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SUICIDE AND SOCIAL CONTROL IN NEW BRITAIN¹

Nole had always been a nonentity. He was not really a "heap of refuse", like a few other men in the village, but surely a marginal man. For one thing he had been an orphan since early childhood, and his clansmen living in the vicinity never cared much for him. Needless to say, no girl had been promised to him on her birth. Indeed, what parents would have been foolish enough to commit themselves to regular food exchanges with his relatives until marriage took place? And what is more, who could have vouched for him? He had, however, gone through all the rites of passage. Some of them, it is true, had to be piteously conducted in the bush instead of being performed on the dancing ground of the village, since his relatives could not afford to go into debt just so that he could join the set of well-off children. But on the whole, he had received his share of those magical means of regeneration given on such occasions. When old enough to work in the garden Nole was adopted by Kulao, one of the "big men" of the village. A few years later he left for a European plantation, as all the boys of his age did. When his contract was over he came back to the village with some money, and he wanted to get married. At this point he was lucky, for Kulao's brother rapidly succeeded in finding a wife for him. The village people heard of the arrangement and began to discuss it. Then Kulao, who had been informed of the matter from the outset, interceded. He summoned his brother and said, "What a lot of fuss! What about the comforts of my life? If Nole gets married, who will fetch firewood for

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me? Who will keep watch in my garden and scare the parrots away? And when I prepare a feast, who will help me clear an extra block of land? Our clansmen are not reliable; they would rather look after their wives and children." Thereupon the negotiations broke off, and the marriage did not come about.

Thus, Nole remained a bachelor. He resumed his menial tasks for Kulao, who again took him under his protection in return. This arrangement lasted a few years, during which time a second set of marriage plans failed for the same reasons. Finally, Nole left the village to be a plantation labourer. But he must have been homesick as he came back immediately after completion of his second contract, and he resumed life under Kulao's wing. Once he was dying to chew betel, so he climbed one of Kulao's areca palms and took a few nuts. Kulao, of course, heard about it immediately, and in his thundering voice which always frightened women, abused Nole in the middle of the village. He called him a thief and a rotter. Poor Nole! His shame was overwhelming. The day after, by way of apology, he wished to present his patron with a huge batch of taros, and he sent for a woman or girl of Kulao's household. But Kulao let it be known that Nole would have to carry it himself if he was so eager to make this offering. Sad at heart, Nole could not avoid performing this female task, and he therefore carried his taros to Kulao's house, crossing the village and enduring gibes on his way. Once the present was left at his door, however, Kulao scornfully rejected it and had it taken away immediately. On the following day Kulao fell ill, and on the third day he was dying.

"How did this happen? Kulao is such a strong man. He knows all the secrets of life. He has never omitted performing the magical lustrations which must follow sexual intercourse. He has always observed all food taboos prescribed for mourning occasions. Finally, he would not have disregarded the taboo signs put on trees or on the boundaries of gardens so as to keep thieves off. So there must be some wicked person using sorcery to kill him." Thus ran all the conversations when the population gathered on the dancing ground of the village on the fourth day of Kulao's illness. After a couple of hours one of the village "big men" addressed the crowd. "It is quite clear," he said, "that someone is trying to kill our respected friend. Only two men are connected with him so closely that they could approach him at any time and mix poison with his tobacco. These two men are Taninglua and Nole. Let us consider Taninglua first. He is already a 'big man', as well as a friend of long standing. There is no reason why he would want to

harm Kulao. But consider Nole now. He has always lived on us like a leech and he has never done anything to help any of us. What is more, he has many reasons for hating the man who has been feeding him for such a long time." Then all the people looked at Nole. At first, he was speechless. After a few moments, however, he stood up and shouted: "That's enough! I'm fed up! You are looking for a culprit, aren't you? Well then, take me. It is I. Yes, I'm trying to kill him. But wait and see if I can succeed." After his outburst Nole left the village and wandered off towards the beach. Everyone was dumbfounded because it is common knowledge that a sorcerer will never confess his guilt. "To deny an accusation as vehemently as a sorcerer" is a saying that a child learns in the first years of his life. It was concluded that this confession was an incredible trick on the part of Nole, a trick meant to confuse everyone, and therefore the very proof of his guilt.

