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MARKET ECONOMY AND CHANGING SEX-ROLES ON A POLYNESIAN ATOLL

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The transformation from subsistence to commodity production and its effect on women's status in society is an issue of long-standing concern to social commentators. As early as 1884, Engels (1969:50) described the advent of "pairing marriage" and "father-right," which he associated with the transition from "savagery" to "barbarism" as the "world-historical defeat of the female sex." Taking the opposing viewpoint, many social scientists have argued that modernization leads almost inexoribly to greater sexual equality (Bernard 1971; Goode 1963; Patai 1967); while more critically oriented writers, particularly those with feminist or Marxist inclinations (Bossen 1975; Etienne and Leacock 1980), have followed Engels' lead in suggesting that incorporation of traditional communities into the world market economy has worked consistently to women's disadvantage.

The experience of Nukumanu Atoll, a Polynesian outlier in eastern Papua New Guinea, bears on this discussion. Male and female worlds on Nukumanu are radically bifurcated. Yet, in contrast with many Oceanic cultures and societies, any masculine bias in its systems of rank is very much attenuated. Furthermore, symbolic definitions of gender and sex identity appear to have changed very little since precontact times. Nonetheless, much change has taken place in allocation of productive tasks over a century of European contact, particularly with the transition from subsistence horticulture to dependence on imported foods; and as a result of changes in the economic system, activities traditionally associated with women have declined in importance while those defined as masculine endeavors have increased.

Finally, this discussion bears on the general issue of why change comes about. The way in which communities respond to Western contact and exposure to the market economy depends on factors ranging from material conditions to historical accident. One objective of this paper, then, is to explore the way in which environmental constraints, social organization, symbolic structures, and historical accident have interacted to produce the particular changes in the system of gender relations that one finds on Nukumanu.

SEX-ROLES AND SOCIAL STRUCTURE IN PRECONTACT NUKUMANU

Nukumanu Atoll, also known as the Tasman Islands, is an isolated Polynesian "outlier" on the eastern border of Papua New Guinea's North Solomons Province. It is located four-and-a-half degrees south of the equator, 25 nautical miles north of the closely related atoll of Ontong Java in the Solomon Islands.
Nukumanu exhibits all the characteristics classically associated with atolls. It comprises over 30 islets surrounding a lagoon some eleven miles in diameter (Pacific Publications 1983). None of the islets stands more than a few feet above sea level at high tide; however, several are quite large compared with those of many atolls. Nukumanu Islet, the “big island,” is five miles long and in some places may be a half mile across; Amotu, the present village islet, is no more than a quarter mile across at its widest point, but it is two miles long. The atoll has extensive reefs on both lagoon and ocean sides, and largely for this reason, is blessed with an abundance of marine life. By contrast, the soil is sandy and infertile, and rainfall is low, creating severe limitations upon vegetal foods both in variety and quantity. Thus, despite a resident population of only about 400 people, making Nukumanu notably uncrowded in comparison with its neighbors, the carrying capacity of the land is already overburdened. Changes in economy and sex-roles must be understood largely in this light.

Subsistence Activities

Nukumanu has experienced a century of intimate European contact, including many decades as a private copra plantation. Thus, not even the longest memories predate the contact period. Fortunately, early observations of the German planter, Richard Parkinson (1907, 1986[1897]), and records from the Thilenius expedition of 1908–1910 (see particularly Sarfert and Damm 1929) provide some insights into early Nukumanu culture. In addition, inferences may be made from Hogbin’s (1931) detailed observations of Ontong Java during the 1920s.

The most productive source of livelihood for Nukumanu, it would seem, has always been the sea. Even today, the economy’s subsistence sector is dominated by fish. The most common methods of obtaining fish involve use of hook and line, usually from a canoe, over one of the reefs in the lagoon or nearby ocean. Trolling and big game fishing with large hooks and heavy line in the deep sea also are routinely practiced. In addition, Nukumanu sometimes fish on the reef with pole and line (siisi) for small fish or put out a large baited hook and heavy line well onto the reef, leaving it unattended for hours. The latter method rarely produces positive results, but the occasional shark or other large fish makes the small investment of time and effort worthwhile.

