

Introduction

This book discusses the topic of social control and women in four cultural groups in Papua New Guinea; the Bena Bena, the Arapesh, the Tolai and the Orokaiva. The term social control used in this book is the one defined by Cohen (1985, pp. 1-3). His conception of social control includes the 'organised ways in which [a] society responds to behaviour and people it regards as deviant, problematic, worrying, threatening, troublesome or undesirable in some way or another'. This definition has been used since it is general enough for it to account for both formal and informal mechanisms of social control.

Using a focused ethnography it will be shown that the system of social control imposed by the colonial power and continued since Independence was inappropriate to Papua New Guinea because it did not fully take account of traditional values and systems of social control. However, the imposed system nevertheless had the effect of increasing the status of women within the system of social control and dispute settlement as compared to their status prior to contact.

A focused ethnography has been defined by Otterbein (1977, p. 10) as an approach which is:

... 'problem-oriented' in the sense that the ethnographer desires to explain the culture trait which he has focused upon. He solves his problem, so to speak, by including in his report topics which he believes, or other anthropologists believe, are causal factors. He will also usually include a description of the subsystem (economic, social, political, or belief system) in which the focus topic is embedded. Most ethnographies written today are focused, but much contextual information is also provided.

In order to illustrate that the status of women within the system of social control was raised through contact with the imported system, it is important to first establish that status in traditional society, especially within the traditional system of social control. This is done in chapters three, four, five and six. Lawrence (1970, p. 44) describes the approach used by the social anthropologist when investigating social control in traditional Papua New Guinean societies as follows:

He starts with a broad description of the society's social structure, showing that the individual is not an indistinguishable transposable citizen-isolate but is tied to a network of prescriptive relationships—as a tribesman, clansman, kinsman, etc.—each with its specific expectations from and obligations to other people. He then lists the specific types of wrong action that are likely to

occur: those against the religious code (non-observance of taboos, women witnessing the male cult, etc.) and those against human beings (neglect of social obligations and positive wrong actions such as theft, incest, adultery, homicide, etc.). It may be believed that gods and spirits rather than human beings punish offences against religion, bringing ill-luck, illness, deformity, or death to wrongdoers. This appears to ensure considerable conformity in this sphere.

Chapter One goes on to examine the changes experienced by women generally within their societies and specifically, within the introduced system of social control during the period of colonial administration. In chapter two a comparison is made between two institutions of social control in the post-Independence period of Papua New Guinea to demonstrate that women fare better under the imported system of social control than they do under custom. The two agents of change examined in the post-Independence period are the Probation Service and the Village Court system.

Any work which attempts to describe the traditional features of a society which has been influenced by contact with other societies faces the problem of whether or not the resource material chosen to describe these features is based on the information of older informants within those cultures.

This book relies on the works of Mead (Arapesh), Williams (Orokaiva), Langness and Read (Bena Bena) for traditional accounts of the respective cultures. Each ethnographer was a trained anthropologist and made use of older informants to gather data. In the Tolai culture, records were made by missionaries, traders and settlers, all of whom were untrained ethnographers. Since the earliest sources were used whenever possible there is more chance that the works were based upon the actual traditions of the people, since pacification of the Tolai was not achieved until the turn of the century. These works become more credible in light of the fact that there was much agreement in their content about the various aspects of culture being studied (although the interpretations of the traditional practices often reflected the cultural biases and particular purpose of the ethnographer concerned).

The ethnographers used to describe the four groups are secondary sources. In some cases primary document sources (or testimony of an eyewitness who was present at the events) were used, particularly in the discussions covering the colonial period. Patrol Reports were written by each Patrol Officer after he had completed his patrol using his diary notes kept during the patrol. These are primary sources because the Patrol Officers observed the people themselves and particularly noted cultural change. The reliability of these journals in demonstrating culture change is high since 'reliability is . . . inversely proportional to the time-lapse between event and recollection, the closer a document is to the event it narrates the better it is likely to be for historical purposes' (Gotterchalk,

Kluckhohn & Angell 1945, p. 16). The reliability of these Patrol Reports is further enhanced by the fact that they were written by trained and experienced reporters (the Patrol Officers were trained by the Australian School of Pacific Administration where they were given some instruction concerning the traditions and customs of the people prior to being sent into the field (Downs 1980, p. 117). Oral primary sources were also used to collect information for the colonial period. Interviews were conducted by the author with two individuals who were present in Papua New Guinea during this period.