On the following day, Kulao died and Nole went to the bush and hanged himself (*ke rua*).²

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So runs the story of what happened among the Maenge of New Britain less than twenty years ago.³ It clearly reflects some striking features. By following up Freud's investigations, Menninger (1933) has cogently shown that no suicide can be committed unless three distinct factors happen to combine in the psychological crucible of an individual. They are the wish to kill, the wish to be killed, and the wish to die. If any of these factors is absent, the suicidal drive will result in that form of self-destruction illustrated by Brutus, or in unsuccessful or protracted suicides. It so happens that Nole's statement on the village's dancing ground expresses, almost didactically, the first two wishes. By

² Nole's suicide was related to me by six eye-witnesses belonging to different village factions, some hostile to Kulao, others not. Hence all information on this case was cross-checked. As regards my general data on suicide, they have been spontaneously given by informants and, where feasible, compared to written records. Such written records consist of patrol reports by Australian Government officers for the period after World War II and files held by Fathers Barrow and White (M.S.C.) for the period from 1962 to 1970. I was generously given access to these documents for which grateful acknowledgment is made to the Department of District Administration and to the M.S.C. Whenever stories related by informants could be compared to written sources such as the above, I made sure that no discrepancy appeared in regard to facts, dates, identities, whereabouts, etc. This is why I feel confident that those data secured from informants only, as is necessarily the case for suicides prior to World War II, are highly reliable, especially after being cross-checked among witnesses with conflicting interests in such matters.

³ All necessary data on their social organization may be found in Panoff (1970).

claiming responsibility for Kulao's death he not only asserts his murderous impulse but also calls for capital punishment for himself, since nothing leads more surely to execution than being convicted of sorcery. With regard to the wish to die, which, incidentally, appears to have been substantiated by less clinical evidence than the first two wishes, it can be found to some extent in those representations that are assimilated through the process of learning traditional Maenge culture. Firstly, the orphan (*konone*), unlike other human beings, is regarded as deprived of his soul because dying parents take their child's soul with them and keep it in the nether world. Although it is true that part of the child's soul may still adhere to its bodily container, this fragment constantly tends to escape and join the substance from which it has been severed (see Panoff, 1968). It should be noted in passing that this is why the killing of a *konone* used to be considered a minor offence, since the victim was already something other than a real living person. Secondly, since, according to Maenge mythology, the abode of the dead is also the place of emergence (*palangapuna*) of the first matrilineal ancestors, the supernatural attraction allegedly felt by any *konone* is clearly equivalent to a *regressus ad uterum*. Most psychoanalytical interpretations of suicide submit that this *regressus ad uterum* is very basic to the wish to die. This is not to deny, of course, that there is a great distance between that cultural theme learned by the Maenge and a particular form of the wish to die as detected by the clinician in the individual psychology of a patient. But the similarity between the two phenomena inevitably comes to mind, and it does so with a special cogency as suicide itself among the Maenge appears to be a culturally determined act.

If Nole's case were to be confined to illustrating Menninger's argument, its significance would be fairly small. It would be just another example among a large number collected by psychiatrists. But even from such a viewpoint it would be possible to emphasize *orality* as a very important theme in this story, thus confirming many classical observations published on the introjection mechanism. Let us then explore this avenue of thought for a while. As seen by the clinician, the introjection mechanism is what achieves a fusion of the wish to kill with the wish to be killed in the suicidal impulse. It so happens that the "big man" who took Nole under his protection was also the man who had to feed him for many years. Any man who regularly looks after a *konone* is called "the one who feeds" (a *paganingana* in the vernacular), and indeed, it was he who was giving food every day to

the poor orphan and later on to the hopeless bachelor. Through taking his daily food Nole was therefore able to thoroughly absorb the object of his hate into himself. This is more than a metaphorical way of describing the situation. For not only do the Maenge believe that the giver's soul necessarily permeates the thing he gives (hence an elaborate form of magic is found in the relationship between creditor and debtor), but they also feel that the recipient must gratify the benefactor in any conversation or attitude. In other words, the psychological process taking place in Nole can be described by the following well-known scheme: forced gratitude generates hate, which when confronted with social norms will in its turn give rise to a feeling of guilt, and the latter cannot be overcome unless the subject inflicts some punishment on himself. Although these data were gathered from observations and comments volunteered by informants, they fit in so well with the psychoanalytical interpretation of suicide that Nole perhaps appears to have sacrificed himself for the sake of scientific demonstration! But such is not the case, as will be seen when further evidence is examined; for this aspect is not of primary concern here.