Second in frequency behind hook-and-line fishing is spear fishing (kakaloló) with homemade spear guns. When time is short, a quick dive on the ocean side can normally provide a meal or two. In addition, spears are often carried by men diving for trochus (karea) and hèche-de-mer (rori) so that market and subsistence activities are combined in a single outing. Nets and hand-spears are employed only infrequently, as their effective use requires the co-ordinated efforts of a large group of fishermen, but the results are usually good.

After fish, mollusks and crustaceans are the major source of protein. Sea turtle, the only reptile to be eaten, is captured during fishing expeditions and is cooked in soup or baked in an earth oven.

Terrestrial and avifauna are seldom consumed. Birds of many species are present and sometimes kept as pets. But rarely are they captured for a meal. Chickens and a few pigs are kept, but in almost three months on the atoll, on only one occasion did I see one eaten.

As on other atolls, Nukumanu’s vegetal inventory is dominated by the coconut (niu). Green nuts (hui) provide the major source of dietary liquid, especially in times of drought. The tender top leaves of the palm (na tilo) and the husk of a tender variety of nut known as te rii (mami in Pidgin) are eaten either raw or roasted. The jelly-like meat (kanobi) is scraped out of green nuts and eaten, while the harder meat (kanobi) of mature nuts (kamatuu) or seedlings (uto) may be roasted, eaten raw, or scraped so that the cream (lolo) may be expressed and mixed
into soups, puddings, and the like. The spongy kernal (kuru or kanouto) may be eaten raw, roasted in the shell, or boiled and mixed into a variety of other foods.

In addition to the nuts, coconut toddy (kareve) is a common item in the Nukumanu diet. Raw kareve is used as flavoring in many foods, or the liquid may be boiled off, leaving a thick molasses-like syrup called bakamoomoa, which is used in cooking. Occasionally, sweet toddy may be drunk, but usually it is left to ferment for two to four days. The resultant alcoholic beverage is drunk by Nukumanu men as a major social activity, especially on ceremonial occasions.

Aside from its nutritive value, the coconut has many other uses. Women plait the leaves into mats and baskets. The mats (kaapiti; tapakau) are used as floor and ground coverings on which people sit to work, eat, drink kareve, chat, or sing; and they are used to thatch the walls of dwelling houses. Wood from the trunk may be used for house posts or beams. Weapons also were, at one time, fashioned from the hard, dense wood. The bast (kumikumi) is used to express cream from grated coconuts. Fronds are used to cover canoes when they are not in use. Mature nuts are dried and sold as copra. Shells and husks are burned as fuel for cooking fires. And tilo leaves and llo kalo (coconut oil, often scented with turmeric root) find constant use in religious ritual and therapeutic massage (toroi).

The second most important plant to be grown on the atoll is pandanus (bara). House roofs are thatched and sleeping mats (moena) plaited with pandanus leaf, and the seeds are chewed as a popular snack.

In addition to pandanus and coconut, the Nukumanu have but one crop of economic significance: a variety of "swamp taro" called vakkebu. This is of the genus Cyrtosperma. Nukumanu say that true taro (genus Colacasia) "used to" grow on their atoll, but that it has all died (ku mmate bakaoti). On Ontong Java and Takuu, Nukumanu's neighbors to the south and west respectively, true taro is still grown. Aside from the species noted above, a number of minor crops—many probably recent introductions—are grown in small quantities. These include papaya (manioko), pumpkin (paamken), sugar cane (toro), banana (huti), and a few varieties of nuts. One man had a garden of unidentified herbs in a small plot behind his house. Turmeric (te lau ano) is an important plant, providing flavoring for foods, fragrant leaves, and colorful kaarena powder. The leaves and powder are used for decoration on ceremonial occasions. Despite its social importance, however, it is said not to be cultivated on the atoll but to be imported from Pelau, one of Ontong Java's two communities.

Division of Labor

With a few exceptions, Nukumanu's division of labor conforms to the common pattern in which women's primary responsibilities lie in the domestic sphere and do not take them far from home, whereas men's activities, even when directed toward domestic ends, are usually pursued at some distance from the residential area. Men's economic contribution, for the most part, involves the acquisition of consumable raw materials by fishing, hunting for shellfish or birds, and collecting and husking coconut. In addition, men fashion the canoes used for fishing, and they play the major role in the construction of new buildings. Women are almost entirely responsible for cooking and collecting and preparing leaves for thatch. Cyrtosperma cultivation is the one facet of food production allocated exclusively to women.

