Sorcery and Social Change:
The Kilenge Context

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I. Sorcery and Social Change

This working session has been organized to examine the relationship between
sorcery and social change. The importance of this relationship has been occasion-
ally suggested (Lieban 1960:142; Patterson 1974-5:231) but never adequately
explored. Obviously, we all feel that in some way this relationship exists,
otherwise we would not be here to discuss it. This relationship can exist in three
basic forms: 1, where the belief in sorcery and sorcery practices have influenced
the course of, or modified the effects of, social change or attempts at social
change; 2, where various aspects of social change have had an impact on sorcery
beliefs and practices, changing peoples thinking about or use of those beliefs
and practices; 3, where there has been a reciprocal process of change, in which
sorcery beliefs influence social change, this change serves to modify sorcery
beliefs, ad infinitum. Each of these basic forms of the relationship between
sorcery and social change probably exists in numerous empirical varieties, e.g.,
where the entire system of sorcery beliefs has been effected, where only a
segment of those beliefs have been effected, where the effects are primarily
limited to political action, economic action, and so forth. Presumably, these
different relationship demonstrate something more than just the causal sequence
involved: they tell us how members of different societies are coping with,
or adjusting to, or trying to manipulate, their changing social and natural
environment.

This information would seem to be important to government planners and con-
sultants, particularly in implementing change at the local level, but both
colonial and independent regimes in Oceania (and elsewhere) have not only
ignored it, they have refused, in general, to recognize the existence and
local validity of belief systems of sorcery. Regulation 80 of the Native
Regulations 1939-1969 of Papua stated "Sorcery is only deceit, but the lies of
the Sorcerer frighten many people and cause great trouble, therefore the
Sorcerer must be punished" (quoted in O'Regan 1974:80). A similar regulation,

Regulation 97 of the Native Administration Regulations 1924, existed in the
Territory of New Guinea.[1] There is a basic ambiguity inherent in these regula-
tions, i.e., that there is no such thing as sorcery but since it is detrimental
to general welfare, something should be done about it. This ambiguous and vacill-
atory attitude, although deriving from the colonial European attitude towards
such "primitive" practices, has often been continued by post-colonial, indepen-
dent governments. Without fully recognizing the relative importance of sorcery
in traditional systems of belief and social control, and the problems presented
by this situation, the implementation of change, particularly at the local
level, can meet with severe interference. Sorcerers may (but not necessarily do)
present an obstacle to social change, and there appears to be no way for
villagers or outsiders to overcome this obstacle. To prosecute and jail a
sorcerer is no solution: he will either work sorcery on his accuser from his cell,
or wait until he is released to seek his revenge. The treatment of sorcerers is
a vexing problem with no clear-cut solution, a problem compounded by government
ambiguity.

Before we can discuss potential solutions to such problems, we must agree
amongst ourselves just what it is to which we are referring. Many anthropological
studies of sorcery, particularly journal articles, have failed to define sorcery
or to distinguish between sorcery and witchcraft. This may be so because

> Anthropologists who have attempted to explain sorcery and witchcraft
> agree on at least one essential point-- the delimitation of the field
> of study. It is acknowledged that sorcery and witchcraft refer to the
> belief, and those practices associated with the belief, that one human
> being is capable of harming another by magical or supernatural means.
> (Patterson 1974-5:132)

Sorcery and witchcraft differ in that "the power of the sorcerer is derived from
utilization of resources outside himself, [while] the power of witches is in-built,
a constitutional factor acquired either through heredity or transference" (Lieban
1960:128). This use of "outside resources" is generally acknowledged to consist of

(1) the use of substances and objects believed to be imbued with
supernatural power, to the accompaniment of (2) verbal addresses (or
"spells" where there is an emphasis on their being word perfect) by
(3) an operator who believes that, provided his procedures have been
perfectly performed, the desired result will inevitably follow.
(Hayano 1973:180).

Two major premises for our consideration are: 1, sorcery can be considered to
be a form of social control; and 2, in such cases, sorcerers are agents of social
control. As straightforward as these premises are, there is still disagreement
in the literature as to whether sorcery actually does constitute a form of social
control. Lieban sees sorcery as a "product of social discord and an index of the
inadequacy of social controls" (1967:125) and Swanson (refering to a catch-all
category of "witchcraft" that includes sorcery) regards the use of witchcraft as
suggesting a "serious lack of legitimate means of social control and moral
bonds" (1960:46). Swanson's use of the term 'legitimate' reflects the major
divergence in the anthropological analysis of sorcery.