What is important is that this suicide is by no means exceptional among the Maenge. Consequently, Nole's story deserves a great deal of attention. Furthermore, it causes one to search for a sociological interpretation to supplement that offered by psychoanalysis. As is well-known, sociologists and psychologists alike have for a long time thought either that suicide was inconceivable among "primitive peoples", or, on the contrary, that this section of mankind indulges in self-destruction to a high degree. With the recent availability of a very extensive collection of data, of which the review by Hippler (1969) gives only a narrow sample, no one can deny that the frequency rate of suicide varies more sharply from one "primitive" society to another than from one "civilized" nation to another. As a result, any ambitious theory still trying to account for suicide among "primitive" peoples as a whole is evidently untenable, and the need for specific investigations in each particular society has been realized unanimously. In fact, this opinion is so generally current that to repeat it here may seem quite platitudinous. However, in view of the fairly widespread habit of correlating suicide with the so-called detribalization following Westernization, it may be useful to advocate some watchfulness.

For the last 60 years there are 25 well-documented cases of suicide in the eight villages visited by the present author. The actual figure is certainly higher, since for reasons to be considered later on, the Maenge

usually prove rather reluctant to talk about suicide, whereas they will readily discuss homicide at length, whether it is committed by themselves, their relatives, or their enemies. The eight villages concerned today have a total population of about 1,000 inhabitants. This figure, however, is the result of various recent events. In 1947 the inhabitants of these villages only numbered about 650, and in 1910, a date for which one must rely on informants' childhood memories, there must have been less than 500 people. If one takes 700 people as an average figure for the whole period in question, one will run no risk of exaggerating the annual rate of suicide. However unsatisfactory this device may be, it will not result in levelling significant variations through the course of time, for only 9 suicides within the present sample took place between 1945 and 1969. On the basis of 700 people as an average figure, and after appropriate conversions to allow comparisons with statistics compiled in other parts of the world, the annual suicide rate among the Maenge amounts to 59 per 100,000 persons. It may be useful to contrast it first with some rates published in the years 1953 and 1955 in various "civilized" countries: Italy had 6.6; the United States, 10.2; France, 15.8; and Denmark, 23.3. Even more interesting is the comparison with two non-Western societies: the Maria of India had 5.3 (Elwin 1943: 47) and the Tikopia had a rate between 60 and 70 (Firth 1961: 7).

No actuary would ever stop at this global rate; he would try to go further, asking for differential frequency with respect to sex, age-set, season, and so on. But such analysis is obviously out of the question for the Maenge data because of the small total of recorded cases. On the other hand, the method used by those committing suicide, which has always been of great interest to psychoanalysts and statisticians alike, can be discussed fruitfully here, since it has a universal character in this society. Indeed, all suicides except one were committed by hanging. The only exception known to the present writer is a case in which a man felled a tree and killed himself by deliberately standing on the spot where the huge bole was to fall, an act performed in front of his terrified fellows. This unique case is remembered with a particularly strong feeling of horror. Informants added that all the unsuccessful attempts at suicide made use of hanging. That suicide by hanging is indeed a cultural feature of the Maenge is confirmed by two types of evidence. Firstly, the vernacular language has no general word for "suicide"; instead it has specific terms for "hanging" and for "to hang oneself," namely *ruanga* (noun and gerundive form) and *rua* (verb), which are opposed to causative expansions such as *pa-ruanga* and *pa-rua* res-

pectively. When reporting the above exceptional case of suicide, the informants had to use *ad hoc* periphrases, saying that the man in question "had killed someone, namely himself." Secondly, the Maenge are well aware of how the East Nakanai (Meramera tribe) commit suicide. They take a highly toxic species of *Derris*, a plant also found in the Maenge environment. Informants commenting on the practice of their northern neighbours usually emphasized that death caused by poison has a very ambiguous character and is therefore unsuitable in their opinion.

Turning now to the characteristics of those who successfully committed suicide, one notices that the 25 recorded cases are distributed as follows: 11 women as against 14 men. This distribution does not resemble that of the "civilized" countries where male suicide is four times as frequent as female suicide. However, this distribution is not different from that calculated by Elwin (1943: 48) for the Maria. Male suicide should be considered first, since it is the argument of this paper that it can be correlated with a cultural complex basic to the Maenge. In all but two cases male suicide was committed by *konones* or marginal men having a similar status in the traditional society. This fact shows, for one thing, that the Maenge are not complacently deceiving themselves when they claim that suicide is a type of death appropriate only to "rubbish men" and women. If it is granted that my statistics are not too poor to permit specific sociological questions at this point, the next step will be to ask why self-destruction seems to appeal chiefly to these two categories of persons.

