RESEARCH IN MELANESIA, VOLUME 7, NUMBERS 3 AND 4. DECEMBER 1983.

ISSN 0254-0665.

TABLE OF CONTENTS Page

professionally-trained PNG ethnographers could mobilise a substantial task-force of literature villagers to record a great deal of cultural material for future generations. However, this task is not being taken seriously by Budget Committees, and the traditions of millions of people are being eroded each year, disappearing without a record being made.

Since the situation is quite desperate, any assistance whatsoever that is offered by overseas researchers should be gratefully accepted and actively encouraged. The costs are almost always fully borne by overseas sources and yet PNG can obtain the benefits by the conditions imposed on research visas - that the data and results must be available for interested parties in PNG, where that is compatible with respect for the privacy and trust of informants.

It is curious that it is not the biologist, geologist, missionary, business-man or tourist who is being hassled - it is the anthropologist, as though something particularly obnoxious is being practised by such people, something quite threatening, one would think, to warrant interference at the political level. The strident nature of the diatribe against anthropologists, and the irrational nature of the arguments raised in support of the diatribe, suggest a bad conscience.

Basically, anthropologists are enquiring into what is going on in a certain community; they may be told things outside their declared research interests that could be embarrassing to certain political and administrative figures if known outside the community. I wonder if the amount of diatribe is possibly related to the size of the bad conscience and the stakes involved?

Barry Craig,
Former Curator,
National Museum of PNG.

FIELDWORK REPORT

Missionaries and Sorcerers: changes in sorcery beliefs among the Maisin of Collingwood Bay, Oro Province.

John Barker,
Department of Anthropology and Sociology,
University of British Columbia.

Paper presented to Anthropology and Sociology seminar, U.P.N.G., August 1, 1983. Not to be cited without the author's permission.

I came to Uiaku village in Oro Province fully expecting to hear about sorcey and I was not disappointed. Within a week one old lady came to our house and told my wife and I that the village would be a good place if it weren't for the large number of murders going on. My experience is no doubt similar to other fieldworkers. At first people were unwilling to tell me much about suspected sorcerers and sorcery cases but as time passed and we all got to know each other better, people volunteered more and more inofrmation. I suppose that the hardest thing for me to get used to was that in a Melanesian society sorcery is not strange or "exotic". In her writings Ruth Landes once coined the phrase "the ordinariness of human monstrosity" and that seems to fit the case here.

In her Introduction to the Peoples and Cultures of Melanesia Ann Chowning points out that sorcery and magic in almost all Melanesian societies are amongst the last areas of "traditional" culture to be affected by the European intruders, notably missionaries. This has always struck me as odd because it has been such things as sorcery and magic that missionaries have specifically targeted in their evangelical efforts. One of the purposes of my research was to look into how the Mission in the region may have changed local sorcery beliefs. I was also very interested to examine the part played by the Church today in the ongoing social drama of sorcery accusations and fears. In the next few pages I wish to set out some of my observations and tentatively suggest some conclusions.

Setting

The Maisin people live in a series of beach villages along the southern shores of Collingwood Bay in Oro Province, about 40 miles south of Tufi. There is a resident population of about 1,200 with a third more living away in urban centres. The Maisin are traditionally hunters, fishermen, gardeners and gatherers who for some time now have supplemented these subsistence activities with sales of beautifully painted bark cloth and remittances sent home from towns by working relatives.

The first recorded outside contacts with Maisin took place in the 1890's when Mission and Government boats cruised the coast of northern Papua. The Anglican Mission eventually established a head station at Wanigela, to the north of the Maisin. In 1901, they opened a church and school in the largest Maisin village of Uiaku. The station was manned first by Solomon Island

teacher-evangelists who were gradually replaced by Papuans, some of them Maisin. Except for a period between 1917 and 1920, no European missionaries have resided in Uiaku. The Maisin received their first Papuan priest in 1963. The pr st and two evangelists presently at work in the parish come from other parts of Papua New Guinea. A deacon is himself Maisin. They are still commonly called "missionaries" by the people and I shall follow that practice here. All but a few adults Maisin have been baptised -- most when they were infants -- and those baptised consider themselves to be Christians.

