

## **Notes, Commentaries, Essays**

### **Icing on the Cake?: Colonialism, Institutional Transfer and Sport in Papua New Guinea**

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This article explores popular sport in Papua New Guinea (PNG) during colonial rule, from 1885 to 1972. It also investigates the various levels of PNG sport, how the expatriate community and the wider Papua New Guinean population participated in sport and appropriated sporting culture in different ways.

The question of PNG sport is considered under four sections. The concept of ‘institutional transfer’ is investigated initially in order to establish that colonial transfer included not only the political and economic structures, but also social phenomena such as sporting codes. The next section explores how these various codes were adopted in their new environment. Papua New Guineans, however, devised their own versions of introduced games which, although apparently similar to versions played by white communities, took their significance from local social and cultural realities.

This is followed by a discussion of violence and racism in contemporary PNG sport. Racial prejudice was an integral part of colonial administration and affected sport directly, with ‘whites only’ competitions organised in towns to serve the recreational needs of colonial public and private sector employees. A concluding section presents some tentative hypotheses about the role of sport in the colonial and post-colonial milieu.

## **The Concept of Institutional Transfer**

Perhaps an initial objection to the application of the concept of 'institutional transfer' to the arrival of 'European' sports in PNG is the question of how far sports may be regarded as institutions. If institutions are regarded as 'the locus of a regularised or crystallised principle of conduct, action or behaviour that governs a crucial area of social life and endures over time', then sporting bodies clearly have a strong institutional aspect.<sup>1</sup>

The significance attributed by individuals to their own sporting activity imbues sporting institutions with a wider social and institutional meaning. Consider, for instance, the description of institutions as 'persistent and connected sets of rules (formal and informal) that prescribe behavioural roles, constrain activity and shape expectations'.<sup>2</sup> Clearly, this fits both actual participation in sport and wider aspects of sporting culture in social life.

This may be seen in respect of the behavioural roles and expectations established by institutions which arise from within the institution itself and also from outside environmental factors. In fact, in orthodox institutional analysis it is the environmental factors which are seen as the more important elements which determine the character of the institution.<sup>3</sup> In a cross-cultural situation, in which an institution is transferred from one context to another, the environmental differences summarised in the term 'culture' will clearly have an enormous impact. They will influence the shape of behavioural roles and expectations developed in a particular institution.

Our definition of institution has to incorporate social factors if it is to successfully relate to human realities. When Friedland used the concept of institutional transfer, to analyse the transfer of trade unionism from Britain to Tanzania, he saw social institutions as consisting of well-established, understood and organised patterns of behaviour, which fulfilled certain functions for groups in society as a whole. When applied

to the physical level, institutions relate to things such as buildings, machines and personnel. When interpreted as non-physical material however, the concept relates to rituals, structures, ideas, rules of conduct and behaviour. For our purpose the important point is that it is specifically the non-material elements Friedland saw as being subject to transfer:

it is not the institution that is transferred but the idea that actors have of the institution ... unions were not brought from England to Africa; instead a set of ideas about a constellation of roles organised to carry on particular activities and solve certain problems was transferred.<sup>4</sup>

A major problem with such a concept is that the possession of institutions, or indeed ideas, was not the sole prerogative of the colonial 'mastas'. The colonised had institutions of their own, as well as ideas about practical activities and problem solving, which had evolved over many generations before the arrival of colonial administrators. For some 'western' scholars this is easily explained by convergence theory, which holds that the more nations 'develop' the more similar they will become until presumably they all become adaptations of the American model.<sup>5</sup> Alternative paradigms vary from the intricacies of the *New Left Review* debate on the articulation of the modes of production to a dual history of institutions in colonial situations driven by both the necessities of the colonisers and colonised.<sup>6</sup>

There are two pertinent issues here to be explored further. The first is that the particular sports of 'western' origin introduced under colonialism were transferred as part of a broader process. In an orthodox explanation of institutional priorities there is an emphasis on the core institutions of colonial rule – the legislature, judiciary, military, administrative and economic systems – as vital to the process of transfer. In this analysis the arrival of new sporting culture would be simply 'icing on the cake'.

Looking at this process of colonial transfer upside down is a second interesting issue. The question can be posed as to whether it really was the political and economic institutions which were the vital part of transfer. If behaviour and ideas are central to both institutions and their transfer, it may well be that sports, with their much clearer definition of behaviour and relationship, played an important and even crucial role.