In the past all the traditional education given to Maenge children and adolescents resulted in the building up of definitely masochistic personalities. Not only were the trials involved in the rites of passage very cruel (especially that of cheek slitting for the boys), but mythology, beliefs, and actual behaviour in social life also laid a significant premium on submissiveness and even self-abasement. A few examples will suffice to make this point very clear. Firstly, it is through crawling through the refuse, urine, and sputa of a senile, ugly woman that the culture hero, still a young bachelor at this stage of the myth, succeeded in obtaining the primeval nuts of *Canarium* and his two wives. When he came back to the village with these gifts, he aroused his brother's covetousness. The latter, whom the myth and informants describe as an "arrogant" man, then decided to secure the same boons from the old woman. So he went to her place, but when there, he refused to obey her humiliating demands. As a result he was first devoured by a host of evil spirits (*soare*), then revived by the ancestress so that he could bear testimony

to the object lesson given him, and ultimately sent back to the village empty-handed and with his heart full of resentment. He was in exactly the same situation as *konones*. We should now consider an example borrowed from beliefs concerning the afterlife. After leaving the body, the soul of any dead man must undergo a single test that is supposed to determine its subsequent fate. At the entrance to the nether world the soul meets a supernatural keeper and is ordered to lick a large repulsive sore on his leg. If the soul refuses to obey, that is, if it is "arrogant" as the informants say, then it is doomed to wander restlessly among the living and to prey on them every night. Humility, on the other hand, is immediately rewarded, since the soul able to overcome feelings of disgust is admitted to the abode of the dead where idleness, plenty of food, and uninterrupted festivals are enjoyed forever.

As a third example of the way in which masochism was gradually generated, it is useful to consider some aspects of that traditional system controlling sexual life, a system that is still responsible for much anxiety in the behaviour of the Maenge today. As in all New Guinea societies, access to women was regulated by "big men" because marriage was eminently a matter within their jurisdiction. Moreover, in Maenge society this power resting with Maenge leaders was supplemented and strengthened by various psychological pressures which necessarily resulted in structuring the male personality. I will only mention the most typical pressures. Firstly, no boy could have any commerce whatever with women until he had passed through the tooth-blackening rite, the last of all the rites of passage. Breach of this taboo was supposed to prevent the black coating from sticking to the teeth so that the young lover was sure of being detected immediately. Furthermore, at any time during the life cycle and irrespective of marital status, sexual intercourse was bound to generate a disease fatal to the male partner unless quickly followed by magical lustrations, the secret of which was a "big man's" monopoly. It is little wonder, therefore, that coitus today is still the major subject of anxiety and even of tears among Maenge men. As may be expected this system of external prohibitions and threats, of self-repression and fears, will account for several phenomena relevant to the suicide problem, in particular the range of marriage opportunities and the setting of most infringements of sexual taboos. As for marriage opportunities, until World War II ended the first son of well-off families was polygynous. His younger brothers and other "middle-class citizens" did not get married until they were forty and had to take widows or divorced women as wives, and nearly all "rubbish men" and *konones* were doomed to

a lifetime of celibacy. This state of affairs still exists to some extent with respect to the last category of persons. Suicides directly or indirectly connected with a breach of the norms governing sexual life numbered 12 out of 25 cases, female suicides being as numerous as male suicides.

If we bear in mind the amount of masochism this culture used to instil into its members, we immediately wonder how Maenge society was able to cope with that tremendous quantity of aggressive impulses which were both generated and repressed by such a consistent system of education and social control. This question is basic to the study of suicide. In pre-contact times outlets for aggression must have been multifarious. As the government enforced law and order and the missionaries also suppressed many outlets, one should look for possible changes in the frequency of suicides. As has already been mentioned, nine cases occurred between 1945 and 1969 as against sixteen in the previous 35 years. This suggests that no increase resulted from growing cultural contacts. The probable reason for such stability is that pressures exerted by masochism had been alleviated *pari passu* with the gradual disappearance of the means of gratifying aggression. Indeed, shortly after warfare had been prohibited, all the cruellest rites of passage were given up and polygyny began to decline so continually that it is now practised by only three men in the eight villages under review. In addition, sexual taboos have lost ground (tooth blackening has been forgotten and can no longer act as a deterrent) and young people resenting the constraints of their village society can easily migrate to Rabaul and other places offering them greater freedom. In summation, some balance seems to have been maintained between self-repression and aggressive impulses. This is due to a slackening of the factors that used to generate both.