There are two main schools of thought regarding the analysis of sorcery: the
African and the Oceanic. The position of the African school is best summarized
by Marwick, who stated that "sorcery (though not witchcraft) is best understood
when regarded as a branch of magic, in particular the illegitimate sub-division
of the destructive branch of magic" (1967:232). By 'illegitimate', Marwick means
"without the approval of society" (Ibid.:233). This perspective dates back to, and
is based on, Evans-Pritchard's original work on Zande magic and witchcraft (1931,
1937), where he "used terms such as 'witchcraft', 'sorcery', and 'magic' as the
English equivalents of concepts that his Zande informants clearly distinguished
from one another" (Marwick 1967:232). By chance, these concepts generally
corresponded with the concepts used in other African cultures, and Evans-
Pritchard's terminology and distinctions became standard for the whole of Africa.
Marwick would have us take this terminology based on one group's perception of
the world and use it for the analysis of sorcery in all cases (1964; 1965:69;
1967). In advocating its application specifically to Oceania, he fails to see

that _other_ groups might have their own notions of sorcery, witchcraft and the like, and that these notions, or their English equivalents, might be just as useful (if not moreso) in describing and analyzing local conditions regarding the manipulative use of the supernatural. By taking one native model of distinctions as the general model (i.e., the Zande), he _ipso_ _facto_ declares all other native models to be inadequate. This position in untenable, both logically and empirically. Distinctions made by one group or people are not necessarily those distinctions made by others. There is no reason why we should take a model based on the African reality and apply it to the Melanesian or Oceanic situation, especially when Oceanic people and their anthropologists do not make the distinctions made by the Africans and their anthropologists. The problems encountered in trying to apply African models cf descent to the New Guinea Highlands are already well-known. The same sort of difficulties are met when one tries to apply the African model of magic, witchcraft and sorcery to Oceania. In particular, a Melanesian model based on the frequently noted fact that sorcery is regarded, _depending_ _on_ _circumstances_, as either socially legitimate or illegitimate (e.g., Tuzin 1974), is more appropriate than an African-derived model which holds sorcery to be a necessarily illegitimate activity.

The analysis of Oceanic sorcery has a long tradition, dating back to Malinowski who regarded sorcery (black magic) as a legitimate means of social control: "ordinarily, black magic acts as a genuine legal force, for it is used in carrying out the rules of tribal law, it prevents the use of violence and restores equilibrium" (1926:86). This belief in the legitimacy and efficacy of sorcery as a means of social control is echoed by contemporary studies in Melanesia, although Lawrence and Meggitt (1972:19) point out that the effect is variable, that sorcery is not necessarily consistent in its socio-political importance. Chowning and Goodenough state that among the Lakalai "fear or sorcery was unquestionably a powerful deterrent to improper behavior in former times"(1971:66), and note that it is still somewhat effective today. Both Lane (1972:261) and LaFontaine (1963:271),

for example, provide similar supporting data. Further afield, Kluckholn's study of Navaho sorcery (1944) makes a similar point. It is vital to note, though, that sorcery as a social control usually operates as an after-the-fact explanation of why something occurred or someone became ill or died (Patterson 1974-5:133). Sorcery, or the threat of sorcery, does not seem to prevent acts that are defined as socially wrong or improper. Rather, it is used as an explanation of why someone has suffered because of those acts.

An oft-noted difference between African and Oceanic sorcery is that the former is directed against in-group members, while the latter is usually directed against outsiders (Marwick 1964; Patterson 1974-5). Thus, in Africa, clan and lineage members (against whom one has no other form of recourse) are the most frequent targets of sorcery, and in Oceania people belonging to other social groups are the usual victims. Patterson, somewhat naively, goes so far as to say that it is "inconceivable" that sorcery would be used to kill in-group members (1974-5:158). If, however, sorcery can be used as a means of social control, then in Oceania we would expect to find at least some sorcery directed against recalcitrant in-group members. Indeed, this is what we find among, for example, the Lakalai (Chowning and Goodenough 1971), the South Fore (Glasse and Lindenbau, 1971) and the Kilenge (see below), among others.

