A 'PNG' Study into Racial Difference
In Contemporary Service Delivery Practices.

N. Neuendorf

James Cook University

Abstract

The people of Papua New Guinea (PNG) and Australia have established linkages through a history of colonisation, Christianity, corporate capitalism and development. This creates an intricate and complex environment within PNG which social relations and interactions occur, between, expatriates, especially Australians, and PNG people. A nuanced understanding of these interactions as they relate to perceived differences in service delivery is likely to generate insights into contemporary understandings of racial differences, colonial legacies and how PNG can 'develop' in to a modern society. At issue for PNG people delivering and receiving service, is how differences in service delivery can sometimes translate into debilitating or inequitable interactions.

As part of my honours thesis, I am undertaking a study based on the narrative accounts of PNG people in Cairns (Australia), Port Moresby and Lae (PNG) about their experience of PNG-expatriate interactions within the context of contemporary urban service delivery and business operations. Through the study, specific accounts will highlight the perceptions of the narrators and their remembered actions. At issue will be perceptions that Australian and other expatriates receive better or different service then the PNG narrator.

Undertaking this research as a Papua New Guinean, working specifically with PNG participants will have specific implications on the research process, and on my role as dually, a PNG person and researcher. This research will involve understanding perceptions of PNG people as told to a PNG researcher. I want to explore (i) how being an identified Papua New Guinean impacts research process; (ii) how being an identified researcher documenting the accounts of a known cohort, impacts participant narrative and story-telling; and (iii) the ways being an identified PNG researcher can contribute to the discussion/debate surrounding indigenous research methodologies and the implications of this for PNG specific research. Academics and institutions recognise indigenous methods in undertaking indigenous specific research. PNG people have an identity that is not easily defined as an indigenous identity, given PNG's unique colonial and post colonial recognition of land ownership and associated forms of local power. Through this paper, I wish to discuss the implications of this in understanding what it means to be PNG, in undertaking PNG specific research.

Background

Papua New Guinea (PNG) and its' people have an established on-going relationship with Australian and other expatriate populations. A history of colonial administration (Denoon, 1983, 1985; Gewertz & Errington, 1998, 1999; Lattas, 1998; Narokobi, 1983;

Rowley, 1958, 1965; Wolfers, 1975; Wolfers & Australian Institute of International, 1976), mentoring and guidance pre and post-Independence (Australian Government & AusAID, 2013; Denoon, 1985; Wolfers, 1975; Wolfers & Australian Institute of International, 1976) current Aid (Australian Government & AusAID, 2013), a booming natural resource industry and business relationships (Australian Trade Commission, 2013; Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2013), have all contributed to specific forms of social, economic, political and cultural interaction within PNG society.

As a result of established relationships there are specific forms of interaction apparent between Papua New Guineans and expatriates. (Bashkow, 2006; Lattas, 1998; Rollason, 2008; Wolfers, 1975; Wolfers & Australian Institute of International, 1976; Wood, 1995). This is further influenced by globalisation and shifting value systems of individuals within urban areas and within the broader community in PNG, the emergence of PNG national elites (Gewertz & Errington, 1998, 1999; Narokobi, 1983; Wolfers, 1975), the on-going relationships with 'expatriates' and the influences of modernity on individual and community values, which all provide a complex and intricate environment in which Papua New Guineans and 'expatriates' interact. In view of the established PNG-expatriate relationship, the study will focus on developing an understanding of the perceptions of racially different service provision from the point of view of the Papua New Guineans who are urban dwellers. Previous literature has documented accounts of the PNG-expatriate interaction within rural settings, (Bashkow, 2006; Lattas, 1998; Rollason, 2008; Wood, 1995) with a particular focus on how PNG people construct their own identity through their relationships and understandings of foreigners. This study will be one of the few recent urban based studies of perceptions of racial difference in PNG. As a result of this urban focus, this project will contribute to a fresh understanding of racial interactions within contemporary urban PNG with PNG people's perceptions being integral to this understanding.

