the girl or young woman such that she came to recognize herself as a sexual being. Similarly, Huli worry that a young woman whose desire has been "opened up" prior to marriage—including through rape—may find that

her husband is not enough for her, and it is thought that she is less likely to be faithful. The onset of female desire in this model has nothing to do with the pleasure or consensual nature of a woman's first sexual experience; rather, it is the physical penetration itself that is thought to produce desire. In conversations and during interviews, one of the concerns people articulated about the increase in sexual violence during this period was that it might result in more women becoming sex workers because of their excess desire.

Tabitha's Case

I never knew Tabitha. She was already dead when I arrived in 2004. She was the teenaged daughter of divorced parents, had gone to live with her father, and was raped by a young man in his household. The young man's kin insisted that she undergo a medical exam, and when the hospital report indicated that she had not been a virgin, they refused to pay compensation. Tabitha and her family were humiliated during the court case owing to the findings of the medical exam, and afterwards the young man's kin regularly insulted her in public, jeering at her pretensions that she, a *pamuk meri* (prostitute, slut), might get compensation from them. Tabitha committed suicide by hanging herself, and ultimately the young man's kin had to pay far more in compensation for her death than they would have if they had agreed to pay compensation for her rape, because their insults were deemed the primary *tene*—cause—of her suicide. Women's injuries to themselves, including suicide, are often a tactic of last resort for asserting the truth of their testimonies (Wardlow 1996, 2006a), and Tabitha's suicide was understood in this way, at least by most people I spoke with.

One wonders, of course, how the village court case (and perhaps Tabitha's life) might have proceeded differently in the absence of the damning forensic report. The report served to establish physical, historical, and moral "facts" about Tabitha that played a pivotal role in her suicide. In the past, village court cases did not always establish "the truth" of an event; sometimes they did, but sometimes they instead produced a sufficiently acceptable outcome in terms of an agreed amount for compensation that "the truth" of a matter could remain indeterminate. People might continue to grumble about the meaning of the events in question, but the dispute itself was resolved. One thing these forensic vaginal exams did, for the short period they existed, was assert the possibility and preeminence of a scientifically verified and unassailable truth (though they weren't, in fact, scientific, and could not produce truth). Arguably this made young women's testimony even less valuable, less worth listening to (cf. Mulla 2014). Nevertheless, Tabitha's suicide, as its own kind of unassailable truth, did, at least for some people, work to overturn the preeminence of the forensic exam as a signifier of a vagina's history, and thus also a signifier of a young woman's morality.

In the South African context, Elizabeth Thornberry (2015) has similarly argued that a change in practices for conducting virginity examinations among the Xhosa

during the colonial period disempowered and silenced women. Precolonially, elderly female kin had the authority to examine young women in response to allegations of rape or premarital sex, but colonial courts demanded that medically trained doctors carry out these exams, thus eliminating older women's generational authority, as well as their practiced knowledge, in making these assessments. Whereas older female kin's findings generally accorded with a young woman's statement about a sexual incident, the focus on bodily evidence in medical exams meant that young women's testimony carried far less weight: only 25 percent of rape cases resulted in a verdict of guilty, Thornberry found. Virginity exams are not a Huli custom; nevertheless, the privileging of medical evidence over female testimony had a similar silencing effect, as Madeline's case demonstrates.

Madeline's Case

Madeline, a teenager, had been travelling with her parents and younger sister to a funeral when *rascals* (criminals) held up their PMV. While Madeline's mother and sister huddled near their father, Madeline had run into the forest, and when she returned, she claimed that one of the rascals had run after her and raped her. The alleged perpetrator was identified and compensation was demanded from his family, who demanded that Madeline undergo a medical exam. The resulting report stated that Madeline was pregnant, that she had not been a virgin before the attack, that it was possible that a rape had taken place, but also possible that the pregnancy was not due to the rape. The alleged perpetrator said that he had chased Madeline into the trees, but that he had not had sex with her. Female friends of Madeline were badgered into admitting that she had a boyfriend. Madeline herself was then repeatedly pestered by her female kin to reveal the truth of the situation: had she had sex with her boyfriend? Had she known she was pregnant before the attack? Had the accused actually attacked her, or was her story about what happened during the holdup a fabrication?