Anecdotal evidence was used to support assertions made about women and social control systems. This is legitimate in Melanesian custom since 'storying' is a universal tradition in Papua New Guinea. In 'storying', the onus is placed on the listener to interpret the message of the story, as compared to the western tradition where the teller interprets for the listener. Stories are the building blocks of social control because they relate what happens when there is a violation of custom.

To gather the information dealing with the post-Independence period, field trips were made to each of the four groups. Interviews were conducted with members of the Probation Service, Village Court Magistrates, villagers, District Court Magistrates and other members of relevant community agencies and groups. When interviewing Probation Officers about the cultural traits and about the activities and experiences of women, an effort was made (where appropriate) to limit the questions asked to the particular village where the officer was born. Officers were also interviewed regarding particular female case files.

An examination was made of all the probation case files of women from each group. Details of the offence, the circumstances surrounding the offence, the Court disposition, what sort of assistance was provided by the Probation Officer to the client and her family, and whether or not the probationers had successfully completed their probation period were noted. Whenever the documented information in the files was inadequate or raised questions, the Probation Officer was questioned.

With regard to women who go before the Village Court, Probation Officers, as well as Village Court Magistrates and villagers (both male and female) were questioned about women from their home village since it was believed that they would know more about the problems faced by women from their own group than elsewhere.

The particular four groups were chosen in an attempt to ensure that language, system of descent and groups from each of the country's four regions were represented and discussed. Both Austronesian and non-Austronesian language groups are present—one is matrilineal and three are patrilineal. In addition, selection was influenced by the fact that a probation office was located in the vicinity of the group, and according to the availability of academic literature on the group studied. Although it might be argued that the groups are not necessarily the most representative

of their respective regions there is enough similarity between cultural groups within the regions that representativeness is assured in terms of the position of women and the system of social control. Collectively, the four groups allow an examination of the full range of traditional social control techniques available within Papua New Guinea.

The Arapesh especially were chosen because of the author's personal ties with the Chief Probation Officer who is an Arapesh. The Melanesian system of building relationships and obligations assisted with this choice because of the obligations that have been built up through the author's four years of living in Papua New Guinea and her association with the development of the probation system in Papua New Guinea.¹

Commonalities of Culture

The Melanesian nation of Papua New Guinea is made up of many small fragmented societies. There exists a great diversity of language and culture within the country and some 750 language groups have been documented encompassing a quarter of the world's languages (Laycock in Wurm 1982). Since the societies are fragmented, customs, beliefs and practices, descent and kinship systems and patterns of residence differ widely. Nevertheless, even within this diversity, it is possible to isolate and identify certain commonalities within the different cultures (Epstein 1974, p. 25).

In Papua New Guinea, each traditional culture shares a similar technology and economy and is composed of groups, the members of which carry out similar tasks and are interdependent by virtue of kinship, affinal and descent ties (Epstein 1974, p. 25; Lawrence 1969, p. 21). Yet even within the group and especially outside the group there are those persons with whom a man has no relationship and no dealings. Usually there is no system of rank within the society since such a system would greatly disrupt kinship ties. The social fabric remains generally stable and relationships between the groups and individuals are not subject to any dramatic variations (Lawrence 1969, p. 21).

