

CHAPTER 5

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR THE ANALYSIS OF WANGGULAM GOVERNMENT; AUTONOMY AND RECIPROCITY

For a definition of the concept of 'government' I draw on the views of M. G. Smith as developed in 'On Segmentary Lineage Systems' (Smith; 1956), 'Government in Zazzau' (Smith; 1960), and 'A Structural Approach to Comparative Politics' (Smith; 1966). His set of concepts is designed both to analyse specific governments and to compare them. Here I use it mainly to analyse Wanggulam government, and hence I do not discuss those parts of his writings directly concerned with comparison. Further I do not entirely accept Smith's conceptual scheme. Where I diverge from him, I will mention this explicitly. Smith defines government as 'the management, direction and control of the public affairs of a given social group or unit' (Smith; 1960, p. 15). This definition can be subdivided into three parts: 'the management, direction and control', 'of the public affairs', and 'of a given social group or unit'. I discuss these parts successively.

The 'management, direction and control' consist of two processes: politics and administration (Smith; 1960, p. 15). Politics is concerned with making decisions concerning policies, that is to say concerning plans or courses of action (Smith; 1960, p. 17). The groups, or people who try to influence the outcome of the decisions are political groups, or politicians. In their efforts to achieve decisions in accordance with their wishes, the political groups, or the politicians, oppose each other and compete for power. The more successful they are, the more power they have. Administration is concerned with the implementation of the chosen courses of action, the policies decided upon in the political process (Smith; 1960, p. 17). In order to perform this task the administration is organized hierarchically, while political action is taken in contraposition to competing groups or persons. Politics is always and

inherently segmentary (Smith; 1956, p. 48). Whereas politics proceeds through power competition, the administration is vested with authority; it has the right to enforce the implementation of a chosen policy.

Concerning the second part of the definition, 'the public affairs', the matters or issues with which a government is concerned, Smith holds that in any particular case it has to be discovered empirically what affairs are managed, directed and controlled. Likewise the nature and the extent of the social group or unit, referred to in the third part of the definition, is, in Smith's view, a matter for empirical investigation (Smith; 1956, p. 47). In his 1956 paper he seems to hold further that the groups or persons taking part in the governmental process are corporations, either corporations aggregate or corporations sole (see for example Smith; 1956, p. 66). In his 1966 paper he writes that 'corporations are the central agencies for the regulation of public affairs' (Smith; 1966, p. 120). He adds that they have the following characteristics: 'identity, presumed perpetuity, closure and membership, autonomy within a given sphere, exclusive common affairs, set procedures and organisation' (Smith; 1966, p. 117). In this same paper he introduces the concept 'quasi-corporation', which, next to the fully fledged corporations, may play a role in government. Smith provides a brief typology of the quasi-corporations (Smith; 1966, pp. 123-124). It seems to me that it might better be left to empirical investigation what types of groups or social statuses take part in government, rather than positing what the properties of such groups and statuses are.

In order to analyse the specific nature of Wanggulam government I have tried to formulate the fundamental values of the Wanggulam underlying their government. In doing so I draw on the analytical methods employed by E. A. Hoebel in his 'The Law of Primitive Man' (1954). Hoebel argues that each culture rests upon certain 'broadly generalized propositions . . . as to what is qualitatively desirable and undesirable'. He calls these propositions 'postulates' and argues that

The particular formulations of specific customs and patterns for behaviour that go into a given culture are more or less explicitly shaped by the precepts given in the basic postulates of that specific culture (Hoebel; 1954, p. 13).

He then starts the analysis of each of the legal systems discussed in his book with a presentation of the jural postulates, those postulates underlying the legal system. With this approach Hoebel is in accord with modern trends in sociology. Talcott Parsons for instance writes

That a system of value-orientations held in common by the members of a social system can serve as the main point of reference for analysing structure and process in the social system itself may be regarded as a major tenet of modern sociological theory (Talcott Parsons; 1960, p. 172).