Like their predecessors, todays "missionaries" hold an ambivalent position in Maisin society. On the one hand, they form a part of village society. Like other village men and women, the missionaries make gardens, live in houses made of bush materials, and endeavour to get their children into high school in order to secure good jobs in town. The mission staff participates to a large extent in the exchange network of the village. Individually, they share many experiences and cultural understandings with the local people. On the other hand, missionaries remain outsiders. They earn a salary, perform a specialised role and are accountable to a Bishop residing away in town. The ambivalent position of the missionary is perhaps best symbolished by their physical situation in the villages. Typically the priest's and teachers' houses, along with the school and church, are in the centre of the village, but, at the same time, clearly demarcated from it. These "stations", like larger counterparts where senior missionaries dwell, are to some extent autonomous from the surrounding social environment. Virtually all church activities take place on the station and not in the villages.

The Missionary Encounter with Sorcery

The sorcerer has long been a stock figure in missionary propaganda. The following description of an Uiaku sorcery of 1916 is fairly typically of what can be found in missionary literature of this period in general.

> I called for Borega to come down from his house. Slowly the wickedly leering old man came down from the ladder, ancient moth-eaten old headdress of horn bills and bird of paradise feathers lolloping rakishly to one side, some smears of vermillion slashing the stale rancid mixture of coatings and super-coatings of pot black and old coconut oil, with which his face and body ware smeared.....
>
> There was a cassowary bone through the septum of his nose,

their origin story, it is told how clan after clan climbed up a rope from a deep hole to the earth's surface. At the top, the chief man called out to each clan, "What are you bringing?" The Dadumu people said, "We are carrying poisons so that people can come to us and we will kill their enemies". Dadumu were invited to come up but when the next clan on the rope said that they were bringing sorcery that would allow them to kill enemies simply by looking at them the rope was promply cut and they plunged back into the depths.

Before contact Dadumu men were the main Maisin sorcerers. Sorcery was a particular right of their clan, although other clans also had their sorcerers. According to the oral tradition sorcery was primarily a means of social control. Disruptive persons could be brought under control by killing them or making them very sick by means of sorcery. Everyone knew who the sorcerers were. They were greatly respected and feared.

Both documentary and oral sources, therefore, point towards the historical importance of sorcery in Maisin society. Oral traditions also back up the documents in showing that Maisin were anxious to rid themselves of sorcery but found it difficult to do so quickly. My informants all agreed that the old sorcery practices have today almost completely disappeared. The old sorcerers either gave up their practices or let them die with themselves. Universally the Maisin praise the Mission and Government for bringing about this development.

Sorcery Today

Sorcery has not died out in Uiaku, however. In compiling census material and doing a survey on explanations of misfortune I found that the majority of major sicknesses and deaths — particularly in the cases of physically active people — are blamed on sorcerers. But the shape of sorcery beliefs do seem to have changed among the Maisin.

Before going into this it is best to briefly outline the different ways that exist of killing people which could be put under the general heading of sorcery and witchcraft.

1. The big name for sorcery — killing through non-physical means — is wea or yawwei. More specifically, wea, yawwei and beta refer to

substances -- "poisons" — used to make a person sick. I was told of several methods of doing wea. In the past the usual method was to pour the wea on a sleeping person out of a long bamboo. The bamboo tube was then heated over a fire until the victim became very sick and died. Discarded bits of clothing or hair, sand from a foot print or a chewed betel nut skin could also be heated up this way. When referring to this kind of sorcery Maisin often say fake-sen tinei — "they did it by hand". All of these methods could be classed as contagious magic.

2. On rare occasions, Collingwood Bay people are threatened by the activities of bush sorcerers known as kosaro. Kosaro use the methods of vada sorcery, long familiar in ethnographic literature. This is, they attack their victim in a group while he or she is alone in the garden or bush. Once the victim is unconscious they place a poisonous substance in the stomach. Then they send the victim home to die. The latter will have no recollection of what took place. Death comes swiftly and suddenly. (The bush people from the Musa basin are traditional enemies of the Maisin and until the 1920's used to raid the coast. It is perhaps for this reason that they are associated with a form of murder which involves both violence and magical substances).