Papua New Guinea is made up of patrilineal and matrilineal societies. Lawrence (1969, p. 21) outlines three types of matrilineal societies within Papua New Guinea. The first includes small local groups of matrilineages whose members reckon their system of descent from one common ancestress. In the second, slightly larger type, a number of matrilineages claim one further common ancestress for them all. The third includes matrilineal groups who base their ancestry on a dual organisation by dividing themselves into two moieties (or halves). This type consists of many matriclans, divided into matrilineages. Each matriclan belongs to

¹ In 1985 the author and another Canadian Probation Officer were recruited by CUSO (the Canadian Volunteer Organisation) to work as Probation Advisers with the Justice Department of Papua New Guinea and design and implement a Probation system relevant to Melanesian culture.

one of the two moieties. This type tends to have higher populations than the first two. Lawrence further divides those Melanesian societies using the patrilineal system of descent into three major types which correspond to the three matrilineal types already described only using the patrilineal system of descent and claiming one common ancestor instead of ancestress (1969, p. 22).

The relationship between the sexes in the social systems of traditional Papua New Guinean societies has been in place for hundreds of years and is related to the fact that the Melanesian people have traditionally been horticulturalists. The choice of matrilineal or patrilineal systems of descent is related to the availability of resources (Martin & Voorhies 1975). Matrilineal descent corresponds with societies who reside on fertile land that have the capability of supporting small, stable groups of people. Control over resources is placed in the hands of women. This therefore, negates the need for competition over resources and the groups tend to be stable and cooperative in their economic systems. Patrilineal systems of descent correspond with less fertile ecological systems where competition over available resources is necessary for group survival and where control over production and allocation of resources is placed in the hands of men. The systems of residence after marriage are also affected by these ecological and economical factors. If there is a scarcity of resources there is also an increase in the prevalence of competition and warfare between groups. Therefore male solidarity is essential in the survival of the group. In patrilineal societies the patrilocal rule of residence (the bride moves to the groom's homeland) means that women are made 'strangers' within the group. They are required for their labour and for their reproductive capabilities. There is no cooperation between groups of women in the patrilocal system of residence. Instead, women are allotted individual plots of land to cultivate. They are also responsible for raising their husband's pigs and for generally working towards increasing the material wealth of their husband and his lineage.

The matrilocal rule of residence (the groom marries into the bride's homeland) congregates groups of related women and makes the men who marry into the matriclan 'strangers' within the group. As mentioned earlier, matrilineal systems of descent (using the matrilocal rule) tend to have stable, abundant subsistence economies (an economy which is not dependent on the use of money). Matrilineal societies using the avunculocal rule of residence (the couple resides with or close to the groom's mother's brother) have much in common with patrilineal societies since the effect on women tends to be the same (Martin & Voorhies 1975). Under this rule women become dispersed and their position is related to the need within the society for an accumulation of wealth. These women also become most valued for their reproductive capabilities and for their labour which contributes to the wealth of their husband and of his relatives. In both patrilineal and matrilineal systems women are controlled

by men. In the former they are controlled by their husband and his brothers. In the latter, women are controlled by their brothers and uncles.

Commonalities of Social Control

Just as there are uniformities in Melanesian culture generally, there exist common principles in traditional mechanisms of social control and dispute settlement (Epstein 1974, pp. 8, 25). Both Epstein (1974, p. 25) and Lawrence (1969, pp. 25-34) argue that such uniformities can be found especially in the area of self-help. These common principles become important when considering the design of a state imposed system of social control.

An analysis of the systems of leadership and authority in Papua New Guinea societies contributes very little to the understanding of traditional systems of social control (Lawrence 1969, p. 24). This is due to the fact that Melanesian societies have no centralised system of authority vested with the powers to prescribe and administer punishment for breaches of the moral code. Leaders do have authority which they achieve through 'their prowess in agriculture, warfare, dancing, sorcery, and organising trade, feast-exchanges, and initiation' (Lawrence 1969, p. 24). They have the ability to manipulate and influence the members of their group. Yet these leaders differ from those in authority in western societies (Lawrence 1969, pp. 24-5). Their authority is derived from the important social activities which they set in motion. Their policy-making role is limited since these prescribed social functions would take place anyway without their initiatives as they are integral to the social fabric of the group. Their authority does not apply judicially (*see* Lawrence 1969, p. 25). The jurisdiction of the leader's authority or 'social range' is limited by the fact that his authority does not apply to outside groups.