I refer to the value orientations as 'principles'. In Western societies such principles are often explicit. In many Western states for instance a principle 'one man, one vote' is expressed and qualified in a great number of governmental procedures, laws and regulations; it is discussed in textbooks on constitutional law; and, in conjunction with others, it helps to mould the specific nature of the government of these states. Wanggulam principles are less explicit, and I had to construct them from scattered items of information and observed behaviour. They are not simply avowed guides as to what people should do, but in fact usually fail to do. There is consequently less distance between the principles as we can formulate them and the way government actually works than there can often be in Western societies. Furthermore, whereas the principle 'one man, one vote' in Western societies relates explicitly to government as a clearly delimited sphere of activities, among the Wanggulam government is merely an aspect of their whole social system and is not concentrated in specialised institutions. The principles underlying Wanggulam government may therefore relate also to other aspects, for instance the economic aspect, of their social system.

I centre the discussion of Wanggulam government on the following four principles:

1. Autonomy;
2. Reciprocity;
3. Competitive leadership;
4. Partnership.

All four principles are concerned with relations between people and all have a direct bearing on relationships of power and authority.

1. *Autonomy.*

This principle formulates Wanggulam ideas about the place of the individual in society. It is concerned both with the individual and with his relations with other members of society. When analysing the government of a particular group of people, we analyse the public affairs of the members of this group and the way they are managed, in other words we are dealing with those affairs the individual is not

allowed to manage for himself. We might complement this picture indicating what is the proper concern of the individual; what is the role of the individual in relation to the group, and, conversely, what is the role of the group in relationship to the individual; and, finally, we might indicate the ideological foundation for allotting affairs to the group, to one of its sub-groups, or to the individual.

Wanggulam have a strong feeling of being their own masters. The ultimate means of force in their society rest with the individual adult members. There are no functionaries or groups of functionaries with a monopoly of the means of force. People do not refrain from using force, and the number of fights, whether with fists, or with clubs, or with bows and arrows, is large. They often occur between close relatives, for example between full brothers, and people do not object to such fights. Intervention in fights occurs rarely. Transgression of the rights of members of society are not met with by the interference of a special instrument of government, but by action of the wronged person himself, possibly with help from one or a few of his co-parishioners.

Among the Wanggulam there are no permanent institutions and functionaries to which members of society owe obedience. Claims on the members of society are not made by officers of government and in the public interest, but by the other members of society and in their own private interest. The claim is the result of the relationship of the people involved and is based upon their previous transactions.

Autonomy provides the adult Wanggulam with a wide range of affairs which they manage without interference from others. There are few public affairs among the Wanggulam. Big men have only a small extent of power and authority and do not dispose of a much greater force than other men do. When the advice of a big man is followed, people are inclined to say that they complied voluntarily. Also, when communal action is taken, big men may have no prominent role at all, as appears for instance during the Sunday meetings organised by the missionaries. These meetings are preceded by much joyous dancing in which most of the men and a number of women participate. The dances themselves consist of running round and round; a few men in the centre act as precentors, and are answered by yells from the dancers. Only the precentors display coordinated rhythm. People go to the meeting by themselves or in small groups. At a distance from the grounds, the men usually wait for the other men of their section or parish, so that the men of one parish ultimately reach the grounds in one or a few groups, in which formation they join the dancers. One

man sets the pace, but he does not go ahead; the group moves in closed ranks. During the dances the groups merge completely.

I was told that in discussions about joint undertakings people attempted to reach a unanimous decision. If a man cannot agree he is likely to withdraw from the venture, or to perform his part of the undertaking according to his own wishes. When deciding upon the location of boundaries between gardens and between parts of gardens the makers of neighbouring gardens settle the matter among themselves. They trace the approximate course of the boundary before clearing the tract and afterwards decide upon its exact course. I was told that on one occasion a man had not taken part in the opening of a garden, because he had not been warned that the approximate course of the boundaries would be discussed. At the discussion the other gardeners had reserved a part for him, but he had refused to make use of it. This man was one of the juniors of the group. A woman does not partake in discussions concerning garden boundaries, but she can influence the outcome indirectly by urging her husband not to give up the fertile plot he had used before, or to try to get another and better one. Women may also reallocate the plots, or part of the plots, when they start planting. That men are reluctant to implement a decision that does not accord with their wishes, appears also on occasions like the distribution of food or riches. When, after sometimes long discussions, a man still disagrees with the procedure taken, he shows this by ignoring the further events. If he himself has contributed, he may distribute his own contributions according to his own judgment.