### **Western Sports in Papua New Guinea**

The German and British colonial administrations established in New Guinea and Papua respectively in 1885, and the Australian administrations in Papua from 1901, and New Guinea from 1914, all brought with them notions of recreational sport. Papua New Guineans as 'natives' were excluded from the sporting culture of the 'mastas' due to notions of racial superiority. The rules of the game, team spirit and even winning and losing, were considered to be beyond the comprehension of people whom the more sympathetic white settlers regarded as, at best, unsophisticated and, at worst, intellectually deficient.<sup>7</sup> In the colonial Territory of Papua and New Guinea (TPNG) the philosophy of *mens sano et in corpore sana* (a healthy mind and a healthy body) assumed both a white body and a white mind.

In Papua, however, cricket involved some local participation, especially in remoter areas. This owed a lot to individual London Missionary Society (LMS) members, who, with their belief in 'muscular Christianity', incorporated that favourite pastime into their evangelical endeavours. Charles Abel a former MCC and Yorkshire player and pioneer missionary at Kwato, noted that one of his early achievements was the levelling of an area for use as a cricket field and suggested that the game of cricket was amongst the real benefits brought by western civilisation to Melanesia.<sup>8</sup> Meanwhile Anglican missions, also in the Milne Bay area, sought to turn their Papuan adherents into 'obedient, chanting, cricket-loving Christians'. Organised sport was used to attract young men to enrol at missionary schools.<sup>9</sup>

In the nearby Trobriand Islands cricket was highly prized by the Islanders who developed their own version of the game – ‘PK Cricket’ – after watching missionaries play the game. Trobriand cricket is played on festive occasions with many players and much ritual. Familiar items of equipment such as bats, balls and stumps are replaced with local versions made by traditional carving methods and incorporating magical symbols. One notable feature of this game is that every time the ball is hit into the nearby bushes the batting side performs the Tapioka dance originating from fertility rites and involving sexually-explicit references.<sup>10</sup>

A different colonial attitude towards cricket was manifest in Samoa where the German Administration in the early years of the century attempted to ban the playing of cricket altogether – not because it was British but because the Samoan version involved the population of whole villages disappearing for games lasting up to a week. The Germans had possibly the unrealistic notion that their colonial subjects ought to have been cutting copra instead of playing games!<sup>11</sup> It is noteworthy that the LMS missionaries, whose love of cricket had such an impact in Papua, included a number of Samoans.

It was not until the 1950s that a selected few indigenous people were allowed to participate informally in sports played by Europeans such as Rugby League, soccer and cricket.<sup>12</sup> Most of these first PNG sports participants were either educated in Australia, adopted by Australian families, or the children of mixed marriages – and, of course, they were all males.

It was reported in the *South Pacific Post* of 7 April 1961 that soccer had been a ‘great favourite’ amongst the Papua New Guineans since 1954. This was undoubtedly true in New Guinea where the influence of German settlers and missionaries counted. Those Papua New Guineans who took up soccer emulated white sport, for there was no participation with whites.

One barrier, which kept the better-educated indigenes out of organised sport in colonial administrative centres, was money. Low wages and fees effectively segregated sport. Membership and entry costs to sports clubs and grounds restricted the clientele to those who earned good salaries as colonial officials. This also prevented Papua New Guineans joining established sporting organisations.

The problem of expense also extended to spectator sport. By the 1960s lower attendance charges were established to enable locals to attend matches. In practice, however, they operated to enforce spectator segregation. An incident which occurred in 1961, when Rugby League was established as the premier football code in Port Moresby, illustrates this point. The entrance fees to the Boroko League Ground were then 1s for Papua New Guineans and 4s for Europeans. The latter fee entitled access to the grandstand enclosure, while the former secured spectator access to the outer. While it was not unheard of for Papua New Guineans to be admitted to the grandstand area, those presenting themselves at the gate with 4s had to pass further tests regarding their suitability. Were they dressed correctly? Where did they work? Which Europeans did they know? Papua New Guineans were often excluded either because they were not 'properly' dressed or because the area was licensed to sell alcohol.

