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Golub, Alex. 2018. Introduction: The Politics of Order in Contemporary Papua New Guinea. Anthropological Forum, 28(4) : 331-341.

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Introduction: The Politics of Order in Contemporary Papua New Guinea

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Abstract: This collection of articles seeks to demonstrate that the concept of order — the intensive and extensive coordination of human action across space and time — is useful for answering some of the most pressing theoretical and practical questions in contemporary Papua New Guinea (PNG) today. Building on existing work in this field (Benda-Beckmann and Pirie 2007) in this special issue we ask: How do people create enduring, stable, and routinised life in contemporary Melanesia today? We position our work as the next step in a growing movement to study contemporary institutions in Papua New Guinea as order-making projects, rather than attempting to divide them into legitimate projects like 'government' and false or ineffective ones like 'cargo cults'.

Keywords: Melanesia , Political Anthropology , Papua New Guinea , Government , Order

This collection of articles seeks to demonstrate that the concept of order — the intensive and extensive coordination of human action across space and time — is useful for answering some of the most pressing theoretical and practical questions in contemporary Papua New Guinea (PNG) today. 'Law and Order' is a perennial topic in the country, both among scholars of PNG and its citizens, and there is a long tradition of legal anthropology in the country. But what would an anthropology of order look like? Building on existing work in this field (Benda-Beckmann and Pirie 2007) in this special issue we ask: How do people create enduring, stable, and routinised life in contemporary Melanesia today? What sort of work goes into making institutions such as the education system, legal system, and medical system function? How do people understand and manage disorder and order in the course of living in and through these institutions?

We position our work as the next step in a growing movement to study contemporary institutions in Papua New Guinea as order-making projects, rather than attempting to divide them into legitimate projects like 'government' and false or ineffective ones like 'cargo cults'. Our goal is to produce a political anthropology of Melanesia which advances our theoretical understanding of this area of the world while being answerable to the Papua New Guinean communities in which we work. And political anthropology of order speaks to a question in the country today: How best to secure prosperity in a world where the state is just one of several possible guarantors of order, safety, and prosperity, and not necessarily the most effective or legitimate one at that?

'Order', 'law', and 'law and order' in Social Thought And Melanesian Anthropology

Papua New Guineans are not the first people to ask this question. How can individuals cooperate together to achieve security and prosperity? This was the question at the heart of the new moral order which emerged in Europe in the sixteenth century as premodern Catholic concepts of a hierarchical and cosmologically-ordained order were challenged by the reformation and the terrible wars of religion which accompanied it (Taylor 2007, 159-168). As philosophical anthropologies of the human shifted and, increasingly, secularized, so too did attempts to understand the human condition, leading to the emergence of the social sciences (Olson 1993). This literature soon ran headlong into the massive changes caused by industrialisation, resulting eventually in the classical nineteenth-century social thought of Marx, Durkheim, Weber, and others (for an order-focused walk through this literature, see Hechter and Horne 2003). Order, then, is an enduring issue in the social thought that originated in Europe and its settler colonies.

The sixteenth century was also the period when Europe began its global expansion and, eventually, colonial domination of most of the world, including Papua New Guinea. As European knowledge of the wider world grew, it too prompted questions of order. Early, pre-modern questions regarding the souls and potential salvation of indigenous people shifted to a broader set of secular attempts to classify humans and other animals as biological beings (Smith 2017). It also involved attempting to understand them collectively, a process which was inherently evaluative. Indeed, ethnology was famously defined by Chavannes in 1787 as the science which studied "the history of the progress of people towards civilization"

(Vermuelen 2015, 269-356). Central to this definition was the degree of orderedness and what we would now call 'social complexity' a society had 'attained'.

Discourses of order at home and abroad were always connected. In the case of British Empire and anglophone colonialism, which would be the dominant force in Papua New Guinea's colonial history, views of colonised subjects reflected Victorian ambivalence to order, hierarchy, and rank at home as much as they did imperfect and biased knowledge of indigenous people (Kuklick 1991, Stocking 1995). And of course in settler colonies, home *was* abroad, and settler discourses of indigenous people reflected settler preoccupations as much as they did the reality of indigenous life (for instance, in the United States, see Deloria 1998).