3. Yafumi or flying witches from Milne Bay Province are another threat to Maisin orginating from the outside. Yafumi are usually women. They have the ability to leave their bodies at night and go for wide-ranging travels by ship, car or plane. Attacks by yafumi are very violent. Victims are commonly found with broken bones and large bruises caused by yafumi spears and guns.

4. Finally there is sevaseva. Certain members of the community have the ability to maintain contact with spirits (yawu) which dwell in the bush and mountains of the area. One attains the help of yawu by making an offering of a smoke or betel nut. Yawu are neutral in their attitudes towards human beings. A medium can request them either to heal or to kill.

These four methods have three points of similarity. First of all, the methods are known to only a few people. Most people, when they plan retaliatory magic, must approach a specialist. Usually this is someone from outside his own village for there is always the risk that the sorcerer a man

hires may be a relation of the would-be victim. In such cases the tables may be turned and the client himself become a victim. Secondly sorcery among Maisin is usually inner-directed. That is to say, while the sorcerer himself may come from outside the community it is unhappy relations with the community that usually leads a man or woman to contact a sorcerer. This brings us to the third point, which is that most sorcery attacks are seen by Maisin to be to some degree justifiable and understandable. They almost always arise from damaged social relationships -- greediness about food, flaunting of one's wealth, lack of proper respect towards an elder or inlaw, and so forth. It is for this reason, Maisin say, that you will live a long time if you are a good and helpful person and if you quickly re-establish happy relations whenever you happen to cross someone.

All four of these types of sorcery continue to exist today in Maisin villages but, according to my informants, the composition has shifted dramatically. In the past almost all sorcery was carried out by wea tamatari -- sorcery men -- who lived in or around Maisin villages. As we have already seen these men had to give up certain foods in order to maintain their power. They ate their food and chewed betelnut separately from others. Thus they are easily identifiable and well-known. Today this form of sorcery has practically died out. Those who now used wea in its limited sense get their poisons usually from outside of the community. They no longer need to fast or to keep their food and betel nut to themselves. There has also been a steady increase in the use of sivasava sorcery -- killing through spirits -- since the early 1930's. In fact this now seems to be the most common form of murder in the area. In the past sorcery was carried out at night; it was invisible but the sorcerers were known. Today to an increasing extent both sorcery and sorcerer are invisible.

Maisin have mixed feelings about these changes. When I asked them directly whether or not sorcery was more or less frequent today than in the past my informants agreed that things had improved greatly. In the past one could not sleep outside or with a window on the house for fear of prowling sorcerers. Nowadays you see people frequently sleeping out on open verandahs. Yet many people I interviewed thought that sorcery was the most serious problem facing the community today. About half-way through my stay in Uiaku a very ill middle-aged woman (who eventually died) was brought back to the village from hospital in Popondetta. The elders and village council

called a series of meetings in which they tried to establish the name of the sorcery and of the sorcerer killing this woman. It was clear at this time -- when they were actually confronted by a victim -- that many people felt that sorcery was actually worse in the area today than it had been in the past. In the meetings several men stressed that in the past when the sorcerers were known the kinsmen of the victim could go to the wea tamati and try to settle the differences which engendered the attack. Because of this the deaths of the younger members of society were less frequent than they are today. One village leader -- an educated man in his 40's clearly recognised the irony of the situation when, in a speech, he praised the elders for having given up their "old bad things". He then went on to harangue the younger men for bringing in all of these new poisons from the towns; the community had no defence against these and so "all of the people are dying". In other words, Uiaku had given up the evils of its own sorcery only to find itself in an even worse position. "Who now will look after Uiaku!" this man asked. "Who knows what is happening and will tell us what to do?"

The Church and Sorcery

Missionary efforts to stamp out sorcery definitely were stronger in the past than they are today. In 20 months I never once heard sorcery referred to directly in church at Uiaku. I have heard two bishops of the Anglican Church talk of sorcery in sermons, but they spoke in the most general terms about the need to get rid of "bad customs".