This division of labor is underscored by the land tenure system in which groups of sisters share control of the Cyrtosperma swamps and pass control to their female descendants. It is largely through their control of the vital Cyrtosperma swamps that women exercised their considerable influence in the sociopolitical system. By contrast, coconut groves are—and for generations have been—controlled and worked by men.
Women's position in early Nukumanu society was further supported by the system of residence. At least within the village, residence was uxorilocal, with the result that a group of sisters and their mother normally lived under the same roof or in close proximity. Not coincidentally, the same group, consisting of a woman and her daughters, typically shared an oven house and cooked together as a solitary unit. Women also work together plaiting thatch and mats. All this was particularly the case in olden times; today these statements must be modified as seen below.

Formal positions of political leadership were held exclusively by men. In precontact times, there were two types of chiefly title: te tuku and na ariki. The tuku appears to have been essentially a secular or administrative chief; and according to at least one version of the island's history, the first tuku gained his position by force of arms within the past 150 years. The term tuku is cognate with Ontong Java's ku'u (Hogbin 1931, 1961) which Hogbin renders as "king." In contrast were na ariki, of which there were an undetermined number. These were sacred chiefs or "high priests." In precontact times, it is uncertain which of these offices was pre-eminent, if in fact the titles could be ranked at all.

Below the chiefs were purepure, the men who enforced chiefly decisions; today they are compared to police officers. Unlike the maru of Anuta and Tikopia, matapule of Tonga, or tulafale of Samoa, however, there appears to have been no genealogical requirements for purepure status; the chiefs appointed as many or as few executive officers as they wished, drawing them from among their loyal supporters regardless of genealogical position.

Although political authority was normally in male hands, women shared important and prestigious roles at the community as well as the domestic level. Women have been among the most admired singers and storytellers, and many have earned respect as healers for their expertise in therapeutic massage and their powers as spirit mediums. In addition, female economic solidarity and control over valuable resources made women a political force to be reckoned with.

**HISTORY OF CONTACT AND SOCIAL CHANGE**

Nukumanu is an isolated atoll, geographically remote from urban centers and visited by ship no more than about once a month. Islanders perceive what they call kastom (Pidgin for custom—traditional culture) to be "very strong" on their home island and, indeed, as I have argued elsewhere (Feinberg 1985), they have maintained an integrated, vital, energetic culture. Yet, that culture is vastly different from what it was a century ago, although built very much on a traditional foundation.

The history of Nukumanu-European relations may be divided roughly into three periods: (1) the German administration, from the 1880s through World War I; (2) the Australian administration, between the two great wars; and (3) the post-World War II period, leading from colonial rule to Papua New Guinea's independence from Australia.

The earliest European contacts produced little change in Nukumanu culture and society. However, in the 1880s, the atoll was acquired by E. E. Forsayth and Company and added to "Queen Emma's" copra empire. This coincided with Germany's assumption of colonial dominion over northeastern New Guinea and the offshore islands, including Nukumanu. At this time, most of the atoll's land was appropriated by the Company and given over to copra production. Wage labor was introduced. Laborers were imported from the Melanesian islands of New Guinea and the Western Solomons, as a result the Nukumanu gained much knowledge of the outside world and learned to communicate in neo-Melanesian Pidgin English. There was little intermarriage between the Nukumanu and plantation workers, but some European and Melanesian admixture in the present population is evident.
Among the most lasting influences of the German period was the Roman Catholic mission, which operated on the atoll for some time. Under the church's influence, the bare aitu (spirit houses) were destroyed and major collective religious rites were ended. Simultaneously, the system of political leadership underwent substantial alteration as the administration, in collaboration with the Company and the mission, put an end to the ariki titles, and the tuku, by default, became the unequivocal paramount chief.

After World War I, the Germans were replaced by an Australian administration. Modifications introduced by the Germans remained, and new ones were added. The atoll continued as a private plantation. The main settlement was converted to an Australian "line village" and moved from the large islet of Vaihare (also known as Nukumanu, the name of the entire atoll) to Amotu, the atoll's second largest islet. With the Germans' departure, the missionaries left Nukumanu and the Nukumanu left the church. From that time until 1984, missionary activity was prohibited on the atoll—first by Australian administrators on Bougainville and, more recently, by the community and provincial governments—but this did not signal a return to the old religion. Thus, for much of this century, the Nukumanu have gotten by without formal religious activities on any but the household level.