The contributions in this volume are part of this broader story, and emerge out of two major strands in the literature. The first major strand in this narrative involves the way that anthropologists have attempted to understand Papua New Guinean lives as governed by 'kinship' and 'religion' (which often mean 'cargo cults'). The second strand focuses on attempts to theorise and implement governance in Papua New Guinea.

Let us first turn to 'kinship', a fundamental concern of social anthropology. By the late nineteenth century anthropologists conceived their object of study to be 'primitive society' — a cross-cultural evolutionary category that included Melanesians -- and took their topic to be how people in primitive societies led ordered lives (Kuper 1988). The Victorian theorists I alluded to earlier alternated between seeing their colonial subjects as living in a 'state of ungoverned human desire' or, alternately, in thrall to a 'custom-shackled savagery' (Herbert 1991, 29, 67; see also Hocart 1927). The 'functional' revolution of Radcliffe-Brown and Malinowski in the 1920s came down on firmly on the side of custom-shackled savagery, identifying social structure, and especially kinship, as sources of order. Malinowski, for instance, famously argued that 'the natives obey the forces and commands of the tribal code, but they do not comprehend them' (Malinowski 1922, 11), conveniently creating a niche in which the anthropologist could be the authoritative knowers of that code.

Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown differed regarding who benefitted from order, as Malinowski was more focused on the needs of the individual, while Radcliffe-Brown believed social systems achieved equilibrium when people fulfilled role expectations. But regardless of these differences, both of functionalism and structural functionalism held that kinship and social structure were a source of order for Melanesians. Even violence and armed conflict were sources of order. In the very first issue of *Oceania* (founded by Radcliffe-Brown during his time at the University of Sydney), Camilla Wedgwood wrote of Papua New Guinea that 'the first impressions received by white people... was that each tribe or village was in a constant condition of hostility with its neighbours, generally assumed by the white man that among the backwards people warfare is an unmixed evil' (Wedgwood 1930, 5-6). But in fact, she claimed, war had a function: 'War serves a double purpose of enabling a people to give expression to anger caused by a disturbance of internal harmony, and of strengthening or reaffirming the ties which hold them together... it is a means whereby a community can express itself as a unit and emphasise its distinction from all other units' (Wedgwood 1930, 33, for more see Knauff 1990).

By the mid-sixties, social anthropology began inquiring into the role of individual agency in social life, and 'process' rather than static systems became a central preoccupation (Vincent 1986, Vincent 1990, 335-362). As it turned out, anthropologists quickly discovered that Melanesians were not 'cold' in Lévi-Strauss's sense, seeking to reproduce a social structure by repressing chance and contingency. Agency and exchange seemed more important than descent or segmentary lineage systems. Indeed, in Eastern Highlands province on Papua New Guinea, people seemed to hold almost the inverse of expected understandings of kinship: Residence created descent, rather than the other way around (Langness 1964, for a longer explanation of this period in the literature, see Golub 2014, 194-198, Harrison 1993, 6-10, Syndicus this volume).

We can see the climax of this work in the late 1980s when two similarly named books, *What Gifts Engender* (Lederman 1986) and *Gender of the Gift* (Strathern 1988) argued the key to understanding social order in Papua New Guinea was understanding local understandings of order. The European analytic of individuals cooperating to achieve prosperity and security could never comprehend Papua New Guinean sociality, since that sociality did not share the ontological and normative presuppositions of modern European social theory (Strathern 1985). Endogenous understandings of sociality and order held the key to making sense of Papua New Guinean lives which were created using these very theories (for more on this, see the almost contemporary accounts of Merlan and Rumsey 1992 and Wagner 1986).

