

**KIN AND KINA: A STUDY OF EMERGING  
INEQUALITIES IN A RURAL LOWLAND  
SOCIETY IN PAPUA NEW GUINEA**

**BY**

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## FRONTISPIECE



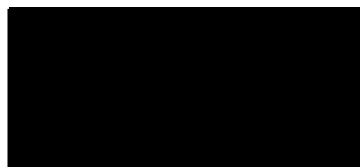
A record of wealth transfers to a wife-giving lineage in respect of a sago grove.

[W]omen are a source of inequality, in fact they are in some senses the only source of inequality, an inequality not between men and women where the equal/unequal distinction has no meaning but the source of inequality between men. Basically men related to each other through women cannot be equal to each other and they cannot therefore carry on equal exchange. Relations between men through women can, of course, only be created by marriage, and marriage in New Guinea is everywhere the start of a relationship of unequal exchange.

(Forge 1972, 536).

## DECLARATION

Except where otherwise indicated this thesis is my own work



George Nicolas Curry

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## ABSTRACT

The thesis describes processes of social and economic change in a lowlands village in Papua New Guinea. The study focuses on the interface between the 'modern' and 'traditional' economies, and is based on an 18 month intensive fieldstudy in 1988/89 of a Wosera village in the East Sepik Province. Data reveal an economic and social division between a poor group of immigrant households (residing in the village for less than 4 generations), and a wealthier group of established households, which have resided in the village for more than 6 generations. Immigrant households hold fewer resources (land, sago and permanent cash crops) than established households. Indigenous exchange networks play a fundamental role in maintaining and accentuating social and economic inequalities. Because immigrant households have few resources, they must enter asymmetrical exchange relationships with resource-rich established lineages for access to the means of production. Through indigenous exchange, immigrants are net givers of wealth and labour, whilst established households are net receivers. Established households are able to supplement their levels of disposable cash incomes by re-directing cash from the indigenous exchange economy to the market economy.

The thesis argues that this economic and social division has emerged recently in response to increasing population pressure and growing integration with the wider external economy. As the effects of population pressure begin to be felt, tenure rules are

tightening so that immigrant households are compelled to enter relationships of unequal exchange with established lineages to maintain access to resources. These relationships are non-market in form and traditionally had economic obligations attached to them which favoured lineages as wife-givers. However, the economic dimension to these kinship relationships is intensifying so that immigrants are becoming increasingly marginalised by the growing demands being made on them for their labour and wealth. Immigrants are a hidden poor because they are dispersed spatially, and it is only through a detailed analysis of the precapitalist exchange sector that the extent of these economic inequalities becomes apparent.

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