A major concomitant of actual sorcery is the accusation of sorcery. Marwick (1965) has demonstrated that while the relationship between sorcerer and victim might only be an assumption on the part of one or the other, the relationship between accuser and sorcerer is a social fact. In Melanesia, sorcery accusations are seen as either exacerbating social tensions, leading to violence and group fission (e.g., Glasse and Lindenbaum 1971:370; Berndt 1971:395), or as easing social tensions (Lawrence and Meggitt 1972:19). This reflects a dichotomy in the wider realm of sorcery analysis on a global perspective: sorcery accusations being seen as an _indication_ or _manifestation_ of social tension and strain, and a way of resolving such strain (Marwick 1964, 1967), _or_ sorcery accusations

seen as _creating_ and _increasing_ tension. For Melanesia, this apparent contradiction
is empirically explicable: in some societies the accusation of sorcery does lead
to increased tensions, while elsewhere it results in decreased tension (see below).

Earlier, I drew a distinction between sorcery and sorcerers. Lieban characterized
the sorcerer as "a man or woman for hire, a specialist who trades in death and
affliction" (1967:23). For the Philippine situation, he noted that sorcerers may
also act on their own, to seek vegence due them. The sorcerer is a manipulator of
a set of beliefs and techniques, working either to redress perceived wrongs against
himself, or "on contract" to satisfy the desire of his clients. If we accept the
notion of sorcerer as a manipulator of a set of beliefs and techniques, then
sorcery itself is a tool of the sorcerer. This distinction is important to the
idea that sorcery is a form of social control, and in examining the relationship
of sorcery and social change. The tendency in the literature, dating back to Mal-
inowski, is to see sorcery as an inherently conservative force.

> ... sorcery remains a support of vested interest; hence in the long run,
> of law and order. It is always a conservative force, and it furnishes
> really the main source of the wholesome fear of punishment and retribution
> indispensable in any orderly society... In whatever way it works, it is
> a way of emphasizing the _status quo_... (Malinowski 1926:93; see also, for
> example, Brown and Hutt 1935:182; Marwick 1965:247)

The fallacy involved here is seeing sorcery as operating independently of the
sorcerer. It is not sorcery itself, but the _sorcerers_, who will determine if sorcery
is to act as a conservative force. In the vast majority of cases, sorcery does
seem to be used in a conservative fashion, but this does not preclude the use of
sorcery in a progressive (I take that to be the opposite of conservative) manner
if it so suits the interests of the sorcerers or their clients.

II. The Kilenge Data

The sorcery beliefs and practices of the Kilenge[2] have undergone several changes
since first contact with the German colonial authorities around the turn of the
century. Before the Pax Germanica, most conflicts and disputes both within and

between hamlets were settled by spears or other forms of organized or unorganized physical violence. Homicidal sorcery[3] was practiced, but its use was not widespread. Only with the prohibition of physical violence by the German administration did sorcery come to assume importance as a means of pursuing conflicts. The tendency to see a dual divsion of sorcery actions as being legitimate in some cases and illegitimate in others was either generated or reaffirmed by the rising importance of sorcery. Sorcery, when used as a response to a provocation which would have stimulated a war or feud before pacification (e.g., theft of pigs or other major objects, adultery, etc.), was seen as being 'legitimate', a proper application of sorcery,by the practitioners, if not their antagonists. Sorcery without an apparent provocation was seen as 'illegitimate', and called for a response of physical homicide or 'legitimate' sorcery.

There are two distinct systems of sorcery beliefs currently held by the Kilenge. Integral to both is the fact that the victim usually does not know and is not informed that he has been sorcerized: the presence of sorcery-induced disease must be diagnosed by divination. The first system of sorcery beliefs is indigenous to the Kilenge-Lolo area. A basic part of this belief system is that only the sorcerer who induced the disease in the victim can cure him[4]. Thus, in effecting a cure, the emphasis is not only on the curing of the physical disease, but also on healing the ruptured social relationship that presumably led to the sorcery attack. The victim or his relatives are aided in their search for the responsible sorcerer by other sorcerers, who can identify the specific symptoms, and thus the sorcerer responsible for it (most sorcerers adept at indigenous sorcery know one particular technique, with its accompanying specific symptoms). The cure is effected by presenting the sorcerer with gifts, after which he will remove the sorcery.