Today, this strand of thought is best-known in the work of the 'Stragnerian' school of authors influenced by Marilyn Strathern and Roy Wagner, who tend to see Melanesians as exemplary in their focus on innovation and creativity (see, for instance, Leach 2003, the papers in Hirsch and Strathern 2004, and the special issue of *Social Analysis* on 'reinventing the invention of culture' introduced by Robbins and Murray 2002). At the same time, authors studying Island Melanesia, perhaps more focused on classical Austronesian cultural themes, tended to maintain an insistence on sociocultural fixity and permanence (Scott 2007, Rio 2007, but see Lindstrom, this volume). At any event, accounts of kinship — retheorised now as 'sociality' — are understood not as a strongly-regulative system of role expectations but an account of lifeworld practices through which relationality and ordering are achieved and maintained (for an exemplary ethnographic example of this, see Stasch 2009, for the more general turn to relationality see Carsten 2000).

Much of the creativity, innovation, and dynamism which ethnographers recorded in Papua New Guinea could not easily be assimilated to Western models of 'kinship' or 'custom'. Often it seemed more like 'religion' (Trompf and Loeliger 1985). When it threatened colonial projects of order, these forms of indigenous political innovation were more often treated as 'cargo cults' and ideologically delegitimated (and sometimes violently repressed). At other times, they were treated, more fruitfully, as nascent forms of political consciousness (Akin 2013, Buck 1991). The stability of cargo cults as a scientific object (Daston 2000) was never complete, however, and intellectuals could not help but notice how hard it was to tell cargo cults apart from other forms of innovation. Indeed, the fascination outsiders had with these movements had more to do with outsiders' fantasies and anxieties than Papua New Guinean projects (Jebens 2004, Lindstrom 1993). Missionaries and government wanted the adoption

of Western forms of governance and religion, and were suspicious of attempts to alter or remix them. This is why Oppermann writes that 'the suspicious copy inaugurates the anthropology of political change in Melanesian' (Oppermann 2015, 200).

The difficulties of policing the line between suspicious copy and legitimate institution has grown increasingly blurred in contemporary Papua New Guinea. Fast money schemes such as U-Vistract seem to be illegitimate copies of real Western institutions, or they could be seen legitimate copies of illegitimate Western institutions (Cox 2018). Are the self-help and personal improvement seminars borrowed from the former coloniser a cargo cult or legitimate (Bainton 2014)? As Bainton points out, the Lihir gold mine brought enormous wealth to an area where people long organised to attract wealth from abroad — can a social movement be called a cargo cult 'when the cargo actually arrives' (Bainton 2010)?

Today authors are increasingly shifting from idioms of mimicry and imitation to a focus on indigenous political innovation on its own terms, without questioning its legitimacy. Key here is the 'Pacific alternatives' approach developed by Edvard Hviding and his collaborators. Hviding's work seeks a way out of the theoretical and moral dilemmas of the 1990s which posed the 'invention of tradition' as a problem to both theoretical understandings of tradition and to the decolonising political projects of Pacific Islanders (on the 'invention of tradition' debate see summaries by Friedman 1993 and Tobin 1994). Influenced by Epeli Hau'ofa, Rio and Hviding's *Made in Oceania* sees 'cultural heritage' as 'a central element of political innovation' (Rio and Hviding 2011, 6). When 'set free from its Western bearings as a codified concept,' they argue, 'it has often become a driving force in local social movements — only to be misunderstood in anthropological analysis of these movements as 'cargo cults'" or as examples of the invention of tradition' (Rio and Hviding 2011, 6). Their local political innovations should be seen as 'Pacific Island "alternatives"... the expanding uses... of locally culturally distinctive cultural repertoires in dealing with those encounters and engagements in which the global interacts with the local... in response to the challenges of global political economy' (White and Hviding 2015, 3). Here, the ethnographic focus is on indigenous ordering projects as legitimate objects of study, not pathological imitations of Western institutions.