However, although in theory there is impartial law in western societies, in practice it may not be as impartial as Lawrence implies. This is evident in Bienvenue and Latif's Canadian study comparing the disposition and recidivism rates for Indians and whites in Winnipeg, Manitoba (1974, pp. 105-15). The study shows that Indians are over represented in police arrest rates (Indians comprise approximately 3 per cent of the population but are arrested for 27.2 per cent of all male offences and 69.5 per cent of all female offences.) The conviction rates were similar in that 27.9 per cent of males convicted were Indian and 70.6 per cent of convicted females were Indian.

Lawrence (1969, pp. 26-34) analyses Melanesian social control by looking at the types of actions which occur and are considered to be breaches against the moral code. He divides offences into two categories: offences against the religious code which include failure to recognise ritual and initiatory taboos and to observe the secrecy surrounding male

cults; and offences against human beings which can be sub-divided into wrongs of omission (for example, disregarding obligations to relatives, affines, exchange and trade partners); and wrongs of commission such as adultery, rape, homicide, theft and proscribed marriage.

Offences against the religious code

Lawrence (1969, p. 26) notes that this type of offence has substantial significance to traditional Melanesian people who 'do not distinguish between the realms of the natural and supernatural, religious sanctions or the intervention of gods and spirits of the dead in human affairs (and) are a powerful force in social control.' This type of offence usually does not lead to retaliation since the people believe 'that the deities and ancestors, who preside over initiation, ritual, and land tenure, will bring the culprit ill-luck in agriculture, fishing or hunting, or illness, deformity, and even death' (1969, p. 26). Lawrence notes the only exception to the above rule was when women accidentally or otherwise witnessed the secrets of the men's rituals. Before contact with western influences these women were killed.

Offences against human beings

This category of offence can be subdivided into two types: self-regulation or those 'forces that tend to prevent wrong action' (Nadel in Lawrence 1969, p. 26); and self-help or retaliatory action which is applied after the commission of an offence.

Self-regulatory forces work through the processes of socialisation, shame, public opinion, criticism and the rule of reciprocity. The socialisation processes at work during child-raising were very strong. Children had to learn clan histories, respect their kinsmen, other kinsmen's property and religion. The customary practices taught to children were reinforced by the immediate application of the sanctions through public opinion and shame. As Lawrence (1969, p. 27) explains, public condemnation was a: '. . . powerful sanction in small communities in which escape into anonymity [was] impossible: the culprit [was] always confronted by people who [knew] him personally and censure[d] his action. It soon induce[d] a sense of shame, which . . . result[ed] in either suicide or, more frequently, exile'.

Socialisation and public opinion functioned to sustain the moral code and it was through these forces that the traditional values were internalised and perpetuated (Lawrence 1969, p. 27). According to Lawrence, the reason for the existence of traditional values can only be found in an examination of the rule of reciprocity and the focal or multivalent activities.

Lawrence (1969, p. 27) says that the 'rule of reciprocity is that where the mutual obligations entailed by a relationship are observed, each party

will derive material advantages from the other.' Social relationships are based on materialism and those in relationship openly look upon each other as providers of goods and services. Failure to observe these obligations will provoke withdrawal of all cooperation (for example, *see* Lawrence 1969, p. 27).

The rule of reciprocity has its basis in cooperation. Cooperation through the reciprocal exchange in kind of material goods and services becomes the currency of a subsistence economy, binding individual members to a 'system of chains of interdependence' (Lawrence 1969, p. 27). In societies which lack cash economies cooperation is the currency and a man cannot buy goods and services in any other way. However, not all activities are of equal importance. Some, such as feast-exchanges, agriculture, house-building, and mourning ceremonies are central and fall within Nadel's concept of focal or multivalent activities (cited in Lawrence 1969, p. 28). Nadel says focal activity describes any activity of such importance that 'others depend on it in a practical and instrumental sense' (cited in Lawrence 1969, p. 28). All other activities are therefore contingent on focal activity being carried out.

