A MELANESIAN RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

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Abstract

Melanesian values and world views construct an ontology and epistemology that can be used to distinguish a Melanesian research methodology. This Melanesian research methodology is one that may offer advantages to those undertaking research in Melanesia in that Melanesian values are in the foreground. Melanesian research methodology does place specific requirements on the researcher with relation to context and processes of data collection and data analysis. In this manner, it is argued that ethics has a pivotal role in research quality. Finally, to assist the researcher, four personal attributes are described that help practise a defensible Melanesian research methodology.

Introduction

This paper proposes that a distinct Melanesian research methodology can be described. A Melanesian research methodology is argued to be one useful way to conduct research in Melanesia respectfully of the diversity of cultures found across Melanesia, and a way of understanding research that Melanesian cultures will find harmonious with their values and adaptive to their experiences. Clearly, past encounters with research dominated by a western-empirical ethic have negatively impacted indigenous cultures (Stanley, 2007). This discussion of a Melanesian research methodology is conducted wholly within the qualitative paradigm due to the context of social research in which the base reflections are developed.

The output of Melanesian researchers is under-represented in the literature. Prior to Papua New Guinea Independence from Australia in 1975, a number of academic journals were active in their fields. More recently, most of these journals have ceased, and PNG and other south Pacific national academics are seldom represented in the academic discourse. One part of this lacuna may be that Western research methodologies are experienced as out of harmony with the Melanesian community sensibilities and concerns (Czymoniewicz-Klippel, Brijnath, & Crockett, 2010; Gonzálezy y González & Lincoln, 2006). It is hoped that a rationalised Melanesian research methodology may empower researchers in appropriate ways to become more active and to publish their findings within an established framework.

The term ‘Melanesian’ is consistently used to describe the group of peoples across Papua New Guinea and the south Pacific islands of Melanesia. All these peoples are experiencing the pressures for development, and also aspiring to preserve their cultural integrity (Bailey, 1994). There are four main reasons for using this collective term of Melanesian. Firstly, there are clear sociological and anthropological ties between the peoples of PNG and Melanesia (Franklin, 2007). Secondly, PNG is a diverse set of cultures across the nation of Papua New Guinea comprising of at least 800 language groups (CIA FactFiles, 2007), many sharing significant roots with Melanesian languages. These PNG cultures are in some places patrilineal and in other places matrilineal, like other Melanesian cultures (Kelep-Malpo, 2007). A third reason is that increasingly PNG thinkers are identifying themselves with the broader Melanesian cultures, using ‘the Melanesian Way’ (Narokobi, 1980) as an identifying label. The former Prime Minister of PNG, Sir Michael Somare, in a recent statement concerning problem solving of international issues between Pacific states in the Melanesian is reported thus:

> Sir Michael has called on New Zealand and Australia to take a back seat at talks next week and let the

> PNG, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu sort out the situation in the Melanesian way. (Radio New Zealand, 2009)

Lastly, there are many social issues across the region that are shared. Land rights and issues of consent to land usage, traditional versus so-called Western approaches to conflict resolution, the divides between customary practices and modern ways transcend national boundaries of Melanesian countries. The term Melanesian helps account for the shared cultural perspectives of PNG peoples and their near neighbours in the South Pacific.

This article is based on more than three years academic engagement and lived experience in PNG and surrounding Melanesian countries. As a senior university academic in a PNG university, I have been involved in research projects of PNG government, international scholars coming into PNG for research, and nationals undertaking their higher degree research projects. As well as teaching research skills, this author has reflected on the experiences of his research and the research experiences of colleagues, postgraduate students and graduate students, attempting to integrate the Melanesian perspectives into a model that honours both culture and academic quality. Without some harmony between the lived experience of Melanesians and the academic understanding of research rigour, Melanesians will continue to find themselves, as academics, alienated from their own cultural experiences (Czymoniewicz-Klippel, et al., 2010; Gonzálezy y González & Lincoln, 2006), even as the Melanesian understanding of custom/culture is rapidly changing (Lindstrom, 2008).

Nature of Methodology

Methodology is here understood to be a validated integration between research design, the means of data collection and the processes of data analysis and reporting. This integration requires harmony between the ontological and epistemological constructions of the researcher (Healy & Perry, 2000). This harmony is embedded in the researcher's world view and constructs what are accepted as useful research questions and how these questions can be answered. Methodology also includes a tacit understanding of the role of ethics within the research activity (Payne, 2000).