Returning to the outlets for aggressive drives in pre-contact times and during the first decade of Christianization one should ask: who used them? Among traditional opportunities for gratifying repressed needs for aggression, warfare, which really should be described as vendetta, is obvious enough to be treated concisely. The only points worthy of note are (1) the striking number of villages completely wiped out in the first fifteen years of this century (at least 6 out of 16 coastal villages), and (2) the techniques used in these operations. These techniques, as described at great length by informants, are especially revealing. Only two cases of pitched battle were remembered and all other operations fell into the following categories: slaughter of defenceless women and children working in gardens, invasion of villages at daybreak followed

by the hasty killing of a few men in the men's house, and ambushes engineered with the assistance of treacherous friends or relatives of the victims. If all the stories still vividly recollected are reliable, the third technique was preferred for various practical reasons, the discussion of which is irrelevant here. However, there is also a psychological reason which reveals itself clearly when all witnesses and participants are heard: it was in the ambush situation that the greatest number of individuals were able to fully expend their aggressive energies. There are many stories relating how 20 to 40 men and adolescents gathered and hit in succession a single enemy who was either unsuspectingly sleeping in his murderers' village or strongly locked in the arms of accomplices. What pervades such memories is a commingling of frenzy and fear on the part of the actors, a feature not devoid of significance in connection with masochism. Not long ago Barnes (1962: 9), in a very different context, made the casual remark that violence for the sake of violence may have been a distinctive trait of the New Guinea Highlands and perhaps of Melanesia. My material may support this hypothesis and also explain why, at least in Maenge society, it was so. Another interesting fact here is the existence of an institutionalized system of hired killers, used either for carrying out all forms of revenge or for getting rid of rivals. The fact that codified contracts and fees applicable to professional services of this kind have not fallen into oblivion testifies to the functional importance of vicarious killing. Thus both warfare and the resort to hired killers offered effective outlets for aggressiveness in most cases. *Konones* and women, however, were barred from these outlets, although the latter sometimes hired killers. While it is true that some marginal men succeeded in improving their social position by making themselves mere tools in the hands of a "big man" and killing people for him, *konones* and other men of equivalent status were generally excluded from warfare activities. Indeed, they were considered untrustworthy in situations of stress because although they were permitted to reside in the village they were not incorporated into the village community. They had been alienated from their natal descent group, which could not vouch for them any longer. On their part, all *konones* knew that they were attractive game because no one would care to avenge their death. As a result, they naturally avoided being involved in forays or ambushes and this in turn substantiated the stereotype of them held by the rest of the community.

A second outlet for aggression was lethal sorcery, which came to the fore when law and order were enforced. Lethal sorcery was, and still is,

a very effective means of gratifying aggressive impulses. All classical studies of the phenomenon in both mediaeval Europe and non-European societies suggest that it can produce this effect in two symmetrical ways, through persuading the operator that he is actually doing harm to the hated person and through allowing non-operators to project their aggressiveness onto a neighbour who is believed to be an operator whenever psychologically required. Formerly the latter itself eventually resulted in direct physical aggression as is well known from early accounts of New Guinea society. Though a little more complex, the way in which matters were brought to a climax in Nole's story illustrates this point and confirms the classical interpretations made by Evans-Pritchard and other writers. The use of magic to destroy subsistence gardens and prevent pigs from multiplying or growing fat is so common a practice that it only needs to be mentioned here. Here again, what is really important in regard to suicide is that not all members of Maenge society had access to this means of liberating repressed aggressiveness. Women were and still are frequently suspected of practising love magic, but no man seriously fears lethal or dangerous sorcery on their part. The black art is generally considered a male prerogative, and women do not appear to believe that they have powers in this sphere. Thus the first way of turning sorcery to the best psychological account was not available to them but the second one obviously was. With regard to the *konone* accusations of sorcery were not rare. This is hardly surprising in view of the untrustworthiness attributed to them and the feelings of disgust and contempt which other people had for them. However sincerely some people accused them, it is quite clear that marginal men were primarily scapegoats. On the other hand, the *konone* himself could hardly believe that he had the means to use sorcery on his neighbours as he had never been in a position to learn the appropriate techniques from experts in the field. It was precisely because he had never been backed up by any influential man's protection that he was doomed to his subhuman fate. Therefore, as was the case with women, the *konone* was also excluded from venting his resentment by using sorcery in the first way. In regards to the second way, he could not resort to that either because no accusation he could make against a "normal" human being had a chance of being taken seriously.

Competitive gift-giving and other forms of dramatic confrontation on festive occasions, which were an addition to, and are now a surrogate of warfare, need only be noted here so that no one will overlook the obvious fact that both women and *konones* were refused this type of

institutionalized opportunity to liberate aggressive energies through appropriate channels.