During World War II, the Nukumanu were entirely out of contact with the Western world. No fighting took place on the atoll, although some Japanese bombs fell harmlessly into the nearby sea. The Europeans left the island; between 1942 and 1950 there were not even any administrative patrols.

For a while during the 1950s, the administration considered leasing the Tasman Plantation to a private company, but eventually the land was returned to the Nukumanu. The changes which had occurred over three-quarters of a century, however, proved irreversible.

The line village on Amotu Islet continues to be the only permanent residence. There has been no attempt to resurrect the sacred chiefs (na ariki) and today even the number of ariki, which lines had them, and their ranking relative to one another have been forgotten. People disagree as to who are the proper descendants of ariki lines and the ranking of ariki relative to the tuku in the traditional system. Meanwhile, the tuku continues to be recognized and to exercise considerable moral authority, although his office and title have no legal standing.

In the religious sphere, the ban on missionary activity remained firm through the time of my investigation. Most Nukumanu considered themselves Christians and there were three small congregations, but they had relatively few active participants, and services were entirely in lay hands. Ancestral spirits were still invoked at the household level for purposes of curing and in association with canoe-building and fishing. However, there has been no attempt to reintroduce major collective rites such as the sana.

Language also has undergone change as a result of contact. Everyone born on the atoll still speaks Nukumanu (NKM) as a first language; but many Nukumanu overseas are married to people from other islands, and many of their children do not speak NKM at all. Even on the home island, everyone except young children speaks a second language. Older people speak Pidgin fluently; children who have been through several years of school speak English; and many youths in their teens or twenties speak both English and the local Pidgin well. Furthermore, English and Pidgin are often used by Nukumanu for communication among themselves. Christian services and hymns are in Pidgin, English, or both. Drunken arguments are generally in English or Pidgin. And such common words as firewood or "hamanas" (Pidgin for happiness) have replaced hie and hiahia in everyday speech.

Perhaps the most pervasive sphere of change is economic. Next to coconut, the atoll's major staples are now wheat flour and rice, which have replaced taro and
vakkehu. Such luxuries as coffee, tea, and sugar have become necessities. Dependence on imported commodities requires a substantial cash income and this, in turn, has had a major impact on the daily round of work.

Subsistence gardening in the vakkehu swamps has been limited by the community government to a maximum of one day a week; anyone who sets foot in the gardens on a day other than Tuesday is assumed to be stealing food and is subject to a fine. This limitation, however, is by no means a hardship. Garden work is traditionally women's work, and no more than half the women take advantage of the opportunity to work on any given Tuesday. So Nukumanu devote an average of perhaps one-half woman-day per week to subsistence horticulture.6

The situation with respect to income-generating labor is vastly different. Cash-producing activities are, in descending order of importance: collecting and preparing bêche-de-mer (rori); trochus shell (karea); and copra production (takasii). These are primarily male activities and men devote from one to five long days a week to these endeavors. Women's contribution to trochus and bêche-de-mer production involves cleaning and cooking—an investment of a few hours a week. In copra production, men husk the coconuts. Women, with some male assistance, carry them, split them, remove the meat, place them in the sun to dry, and keep them free from dirt and rain. Thus, the total time invested in income-producing activities by women varies from perhaps one-half to five days a week, depending on whether or not copra is in preparation. In wet weather, copra is dried in ovens constructed expressly for this purpose. Normally, men tend the copra ovens and at such times women's input into the production process falls accordingly.

The decline of dependence upon vakkehu, combined with the advent of copra, has affected relations between men and women. Traditionally, gardens (keri) were controlled by women and such control was passed from mother to daughter. Control of coconuts, by contrast, was passed in the male line, from father to son. The rules of land tenure have not changed, but introduction of the market economy and copra at the expense of vakkehu has meant that women's traditional sphere of influence has declined in importance while the men's sphere has expanded.

