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IN PAPUA NEW GUINEA AND AUSTRALIA**

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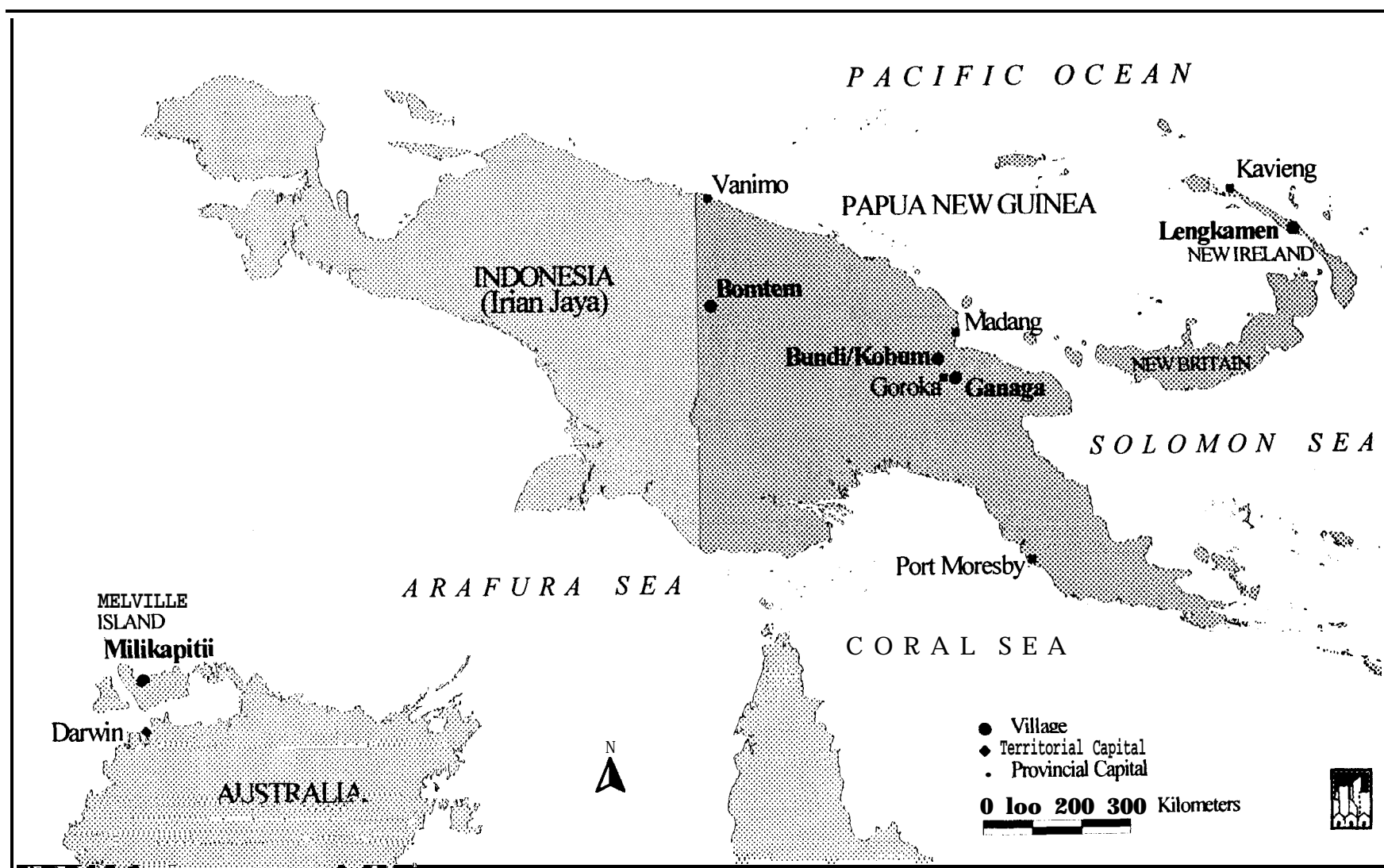
INTRODUCTION