During one of these interrogations, at which I was present, a few women who had themselves been victims of a PMV holdup exchanged looks and noted dryly that Madeline's behavior had been aberrant: a young girl like her would have clung to her father, as her mother and sister had done, not run off into the bush on her own. The insinuation was that even as the attack was taking place, Madeline—unnaturally, disturbingly—had the presence of mind to spot the serendipitous opportunity: she could hide her premarital sexual dalliance by claiming she'd been raped during the holdup. A pregnancy due to rape was less stigmatizing than a pregnancy due to consensual premarital sex, because in the former she was an innocent victim, whereas in the latter case, she could be construed as "loose." Perhaps Madeline had calculated that if she ran into the bush, where there were no witnesses, no one would be the wiser.

Later that same day, when Madeline was absent, the women recalled their own experiences of being victims of a PMV holdup and gang rape the year

before—their terror, the gasping for breath, their legs that suddenly went weak and wobbly. To ease the moment of painful recollection—a moment in which they were re-embodiment the event, with one woman gulping for breath and another in tears—they teased each other. “I remember seeing you lose your footing and roll down the hill. Your skirt was up over your head and your petticoats were in the air. You looked like a fat chicken tumbling down that hill.” “And do you remember —? She was trying to whack that rascal with her umbrella.” Ultimately, however, they drew on their own harrowing memories to analyze Madeline’s account of her incident, and to agree that it raised troubling questions. Why had she not been paralyzed with fear, as they had been? How had she been able to run when they could barely breathe or coordinate their limbs? That Madeline’s response to sexual violence had not been the same as theirs made them suspicious, which suggests that trauma can have the troubling impact on its survivors of making them doubt or even disqualify victims whose affective responses do not match their own.

Notably, all this speculation about Madeline’s aberrant behavior and possible canny manipulation of events was voiced only *after* the results of her vaginal exam were made known. Until that moment, Madeline’s female kin had forcefully upheld her version. In other words, the “factual” findings of the exam not only undermined her narrative, but also sowed doubts among those who would normally have zealously supported her.

It was at this point that Madeline suddenly refused to speak about the incident at all. In response to questions before, during, and after the village court case, she remained silent, head down, face studiously blank. She was also silent about the outcome, which was that the village court case against the alleged rapist was dropped, as were attempts to demand compensation from her supposed boyfriend. Both young men maintained that they had not had sex with her, and in the face of Madeline’s silence and uncertain medical exam results, it became impossible to move forward litigiously. In the cases I knew about, the forensic exam silenced young women: Madeline went mute when she realized her kin might believe the exam over her own testimony. As Laura Hengehold has observed in the North American context, rape trials, with their requirements that victims’ testimony correspond to preconceived narratives, can “turn [women’s] desiring and discursive energies against themselves when they attempt to describe ‘what happened’” (Hengehold 2000: 193). Madeline, with her vagina appropriated from her by the forensic exam and used to contradict her voice, chose silence. However, it also seemed that her resolute silence had powerful social effects: her refusal to cooperate, explain, justify, or make herself legible to others ultimately derailed their attempts to create and resolve a dispute about her sexual conduct.

A conjunction of factors drove this intimate forensic scopic economy in which a girl or young woman was re-violated in order to reveal “facts” that would enable a dispute to be resolved and compensation paid or withheld. There was, of course, the widespread sexual violence during this period, which resulted in an increase

in compensation claims. Not to demand compensation was shameful, and was read as a family's disavowal of the woman, a decision that she was not worth pursuing redress. Moreover, if compensation wasn't demanded, there was the possibility that a girl's "brothers" (whether natal or more broadly defined male kin) would take matters into their own hands and rape "sisters" of the alleged perpetrator, or otherwise take revenge, dangerously escalating a conflict. Concurrent with an increase in sexual violence, however, there was also concern about increases in consensual premarital sex, with many people asserting that young women were "no longer fenced in"—that is, not as well monitored and controlled as in the past. Thus, when a woman's kin alleged rape, a young man's kin was likely to allege consent. It was hoped that medical evidence could resolve this kind of impasse. Finally, over time there has been a more general escalation in the demands for medical evidence in Huli compensation cases. Where testimony, witness confirmation, or community knowledge about complainant and accused had been sufficient in the past, now medical documentation had become part of the assemblage of making grievances visible and compensable (see also van Amstel and van der Geest 2004).