Finally, the way in which parents choose the personal names they give their children functions as a safety valve. This may appear negligible when compared to warfare or sorcery, but it certainly sheds more light on the tremendous amount of aggressiveness accumulated in Maenge society than a systematic list of all other institutions providing outlets for these pressures. Each personal name is usually made up of a subject, a verb, and a complement, and always refers to some past event. It may encapsulate the particular circumstances preceding or surrounding the child's birth, but in 70 percent of 200 random cases it refers to a mischief done to the father, the mother, or a relative (public abuse, cheating in a ceremonial exchange, assassination, and so forth). Thus the personal name functions as a reminder and a retaliation program bequeathed to the future adult. In the meantime, however, it has a cathartic power that should not be disregarded. Indeed, whenever a Maenge calls his little son or daughter who is playing on the village square, he enjoys, ten times a day, the gratifying opportunity of expressing his feelings of hatred and resentment without incurring risks. The following are some examples of what is heard on such occasions: "They have slandered him!"; "the gift has not been reciprocated"; and "he was killed instead of the culprit." The custom of choosing personal names in this way is as universal today as it was four decades ago. This cheap form of aggression can be indulged in by anyone who has children. Thus only the *konone* was excluded.

As shown by the foregoing, the two categories to which nearly all suicidal persons belonged are precisely those whose members have the fewest opportunities to pour out their aggressiveness. Especially in the case of a *konone*, pressures by those forces constantly driven back into the self, were strongest, since this individual had to stand a great deal of specific frustrations in addition to those imposed by Maenge culture on all its members. The fact remains, however, that in our sample actual cases of female suicide were as numerous as suicides committed by *konones*. As a village of average size contains two *konones* as against 25-30 female adults, the frequency of suicides committed by the former is at least ten times higher than that obtaining among the latter. But despite this important qualification it is clear that these two main types of suicide must be distinguished and paid equal attention, in line with the Maenge views on the phenomenon.

The classical typology of suicide worked out by Durkheim (1897)

retains all its importance in the history of sociological theory, and many a writer interested in problems of social integration can still derive stimulating ideas from his book, whether the source of inspiration is willingly acknowledged or not. However, when trying to apply Durkheim's classification to the Maenge material, it appears that neither Nole's suicide nor any of those cases that will be presented shortly easily fits into any of the three categories available (anomic suicide, egoistic suicide, and altruistic suicide). Therefore, one is led to suspect that despite Durkheim's protest all the trouble actually results from the premium laid on motives as criteria in the study of suicide. The difficulty still remains even when it has been fully realized that the so-called motives remain motives attributed to the suicidal person by survivors, that is, mere rationalizations that call for critical examination as suggested by Bohannan (1960: 26) as well as by others. In other words, these motives are a form of what Mauss has called 'social deception'. Now, while it cannot be denied that a study of social deception is likely to tell us something about the society in question, what specific light will it shed on the very mechanism of suicide? Durkheim himself was so aware of the difficulty that he tried not to take suicidal motives into account, but in the end he did not succeed in this, as his distinction between egoistic suicide and altruistic suicide is obviously based on suicidal motives. Thanks to psychoanalytical interpretations, it is now possible to bypass this type of problem, but it is still necessary to try and set the relevant individual mechanisms in a sociological perspective. This one can do more easily in a non-western society, for the risk of falling a victim to "social deception" is less great. As a result, one is prompted to ask the following question: what, in each of the recorded cases below, are the *consequences* of suicide with respect to survivors and ultimately, with respect to Maenge society?

An adolescent who lost his parents in early childhood was "fed" by the most prominent "big man" of a village and also taken under his protection. Every day he had to devote most of his time to his patron's gardens, and he came back to the village at nightfall to sleep in the men's house. It so happened that before undergoing the tooth-blackening rite (*pakalanga*), he embarked on a love affair with a widow who was also "fed" by the same "big man". At the same time he had to keep a night watch in the gardens in case pigs came to devastate them. As time passed, the young *konone* began to sleep in the bush with this woman instead of coming back to the village. It was not very long until the "big man" concerned became aware of the situation. One morning

at daybreak he rushed to the gardens with two spears in his hands. Both lovers were fortunate enough, however, to escape to the forest in due time. Later, as the day wore on, people repeatedly saw the *konone* roaming around the village and the spring. At nightfall they eventually found that he had hanged himself on the outskirts of the forest. As for the widow, she took refuge in her late husband's village, where she was soon murdered by a hired killer.

The wife of a middle-status man committed adultery with a *konone* who was in his thirties. Despite all precautions taken by the lovers, their liaison eventually came to light. Thereupon, the woman immediately accused the *konone* of practicing sorcery and this led all the village "big men" to join forces and threaten him with imminent death. The poor man then ran to the bush and hanged himself, while his mistress succeeded in getting off with a tempestuous lecture and a few blows delivered by her husband.