This approach can also be seen in the 'ethnography of power in contemporary Melanesia' described by Lattas and Rio (who was also one of Hviding's collaborators). This collection uses the language of 'experiment' rather than 'alternatives', arguing that 'Melanesia has... a long history of experiments' that 'combine custom, state structures and religion so as to create modern Melanesian ways of governing' (Lattas and Rio 2011, 1). Like Hviding, Lattas and Rio argue that these innovations have been 'pathologised as dysfunctional precisely because they can be used to subvert, contest, and divert state programs' (Lattas and Rio 2011, 1). These experiments, on their account, aim to 'remediate, supplement and strengthen state structures' (Lattas and Rio 2011, 1) by merging 'local customary technologies of power with modern Western governmental technologies (state, church and corporations)' (Lattas and Rio 2011, 2). This approach, like Hviding's, seeks to destigmatise Melanesia political innovation, but tends to be more Foucaultian and less celebratory than Hviding's work.

A second stream of literature examined how indigenous Melanesians interacted with the extension of colonial control over their homelands. Identifying customary law and imposing Western law were both projects that attracted the attention of anthropologists. The 'pacification of Melanesia' (Rodman and Cooper 1983) meant understanding 'tribal fighting' and 'sorcery' as sources of disorder and solutions sought in the form of customary dispute management, local and village courts, and other mechanisms. Sir Hubert Murray, the long-lived administrator of British Papua, hired two government anthropologists for the Papuan side of New Guinea, and worked hard to establish a chair in anthropology at the University of Sydney. Its holder, A.R. Radcliffe-Brown, was supposed to provide anthropological training to colonial officers, an effort that met with mixed success (Stocking 1995, 339-341, Bashkow 1995). This project eventually turned into ASOPA, the Australian School of Pacific Administration, where anthropologists lectured to colonial (and late post-colonial) bureaucrats about the culture of their charges (Lawrence 1984). Anthropologists also served during World War II (Gray 2006; Gray, Munro, and Winter 2012). This interest in applying anthropology continued during Papua New Guinea's independence. The Law Reform Commission of Papua New Guinea employed anthropologists to determine the 'underlying law' on which a new, culturally distinctive Papua New Guinean law would be formed (see, for instance, Narokobi 1985, Scaglione 2001). This work continues and is connected to contemporary research into village courts (Goddard 2009, Demian 2015, Schwoerer this volume).

Of course, anthropology in Papua New Guinea has a variety of motivations, most of which had little to do with direct application to governance, and there is much work that studies what we might call 'order'. Much of the literature on social mapping and customary land tenure (summarised in Weiner and Glaskin 2007) focused on this issue, joining a wider literature arguing both for (Fingleton 2008) and against (Gosarevski, Hughes, and Windybank 2004) the utility of customary tenure. Studies of urbanisation, development, and modernisation — often with a strong applied focus — also took up the issue of order, examining how Papua New Guineans created new lives in rural spaces penetrated by capitalism, and in urban spaces in which custom could not be a guide (Morauta 1974, Strathern 1974, Hukula 2017, Lindstrom and Jourdan 2017, Rooney 2017). There is also a small tradition of anti colonial anthropology in Papua New Guinea: for instance, the work of Peter Worsley, whose career was impeded by the anti-leftist bias of the colonial administration (Gray 2015).

This review is too simple, but I hope it makes clear that much of the literature on Papua New Guinea is in some sense about 'order', even if it is not presented in these terms. Some studies of Melanesian life have focused on ordering projects which stand outside, against, or in imitation of the state and the institutions which it introduced. Other studies, in contrast, have attempted to understand the state's presence in Melanesia: how indigenous ordering projects can be captured, coopted, or reconciled with the state and its accompanying institutions. As many of the authors cited above make clear, it is wrong to assume that the medium-term history of Melanesia is one of inevitable — albeit slow — spread of government and bureaucratic rationality across the region. Rather, the state has always been just one of many ordering projects competing for legitimacy and resources in Melanesia.