Alice Street has argued that in Papua New Guinea, X-rays and other visibilizing health technologies might better be considered "relational technologies," rather than biopolitical or even diagnostic technologies, because their importance for patients is not that they "could now know and see what was inside them but that, in being rendered recognizable and knowable within the conventions of biomedicine . . . doctors would feel compelled to cure them" (Street 2014: 131). In other words, from a patient's perspective, particularly in a context of scarce medical resources, the X-ray is less about revealing the truth of the body and more about being able to produce oneself as the kind of person—a patient—who can solicit therapeutic attention from the busy doctor, whose presence and care are perpetually elsewhere. Any assumption that Tari Hospital's forensic vaginal exams had biopolitical or medicalizing effects is similarly problematic, though in this case, the visualizing technology might better be thought of as a *moral* technology rather than a relational one. Through attempting to use the exams to visibilize morality within the vagina, the exam worked to produce young women as particular kinds of female persons: prior virgins whose injuries could compel compensation from others or, more often than not, according to the records I examined, "far experienced with sex" and thus unable to be recognized as worthy compensable subjects. Governmental abandon meant that there was no oversight of hospital practice and thus nothing to prevent the development of this anomalous procedure. What gave these exams their authority and scientific truth-value was the fact that they were carried out in the state-authorized site of the hospital, using state-trained employees and state-provided equipment. However, this was unsanctioned practice that emerged in the vacuum created by the state's absence.⁸ These exams quickly disappeared once order in Tari was restored.

TRANSACTIONAL SEX

Passenger Women

Last Minute Lucy was sometimes meanly teased by family members for “catching AIDS at the last minute,” by which they meant at a later stage in life, when most people assume a woman’s sexual activity is winding down or over. Wearing big hoop earrings and a colorful skirt, she looked to be in her early fifties when I first interviewed her in 2012. She was living with her younger brother, who was also HIV-positive, and they were another of the nuclear family clusters that made me concerned that HIV prevalence in the Tari area was significantly higher than the reported national prevalence. They had not spent much time together after their youth—indeed, had lived in different provinces for most of their adulthood. In other words, they did not belong to the same sexual networks, which might have resulted in them both being infected. They were living together when I interviewed Lucy because neither was married and both had been ostracized by their other siblings because of their HIV-positive status.

Lucy said she’d had a disastrous marriage when she was much younger. Her husband had infected her repeatedly with gonorrhea, often refused to go to the hospital to be tested or treated, and was later convicted of raping a young girl and was sent to prison. “After that I’d had enough,” she said. “That was enough of marriage for me. I decided to live alone. He’d fucked around and ruined that girl and ruined my life, so I decided I would passenger around too. I went around and was friends with lots of men.”

She soon tired of this lifestyle, however, and moved into her older brother’s household. According to her, she hadn’t had sex for forty years. Given my estimation of her age, this did not seem likely, and I understood this statement as signifying both a very long time and, with its possible gesture towards the Israelites wandering in the wilderness, a kind of self-imposed penance for her earlier unrestrained ways. Dependent on her older brother for land and a home, she had dutifully cooked and cleaned for his household.

And then, at the last minute, my brother hit me. [Why?] He didn’t like the way I’d prepared his dinner. I’d been caring for his household for years, and then one night he lost his temper about having to eat sweet potato all the time, and he hit me. So I left. I decided to passenger around again. I went to a *dawe anda*, I befriended a man, I went home with him, and I caught AIDS.