Researching Racial Difference and Service

Although an initial focus will be on difference in racial interactions within service delivery practices, the understandings and representations of inter-racial interactions will be analysed beyond a specific focus just on race. Equally important to note, PNG people use racial difference to explore and evaluate ideals beyond race, such as, but not limited to, morality, self-worth and nationalism. (Bashkow, 2006; Denoon, 1983, 1985; Fanon, 1967, 1968; Gewertz & Errington, 1998, 1999; Gilroy, 2001; Lattas, 1998; Narokobi, 1983; Otto & Thomas, 1997; Rollason, 2008; Said, 1978; Wassmann, 1998; Wolfers, 1975; Wood, 1995) Race also allows an exploration and evaluation of the success of PNG people to be 'modern'. In their interaction with expatriates, PNG people deploy forms of moral reasoning about these and other topics. The constructions of identity (Billington, 1998; Cerulo, 1997; Cooley, 1902, 1909; Mead, 1972) by PNG people of themselves in relation to the expatriate other are part of a complex process of moral self-evaluation by PNG people. This moral self-evaluation produces and perpetuates specific types of PNG-expatriate interaction. (Robbins, 1998, 2004; Sykes, 1999, 2011-2015)

This methodological emphasis on narrative (Czarwinska 2004) will allow a nuanced analysis of PNG peoples' concerns about race, post-colonial PNG, nationalism, (Narokobi, 1983; Otto & Thomas, 1997) the persisting power of the 'white-man' (Bashkow, 2006) and the moral self-evaluation of PNG people (Robbins, 1998, 2004; Sykes, 1999, 2011-2015). It will especially highlight the difficulties and uncertainties PNG people face when trying to be truly 'modern' professional service deliverers operating at global and national standards. In

documenting the narratives of PNG people, the data will be analysed in terms of; (a) the representations of expatriates by PNG people given the racialized history of colonial administration and post-colonial interactions between PNG and expatriate populations; and (b) an ethnographic analysis of material collected through discussion and interviews of contemporary service delivery practices in PNG by a cohort of Papua New Guineans in PNG and Australia.

Undertaking Research in PNG

This point in time finds me within the initial stages of undertaking this research process with some experience of data collection. Several important concepts have become evident. Firstly, my engagement in research forces me to reflect on my own status as a Papua New Guinean **since I am not a citizen but of PNG descent**. I want to identify how my status impacts on, a) the way in which this research process is being undertaken; and b) the way information and data is elicited and interpreted. Secondly, as an early career researcher my capacity as a researcher is at best, governed by the novelty of the experience rather than based on prior experience. Third I think my role as a PNG Researcher contributes to the possibilities of defining myself via a series of contrast and reflections on what it might mean to be an Indigenous researcher engaged in indigenous research. I want to consider how indigenous research methodologies can be brought into debate with PNG specific research to enable me to better understand and critically position myself as a PNG researcher without claiming 'indigenous status' nor claiming the status of PNG citizen. I do not claim indigenous status since PNG was never a settler dominated state and I along with most other PNG have never lost my rights in my land. PNG has a different colonial and post colonial history that precludes the easy application of 'indigenous' to most debates about development and modernity. People in PNG relate to the state and claim effective citizenship entitlements through the concept of 'landowner' rather than their indigineity. The very concept of being PNG reflects this – it is a category derived from belonging to a nation state rather than being oppressed by a state.

Identifying as a Papua New Guinean

Identifying as a Papua New Guinean can be beneficial to this particular research, but also detrimental. Beneficial in that, to some level, if only superficially, I can assert with certainty that I am PNG by descent, however, I am not a PNG citizen. What it is to be a PNG is a very significant issue for PNG peers living in PNG and Australia irrespective of their citizenship. These factors in mind, I can assert with certainty, through my own lived experience and understanding that the issue studied is significant.