In everyday life the autonomy of the individual Wanggulam appears in the great ignorance people profess about each other's activities and whereabouts. People do not take each other into their confidence. They try to keep their plans to themselves, if necessary by deceiving others. Conversely, they realise that other people also want to keep their plans to themselves and, in order to do so, are prepared to deceive. People dislike meddlesomeness, as it implies encroaching upon others' affairs. This attitude was to some extent abandoned during the climax of the religious movement when the mission pupils began to urge the Wanggulam to confess in public in order to be converted. A number of men did confess, relating the killings they had taken part in. The women however did not confess their *mum* activities. Although people resented this, scarcely any pressure was exerted upon the women to confess.

I did not find a word approximating 'autonomy' in the Dani language.

Accordingly my remarks concerning these concepts are based on the behaviour and the verbal information of the Wanggulam. Neither did I find a word approximating 'dependence' or 'inferiority'. The only term implying a position of inferiority, *eiloman* (see p. 19), refers to the feeble-minded men who are under the guardianship of their *apulit ewe*, their 'false + B'. *Eiloman* are looked down upon, and one would not like to be in their position. I mentioned above that often there is no affection between adult brothers, and that they often do not live together. This seems to indicate that a younger brother may see an elder brother as a threat to his autonomy, as is demonstrated in the relationship *apulit ewe-eiloman*.

The autonomy of the adult Wanggulam is not absolute. There are a number of occasions on which he submits to authority, whether exercised by big men or by others. Originally I used the term 'sovereignty' to indicate the phenomena referred to above under the heading of 'autonomy'. I decided to replace the term 'sovereignty' by 'autonomy' after it had appeared that the former term carried an incorrect connotation of absoluteness, implying a total lack of subordination which would mean the absence of government among the Wanggulam. Autonomy is tempered by the other three principles. We should further distinguish between autonomy as it appears from statements of the Wanggulam, and as it appears from their actions. It seems to me that the Wanggulam are inclined to overstate the autonomy pertaining to the members of their society. Wanggulam tend to give the impression that they follow a big man voluntarily; and that they do not feel obliged or forced to follow him. This attitude extends to personal rights and duties between individual Wanggulam. For example, a man who is about to hold the first wedding ceremony for his daughter says that it is up to the others to decide to contribute to the *uak* and with what items. Also, a person who has rendered a prestation will say that the recipient is free to decide whether or not to reciprocate. Nevertheless in all such situations a man does expect others to render him prestations: a man does expect that his closest kin and neighbours contribute to the *uak* for his daughter; that the men from his hamlet join his work party; and that his prestations will be reciprocated. There will be resentment or retaliation if his expectations are not met. One of the reasons why people cooperate with others and reciprocate their prestations is that they want to avoid resentment and retaliation. Linton reports about the Comanche that they 'attached tremendous importance to individual freedom of action', but that the Comanche band 'was

better organised than it was willing to admit' (Linton; 1936, pp. 228-229). The same might hold true about the Wanggulam and their parish. Autonomy pertains only to the men of over about 25 years of age. Most men are married at this age and have been active in fights and battles. Until this age they are not free to leave their father (see Case 3, p. 83). I never heard of tension arising because a father had tried to dominate his son, but an important factor here is that usually a father is on the decline when his son is about 25 years of age.

A young man grows into a fighter through a number of '*rites de passage*'. At a very early age, about four, he is presented with a bow and arrows, apparently without further ceremonial. There are a number of yardsticks to measure his proficiency with this weapon. A boy starts by just trying to hit fixed objects; next he starts to shoot birds. When he has succeeded in shooting his first bird, people say, he runs to his father, in excited pride, to tell him. The next step is taken when he joins the men when they go hunting and tries to shoot marsupials and wild pigs. The final step is the introduction to the battlefield. During a battle the youth is called up by his father or elder brother, alongside whom he has to fight. His father or elder brother watches him and instructs him only if it appears that he is a clumsy fighter. Other men do not interfere: they keep an eye on the performance of the youngster and judge him accordingly. A common way of killing a captured enemy is for a few men to hold him fast while others shoot him from a couple of yards' distance (compare Matthiessen; 1962, p. 110). 'To learn it', as the Wanggulam say, young men are invited to be one of the killers. In this training there is a minimum of instruction: a boy learns shooting by practising for himself and imitating others.