Albert Maori Kiki, then President of the Kerema Welfare Association, which had been agitating for better working and living conditions for 'natives' in Port Moresby, attempted to enter the grandstand during a match in 1961. He was refused on the ground that it was a licensed area.<sup>15</sup> It was illegal for 'natives' to consume alcohol anywhere in TPNG at this time. The Roman Catholic priest, later Bishop, Fr Louis Vangeke, was the only exception to this ruling. He was granted immunity from prosecution so that he could say Mass!

Ray Gorris, the League President, whose name the stand now bears, refused Kiki admission. Questioned by the press, Gorris pointed out that with expanding membership 'there will soon be room only for Europeans

in the Stand' and added that 'when the present Stand is paid off the club would probably build one for the natives'. Maori Kiki, for his part, was convinced that he had been refused admission on racial grounds. The issue was sufficiently sensitive for the Secretary for Law in the colonial administration, Wally Watkins, to intervene with a statement that there was nothing in law which forbade 'natives' from using the stand.<sup>14</sup>

Maori Kiki's observation revealed that the club's European gatekeeper regularly refused admission to non-Europeans for various reasons. Some were told that they did not meet the dress standards, but well dressed Papua New Guineans were told that the admission was for members only. Others were informed that the law forbade entry to licensed areas or that the club was not allowed to charge Papua New Guineans the 4s fee required for entrance to the grandstand.

## **Racism**

While it was clear that European sports were attractive to Papua New Guineans, it is also clear that their organisation was subject to the same general attitudes of paternalism and racism, which pervaded the colonial missions, the white settler community and the colonial administration itself. This surfaced in institutions such as the 'whites-only' swimming pool and the ban on 'non-whites' swimming at Ela Beach.<sup>15</sup> It also affected the social side of sporting clubs. The banning of Julius Chan from membership of the Aviat social club led to a major furore which divided both the colonial administration and the club itself.<sup>16</sup> To their credit some members of the club resigned over this racially-exclusive policy.

There were shifts in attitudes in the colonial administration in the 1960s. Fred Kaad, the District Commissioner for the Central District covering Port Moresby and nearby areas, went on record as supporting the provision of sporting facilities to members of all races in order to ease social tensions.<sup>17</sup> The Assistant Administrator, Dr John Gunther, suggested in an address to the Port Moresby Chamber of Commerce that 'in a multi-

racial society like the Territory no-one can be comfortable unless all sections go out of their way to break down every possible barrier that marks man from man'.<sup>18</sup>

Gunther went on to urge that 'this chamber takes the earliest opportunity to receive Papuans as members'.<sup>19</sup> Despite these efforts, the status quo remained largely undisturbed. Indeed, the very fact that such prominent members of the colonial administration had to make such statements indicated just how intransigent racial barriers had become by the early 1960s.

Rugby League provides a particularly interesting example. The first Papua New Guineans played in the Port Moresby competition in this decade. Initially, they were restricted to the reserve bench or reserve grade. Exceptions were John Kaputin and Johnny Koniel, both Tolais from the Rabaul area, who played in 'A' grade Rugby League teams for Kone and Paga clubs respectively. Kaputin was an outstanding all-round athlete, who took part in the British Empire and Commonwealth Games in Perth in 1962, and subsequently pursued a successful career as a national politician and businessman. His League career was marked by personal triumph over racial barriers, which saw him first break into the 'A' grade competition and play a major part in Kone's 1961 premiership. His day of triumph must have been seriously soured by the refusal to admit him to the post-final celebrations, which were held at a 'whites only' club!

From this time the move of Papua New Guineans into the top ranks of the League became a flood. It had ironic consequences in terms of representative teams. The major match of each league season became the Papua versus New Guinea fixture. Initially this contest involved colonial officials and white settlers and featured spirited rivalry within the spirit of the game. The growth in the number of Papua New Guinean players, who saw their representative honour in terms of clan, tribe and regional loyalties, introduced more intense rivalries and encounters akin to warfare. The tensions were exacerbated by economic development which was

concentrated in the larger and more populous New Guinea region. The annual match in 1969, which saw Papua victorious, became an occasion for near civil war. One New Guinean spectator recalled that it led to the looting of market stalls and shops and to vehicles being turned over and set alight. Even though Papua won the match many Papuan families left town and returned to their villages.<sup>20</sup> One Port Moresby Papuan community even moved from their traditional beach side living area to an off shore island to isolate themselves from the violence. It was over a decade before some of them felt confident enough to return.