While ontology answers the question: How can we know or find out?, epistemology describes the relationship between the reality and one who seeks to know (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p.108).

> Epistemology is concerned with who can be a knower, what can be known, what constitutes knowledge, sources of evidence for constructing knowledge, what constitutes truth, how truth is to be verified, how evidence becomes truth, how valid inferences are to be drawn, the role of belief in evidence, and related issues. (Gegeo & Watson-Gegeo, 2001, p.57)

Methodology is based on both ontology and epistemology; it describes the processes of research activity (Cohen & Manion, 1994, p.39). Methodology is a self-conscious approach to systematise knowledge production, which is the conduct of data collection and analysis. Sometimes 'research design' is a term used to describe this distinction between methodological issues and methods of data collection. The diverse and varied methodologies: quantitative, qualitative; Critical Theory; feminism; Marxism; constructivist; and Queer Theory (Mayo, 2007), amongst others, are formed by specific ontological, epistemological and methodological convictions (Fawcett & Hearn, 2004; Kirkham & Anderson, 2002; Packer & Goicoechea, 2000).

Gegeo and Watson-Gegeo (2002) argue that Malaitan communities leaders could and did critique community development plans from their own epistemological perspective, which in this case required development to be "within members' epistemic horizon ... take one log (step) at a time" for which there was the Kwara'ae expression 'lofoliunga'inia' (Gegeo & Watson-Gegeo, 2002, p. 397). This Malaitan community had clearly distinct understandings of how claims were to be verified and discussions about evidence were to be conducted to the extent of having tok pisin words to describe these separate epistemological understandings and approaches within the community (Gegeo & Watson-Gegeo, 2002).

Methods describe particular means of collecting or making data. The term 'method' applies to both the means of collecting the data and the type of data collected, as in quantitative methods – ways that collect data that is reported in numeric forms. Methods and the data they collect are validated by methodological convictions. While some authors use the term 'methods' to encompass methodology, as in research methods, the context usually is unambiguous whether method or methodology is described as the topic. Since the focus of this paper is a Melanesian research methodology, methods will be treated as the methodologically validated means of data collection and data analysis.

Indigenous Research Methodologies

There is a growing literature of indigenous research methodologies. This section attempts to deconstruct some of the claims of such indigenous research methodologies, not as a review of these methodologies but to investigate possible linkages to a Melanesian research methodology.

Some Pacific researchers have claimed a distinctiveness for their research approaches (Huffer & Qalo, 2004). Such a claim covering the Pacific nations, 20% of the Earth's surface, is bold. While not negating the distinctions drawn between colonial pasts and present realities, whether these distinctions pertain to methodologies (Gegeo & Watson-Gegeo, 2001, pp.55-57; Meyer, 2001, p.126; L. T. Smith, 1999), is not fully clear to this author. For indigenous research methodologies to make justifiable claims, the claims need to be argued in methodological terms. One such argument is that indigenous epistemology positions the researcher, and indeed all participants, in a different manner than other methodologies.

> By indigenous epistemology we mean a cultural group's ways of thinking and of creating, formulating, and theorizing about knowledge via traditional discourses and media of communication, anchoring the truth of the discourse in culture … Conceptually, indigenous epistemology is concerned with the process through which knowledge is constructed and validated, and the role of that process in shaping thinking and behavior. All epistemological systems are socially constructed and formed through sociopolitical, economic, and historical context and processes. (Gegeo & Watson-Gegeo, 2002, pp.381-382)

The social, and therefore cultural, constructions of research are powerful determinants of discourse. Some North American scholars have confronted the social and cultural oppression of original peoples and drawn a new narrative within research discourse (Barton, 2004). Indigenous research methodologies re-position indigenous peoples within research practices (Henry, Dunbar, Arnott, Scrimgeour, & Murakami-Gold, 2002, pp.11-15). Within this effort, it is critical that a new privileged group is not created based on race or insider status.