The second system of sorcery is not really a system proper-- it is composed of bits and pieces of sorcery that have been imported from other parts of Papua New

Guinea, particularly other New Britain locales (e.g., Tolai, Mengen) by men returning from wage labor. With imported sorcery, any sorcerer or curer is capable of curing the victim. This is a departure from the traditional system, in that the emphasis changes to curing the illness, and not the strained social relationship. With the social rupture extant, the victim is liable to be attacked again and again, until the sorcerer responsible receives the satisfaction of seeing his victim die, or of mending the relationship.

The public accusation of sorcery tends to ease tensions caused by death or illness. The accusation indicates a public willingness to settle the matter. In cases of illness or death where sorcery is suspected but no accusation is made, reticence in dicates a fear of further sorcery and/or a desire to seek sorcery revenge. In the event of the death of an individual, and the diagnosis or divination of sorcery as the agency responsible for the death, the victim's relatives may either hire another sorcerer to revenge the death, or may take no action whatsoever. Reluctance to take revenge is predicated on the fear that the initial sorcerer may hear of such attempts at revenge, and make a pre-emptive strike to protect himself. Several sorcery deaths of the last 15 years are said to be the results of such preventative strikes.

The events associated with World War Two had major ramifications on Kilenge sorcery beliefs. Aisapo, a man of Ongaia village with Kove ancestry, was appointed by the Americans and the Australians to be the paramount luluai, or waitpus, for the Kilenge-Lolo Census Division. He was a man of far-reaching vision, interested in changing the Kilenge way of life primarily through economic development, but he lacked a clear-cut claim as natavolo, hereditary leader or manager. One of his first actions was to gather all the Kilenge and Lolo sorcerers on the beach, and have them discard all their sorcery-related paraphenalia into the ocean. He declared sorcery to be illegal, and such was his influence in those uncertain times that people obeyed him. He also tried to remove the danger of other supernatural powers from Kilenge life, as he had the sacred Nausang and Natavutavu masks danced

publicly before women and children, theoretically stripping the masks of their power. In the 1950's, he instituted a series of changes in Kilenge life, designed to bring the villagers into more contact with the political and economic world of the outside. He organized the construction of the Cape Gloucester Patrol Post in 1959, and shortly thereafter organized the Kilenge and Lolo to build a vehicle road from Cape Gloucester to Sagsag. In the mid and late 1950's, following a directive from the District Headquarters at Talasea, he ordered the villagers to pl ant lines of coconut trees, so that they would have access to cash and trade goods by manufacturing copra. To ensure the success of these plantings, he had all the pigs in the Kilenge villages killed off, and enforced a five year ban on pigs. When the trees began to bear, he organized the Ongaia Native Society, a co-operative venture designed to buy and market copra, and retail and wholesale goods to people living in the area.

In the time when these various enterprises were successful, Aisapo worked to establish his status as a traditional hereditary ruler, _natavolo_, by sponsoring feasts and ceremonial cycles (see Zelenietz and Grant, n.d.). By the mid 1960's, however, the pace of development had slowed: copra rotted on the wharf as shipping was irregular; the Society trade store frequently was empty for the same reason; members of the Society had not received dividends on their subscription shares; and attempts at planting other cash crops, particularly cocoa, had failed. Additionally, Aisapo had never distributed money to owners of plots of land that had been leased to various enterprises. The success of Aisapo's projects, and hence his leadership, was becoming open to question. In order to secure his position, Aisapo embarked on a program of eliminating his competition among fully-recognized traditional leaders. Contravening his original stand on sorcery, he made contact with several Lolo sorcerers and became, in the words of one informant, the "concert master" of sorcerers. Over a period of years, he ordered these sorcerers to sorcerize most of the _natavolos_ and other leaders in the Kilenge villages of Portne, Ongaia and Kilenge proper. Whereas Aisapo's original basis of power has been a mixture of physical fear, the weight of his position as _waitpus_, and his success at bringing

money into Kilenge, his basis of power by the late 1960's was people's fear of
sorcery. In these years, it seems that he promoted the continuation of economic
development by the threat of sorcery.