**SEX AND GENDER**

Nukumanu life is strongly marked by intersexual differentiation and intrasexual solidarity. Male and female children play together until adolescence, but from that time on, it is striking—even for one who has lived on other Polynesian islands—just how little men and women have to do with one another.7 As is true in much of western Polynesia, brothers and sisters (hai kave), both classificatory and “real,” are expected to avoid one another, particularly in private settings or when sexual matters are being discussed. Spouses (avana) eat and sleep but seldom work together; even when engaged in the same project, they work on different aspects. They do not show affection in public and rarely even go for walks together. A parent and child of opposite sex may be close and sometimes go so far as to practice therapeutic massage on one another, but it is rare that even they should work at the same task. A few activities such as copra-making are shared by men and women, but even in these cases, for the most part, they perform their duties separately.

Human life in all societies is symbolic life, and human action is largely symbolic action (Geertz 1973; Schneider 1968; Sahlins 1976). Human beings live in a world which is not just physical, but is infused with meaning by the various symbolic systems in which they partake. The nature of the universe in which people live is symbolically constructed, and commonly, we find that social relationships are expressed in spatial terms (Lévi-Strauss 1967; Sahlins 1976; Feinberg 1980, 1982). Furthermore, most cultures have one or a few central themes of foci—dominant concepts and values, goals for which people strive,
ideas about what it is that makes life worth living (Benedict 1934). Sometimes a society's dominant theme or cultural focus may be more or less unitary, as in Benedict's version of the Apollonian Pueblo or Dionysian Plains Indians. In other cases, the system may be more complex.

On Nukumanu, men and women live in very different experiential and symbolic worlds, and it is at best an open question whether they have the symbolic apparatus to reconcile the differences to provide a common focus. It is clear, however, that men share with other men a common sense of purpose; similarly, women share a common symbolic focus with other women.

Traditionally, as in many Oceanic cultures, Nukumanu men were associated with the sea; women with the inland area and gardens. With few exceptions, men have always been responsible for fishing and canoe building. Inter-island voyaging and dealing with outsiders have long been strongly marked as male activities. Women have been exclusively responsible for the vakkehu and taro gardens, for plaiting mats and thatch, and, by and large, for cooking. When women go to the sea, they are passengers traveling from one islet to another to work their gardens on Vaihare or to visit kin on Ontong Java. The men paddle, pole, control the sail, or steer.

With some modifications, this state of affairs has continued in the new setting; if anything, the dichotomy between the male and female worlds has been accentuated. Fishing and canoe-building remain essential tasks and are firmly in the male orbit. At feasts, men provide the fish, sea turtles, and other meat. Women harvest vakkehu and prepare all of the food. The men then congregate on the lagoon side (tai) of the central corridor (rototonu); women gather on the inland/oceanward side (tua “back”). The administrative chief (tuku), community government leaders, and anyone intimately concerned with the occasion make introductory remarks. The men and women eat separately, from separate but similar piles of food that have been arranged on the respective sides of the central corridor. Young boys may eat on either side. Older boys eat with the men, and all girls with the women. Typically, the meal is eaten quickly and the gathering disbands—the men retire to one of the soa houses to drink, and the women are left to clean up.

Again, in the economic sphere, the two most important income-producing activities—bêche-de-mer and trochus collection—are both performed at sea and are predominantly masculine endeavors. Men spend most of their waking hours on the sea, preparing to go to sea, or talking and singing about ocean voyages. An avoidable faux pas on the ocean is cause for extreme humiliation, and among the surest ways to provoke a fight is to impugn another’s seamanship abilities.

In addition to the sea, a second focus has been added to the masculine world-view in the form of the recently introduced but firmly entrenched tradition of kareve “toddy” drinking. Toddy is the sap of the coconut tree, which may be collected and used in cooking. It may also be fermented to form a moderately potent alcoholic beverage. The practice of fermenting toddy is said to have been introduced to Nukumanu in the early 1950s by a man from Pelau, Ontong Java, who had learned the art himself on Sikaiana in the Solomons. Kareve drinking quickly became a popular pastime among Nukumanu men, and today its production and consumption is part of the daily routine. Each day, at dawn and dusk, men climb their kareve trees to collect the toddy and change receptacles. The liquid is placed in glass bottles or large glass fishing floats and allowed to ferment for two to four days. When sufficient quantities have been collected, it is consumed by men in groups ranging from three or four to well over a dozen. These sessions are marked by much singing, joking, and camaraderie, which constrasts with the reserved and rather dignified air of Nukumanu men at most other times. Such sessions occur about twice a week and may last from a few
hours to all night, depending on the occasion and the amount of beverage available.