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To **DATE** only a handful of authors have focused ethnographic attention on intergenerational relations among women (Abernethy 1978; Bujra 1979; Dickerson-Putman and Brown 1994; Hawkes et al. 1989; Levine 1965; Sacks 1992). The authors in this volume seek to correct the relative neglect of this important topic by exploring the complexity of relationships that exist among women of different ages in both precolonial and postcolonial contexts. These articles, which draw upon richly detailed ethnographic studies from Australia and Melanesia, share a unified focus on how women's opportunities and access to influence, power, and authority change as they travel through their culturally constructed life course and how these changes affect their relationships with other women and men. The myriad ways in which culture contact, economic development, and culture change have affected the opportunity structures, power bases, and interrelationships of women are also of major concern to most authors.

The five societies represented in this work are the Tiwi of northern Australia, the Mandak of New Ireland, the Atbalmin of the West Sepik Province, the Gende of Madang Province, and the Bena Bena of the Eastern Highlands Province. Although the ethnographic contributions only touch on a limited segment of the Pacific, the four Papua New Guinean articles do offer good coverage of the different regions and adaptations in this political unit. These locations offer intriguing variation in the impact of culture change and development and local experiences and understandings of these pro-



MAP 1. Island of New Guinea and a portion of northern Australia, locating communities discussed in this volume.
 (Courtesy The Polis Center)

cesses. This volume also richly benefits from the insights that can be drawn from Jane Goodale's long-term and continuing research among the Tiwi.

These collected works both draw inspiration from and speak to a wide variety of important and timely theoretical discussions within the discipline of anthropology. First, these articles contribute to the growing literature on the cultural construction of gender and gender roles. Recent scholarship on gender has had a significant influence on the present volume (Atkinson and Errington 1990; Morgen 1989; Sanday and Goodenough 1990; Strathern 1987, 1988), particularly the notion that concepts of gender and ideologies of gender are flexible, multifaceted, negotiated, achieved, and situational. Sanday, for example, states that a number of often competing gender ideologies can coexist in a particular society and can be used to implement economic and political goals (1990:6-7).

Contemporary feminist anthropologists have also vividly demonstrated that male-female relationships are but one of the patterns condensed in a society's gender ideas (Jolly and Macintyre 1989; Ortner 1974). Lutkehaus, for example, in her analysis of female initiation in Melanesia, suggested: "Gender as a metaphor contains the notion that relations between the sexes and notions of gender difference are images that express ideas about other aspects of culture, about lifeforces and general values, relationships between power and authority between individuals and groups, or the creation of racial and/or national boundaries and identities" (1995: 10).

All of the ethnographic contributions to this volume also speak to the relationships among gender, age, and power. The relationship between gender and power has been explored by many anthropologists (Collier 1974; Errington 1990; Yanagisako and Delaney 1995). In their introduction to ***Women and Power in Native North America***, Klein and Ackerman assert that power is a process rather than a status and is "an active reality that is being created and redefined through individual life stages and through societal history" (1995:12). Although individual authors in the present volume have defined power within specific cultural contexts, all would agree, following Foucault (1980), that power exists in human action, is not a structure that is owned by one social group and denied another, and can be exercised and deployed through a variety of strategies, networks, and mechanisms.

Particularly germane to the current volume is the recommendation of various feminist scholars that gender studies must move beyond a model that focuses on the relations of men and women to one that also considers relations ***among*** women (di Leonardo 1991; Ginsburg and Tsing 1992). One significant example of this approach can be found in the work of March and Taqqu (1986). These scholars explore how informal networks and associations can provide mutual self-help and can bind women together beyond the

boundaries of their immediate households. Women's economic associations provide networks through which women can learn their work, find jobs, exchange labor, accomplish tasks, and protect their resources and interests. Informal women's networks can also mobilize for the preparation and execution of cultural and religious activities such as initiation and other life-cycle events. Often these networks and associations are particularly important for in-marriage women, because they help them define a place for themselves in their new communities.