About 1917 a patrol officer was surprised to find that the Solomon Island teacher at Uiaku had a firm belief in and respect for sorcery. Most of the Papuan clergy today would seem to have beliefs in sorcery not fundamentally different from villagers with similar levels of education. Their opinions about sorcery, therefore, are quite different from the early European missionaries who saw it all as a fraud.

I interviewed two priests who had worked at Uiaku as well as two deacons and several evangelists -- some of whom were local men. All of them described the sorcerer as a particularly odious sinner. There could be no justification for taking another person's life. The only really effective defence against sorcery, in their view, is faith in God. One of the priests told me that the victims of sorcery -- as well as those who imagine themselves to be victims -- are committing sin every bit as much as the sorcerer because they

are turning away from God: they have no faith in His powers over evil.'

If modern day "missionaries" influence sorcery beliefs in Maisin villages, that influence must be indirect. The old stereotype of the missionary and sorcerer locked in battle has no basis in the recent past. When requested, the priest, deacon or evangelist will go into the village to pray and comfort the sick. If the sick person believes that they are the victims of sorcery, the clergy will try to bolster their flagging faith. But when a man in the village is widely gossiped about as a sorcerer, the missionary takes no action. If he is an outsider the chances are that his understanding of the situation will be limited. If the church worker is Maisin and interferes he runs the risk of retaliation upon himself or his family. The actual accusation of sorcery -- outside of ongoing village gossip -- is a legal matter which must be dealt with by the village council and elders. It is possible that the missionaries influence people's ideas and practices connected with sorcery in a more indirect fashion. Every Sunday the Bible is read in church and a licensed preacher extracts the "advice" or giu from it. By listening to the giu the Christians in the community should learn how to live good lives and, ideally, how to deal with disruptive individuals in the community. Significantly, the Deacon at Uiaku informed me that no man who practiced sorcery could possibly have been to church on a regular basis for if he had he would know the giu and realise that he does wrong.

From the villagers' point of view, the missionaries today do not always provide a convincing demonstration of the vanquishing of sorcery through faith in God. The main problem is that the clergy themselves may have relatives who are known or suspected of being sorcerers. One of the priests who served at Uiaku for a time, for example, was the son of a well-known sorcerer from a different cultural group towards Tufi. Those of the mission staff from Milne Bay Province are suspected to have yafuni witches amongst their relations, or perhaps to be yafuni themselves. In addition, mission staff are widely thought to be open to sorcery attack as much as are villagers. The deceased wife of one of the deacons in the area was said by many to have been killed by yawu spirits called up by an annoyed relation. As I mentioned before, some villagers interpret the reticence of the missionaries to speak out against sorcerers to come from a fear that they themselves might be attacked.

I found that villagers had very ambivalent notions about the relationship between sorcery and Christianity. Most people I spoke to thought that the sorcerer was a man tempted by the lies of Satan to use powers of evil against his fellows. Others, however, expressed some doubt whether things were this simple. God created everything, they reasoned, therefore he must also have created sorcery and sorcerers. Since the sorcerer usually punishes those people in the community who have done bad things, this might be one of the ways God punishes wrong-doers in the world. Ambivalent attitudes also prevail concerning defence against sorcerers. All Maisin would probably agree that faith in God is enough to protect a person from a sorcerer. Yet, in almost every case of suspected sorcery that I came across the relatives of the victim went to a village healer for help before or instead of asking for the priest's guidance. The impression I have is that most villagers are able to deal with this ambivalence rather easily by merging the missionaries' emphasis on faith with their own attitudes towards sorcery. The faithful Christian, after all, is a person who is generous, hardworking, and quick to resolve animosity. The existence of sorcery just shows how short people fall of such goals.