The importance of kareve to Nukumanu men may be gauged by the fact that they continue to consume it in large quantities despite a host of seemingly dysfunctional consequences. Productive tasks are started late or cut short so that men can climb their trees or change toddy receptacles. It is difficult to leave home for extended visits to the outer islets for purposes of fishing or bêche-de-mer-collecting unless one has a trusted assistant to care for his kareve tree during his absence from Amotu village. Tremendous amounts of time, from the point of view of material production, are wasted during drinking parties. Trees which have been tapped for toddy become unproductive for nuts. Kareve drinking is seen as the major cause of fights and of domestic quarrels between husbands and wives. Large numbers of court cases center around disputes involving kareve or actions while under the influence of kareve, and many Nukumanu men cite toddy as the atoll's single most serious problem. Yet, I never heard any male seriously suggest that toddy drinking should be banned. In fact, the most responsible leaders of the community were among the most committed drinkers. Obviously, then, the value of kareve lies in its symbolic rather than its material value.

As in other parts of the Pacific, on Truk, for example, (Marshall 1979) drinking is a masculine activity on Nukumanu. Women only drink at special celebrations like Christmas and New Year, when normal rules are suspended. And drinking usually occurs in places marked as singularly masculine. The most prominent of these are soa (friend) houses: small, elevated, rectangular platforms, covered by a low roof and no walls. When not otherwise in use, the soa may be utilized by boys and teen-aged youths for respite from the sun and as a place to gather to play cards or draughts; but its primary purpose is as a common drinking area for adult males. Women may gather around the soa but never get up on the platforms. There are three soa: one at each end of the central corridor between the two main rows of dwelling houses, and one on the lagoon beach, toward the eastern end of the village.

The second characteristic area for drinking kareve is one that symbolizes masculinity in perhaps its most unadulterated form: the areas where men cut canoes. These are along the lagoon beach to the east and west of the main village, and they are areas of focal symbolic significance. Canoe-cutting (taataa vaka) is an exclusively male activity, associated with other male activities such as voyaging and fishing, and with the pre-eminently male domain of the sea. The most popular canoe-cutting area is just to the west of Amotu village—an area said to be watched over by an evil spirit (tipua haaeo) and to be dangerous for women or children to enter.

Through the changes that have taken place over the past century, women appear to have lost more than men. Women still have their exclusive spheres of activity: cooking; mat-making; washing clothes; preparing thatch. They recognize that through these activities they make an essential contribution to the well-being of the community. But women lack the sense of commitment, excitement, and emotional attachment that men feel for the sea and kareve. And the area in which women had exerted their dominant influence structurally—through their control of the vakkehu swamps—has been drastically devalued. Some camaraderie continues in female activities. Women often seek company when cooking, plaiting mats, or splitting coconuts for copra. But these are essentially individual activities which one performs in the presence of others. Even the old collective ownership of oven houses, and co-operative cooking by groups of sisters, their mother, and their daughters has been, for the most part, abandoned, leaving women far more isolated and dependent on their husbands and brothers than they were in the past.
For many women, the decline in fulfillment and satisfaction which can be achieved through traditional activities has been offset by the church—or, more accurately, the churches. Hammond and Jablow (1976:120) remarked that religion:

is very much a part of the public domain, a vital source of power and a sanction for authority. As such, it is only to be expected that women's roles and participation in religious institutions is limited. Even where women are active in the major religious institutions of a society, their roles are subsidiary to those of men. Only in those special women's cults, tangential to the dominant religious system, do women play the principal roles.

Unless one considers Christianity to be a "special women's cult," this characterization of women's participation in religious activities could hardly be further from the truth for Nukumanu.

Three Christian churches are active on the atoll: Anglican, United, and Jehovah's Witnesses. The Anglican Church is an import from Ontong Java and has the largest following, including both men and women. Its leaders and a disproportionate number of members are from Ontong Java, and non-members perceive the Anglican Church as an extension of Pelau. (Anglican leaders say, rather defensively, that their church is "mixed.") The other two nominally have both male and female adherents, but the leadership and active membership is entirely female. I did not see any adult males participating in formal activities of either church; in fact, the United Church is often spoken of somewhat condescendingly as "the girls." Furthermore, the two churches were established by young women in the face of initial opposition by the community government. Most notably, the women who introduced the United Church to Nukumanu were sentenced by the local court to eight weeks of hard labor for the crime of "evangelism." Yet, with little training or male support, and despite some harassment, the women persevered. Now, just a few years later, these churches are very much a part of the social landscape.