Aisapo died in 1973, and his death is ascribed to sorcery. But there is no
agreement on who killed him, or why-- different informants, with different
grievances, give different causes for the sorcery. These reasons range from Aisapo's
stealing of ground and money, to his non-payment of Lolo sorcerers for services
rendered, to specific acts of sorcery homicide. Even after his death, Aisapo's
actions, particularly those relating to sorcery, continue to dominate leadership
in Kilenge. Those people genealogically qualified to be natavolos. primarily
the sons of the natavolos that Aisapo had eliminated, are afraid to act the part.
They fear that if they assert themselves to claim their positions, the sorcerers
who killed their fathers will fear that the sons are seeking revenge, and hence
make pre-emptive strikes, killing those sons to preserve themselves. Thus, there
are no new traditional leaders who are obviously rising through the ranks in
Kilenge society today, although one or two are trying somewhat more devious paths.
The lack of traditional leadership sompounds the more general problems of leadership
and social control in Kilenge society today (see Zelenietz n.d.).

The reintroduction of sorcery under Aisapo has raised other problems for Kilenge
villagers. It appears that sorcery has now become a disincentive in economic de-
velopment. If a man becomes too successful in running his trade store or in producing
and selling copra, his neighbors or people in other villagers may become jealous of
his success, and may resort to sorcery as an outlet for this jealousy (such is
one interpretation given by an informant to a sorcery case that arose in November
1977). It does not seem that sorcery is utilized against business groups with
large memberships, but then these are rarely successful: with the large membearships,
men feel little personal involvement or interest in the group, money gets "lost",
and assests "disappear". Sorcery is used only against individuals or small
groups of brothers, who usually run successful enterprises.

The new rise of sorcery has also increased Kilenge fears of their most immediate neighbors, the Lolo. They speak the same language (Male'u) and are culturally very similar, but the Kilenge fear the Lolo ability to sorcerize them, and therefore restrict intercourse with them.

III. Summary

Sorcery in Kilenge today is used as a _post hoc_ explanation of why someone became ill or died. As such, it serves to reinforce ideas and norms about what proper behavior is, but it does not prevent violation of those norms. Because a man (or woman, or child) does not always know what action might offend another person, particularly a Lolo, one is always open to sorcery, no matter how properly one behaves.[5]

In times when there have been no major sorcery accusations, the Kilenge tend to downgrade the importance of sorcery and their beliefs in sorcery in daily life. When one sorcery accusation has been made, people manifest a much greater concern about the potential for other acts of sorcery. If no other accusations or cases develop, the fear eventually dies down.

The sorcerer is an agent of social control, whose services are available to anyone who feels aggrieved and who can pay the price. Aisapo used the sorcerers as his tools to maintain his position as dominant leader in Kilenge society. A by-product of this was the threat of sorcery as inducement to continue cash-related activities. Later, after Aisapo's death and the return of the control of the sorcerers to their own hands, the threat of sorcery has served to stultify attempts at political and economic development in the Kilenge villages.

Notes

1. These Regulations have been changed by the Sorcery Ordinance 1971, which forbids the practice of harmful sorcery only.

2. The Kilenge live on the northwest tip of the island of New Britain. Administratively, they form part of West New Britain Province, Papua New Guinea. Ethnographic research was conducted by the author and Ms. J. Grant from March 1977 to January 1978, and

was funded by a grant from McMaster University. I thank the various government agencies in Papua New Guinea for their co-operation, and the Kilenge people, particularly those of Ongaia village, for their help and support. A more detailed analysis of Kilenge sorcery appears as Chapter 5 in my dissertation.

3. Unless otherwise noted, 'sorcery' here refers to homicidal sorcery. Today, the Kilenge don't practice sorcery- perhaps one or two men know a bit. They maintain that all sorcery knowledge was given up with missionization (1929), or that all the men that knew it have died, and didn't teach it to their sons. If a Kilenge wishes someone sorcerized, he must go to the Lolo and hire a sorcerer on contract work.

4. Most diseases are not seen as being sorcery induced. Diseases that are cured at the mission hospital, or that are common or restricted to a specific age group (such as tunerculosis), are regarded as "natural". Lingering diseases, particularly those that are uncommon, are thought to be caused by sorcery.

5. When talking with people who, by their own description of their actions, should hev been sorcerized by Aisapo but weren't, they said that Aisapo "couldn't" have killed them: they were too closely related, or too valuable to his work. However, had they died while Aisapo still lived, there is no doubt that their deaths would have been ascribed to sorcery by Aisapo's agents.

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