To “passenger around” is a euphemism for sleeping around, and “passenger women” are women who have abandoned home and family with the intent of having extramarital sexual relationships, often in exchange for money (Wardlow 2002, 2004, 2006a). Like Lucy, they sometimes assert that relationships in which they felt unjustly and poorly treated triggered their decision to take this step. Some simply want to escape a situation they find intolerable, and some describe their actions

as a kind of revenge promiscuity—that is, they flagrantly engage in inappropriate sexual conduct in order to anger and shame those who have wronged them. Last Minute Lucy described two periods of her life when anger drove her to become a “passenger woman.” The first was in response to her husband’s philandering and her inability to protect herself from repeated sexually transmitted infections. Her infertility, likely caused by these repeated infections, his sexual assault of a child, and her consequent rage and humiliation motivated her to set off on her own and befriend men as necessary. Much later in her life, feeling unappreciated by her older brother and wrongly beaten by him, she again set off on her own, this time heading straight for a *dawe anda*. *Dawe anda* are secluded houses somewhat like brothels, where men sing traditional courtship songs to the women there and sometimes pay them for sex (Wardlow 2006a: 193–95). Three other women in my sample of thirty women living with HIV also said that they’d left their households in anger—because of a husband’s infidelities or his violence—and decided to “passenger around.” They did not know whether they had been infected by their husbands or by their subsequent sexual partners.

By 2004, the term “passenger woman” (*pasinja meri* in Tok Pisin, *pasinja wali* in Huli) seemed to be falling out of usage in Tari, and the descriptor *pasinja* had changed somewhat in meaning compared to the mid 1990s when I had done my doctoral research. People had begun referring to some men as *pasinja man* and groups of people as *pasinja manmeri*. These latter usages referred to men or people who drank, gambled, and often traveled from one place to another looking for opportunities to engage in these activities. They would hear about a lively *dawe anda* and go there for a while, and then move on to the next diversion. They were described as lazy, irresponsible, and unwilling to undertake the hard work of caring for a family. Passenger women were, in addition, assumed to sell sex or otherwise engage in inappropriate liaisons.

Notably, in 2004, passenger women did not seem to be any more vilified for their behavior than passenger men. Moreover, despite the widespread sexual violence in the mid 2000s, I heard of no cases that were specifically about punishing passenger women for their sexual behavior. This was a profound departure from the mid 1990s, when most of the violent sexual assaults I heard about were said to be of passenger women who deserved what they got simply because they were passenger women. In the 1990s, a woman’s embrace of sexual autonomy, and especially her sale of sex, were seen by some as so profoundly wrong and threatening to the social order that she might be gang-raped or murdered (cf. Moffett 2006). The intense rancor that animated these ideas had diminished by the mid 2000s. Selling sex was still considered immoral; however, the degree of animosity towards women who did so had lessened significantly. This shift should be understood in the context of Tari’s socioeconomic decline in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Most important, I think, was the evaporation of ways for women to make money,

a situation that made many people take a more generous attitude towards women who sold sex “for the right reasons” (e.g., to pay children’s school fees).

The Rise of Transactional Sex

As discussed above, during this period, many stores and government offices closed, resulting in the loss of employment for those in less-skilled jobs (e.g., clerks, cleaners), some of whom were women. More important for most women was the flight of civil servants, health workers, and teachers. Many rural women make their money by selling produce and other items (betel nut, loose cigarettes, etc.) to the employed, and with many of the employed having fled the area, and the remainder unable to access their pay, women had far fewer customers for their goods. Men still had some means of making money, however. A number were employed by PJV, for example, and there was eventually an influx of police—both regular and mobile squad (all men at that time). And the hospital and the few remaining stores all had male security guards. Given this situation of female economic precarity, it is perhaps not surprising that the number of women selling sex increased. As one man said, “We would have to blindfold ourselves not to see all the willing women here now.”

Moreover, with more women selling sex, the price to buy it plummeted (Wardlow 2007, 2009). Many of the men interviewed by my male field assistants in 2004 commented on how easy it had become to find a woman who was willing to have sex for a small amount of money—approximately two dollars, compared with approximately twelve dollars in the mid 1990s. In the 1990s, only some men could afford this higher price, and the ability to buy sex was a marker of inequality between men. Indeed, my impression at that time was that some men’s condemnation of passenger women stemmed more from their resentment at not being able to afford them than from a feeling of moral offense. In contrast, in 2004, with lower prices, buying sex was no longer a source of division between men and instead became a means for them to solidify their camaraderie. Now that more men could partake, more men could share stories and compare notes, as suggested by an interview one of my field assistants did with a married man, who said:

I get very graphic when I talk about passenger women. I say, “This woman is willing to do this or that.” Or, “Her genitals looked like this.” Or, “That woman’s genitals feel like that.” My friends are the same—they boast about the different styles they’ve tried. They say, “She was in this position and I did this,” or “I pushed her down and did it to her like that.” We really talk about sex and passenger women in a very explicit way. And when one man does this, it gives the rest of us the idea to try a particular style or try a particular woman.