Conclusion

There are some signs that belief in sorcery is weakening amongst Maisin. Several of the younger people who have been educated and worked in towns doubt whether sorcery takes place as frequently as other villagers believe. One man who is a former dentist told me that he doesn't think sorcery is ever carried out, although I never heard him say this in a meeting. For most people, however, sorcery remains a threatening reality. The young people in the village refer to the various forms of sorcery as "custom" -- things of the past. But, as we have seen, sorcery beliefs have been recast through time. The home-grown variety of Maisin sorcery was mostly given up, but as contact increased the movement of people throughout Papua New Guinea the range of sorcery techniques available to Maisin greatly expanded. At the same time the identification of the sorcery and sorcerer has become progressively harder. Maisin gave up their old form of sorcery not only because of pressures applied by European missionaries but also because Maisin wanted to become Christians and so were willing to experiment with abandoning their traditional sorcery. We have seen that they were mostly successful in leaving the old practices behind but not in losing their firm belief in sorcery. Sorcery beliefs have been recast and at the present time

the village people and the Mission staff are in basic agreement over principles. There is, of course, no guarantee that this will remain the case in the future.

I suspect that the Anglican Church workers have played a role in modifying attitudes in regards to sorcery in two other ways. I can't really confirm these impressions but I hope to be able to say more about them when I've had a chance to thoroughly review my data. Firstly, the missionaries have probably often been effective at reducing the tensions in a community following a death by providing co fort to those in mourning. Several people told me that they were able to cope with the deaths of loved ones only through the knowledge that God wanted the deceased for a greater purpose in Paradise. This, along with the teaching that one should forgive one's enemies, may help to reduce suspicions of sorcery and its actual practice. Secondly, I suspect that mission teaching has caused a shift in thinking amongst Maisin concerning the nature of the "g od man". The leaders of the past were all brave warriors, good speakers and generous individuals; but many too were great sorcerers. Today's leaders must be kind, helpful and generous. They live a long time because they don't make "mistakes". They are never sorcerers. Sorcery may be used to punish mistakes but it itself is also a mistake. Those who use it are feared and avoided, but not respected. And, because they enrage others like themselves, sorcerers never live to enjoy old age.

References

Benson, James. 1955. "The Lime Pots of Uiaku", The Anglican, April 29, 1955.

Chowning, Ann. 1977. An Introduction to the Peoples and Cultures of Melanesia. Second edition. Menlo Park, California Cummings.

U.P.N.G. AND THE FUTURE OF MELANESIAN STUDIES

Marc Schiltz

After eight years of independence in PNG, and seventeen years of academic progress at UPNG, it seems timely to re-assess the on going interests in Melanesian studies within this country. Looking at Melanesia simply as a geographical area within the South Pacific region, inhabited by peoples of diverse cultures whose earliest ancestors settled here some 50,000 years ago and whose future destinies will inevitably be interlinked, the focus on Melanesian studies itself can hardly be questioned. The interest in Melanesian studies which marked the beginning of new nationhood in PNG parallels the period around political independence in Africa, and the birth there of various centres for African studies. What I do question in this paper, however, is how Melanesian studies are organised, and what should be the orientation of such studies, as well as their place within the department of anthropology and sociology at UPNG.

My concern in this paper, then, is to take stock of past and current research in Melanesia, and in the light of this suggest certain directions in which a greater feedback from Melanesian studies on development issues can be achieved. After all, the peoples of Melanesia belong to developing nations, some still under colonial rule, but others politically independent. Among them political consciousness and commitment to determine for themselves their historic destinies is no longer limited simply to asserting village or tribal sovereignty, but to identifying themselves as nations in the Pacific region and in the world at large.

The questions I wish to address more specifically, however, concern the orientation of anthropological research, as well as the teaching of anthropology at this university. While my approach is that of a social anthropologist, the questions I address are by no means restricted to narrowly defined anthropological concerns. They are directed to colleagues in the social sciences generally, both here and abroad.

More than a Hundred Years of Research in Melanesia

For more than a century researchers have been drawn to Melanesia. Their investigations have covered a very diverse range of questions within the arts and sciences. Inasmuch as most of this research was carried out by individual scholars who were attached to various universities and funding organisations overseas, research has tended to be fragmentary and uncoordinated, reflecting diverse scholarly interests which were often alien and sometimes even contrary to the interests of the people in Melanesia.

It would be difficult to ascertain how many scholars have so far worked in Melanesia, but it is probably a fair assumption that most were anthropologists. King and Ranck (1982:106-9) list more than four hundred anthropological fieldworkers for PNG only. When we add all those who have worked elsewhere in