Lawrence (1969, p. 29) discusses the relationship between morality, social control and self-regulation. He says, firstly, that statements of moral obligation merely recognise interdependence and mutual self-interest since 'what is valued, what is essential, is not the existence of a relationship *per se* but the practical advantages it confers' (1969, p. 29). Also, actions are given a higher moral imperative if they are prevalent in economic and social life. There is no moral obligation independent of reciprocity, inducing cooperation, followed by self-interest. Secondly, moral obligation will only be recognised where there are effective relationships which can offer material advantages. Lawrence (1969, p. 29) contrasts this with western society since 'morality is not conceived as Universalist but has a restricted social range'. Thirdly, the process of self-regulation should be understood as only one aspect of everyday life. In contrast to the western legal system the sanctions are not punishment but examples of 'penalisation'. As Lawrence (1969, p. 30) says, 'self-regulation is obviously a feature of western society but is not recognised as a legal principle'. Read (1955a, p. 255) agrees with Lawrence in his comparison of the Melanesian and western morality:

. . . moral values are one of the principal regulative mechanisms of culture. To be effective . . . moral values must be internalised and generally accepted by the majority of those who constitute the group . . . a majority of our own moral judgements imply the Christian ethic of personal freedom and responsibility, the transcendent and objective nature of the good and common obligations in a moral universe. By way of contrast, the moral judgements of other peoples may be couched in terms of practicality; they may eschew the speculative and abstract and they may stress the immediate claims of interpersonal relationships.

Self-help or retaliatory action

When self-regulation is not effective or the act is outside the range of self-regulation (for example where there is no morally binding relationship) self-help can occur. In the western legal system self-help is essentially absent after the first contact with the system but in traditional Papua New Guinea societies where there is no organised legal system, self-help assumes maximum importance (Lawrence 1969, p. 30). An individual must seek his remedy with whatever support he can muster from kinsmen and others.

The severity of the retaliatory action will generally depend upon the closeness of the relationship between the plaintiff and the defendant (Lawrence 1969, pp. 32-4). If it is close, the action will be less severe and if distant, more severe, involving greater numbers of people. The reason is that most relationships, even where there is conflict, are still important especially when severe action would weaken the in-group against outsiders. Thus, settlements are often easily reached in these situations. Where there is no relationship there is no sense of moral obligation and self-help can take the extreme form of unrestricted warfare.

Lawrence (1969, p. 34) says that in settling a dispute in Papua New Guinea, 'the aim is to restore social order, or to patch up relationships that have been broken or damaged'. This contrasts with the aim of western systems which emphasise impartial justice and punishment being determined by the wrong committed. Relationships between the individual wrong-doer and the victim have less relevance.

Melanesian dispute settlement techniques differ substantially from the Western judicial approach to disputes. The difference lies primarily in the focus of the approach with the West focusing on the act itself and Melanesians focusing on the social context and the social relationships within which the act took place. In *Contention and Dispute*, Epstein (1974, pp. 11-12) aptly describes the distinction between the two approaches in the following:

Thus in Western systems classification tends to relate to the nature of the offending behaviour considered primarily as an act, and one of its functions is to indicate for a given set of circumstances the appropriate procedures to be followed or mode of redress to be sought. By contrast New Guinea conceptions stress the nature of the offence is defined not so much by the act itself as by the social context in which it occurs. That is to say, how a particular act is interpreted, and more importantly, what reaction follows it, will depend very much on the social relationships and interests of the parties involved.

Commonalities of culture and in social control will be evident in the descriptions of the four chosen groups. The extent to which the colonial powers and the post-Independent Government took account of the

differences between western and traditional approaches to social control is discussed throughout.