Shortly before undergoing the tooth-blackening rite, a young man sat with some mates of his own age in the men's house of his natal village. He was not a *konone* but simply an unassuming youth whose parents were rather poor and without much influence in the community. A woman chanced to walk past the entrance of the men's house. To tease him, the other boys immediately urged him to follow the woman up to her garden. They kept on joking and then claimed that he had already had intercourse with her. This statement was overheard by a few of the village leaders. The youth so attacked found no words to counter them. Instead, he left the house and went to a tree grove near the village, where he hanged himself.

Here we have three further cases that may help us to see two important points. First, the individual who resorts to suicide is evidently persuaded from the outset that he is not strong enough, either physically or psychologically, to counter the initial aggression aimed at him. This situation has already been demonstrated in the most striking way by Nole's story, an extreme case in this respect. Indeed, the only counter-attack available to this *konone* was to claim vehemently the guilt attributed to him and turn, therefore, a fate imposed on him by others into a willed fate of his imagination. The second point that is equally clear is that the suicidal person behaves as though he were merely executing a sentence passed on him by the leaders of the village or society as represented by them. Are we then dealing here with altruistic suicide? This cannot be the case, since the *konone* evidently considers death the only way out of the dramatic predicament into which other

people have driven him. This gives his act a strongly egoistic tone. Turning now to the anomy phenomenon as a possible explanation, it will readily appear that this interpretation would be even more misleading. Indeed, social control in the traditional setting of the Maenge would be altogether inconceivable without the existence of marginal people. Not only do they supply cheap labour and a following that help "big men" to compete among themselves, but they are also indispensable as warning models. It is precisely because each village has its own "bad lot", that any well-behaved person sees that submissiveness and patience can be perpetuated from one generation to the other. In this connection, it is also necessary to have the rules broken from time to time and the culprits punished by their own hands, as is fit for men without warlike virtues, so that the community has the benefit of an object lesson. Thus it is probably no accident that the tree grove or the forest clearing where a person hanged himself 50 years ago is still named after that unfortunate individual.

If it is granted that, when committing suicide, the *konone* acts as executioner on behalf of his community, then one has to face the question as to whether suicides of this type are simply disguised murders. It would be tempting to assume that "big men" or "normal" people liberate their excess aggressiveness by taking the sentence into their own hands and killing the culprit. As the tribe studied by Todd (1934: 205-6) is not so far from the Maenge area and used to prescribe the ritual strangling of certain widows on their husband's death, the question is worthy of consideration. Many a Maenge has heard of this practice, which is regarded as 'foolish' and discussed quite freely. At any rate, this topic evokes no emotional stress in conversations — a telling fact. However, there are stronger reasons for rejecting all doubts about these suicides. Besides linguistic evidence presented earlier the consistency obtaining in both social and psychological systems make it impossible for homicides to be passed off as suicides. Because of factional rivalries in a village no secret is preserved for long and any deceit of this kind would inevitably become common knowledge. Moreover, since the killing of a *konone* does not call for revenge or compensation in ceremonial money, why should the murderer want to conceal his act? In point of fact, the second case story told above makes it clear that the suicidal youth escaped homicide before killing himself. More generally speaking, all homicides, including those of *konones*, are reported in the most relaxed way, while suicides are frequently referred to with some embarrassment, a psychological datum of great significance. This feeling

of embarrassment seems to depend on two distinct factors which combine in such a way that a propensity of informants reducing the actual number of suicides is much more likely than a tendency to exaggerate it. The factors are: (1) self-destruction evokes an unmistakable disgust in the heart of men who have always been only too happy to make a full use of violence on any favourable occasion and (2) a strong, though unexpressed, sense of guilt towards the *konone* who is, after all, the "foster child" and protégé of the village community according to traditional ideology.

Though ten times less frequent than suicide committed by *konones*, female suicide is nevertheless a remarkable feature of Maenge culture. At first sight it raises a very different problem. Indeed, it is safe to say that women are generally in a better position than men to resist the all-pervading masochism. To begin with, they are considered sexually active and dangerous whereas men tend to fear coitus as a threat to their physical integrity. That such a difference in attitudes towards sex greatly helps men to plead not guilty, whenever a liaison results in scandal, cannot be denied, but the image of women held by men is also bound to affect the way in which women build up their own personalities. In addition, in former times when polygyny used to doom many men to celibacy for a long period of their lifetime, women were always certain to get married, whether they were young girls or older widows. Thus they could play a part in the social life through their children and through that rivalry between their own group and their husband's. In relation to *konones* they enjoyed a still more favourable situation. Suicide, however, is considered characteristic of them also. Why?