Morgen, in her analysis of the use of gender in anthropology, notes some of the social patterns and principles that could affect the character of inter-relationships among women:

Some of the important new thinking has come from the various efforts of scholars to deconstruct the meaning of woman/womanhood and to examine women's multiple roles, statuses and positions within the power structures of societies particularly as those are shaped by age, kinship, marital status, race, ethnicity and class. One of the most important influences on the redirection of feminist theory in general and feminist anthropology in particular is the exploration of differences among women. (1989:9)

Through their analysis of Pacific societies, Faithorn (1976), Strathern (1987, 1988), and contributors to this volume' concur on the need to explore how age may affect relations among women.

This interest in how age and generation affect women's relationships also relates to the work of scholars interested in the anthropology of aging women who explore how women's lives change as they become older and enter the later stages of the life course. Cross-cultural evidence indicates that increased age brings role discontinuity to woman and allows them to become more dominant and powerful. The volume *Aging and Its Transformations*, edited by Dorothy and David Counts (1985), should be viewed as a base upon which the present volume is built. Contributors to the Counts volume described the relationships between gender, age, and death in a variety of Pacific societies and documented the greater freedom experienced by women as they aged and approached death.

There are numerous ways in which role discontinuity brings improvement to women's lives (Brown and Kerns 1985; Kerns and Brown 1992). First, older women experience fewer restrictions on their behavior and mobility. For example, menopause and the cessation of menstrual tabus expand the opportunities of women in some cultures. Second, increased age affords women greater ability to allocate the labor of younger women in

both their households and their domestic groups. Finally, in some cultures, older women have the opportunity to participate in extradomestic roles. For example, some older women may take on roles as midwives or have important roles to play in initiation and other specialized rituals. These changes in the lives of older women can form the basis for age stratification among women.

Foner has noted that age stratification exists when “individuals in a society, on the basis of their location in a particular age stratum, have unequal access to valued social roles and rewards” (1984a:xiii). This stratification develops between younger and older women as older women “acquire considerable domestic authority, gain prestige in their family and community and become more active in the public sphere” (Foner 1984a: 241). This privileged position of older women, in some societies, may allow them to exert some control over the lives and opportunities of younger women.

Most of the ethnographically rich articles in this volume also contribute to our understanding of how native concepts of gender and age and the existence of various types of relationships among women can shape the outcome of the development process. Much of the gender and development literature concludes that development has either bypassed or negatively affected the lives of women, primarily because, until recently, planners and policy makers did not give adequate consideration to native activities of women in devising their plans for development (Boserup 1970; Charlton 1984; Rogers 1980). Some scholars in Melanesia have also examined how native patterns of gender differentiation have shaped the participation of men and women in economic development and culture change (Brown 1988; Hughes 1985; Preston and Wormald 1987; Stratigos and Hughes 1987).

March and Taquu (1986) have examined how existing and “active” informal networks of women can serve as bases and vehicles for women’s development. Planners and policy makers could use knowledge about the informal organizations of women to establish new associations that could increase women’s control of resources during the development process. For example, March and Taquu attribute the success of the *wok meri* investment and savings groups in Melanesia documented by Sexton (1982, 1986) to the fact that these new groups were based on existing and “active” associational ties among women.

Native concepts of age and intergenerational relations among women, however, have rarely been seen to influence the choices and opportunities of women as they negotiate development. Two notable exceptions are the work of Boserup (1990) and Foner (1984b). Boserup found that development can improve the position of certain age groups of women and cause deterioration in status for other age groups (1990:23). Boserup also noted

that in the early stages of economic development, older women tend to retain their privileged status in the household, but in the later stages (industrialization), the authority of older women declines as younger women leave their households to compete in the labor market. Recent studies of the impact of the international division of labor and the introduction of factories to developing countries have shown that some technologies tend to favor the skills of younger, more docile workers (Elson and Pearson 1980; Ong 1990; Wolf 1991).

Culture change and development can also interact with and affect native systems of age stratification. As Foner notes,

What is clear, then, is that contact with industrial nations does not have a uniform or predictable effect on age relations in nonindustrial societies. In trying to understand how contact affected the old as well as other age strata in these societies a variety of factors must be considered. These include the particular external forces of change, such as the nature of colonial rule and subsequent political and economic developments in national centers since independence, the peculiar social, economic and political conditions as well as cultural beliefs and values in each local setting. (1984b:212)

In short, the way individual women respond to change may depend on their location in a system of age inequality.