In short, a core of women have become highly committed to one or another Christian church, and the pursuit of church activities has become a dominant focus of their lives. A few have suffered minor martyrdom in the process, but their resolve has remained unshaken. While religion provides a cultural focus for some Nukumanu women, however, it does not for many others; and for those not active in a church, there does not appear to be any comparable focus or sense of purpose and fulfillment to their lives.

CONCLUSION

Elsewhere, I have argued that despite a century of contact and substantial social and economic change, Nukumanu has maintained a vital, integrated culture which has, in many ways, remained quite faithful to the spirit of the past (Feinberg 1985). I remain convinced of this interpretation's merit. However, in the interest of time and space, my previous discussion glossed over the countervailing tendencies toward tension and conflict that also have emerged from the colonial experience. This is not to say that all current cleavages among the Nukumanu are primarily sex-linked. For example, with an expanding population and no commensurate expansion of resources, land disputes among and sometimes within descent lines have begun to proliferate. On the other hand, male-female tensions also have shown marked increase. Sexual imposition and domestic quarrels following men's drinking parties have become commonplace, and many women have grown openly and vehemently opposed to toddy drinking. Similarly, intersexual tensions may be seen in the establishment of the three Nukumanu churches, as described above. Even in dance styles, sexual antagonisms are often expressed. In the most popular dance form, na rue, a group of men face a line of seated women who sing and keep rhythm by drumming on old flour cannisters.
The men dance toward the women, moving faster and faster, until they come to a stop just a few feet before the singers, kicking sand and dust into their faces. Despite the maintenance of traditional symbolic constructs, then, women's position in Nukumanu society appears to have declined over the past century. This does not mean that men or women are regarded as a different type of being than they were in olden times. Nor has the quality of life declined appreciably in material terms. While wheat flour and rice may strike some people as a less interesting diet than taro and vakkehu, this is offset by the fact that women need no longer work long hours on successive days in mosquito-ridden swamps. However, with the advent of money and imported tools and foods, women's traditional sphere of economic influence—the taro and vakkehu gardens—simply has grown less important. And the cohesiveness generated by co-residence and co-operation in harvesting food, plaiting mats, and cooking has been seriously compromised.

The reasons for this sequence of events are complex. Historical conditions—most notably, several decades of plantation experience under the German and Australian administrations—exposed Nukumanu to European commodities and wage labor. The enthusiasm with which foreign commodities were greeted by the Nukumanu, however, must be understood largely in terms of the atoll environment: the paucity of rainfall and the difficulty of growing crops.

To historical accident and ecological constraints must be added a division of labor in which it was up to men to deal with the outside world while women's concerns were predominantly intra-community. This is a common Oceanic pattern, possibly stemming from the days of inter-island warfare and overseas exploration. Given such a division of labor, it was logical for wage-earning and money-handling responsibilities to fall into male hands. This logic was underscored by male control of coconuts and a symbolic association of men with the sea—coconuts and the sea being the primary sources of cash income on Nukumanu. And as seafaring and navigation are predominantly male pursuits, it made good cultural sense for men to travel overseas for purposes of education and wage employment. By contrast, although girls are encouraged to succeed in grade school on the atoll, even the most promising female students have been discouraged from leaving the atoll to obtain a secondary education. This is said to be because females are “more important” than males for maintenance and preservation of cultural traditions. In addition, many Nukumanu feel that if women marry exogamously, they are unlikely to return home to their natal families. As of 1984, then, women were discouraged from taking advantage of the opportunities for self-realization presented by the outside world while satisfactions available through traditional activities were reduced. This state of affairs, however, was beginning to change. Some girls have gone away to school; a few had even been able to pursue careers. One woman, for example, had for some time been employed as a nurse at the provincial hospital in Arawa. Meanwhile, at home, women were becoming increasingly assertive. This may be seen in developments surrounding the three Christian churches, in several women becoming actively involved in family trade store businesses, and in the presence of one woman on the atoll's community government.