Overview of the Volume

The papers in this special issue hope to expand on these literatures by finding a place between them. Each of the authors in this collection examine the concrete everyday life of Melanesians as they involve themselves in state institutions. At the same time, we examine the unique -- perhaps even uniquely Melanesian -- way that people attempt to make these institutions feasible (Golub 2014), both by undertaking unorthodox means of preserving and upholding them (Andersen, Schwoerer), or by detouring them and finding new and unique ways to use them for one's own projects (Syndicus). In doing so, we focus on the lived experiences of relationality that must come into play when assumptions about abstract institutional structures are deployed on the ground. Our goal, then, is to take the tools developed to study ordering projects outside of the state and use them to understand how institutions are animated on the ground. Rather than stigmatise the processes we examine as phony (Schwoerer), disruptive (Syndicus), or irregular (Andersen), we examine how atypical and non-sanctioned action within institutions is productive of order — not a way that the system is broken, but the means by which it stays open.

The papers

Each of these papers takes up the theme of order-making in different ways.

Barbara Andersen's piece examines nursing students in highlands Papua New Guinea who do a village stay as part of their training. These students face several challenges. First, like members of bureaucracies everywhere, they must try to implement general rules of conduct in particular circumstances. This task of realising a bureaucratic order in an imperfect world is a perpetual problem for all organisations. However, in the case of highlands PNG it is aggravated by the lack of resources and support that nursing students receive. In particular, the grassroots Papua New Guineans nursing students are supposed to aid and educate are themselves potential sources of disorder, and can be a physical threat. Having respect for 'culture' thus becomes key for nursing students. At times, this 'culture' is seen as a separate logic from that of the health system, and students must try to reconcile these two conflicting orders. On the other hand, 'culture' here seems to represent not an alternate order, but a source of disorder — the unpredictability, unintelligibility, and irrationality of rural demands is so difficult to deal with because it lacks an orderly or predictable logic. Furthermore, the cultural logic of the village seems to impose itself on nursing students, as men and women fall into gendered roles which are appropriate in 'the village' but not 'town'. Throughout, Andersen shows us the difficulty of expanding the state's order-making project into rural areas, and the role that two different order ideologies play in this process.

Tobias Schwoerer also examines an order making project in Eastern Highlands, PNG. Schwoerer's case revolves around courts that are unsanctioned by the government. These unofficial village courts claim to be legitimate representatives of the government of Papua New Guinea even though, strictly speaking, they are not. Schwoerer shows not only how these courts deploy an ideology of government imprimatur to legitimate their order-making

project, he also shows that they are relatively successful in resolving conflicts. Schwoerer is inspired here by a tradition of Germanophone political anthropology of Africa. This body of research examines how grassroots people build their own order-making projects as the state withdraws. The result is a series of 'parastatal' institutions which fulfill the state's mandate to maintain law and order. However, Schwoerer provides important historical contextualisation of his ethnography: In rural Eastern Highlands province, the state was never very present. The parastatal unofficial courts which he examines have always existed alongside a formal government which has always been remote and relatively ineffective in providing order. Parastatal institutions in Papua New Guinea, he suggests, are not indicative of the collapse or weakness or failure of the Papua New Guinea state. Rather, they are structures of the medium *durée* which existed alongside governance in Eastern Highlands during Independence as well as the territorial period.

Ivo Syndicus's paper is set at the University of Goroka, again in Eastern Highlands province. Syndicus provides an ethnography of student strikes at the University of Goroka. On the face of it, strikes seem by definition to be a force of disorder aimed at disrupting the orderly function of an institution — in this case, a university. But as Syndicus shows, making a strike is an order-making process of its own. Externally, the strike appeared to be a spontaneous show of unchannelled emotion. But inside the university, strike organisers created rallies and other events at which emotion was mobilised in support of the strike. Additionally, strike organisers also created an 'order ideology' or a shared narrative of why the strike was taking place and what student demands were. Theoretically, Syndicus draws on a long literature in Papua New Guinea which examines how corporate groups are made through group action such as ceremony. In doing so, he demonstrates how there may be a Melanesian logic to what appears on the surface to be a quintessentially modern institution. At the same time, he suggests that previous authors who focus on the 'aesthetic' quality of group formation in Melanesia may underplay the role of emotion and affect in creating group solidarity.