Moreover, my later research in 2012 and 2013 suggested that warfare, emotional trauma, male solidarity, and sexual risk were complexly intertwined. Some men I spoke with at the AIDS Care Centre said that after they’d fled their own territory

due to tribal fighting, they had been taken in by male kin who had encouraged them to attend *dawe anda* and had paid their entrance fees. As mentioned earlier, *dawe anda* (literally, courtship houses) are enclosed sites where men can gather to form teams and compete for women's attention by singing traditional erotic courtship songs. The women who attend are typically there to sell sex (though if they are divorced or widowed, they may also be hoping to find a new husband). In public discourse *dawe anda* are stigmatized as places of illicit sexual transaction: "good women" do not attend, and young unmarried men, whose bodies are said to be easily polluted by sex, are not supposed to. The men at the AIDS Care Centre who had been forced to flee their homes said that the ebullient and boisterous male fellowship, the flirtatious banter with women, the singing of *dawe anda* songs, and the sex all helped to dissipate feelings of terror and loss.

More generally, during this difficult period, many people knew women whom they thought of as "good women"—that is, women known to be hardworking, respectful, and generous—who had exchanged sex for money in order to buy food or pay their children's school fees. The fact that many more women were selling sex seemed to produce not only an alarmist response, but also a more nuanced, and often generous, parsing of sex sellers' moral characters. For example, some of my female friends, who in the past had condemned passenger women, suggested that women who sold sex occasionally out of economic need shouldn't really be thought of as passenger women or *pamuk meri* (sex workers). They associated these terms with women who gambled, drank, abandoned their children, and were "in the pocket of one man one day and another the next." To their minds the terms "passenger women" and *pamuk meri* failed to capture the challenging situations and moral decision-making of the women they knew. In short, aware of Tari's dire situation, and experiencing its miseries themselves, many people seemed to accept that necessity might drive some women to regrettable but not condemnable sexual behavior.

CONCLUSION

In Papua New Guinea, where the lack of infrastructure and services is perpetually lamented, people express an acute "desire for the state," Alice Street observes (2012: 1), and they often work assiduously to gain visibility in its eyes. People living in the Hela region during this period experienced, not just disregard by the state, but state abandonment—that is, the refusal of the state to "see" a populace, the withdrawal of its recognition. The violent and coercive sexual relations that emerged should not be seen as a reversion to brutal cultural tradition, which is how violence in Hela is often represented in Papua New Guinean newspapers, and more recently, in social media. Rather, state abandonment produced fear, anger, frustration, and desperation. It also enabled a vicious cycle of post-election clan conflict and crime to spiral out of control.

It is important to note that the cascading consequences of state abandonment accentuated gender asymmetries and vulnerabilities. Many of ways that rural Papua New Guinean women make money (e.g., selling produce or chickens) all but disappeared when government employees fled or could no longer access their wages. Not surprisingly, some women turned to transacting sex in order to gain cash for school fees and basic store goods, such as rice or cooking oil. And as the policing and court systems became dysfunctional, families came to rely on their young men for protection and intimidation of enemies; sexual violence was a tool in their arsenal. State abandonment also resulted in a form of medical violence against young women: spurious virginity exams that were used to resolve disputes about the compensability of alleged sexual assaults. Finally, crime—complexly entangled with clan conflicts—increased, and when PMVs or private vehicles were held up by armed gangs, rape of the female passengers was common. HIV vulnerability was therefore not simply a matter of whether women had the power to refuse sex or demand condom use. Rather, as this chapter demonstrates, HIV vulnerability is a question of how sexual interactions—desired, coerced, or forced—are shaped in the crucible of specific political histories.