After trying to defuse the situation by changing the representative team names(!), the League abandoned the fixture altogether in 1972. The ethnic basis of teams, which had provoked the problem, however, continued. To this day all major sports are organised on the basis of teams with specific ethnic loyalties. The University of Papua New Guinea even boasts two Rugby Union clubs – Brothers for the Highlanders and University for everyone else. In a nation of fierce inter- and intra-ethnic rivalries reinforced by language divisions and unequal regional development the potential for violence in sport is always present. Colonial attitudes, which legitimised racial division as a ‘natural’ part of sporting life, provided an institutional basis for sporting culture based on the fierce ethnic loyalties of the Papua New Guineans.

## Violence

There are some other non-racial aspects of violence in PNG sport. One problem is a human resource difficulty. Two teams playing a body-contact sport may in theory be more inclined to modify their aggressive actions if the rules are well-known and a contest is refereed by an umpire who has an expert knowledge of those rules. Very often, however, inexperienced refereeing combines with the players' lack of knowledge of the laws of the game and a perceived Melanesian lack of respect for non-clan based authority to produce violent brawls involving both players and spectators.

The table overleaf reports instances of violence at Port Moresby Rugby League. These provide a general indicator of violence in the period from 1962 when PNG players began to become involved in the competition to 1972, the year of self-government. It should be borne in mind that the Port Moresby Rugby League was the most organised of PNG's sporting competitions. It attracted the greatest number of spectators and had the largest financial resources.

The central feature of the table overleaf is the consistency of the statistics from season to season. Despite the growth in the League over these years to become PNG's major spectator sport, the reported level of violence remained the same. By 1972 the local press was reflecting concerns that 'Papua New Guinea ... has a dismal record of violence in sport' with brawls responsible for the abandonment of matches—in soccer, Australian Rules, Rugby League and Rugby Union football – in Port Moresby, Lae and Rabaul. The Rugby Union competition had been abandoned entirely in Lae earlier in the year and the Port Moresby Rugby Union had considered similar action.<sup>21</sup>

**Numbers of violent incidents at Rugby League matches (and their character) as reported in the *South Pacific Post*.**

(Note: This table was compiled by James Gissua drawing on material from the *South Pacific Post* for the designated years and months. This involved tabulating and classifying reported incidents of violence which occurred in matches in different locations in Port Moresby).

Month	Referee at fault	Incident within the game	Spectator violence	Total
<b>1962</b>				
February	2	3	4	9
May	3	5	6	14
August	4	1	2	7
November	-	2	2	4
<b>1968</b>				
February	2	4	-	6
May	1	2	2	5
August	-	3	1	4
November	2	3	9	14
<b>1972</b>				
February	4	4	2	10
May	6	3	3	12
August	2		1	3
November	3	2	4	9

The question of violence was not, however, confined to town competitions and was evident in rural areas, where sport had long played a role in releasing frustrations generated by plantation life. Oral evidence from the Madang region suggests that plantation labourers in the 1930s, who lived in barrack-like dormitories with no recreational facilities, looked forward to the regular post-church game on Sunday as a way to 'release their frustrations'.<sup>22</sup>

Soccer was played in Madang but soon evolved into a new code. Known locally as 'Kick Mark' this involved two teams of up to twenty men organised in such a way that the two central figures from the opposing teams were given an opportunity to settle differences which usually related to clan problems in their home areas. The central figures in the game were the half backs whose role it was to patrol their team's goal mouth. They were 'generally big blokes with powerful kicks', which were directed at the ball or any player who came within reach. Other players, however, also had an opportunity to enter into the spirit of the game by dribbling the ball straight at anyone with whom they felt aggrieved. With very little teamwork players did as much as they could either in possession of the ball, or in tackling designed to injure their opponents. The game reached a climax when one of the half backs dribbled the ball up the field to confront his opposite. As the rival half backs met trouble would erupt all over the field.