With this form of initiation common action is not taken: there is neither a group of initiators, nor a group of initiandi (this contrasts sharply with the situation among the Dani living in the Grand Valley among whom initiation ceremonies form part of large scale pigfeasts (Peters; 1965, pp. 133-147)). The right to introduce a young man to the battlefield rests with his father, or, if the father has died or is residing elsewhere, with an elder brother. The other members of the group merely look on to judge whether the novice will be a worthy adult or not, they do not take a direct part. The initiate and his personal capacities are the centre of the interest, and not the group. Nevertheless the matter is of great interest to the men; a good performance on the battlefield gives a Wanggulam the highest social esteem he can acquire.

It seems that autonomy is also an attribute of women. Although they do not have bows and arrows, women dispose of a formidable means of power: *mum*. People try to avoid a woman's anger, lest they be killed by *mum*. Just as men do not command each other, so they do not command women. When they want women to do something, they try to persuade them; for example men try to persuade women to go to the fields to dig potatoes, or they try to persuade a girl not to run away from her husband. During the distribution of the wedding payments women often advise their husbands. I have mentioned also the important voice a wife has in the use of the assets she and her husband have at their disposal.

2. *Reciprocity.*

Claims people have on each other, both in friendly and in hostile relationships, are gauged by the criterion of reciprocity: for a service rendered an equal service should be paid back; a counter action should aim at a retribution equal to the wrong suffered. In the preceding chapters I mentioned the importance of reciprocity in regard to contributions to wedding payments and economic co-operation. The function of reciprocity is not merely that it defines the size of claims and obligations, but people associate the occurrence of friendly relationships with the reciprocal exchange of goods and services. People who are on good terms exchange with each other, whereas a refusal to exchange, whether expressed by ignoring obligations or declining a request, is interpreted as a sign of being ill-disposed. Although good relationships presuppose exchange, exchange itself does not necessarily lead to good relationships. People do not expect that others will readily meet the full extent of their obligations, and they complain often that they have been wronged. Reciprocity pervades hostile relationships too. The Wanggulam conceive of their relationships with their neighbours as consisting of long series of reciprocated acts of hostility. Fights are explained as resulting from former fights or former killings, even though people do not always know the facts of the case. The chain of hostilities was not always continuous, and might be concluded by the transfer of compensation, but in these hostile relationships absence of hostile actions was not interpreted as absence of hostile feelings: Wanggulam think of their relationships with neighbouring parishes as permanently hostile.

In many Melanesian societies reciprocity, together with the equality

of the members of society, has been noticed as of great importance, and, according to Pouver, reciprocity implies equality (1961, p. 11). Yet it seems that reciprocity can exist also in relationships in which inequality prevails, as long as both partners, and not only the subordinate, are obliged to render their services, as for example in the relationship between the government of a Western state and its subjects. The latter are obliged to render services like taxes while the government has to provide, for example, social services (compare Malinowski; 1934, p. xxxviii). The reciprocity prevailing in Melanesia seems to be a special mode of reciprocity moulded by the equality of the members of society.

According to the Wanggulam good relationships are marked not by a single pair of reciprocal actions, but by a continuing flow of reciprocations ('When you stop giving each other things, you soon drift apart', see p. 24). This is also expressed in the marriage regulations: Penggu and Karoba continue giving each other their women, thus merely reaffirming an existing relationship, while peoples like the Kyaka and the Enga seem to be keen on establishing new relationships with each marriage (Bulmer; 1960, pp. 4-5). The Enga would probably consider the Wanggulam marriage system a waste of bridewealth (Meggitt; 1958, p. 277 and 1965, pp. 95-96).

Before discussing further implications of autonomy and reciprocity, I will describe the third of the principles mentioned, competitive leadership.