While drawing inspiration from the scholarly work reviewed above, this collection both expands our understanding of this body of work and raises a number of theoretically interesting questions.

How Are Women Viewed, and by Whom?

As the authors in this volume so clearly demonstrate, there are as many images of women as there are kinds of women, varieties of female behavior, and social perspectives from which women may be seen. Indeed, as Bercovitch demonstrates, the view that the people of a society have of their women (and of their men, for that matter) may be paradoxical. As Meigs (1990) has argued and as Bercovitch and Dickerson-Putman illustrate in their articles here, on one occasion a man may describe the women of his society (with the possible exception of his mother) as weak, foolish, silly, irresponsible, capable only of weak or flaccid thought, dirty, contaminating, and so forth. Another time the same man may admit that women have exclusive sources of sacred power or potency without which society could not repro-

duce itself. On yet another occasion, he may acknowledge the complementary roles and responsibilities of men and women that are essential for social survival.

Both of these authors also reveal that the allegiance and interests of older women as well can be contextual and situational. At times older women may align themselves with older men as a way to protect their privileged positions. In other situations older women may view themselves as united with younger women and in opposition to both older and younger men.

One source of anthropological confusion with regard to the image of Pacific women derives from the misunderstanding of the symbolism and importance of female reproduction. Female fertility, reproduction, and reproductive fluids are important components of women's identity in many societies. The essence of female reproductivity may be a source of power for women. It may make women vulnerable to danger at certain times (in their lives, during the month, or during the reproductive process). It may sometimes render women dangerous to others and even to themselves. It is a mistake to term this essence "pollution," as the essays in *Blood Magic* (Buckley and Gotlieb 1988) and in this collection demonstrate. Of particular importance in this regard is Bercovitch's discussion of the paradox in the Atbalmin male's reaction to female reproductive nature. Atbalmin men most value those aspects--both physical and essential--that they also most fear. Indeed, the Atbalmin menstrual house is a sacred structure where women perform secret female rituals essential to the continuation of Atbalmin society. It is equivalent in importance to the men's house. Bercovitch's recognition of the religious significance of the menstrual house is an important contribution. When anthropologists translate the local term for this structure as "hut" rather than "house," they close their minds to its potential importance. Bercovitch has appreciated its possibilities. And Dickerson-Putman's revelation that Bena Bena women view their time in the menstrual house as a vacation and a valued opportunity to spend time with friends provides a new perspective on the meaning of behavioral tabus.

What Is the Source of Women's Power and Influence?

In their discussions of female power and influence, most of the authors in this collection focus on

- autonomy--the ability to make one's own choices;
- control--especially over the choices that other people make; and
- differential access to resources, both material and nonmaterial, including knowledge.

Most of them argue that there are different sources of power and influence at different stages in a woman's life. These include

- fertility and reproduction;
- advanced age, during which a woman embodies the intangible energy or principle of knowledge and the actions that flow from such knowledge (the chapters by Dickerson-Putman and Bercovitch discuss the implications of this source of influence, and Sykes reveals that older Mandak women are aware that possession of the secret knowledge and rituals of the *linnendaven* creates the responsibility for passing that knowledge on to a new generation of women); and
- personal qualities, including those that lead to success in political-economic activities such as raising tuskers, managing a large aggregate household, manipulating the exchange system, and investing in others.

Most articles deal at least briefly with the nature of female power and influence and discuss whether and how they are different from power and influence in males. There is great variety in the way in which female influence is expressed. Dickerson-Putman and Sykes explore how female power is expressed in the context of life-course rituals. Among the Gende it is the consequence of paying social debts and is enhanced by investing in the obligations of others. Young Bena Bena and Atbalmin women try to exercise power by controlling their own production and reproduction. Their efforts may provoke violence against them.