Often the tactic of using the team's smallest player to dribble the ball forward was used. Once such a player was tackled, preferably by a bigger opponent, or indeed several opponents, his own team mates would be justified in fighting any opposing player who was nearby. At this point spectators also often joined the 'game'. The normal supervision of the 'boss boy' would be neutralised by a bribe paid the night before. The labourers would be left alone to settle their differences in what amounted to a ritualised form of warfare.<sup>23</sup>

This use of sport as a substitute for direct tribal conflict, or indeed as a means of bringing differences out into the open, seems to have become a firm part of the PNG sporting tradition. Recently it was reported, for instance, that a man was killed and three houses burnt because of a soccer match which sparked a full-scale tribal fight. The trigger for the violence was the elbowing of the goalkeeper of one team by an opponent.<sup>24</sup>

## Conclusions

This article has explored the introduction of western sports to Papua New Guinea in terms of the framework of 'institutional transfer'. It has been suggested that colonialism led to the transfer not only their political and economic institutions but also of sporting codes as well.

While some academic attention has been focussed on the process of adaptation of the political and economic institutions, sporting institutions have not excited such interest. Our tentative view is that it may well be the case that the latter have in fact become more fully adapted to PNG realities than the former. Further research is necessary to prove this point. For our purposes it is sufficient to note that various sports evolved and adapted to fit in with the local social environment. Not only was their significance as 'games' altered but in some cases even their fundamental rules underwent basic changes. Such adaptation shows, as Friedland observed of unionism, that the institutions only survive in a new environment if they adapt to the realities of that environment. Open systems theorists would view this as an assertion of the determinative impact of environmental factors while Marxists would regard this as a demonstration of the primacy of material conditions in the history of ideas. However, this article suggests that the introduction of 'European' sports to PNG was much more than icing on the cake of colonial institutional development – it was an integral part of the recipe and the baking.

## NOTES

1. V Bogdanor, ed., *The Blackwell Encyclopaedia of Political Institutions* Blackwell, New York, 1987, p. 290.
2. M Hawkesworth and M Kogan, eds, *Encyclopaedia of Government and Politics* vol. 2, Routledge, London, 1992, p. 871.
3. See for instance, D Katz and R L Kahn, *The Social Psychology of Organisations* John Wiley and Sons, New York, 1967, pp. 19ff.
4. W H Friedland, *Vuta Kamba: the Development of Trade Unions in Tanganyika*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 1964, p. 4.

5. C Kerr, J Dunlop, F H Harbison and C A Myers, *Industrialism and Industrial Man*, Heinemann, London, 1962; C Kerr, *The Future of Industrial Societies: Convergence or Continuing Diversity?*, Harvard University Press, 1983.
6. A Foster-Carter 'The Modes of Production Controversy', *New Left Review* vol. 111, Jan.-Feb. 1978, pp. 47-79; P Rey, *Les Alliances de Classes*, Paris, 1973.
7. J K Murray, *The Provisional Administration of the Territory of Papua-New Guinea* John Macrossan Memorial Lectures, UQP, St Lucia, 1949, pp. 28, 34.
8. D Wetherell, *Reluctant Mission: The Anglican Church in Papua New Guinea, 1891-1942*, UQP, St Lucia, 1977, pp. 22, 71.
9. Wetherell, *Reluctant Mission*, p. 167.
10. The origin of the phrase 'PK Cricket' is unknown. However, the younger generation of Trobriand Islanders of the 1960s and 1970s associate 'PK' with PK Chewing Gum. The relationship is evident during the dancing and chanting of the batting side which includes phrases such as: 'Stick on to the bat like PK gum and fly into the bushes where no one will find you.' Obviously the words refer to the ball.
11. J Linnekin, 'Ignoble Savages and other European Visions', *Journal of Pacific History* vol. 26, no. 1, 1991, p. 25.
12. This type of information, used in the paper, is drawn from the oral record preserved by older men from the Bogia area of the Madang Province. Since Madang was a centre for regional administration and one of the centres in which both German and Australian administrations attempted to establish enterprise it seems likely that their memories reflect a more general situation.
13. *South Pacific Post*, 21 April 1961.
14. *South Pacific Post*, 21 April 1961.
15. *South Pacific Post*, 27 Jan. and 21 April 1961.
16. *South Pacific Post*, 15 Dec. 1961, 2, 6 and 26 Feb. 1962.
17. *South Pacific Post*, 20 Jan. 1961.
18. *South Pacific Post*, 28 April 1961.
19. *South Pacific Post*, 28 April 1961.
20. Interview, Augustine Adamungi, Port Moresby, Aug. 1988.
21. *Post Courier*, 28 April 1972.
22. Interview, Peter Begani, Bogia, Dec. 1990.
23. Interview, Begani.
24. *Australian*, 12 May 1993.