But being a Papua New Guinean, having had similar experiences and shared understandings with PNG participants, does not guarantee that because of the PNGness we share the same explicit interpretation and understandings of these interactions. We are divided by social and cultural configurations of residence, education, class, ethno-linguistic identity, gender etc...Russell Bishop suggests this to be beneficial. He recognises that the act of collating narrative experience or story-telling as a research tool 'is useful and culturally appropriate' for 'representing the 'diversities of truth' within which the story teller rather than the researcher retains the truth.' (Smith, 1999, p. 145) Smith further argues that 'in story telling is a focus on dialogue and conversations amongst ourselves as indigenous peoples, to ourselves and for ourselves.' (1999, p. 145). Smith highlights the diversity of experience that can be elicited under the fluid category of 'indigenous', and argues it can be empowering. Equally I

would want to argue that the category 'PNG' is equally fluid and ambiguous but covered by its range is a useful diversity of positions and experiences that can all be empowering.

For this study, I recognise that there is no absolute or essential PNG position when documenting and understanding the PNG-expatriate interactions. Identifying as PNG is not restricted to a political notion – it does not restrict being PNG to be defined by citizenry alone. Rather, in documenting very specific individual experiences, through narrative, identifying as PNG is not restrictive. These more complex understandings of who identifies as PNG can then inform an understanding of differential service delivery.

In addition, Identifying as PNG superficially affords me a degree of legitimacy or authenticity in ownership and justification of the topic. Granted, any use of the term legitimacy or authenticity is fraught with debate and contention. (Smith, 1999) In this context, the use of both terms is used quite superficially. In a sense essentialising my identity as Papua New Guinean via notions of authenticity significantly asserts that I have some unique experientially based understanding of PNG-expatriate interaction. These experiences can add weight to knowing and understanding the issues that I have highlighted as my research topics. This can be a fraught notion. As Yin Paradies (2006) explains from his own experience, identifying as indigenous conjured a general perception amongst his colleagues, of his legitimacy in explaining 'indigenous' issues. Paradies himself is the first to acknowledge that although he identifies as indigenous it, does not mean that his knowledge of indigenous specific matters is therefore absolute, explicit, securely authenticated or legitimated. His identity as indigenous is a component of the other parts of his ethnic make-up, is influenced by his personal history and the history of his community in consideration of social and historical conditions. Further, there is no adequate definition of what it means to be 'indigenous'. Indeed, depending on the definition given, identifying as indigenous can disregard the other non-indigenous facets of identity that make up a person. In the same way, identifying as a Papua New Guinean does not ensure that my understanding of a PNG specific situation is absolute or guaranteed by some attribute of my identity. My identification as PNG may cause a disregard of other components of my identity. Therefore, I would assert that the legitimacy or authenticity of PNGness stems not from a defining absolutist essentialist view, but from a negotiated understanding of myself as a PNG person, in consideration of the diversity of personal constitution. In the same way this notion can be applied to understanding and interpreting the narratives afforded through this particular research.

Such notions of identity point us toward the idea that, for many educated PNG people, and indigenous, and non-indigenous people, a defining feature of modern identity is a specifically modernist notion of knowing. (Beer & University of Oxford. European Humanities Research, 2002; Billington, 1998; Cerulo, 1997; Czarniawska, 2004; Foucault, Rabinow, & Faubion, 1997; Husserl, 1927; Inda, 2008; Smith, 1999) Personally, it often seems that modern identity seems to require a set of knowledge practices that are 'grounded' in some key, integral concepts - knowing oneself (a project perhaps most clearly defined by Socrates and Plato), knowing one's family, knowing one's community, and knowing one's ground (a theme commonly deployed by nationalists) (Narokobi, 1983). Awareness that such kind of knowledge exists does not authenticate entitlement to my understanding of PNG-expatriate interactions. Moreover I know that there are other knowledge traditions found in PNG (Strathern, 1988, 1991) that could produce completely different accounts of PNG identity constructs, based the idea of transaction. Rather than the modern Western construction of identity as based on an 'individual' who is a member of an overarching 'society' these

apparently more uniquely PNG constructs could generate a very different kind of knowledge of the PNG-expatriate interactions to those based on Western notions of identity. The intellectual task of rethinking identity in to more distinctly PNG categories is beyond the realm of my study. However such rethinking can contribute to my study in that, work like Strathern's makes clear to me the ways in which 'identity' is discussed in PNG often adheres to a modernist, highly individualistic project where 'identity' is something chosen, created and alarmingly, either lost or found.