These recent changes are undoubtedly in part a reaction to the egalitarian strand in Western thought in a society with traditions of assertive women who have played important social roles. Yet, to the extent that egalitarianism is being reasserted, it is on a different footing from the past. In precontact Nukumanu, men and women appear to have been separate but more or less equal. As a result of Western contact, the introduction of commodities, and incorporation into the world market economy, women remained culturally separate but became socially unequal. There are indications that they may become in time more equal once again—at least partially under the influence of the androgenous moment in
Western culture—but as the sexes become more equal, they are also growing more "unseparate." Looking toward the future, then, the result of Western contact, perhaps paradoxically, may be to compromise important aspects of traditional culture—symbolic constructions of what it is to be a male or female human being—even to the extent that it promotes resurgence of an earlier sense of equality in complementary domains.

NOTES

1. This paper is based on research conducted in Papua New Guinea from January through June 1984. Of that period, three months were spent on Nukumanu and two months were with Nukumanu people on Bougainville and in Port Moresby. I am indebted to Kent State University for the sabbatical leave which made this research possible. Many people contributed to the success of my field study. In particular, I am indebted to Leo Hannett, Graeme Kemelfield, and Eliuda Temoana. Also, I wish to thank Francis Kipano, Temoa Atoi, Hean Temoana, Tepaona, and my wife, Nancy Grim, for their kindness and support during my stay. I am grateful to Denzel Benson and Elizabeth Mullins for providing valuable criticism of an earlier draft of this article.

2. Female control of taro and *Cyrtosperma* swamps is also found on Ontong Java (Hogbin 1931a:410, 1961:111-112). By contrast, on Nukuria and Takuu, the Polynesian islands to the west, men controlled the swamps as well as the coconut orchards.

3. This corresponds with land tenure patterns reported for Ontong Java, particularly prior to a redistribution of certain lands near the two village sites around 1880 (See Hogbin 1931:409-410, 1961:111-112, 130-132). Nukumanu's residence pattern in precontact and early contact times probably corresponded closely with that reported for Ontong Java (Hogbin 1931:419-420, 1961:chapter 3), where village residence was typically uxorilocal while residence on the outer islets was virilocal. This corresponds with male control of the coconut stands on the outer islets and female control of the *takkehu* swamps which were located near the village. One of the early consequences of contact on Nukumanu was establishment of a foreign copra plantation; as a result, local dominion over most of the outer islets was lost. (See also Bayliss-Smith 1975 for comment on the Nukumanu use of the outer islets.)

5. Although the traditional administrative chief no longer exercises binding legal authority by virtue of his position as *tuku*, people continue to look to him and his close relatives for leadership. Thus, the first elected chairman of the community government was the *tuku*; and at the time of my study, the chairmanship was held by the *tuku's* son.

6. Fishing, by contrast, remains important in the subsistence sector of Nukumanu's economy and, as indicated above, it is often combined with income-generating activities.

7. Thus, on Anuta where, in formal terms, male-female relations are far more hierarchically ordered (e.g., see Feinberg 1978, 1981) both my wife and I came away from a visit in 1983 with the distinct impression that men and women were emotionally far closer and their interaction more relaxed than is the case on Nukumanu. Among Anutans, the respect required between cross-siblings (siblings of opposite sex) is not expressed as avoidance. To the contrary, as on Tikopia, (Firth 1963:178-185) a brother and sister may sleep together on the same mat as the possibility of sexual attraction between them is seen as extremely remote. Men and women in a variety of relationships stroll together through the village or the bush, sit together and chat, laugh at each other's inoffensive jokes, and even engage in mild banter. On Nukumanu, any of these occurrences is rare to nonexistent.

8. On rare occasion, young women will dive to spear fish; but this is very much the exception. More commonly, but still unusual, a woman can collect *bêche-de-mer* or shellfish on the reef during low tide.

9. I first heard these comments from the headmaster of the Nukumanu primary school. Although this man was an outsider from Buka, he was intimately concerned with the problem and had discussed it with many Nukumanu. Furthermore, over time, I heard similar comments from a number of Nukumanu informants. Perhaps it is noteworthy in this regard that residence among Nukumanu who marry overseas—in contrast with established patterns on the atoll—is expected to be virilocal.

10. In fact, there was a space reserved on the community government for a woman to represent women's concerns to the local legislative body. This may have been directly inspired by the provincial government, which had a ministry of women's affairs.

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