In the traditional context women had fewer opportunities to pour out their aggressiveness than 'normal' men. Besides this psychological mechanism, a sociological one can be found in the two customs of food-giving and brideprice (*avale kuna*). Today no marriage takes place without brideprice. Formerly, however, only actual and potentially "big men" are said to have paid *avale kuna* in certain villages. But what was already universal was the duty falling upon the boy's parents to feed the future wife from the time she was promised (that is, from early childhood) until marriage eventuated. As in some other parts of New Guinea, food supplied in this way was described as "making" or "building up the future wife's body", and it had to be repaid to the boy's parents if it so happened that the girl did not marry the man to whom she had been promised. In this connection, one should mention

that if a wife forsakes her husband then her descent group also has to return the brideprice, but there is no such obligation, except in cases to be considered below, if it is the husband who repudiates his wife. As might be expected, family stories are replete with cases where the wife fled to her parents' place after being ill-treated by her husband but was eventually sent back to the latter, despite all her tears and words of protest. On the other hand, when his wife committed adultery a man had to take a course of action within the following range of possibilities: (1) killing both culprits or only his rival, (2) sending the wife back to her parents and demanding that the brideprice be returned, (3) handing the wife over to his rival for a consideration equivalent to what he had paid himself when marrying her, and (4) turning a blind eye to his wife's misconduct. Of course, his decision ultimately depended on both his status in the community and his own strength of character. Those who had no "big mouth", to put it in vernacular terms, or who may be categorized as "men of silence", to use Valentine's (1963) typology, would choose the last course of action, but they would thereby ruin forever their future as influential persons in village life. The only two male suicides not committed by *konones* were committed by such men.

With only one exception, all those women whose suicides are well documented were experiencing dramatic difficulties with regard to their present or future marital situation. Some were unmarried girls involved in a liaison with someone other than the man to whom they had been promised, others had committed adultery, and still others had failed to divorce their husbands after being repeatedly ill-treated or humiliated by them. The same conditions also obtained in the cases of those women who recently made unsuccessful attempts at killing themselves. Now, if one looks for the practical consequences of these suicides instead of speculating about their motives, the same fact comes to light in each case: the victim's parents or descent group did not have to repay the brideprice, or the food which "made the woman's body". What is more, in two cases these relatives even succeeded, thanks to appropriate pressures, in getting compensation from the husband in recognition of his responsibility in the troubles preceding the suicide. This is not to say, of course, that women kill themselves in order to obey their parents or to save their group's prestige and wealth. Such a mechanical connection between the two facts would be hard to conceive and is not even needed to make female suicide more intelligible. Indeed, at the unconscious and semiconscious levels there are enough

factors whose combination can function as relays between the suicidal decision and the benefits to be derived from the woman's death by survivors. Only the main ones need be mentioned. Firstly, the woman certainly knows, usually after several unsuccessful attempts, that she cannot return to her own group or parents. Secondly, there is an obsessive premium laid on hoarding those valuables previously acquired by the descent group, and this premium governs education as well as most circumstances of adult life. Lastly, repressed aggressiveness is matched by the introjection mechanism which is here again based on orality as a result of the dependency relationship embedded in food-giving. We are therefore dealing with a commingling of impulses dating back to childhood, later frustrations, and even rational behaviour when we try to see female suicides in a sociological perspective.

Out of the 25 recorded cases three have already been mentioned as exceptional suicides in the sense that they do not easily fit into the two categories examined so far. They deserve only a few words. Two of them were committed by potentially "big men", or at least up-coming men. Both killed themselves after their wives had left and publicly settled down in the houses of rivals. Both the heinous character of the offence and the fairly high position of the husband called for immediate and strong reprisals. To remain passive was to lose one's face forever. By so doing, they would debase themselves to the *konone* position and would therefore have to die like *konones*, as informants have pointed out. The third case is that of an old woman who hanged herself after her own son had abused her in an obscene way in the presence of her sons-in-law. According to all informants, she could do nothing but commit suicide because her son was the attacker. If we look again for the effects of these suicides on survivors, then a final aspect of Maenge culture appears. Indeed, the soul of a person who takes his own life does not go to the abode of the dead until it has inflicted some punishment on those responsible for his fate. Supernatural diseases and possession by spirits are the most common forms of this posthumous revenge. Thus, it may be that such a belief facilitates suicidal decision on the part of "normal" people; *konones* of course, for reasons stated in the previous pages, are refused even this ultimate compensation. From this vantage point, female suicides and those committed by men of silence appear to belong to that great category so aptly called "Samsonic" by Jeffreys (1952).

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