Enclaving Identity

One effect of modernist notions of identity is that it is disposable. Such notions give rise to the notion of enclaving and recognises the possibility that some PNG people, through established links with expatriates and being conditioned through particular interactions, have been able to compartmentalise or preserve parts of themselves. This has enabled individuals to negotiate interactions with expatriate and national others. One participant's explanation of enclaving was by using the metaphor of putting oneself in a jar and placing it on the shelf. As a PNG person, she was able to switch off that part of herself that was PNG, place it on the shelf, effectively, preserving it. The version of self that existed in the workplace was suitably determined as one that enabled a level of function in that specific context.

As a novice researcher, this notion presented several questions for my practice, specifically, as a PNG researcher. Such as; Can this metaphor be translated to be applicable to PNG specific research? As an identified PNG researcher can I interchange roles between being a Papua New Guinean, and being a researcher? Would this be important in supporting how the research process develops, and can support a PNG specific understanding of issues? Or is this too convoluted and too much an abandonment of self in the pursuit of understanding?
As a PNG Researcher, maybe the answer to these questions lies in the concept of positioning oneself in a way that is constantly cognisant that the position you hold as a researcher can, through the process of eliciting narrative, be 'accepted, rejected, or improved upon by the partners in the conversation.' (Czarniawska, 2004, p. 5; Davies and Harre`, 1991) As a PNG researcher, this would enable a separation from the part of yourself that shares a lived experience, to one that enables more levity in understanding the participants specific experience. It does not fully negate the PNG in PNG researcher, but can support through negotiation of self, the value of being both researcher and Papua New Guinean.

It is important to recognise and highlight the power relationships that may exist in this process. Inevitably, there exists a discussion of some level of power held by the researcher, in the reinterpretation of participant narrative. (Czarniawska, 2004, p. 5) To my mind, the recognition and constant negotiation of self in research process can add dual value to the research process. In one respect it can enable to PNG researcher to focus on specific participant narrative. In another respect, it can promote a better balance in the level of power a researcher has throughout research process. Understanding of shared culture through respectfully and mindfully retelling the narratives elicited can only support and add value to PNG specific research.

Contribution to Research Practice

Can indigenous research methodologies contribute to PNG specific research? Indigenous research methods have previously centred on criticising understandings elicited by non-Indigenous researchers. (Smith, 1999). Specifically, the imperial and colonial histories that

have shaped and governed indigenous peoples and research now require a 'decolonizing' of research methodologies. This history, although not operating at a level totally synonymous with the experience of indigenous populations in settler colonies, is a contributing factor to research practice in PNG.

As recognised by Smith (1999, p. 1) 'research' of indigenous peoples 'is inextricably linked to European imperialism and colonialism.' Further 'the knowledge about indigenous peoples was collected, classified and then represented in various ways...through the eyes of the West...' (1999: 1). One difficulty here is that a knowledge tradition is essentialised and reified into an unhelpfully abstract entity – 'the West'. In PNG the European has been subject to all sorts of entanglements with local projects – involving cargo cultus , mimesis , conversion , education etc (Bashkow, 2006; Gewertz & Errington, 1998; Lattas, 1998; MacLean, 1998; McPherson & Association of Social Anthropology in, 2001; Robbins, 1998; Rollason, 2008; Stasch, 2009; Wolfers, 1975; Wood, 1995, 2013). These local projects have always involved embodied connections with the European so that the West has never been simply a homogenous external Other. As Other the European (or the West) has always been part of all Melanesian projects of colonial and post- colonial self construction.