Finally, **Lamont Lindstrom** provides an Afterward which contextualises these papers in light of some of the deeper literature on 'cargo cults'. Focusing on concrete social processes, he provides us with a list of recurrent moves that have been made in Melanesia to create and preserve order. There is, he suggests, an enduring vocabulary of tactics that perseveres and is deployed in Melanesia today. Contemporary phenomena such as student strikes or electoral politics may, therefore, have deeper and enduring roots in past Melanesian culture than is initially apparent.

Themes

All of these papers demonstrate how contemporary Melanesians undertake order-making projects under the auspices of state institutions, even as they *détourn* or obviate those institutions. The case described by Schwoerer comes closest to being 'Pacific alternatives' in Hviding's sense. Unofficial courts and innovative political techniques seek to do the work of the state in the name of the state, or at least using its methods. It is easy to see how these courts would appear as a 'mimetic' or illegitimate copy of a Western institution. Syndicus's paper is superficially about threats to order at an educational institution but demonstrates the

accomplishment of the order of a student strike, a social process which is both opposed to and relies on the university administration. Andersen, perhaps most poignantly, describes the difficulty of those acting on behalf of institutions who are forced with the unenviable task of attempting to personate (Golub 2014) those institutions 'on the ground' in the face of grassroots intransigence.

Overall, each of the papers demonstrates the health and vitality of Melanesian institutions. One feels, when reading them, that grassroots political innovation is quite successful despite - - rather than because -- of the influence of Port Moresby. Schwoerer and Andersen demonstrate that much of what counts as 'law and order' or 'functioning institutions' in Melanesia owe their success less to bureaucratic regularity than to the hard work of local actors. Equally, few of the articles describe a world where Melanesians receive the resources they want, need, and are entitled to by state institutions. I am reminded of von Benda-Beckmann and Pirie's (2007) claim that the state can be thus a source of disorder as well as order in the lives of the grassroots people. In this version of Melanesia, local actors do not fail the state, the state fails them -- and it is only due to their hard work that they are able to keep it ticking over.

As a result, these articles demonstrate the limitations of narratives of 'failed states' in Melanesia. As Andersen points out, the health care system in Papua New Guinea was designed mostly to heal the coloniser. Contemporary attempts to extend care to rural populations should be understood as novel and, given the lack of funding and support which was provided during the territorial period, it is not surprising that it faces serious challenges. Schwoerer emphasises that parastatal courts have existed alongside the state for decades. Syndicus demonstrates that state institutions do not merely fail, but are actively contested by well-organised interest groups.

Taken together, these papers show the limitations of a narrative of a state which fails because of internal corruption. Rather, they suggest that we view the state's order-making project as just one of many which have taken place alongside each other and have intersected across space and time over the long term. A fuller anthropology of order in Melanesia, then, should examine the different historical temporalities to which the state takes its place alongside other order-making projects. Such an account would be able to recognise the novelty of contemporary political innovation as well as the longer, more perduring forms of order making which the state encounters.

Finally, all of these papers demonstrate the concrete importance that an anthropology of order has for Melanesians themselves. Theoretically, we see in these papers the importance of 'order ideologies' analogous to language ideologies or semiotic ideologies (see Golub 2014, 203-206, Woolard 1998, Keane 2018) or 'social imaginaries' (Taylor 2007, 171-175): It is the reflexive and reflective work of local people which is key to establishing 'order' as they conceive it. But Strikes, elections, healthcare, and courts are not just topics of theoretical interest for anthropologists in rich countries. They are social processes that have a profound effect on the lives of Melanesians as they seek to live prosperous lives in trying conditions. Non-Melanesian anthropologists who seek to be answerable to the people with whom they work should study these sorts of processes, and aim to produce ethnographies which

understand and explain them. In this way, we can produce work which is valuable both to our discipline's theoretical concerns as well as to the people who have hosted and supported us in our fieldwork.

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