A number of the contributors examine the relationship between power and responsibility. Among the Tiwi, older women must balance their power to direct the productive activities of younger members of their households with the Aboriginal responsibility of caring for these dependents. Young Mandak women undergo initiation rites in secondary school that create the Ladaven, a new generation of women who--as Papua New Guinea-style feminists--understand the nature of social power. They learn that this power carries with it the responsibility to create new clan members and the obligation to reciprocate school sponsors for their support.

What Principles Govern Relationships between Women?

In some contexts, cooperation and mutual support characterize relations among women. Among the Bena Bena, for example, women worked together to organize life-course rituals and to prepare food for clanwide feasts. The chapters by Goodale, Dickerson-Putman, Zimmer-Tamakoshi, and Bercovitch address the sources of tension or stratification in the relationship between younger and older women. Older women may have considerable influence in marriage negotiations on behalf of their children and in training

daughters-in-law. They may also have the freedom to achieve influence and wealth by participating in exchange cycles.

A particular source of tension between younger and older women is arranged marriage. As Bercovitch points out, older women may align with men to influence or force young women to accept an arranged marriage. It is in the interest of young women eventually to marry. It is in the interest of senior women and their sons, on whom they will depend for support in old age, to keep young women in the community as potential wives. Bercovitch also creatively connects the marital choices of young women to a social theory of place that he terms "movement and emplacement." The key idea here is that a woman's marriage decisions can lead to her movement and her creation of a new place that through time becomes peopled with her descendants.

How Have Intergenerational Relationships Influenced the Course of Various Types of Social Change?

As Dickerson-Putman, Sykes, and Zimmer-Tamakoshi discuss in their articles, inherent tensions between generations of women may be exacerbated by development projects, the money economy, or new ideas and forms introduced to young women by the schools. Most of the articles discuss how contact with Western institutions and imposed change have affected the relationships between women, the sources of female power, and the way that women experience aging. New institutions, ideas, and development projects may provide new opportunities for women. Or they may, as Zimmer-Tamakoshi demonstrates, add to women's burdens while only minimally improving the lives of the local people. The withdrawal of Gende women from a company that was a burden rather than a realized promise is a female critique of male- and youth-focused development projects.

Dickerson-Putman's and Zimmer-Tamakoshi's articles also provide an interesting contrast in how age stratification systems can influence which age group participates in a newly introduced activity. The administrators of the Kobum Spice Company specifically chose docile, nimble-fingered, younger Gende women for the most lucrative employment, temporarily reversing the pattern of age stratification of the past, while investment organizations introduced to Bena Bena women favored the participation of older women, who had greater access and ability to acquire cash, and thus reinforced the existing pattern of age hierarchy. Both authors stress the need for policy makers and project planners to be more sensitive to local power relationships based on age and gender.

In certain cases new opportunities for some women have created in-

creased hardships for others. New, Westernized institutions have given some women new ways of contesting the established power structure, including the power held by other women. In other situations, new institutions--for example, those in secondary schools--have combined old rituals with new structures to create a form of feminism expressed by meeting obligations. In this case, discussed by Sykes, change has led to the creation of new forms and sources of social power for women, forms that are appropriate to and rooted in traditional New Guinea societies. The article by Sykes as well as others in the collection offer valuable lessons about how customs and beliefs can serve as native idioms and contexts for change and development.

As Goodale points out, the consequences for older women of new political, social, and economic forms are unclear. For example, Tiwi women may continue to play a powerful role in the traditional aggregate household where skillful management creates a balance and diversity of resource foragers and consumers. Goodale points out that the continued value of bush foods among the Tiwi has in part sustained the position of older women. Their future influence in other aspects of Tiwi society is less clear. If they are to be influential, they must cope with the conflict between the values of cooperation and shared responsibility that are characteristic of gender relations in traditional Aboriginal society and the gender inequality inherent in white Australian society.

The articles in this collection should be viewed as a first step toward understanding the meaning and impact of intergenerational relations among women in the Pacific. It is hoped that this beginning will stimulate other Pacific scholars to pursue similar research questions in the communities in which they work, providing the ethnographic breadth to help us better comprehend how intergenerational relationships among women affect their everyday lives and their experiences with development and change.

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