While trying to imagine the 'West' as independent of the indigenous may be not be a very feasible project in PNG; more useful is Smith's call for creating appropriate approaches and methodologies to research with indigenous peoples that allow more 'respectful, ethical, sympathetic and useful' research to occur. (Smith, 1999, p. 9) Smith argues for 'self-determination' as an important component of undertaking research with indigenous peoples specifically, in light of colonial history. As a PNG researcher, certainly the precept of self-determination can add value and contribute towards cultivating a PNG specific focus in research. But in practice self-determination in research is tenuously fraught and difficult to achieve.

Undertaking research as a Papua New Guinean can enable and support: (1) an explicit insight into specific interactions within an urban context of service delivery beyond the issue of race or racial difference and; (2) a focus on PNG to PNG exchange of information in relation to the PNG-expatriate interactions. The information exchanged may be significantly different to that given to an expatriate researcher. The level of rapport and understanding may require less explicit clarification of certain assumption informing the research and the resulting interviews and narrative.

Conversely it is the job of a researcher to probe and understand issues and situations in explicit terms. As a PNG researcher this is something to be mindful of as there is a possibility of losing some of the explicit meaning of specific experiential interactions. The participant may view the researcher as a PNG person who should obviously understand the situation, rather than a researcher who needs to be told specific information to formulate an in-depth understanding. (Amit-Talai, 1999; Angrosino, 2007; Bryman, 2008; Cadet-James, 2009; Czarniawska, 2004; Davies, 1999; Gail, 2010; Glesne & Peshkin, 1992; Polkinghorne, 1988; Smith, 1999). As Bryman recognises, in assuming this participant-as-observer research role, it involves the risk of 'over-identification'. (Gold cited in Bryman, 2008, p. 411) This is problematic in terms of explicitly understanding the situation and could lead to misrepresentation and misinterpretation of specific interactions between PNG participants and PNG researcher. Therefore it requires continuous self-evaluative reflexive research practice.

Alternately, the participant may view the PNG researcher as just a researcher, causing the interaction between the two to be a situation that is potentially fabricated in some way. It may affect the researchers' ability to fully engage in the conversation, undertaking the role of researcher, guarding the PNG component of themselves. In the same way, the participant, viewing the PNG researcher as just a researcher, builds up a formality that would not be evident under other circumstances.

Conclusion

In undertaking research with PNG people and identifying as a PNG researcher I have found that what is involved is not simply a dichotomous split between being a PNG person and being a researcher. Rather what is involved a continual negotiation of understanding all facets of being a Papua New Guinean and being a researcher. Further, recognised by Dana-Sacco (2010), identifying as an 'indigenous' researcher requires critical 'introspection' involving 'regular, rigorous, reflective self-evaluation...in the context of...accountability to the collective.' The question for me in this research is not how we can resolve either a sense of PNGness or a sense of being a researcher, or a sense of being both, but in providing an understanding of the specific contextual circumstances. Further, I believe there is a continuous dialectical relationship between being a PNG person and being a researcher. It is never fully oppositional and nor is it simplistically synthesised in to a unity. Rather it is always in a state of constant flux and negotiation as is evident in my own PNG specific research.

Thirdly, self-evaluative and self-reflective methods in indigenous research practice can only add value to the collective and promotes a level of accountability. It requires a researcher to continually negotiate their practice to ensure the many facets of their circumstance are recognised and addressed to elicit understandings of specific situations. In doing so it ensures that these specific situations are afforded a level of understood truth that can be fully owned by peoples' lived experiences. It affords a level of respect for the contextual circumstances of the issue being studied and the participants involved, while also respecting the specific situational significance of that particular study.

In respect my own research there is benefit from the fact that I am a PNG researcher, as well as being in part an Australian researcher and a researcher influenced by the cosmopolitanism of the global academy (i.e. attendance at conferences). All components can be beneficial in understanding the significance of issues faced by PNG researchers doing their own research with other PNG people.

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