> Indigenous methodologies do articulate that indigenous scholars cannot be privileged just because of their indigenous background, because there are a great variety of "insider" views. Insider research has to take seriously the notion of accountability, which is an obligation or willingness to accept responsibility, as well as the notion of respect and – most of all – the notion of a thorough knowledge of indigenous traditions and languages. (Porsanger, 2004, p.109)

In Australia, Aboriginal research can be described as a communal act (Dunbar et al., 2002; Dunne, 2000; "Indigenous Research - a communal act," 2003). Porsanger argues that Maori research methodology is based on an "epistemology of whanaungatanga" which forms the basis of relationships between the researcher as part of the community (Porsanger, 2004, p.111). It is frequently asserted that indigenous peoples have an intrinsic relationship with the land and that community values are highly prized.

Donnelly (2007) argues that the PNG cultural perspectives challenge traditional or 'Western' understandings of research. Papoutsaki (2007) argues that the Melanesian perspective allows an approach to de-colonising methodologies. Without the deconstruction and de-colonisation of methodologies, consumers of research may be confounded by the cultural perspective (Gesch, 2007; Strachan, Akao, Kilavanwa, & Warsal, 2010). The following sections will assert that a specific Melanesian methodology can be argued because particular Melanesian understandings of the world and specific culturally embedded values exist to describe a Melanesian understanding of and practice

of research, including ethical and consent concerns.

Describing a Melanesian Methodology

To describe a uniquely Melanesian research methodology it will be helpful first to describe a Melanesian ontology and epistemology relevant to research activities. Is there a Melanesian perspective or view of reality, distinct from the Western reality of more traditional research?

The Melanesian world view is described as holistic (Lea, 1997, p.3; Namunu, 1996; Zocco, 1998), in relationship between the natural world, living creatures and persons; with illness seen as a disruption of the harmony of these relationships (Mantovani, 1995, p.18). A Melanesian methodology requires an ontology that is grounded in relationships, that is communal and active among the research participants and shared with researchers as well as participants. A Melanesian ontology will foreground research questions that are holistic and integrative, respecting the cultures of all participants and stakeholders. Furthermore, a Melanesian ontology will respect wide questions about community and inter-relationships, while being sceptical of 'single factor' explanations.

A Melanesian methodology will be grounded in Melanesian values. Franklin enumerates 10 values that support the Melanesian world view. These 10 values are:

1. The value of land (graun or wara);
2. The value of the clan (lain or wantok);
3. The value of reciprocity (bekim, bekim bek);
4. The value of food (kaikai, mumu);
5. The value of ancestors (tumbuna, tambaran);
6. The value of ritual (taboo, singsing, lotu);
7. The value of leadership (hetman);
8. The value of education (skul);
9. The value of compensation (peibeck, bekim, birua);
10. The value of work (wok). (Franklin, 2007, pp.28-37)

A Western understanding of these same terms is not always coincident with the Melanesian values (Burt, 2002). Franklin argues that these values determine a distinctively Melanesian world view. Gegeo and Watson-Gegeo (2002, pp.381-382) further argue that the truth value of the discourse is embedded within the culture and cannot be comprehensively rationalised outside the culture, making comparisons between Melanesian interpretations and Western perceptions problematic. One distinct difference between Western and Melanesian understanding is summarised by the holistic epistemology of the Melanesian, such that single causes are unlikely and effects are caused by the conjunction of disharmony or harmony between communities, people, and natural elements of the world (Togolo, 2002, p.214). This epistemology creates a distinct world view, a different inter-relationship with the natural elements and the supernatural elements of the world, a way to experience Melanesian questions and answer their physical, social and spiritual needs (Mantovani, 1998).

A Melanesian methodology requires an epistemology that foregrounds the cultural values of the participants. Melanesian epistemology will reinforce and build shared values and develop insights in harmony with the community. While Franklin's 10 values are not exhaustive, Melanesian epistemology will develop questions and means of responding to those questions in shared cultural values. Melanesian epistemology will focus on the life of the community since Melanesian values are focused on life, particularly community life (Mantovani, 1998, p.9; Namunu, 1996, p.80). More specifically, Melanesian epistemology will be grounded in the program to develop, reinforce and grow community life relationships, and the research will not be constructed in ways that might threaten community life and relationships.

Melanesian research methodology is different in a number of aspects to other indigenous methodologies. Firstly, a Melanesian research methodology is embedded within the distinctive

Melanesian world view. Franklin (2007, pp. 28-37) has described the ten-fold values that describe Melanesians' world view. Similarly, Melanesians' sense of unity within many divisions of languages, geography and levels of socio-economic development, particularly low levels of adult literacy (Czymoniewicz-Klippel et al., 2010) uniquely stamp the Melanesian world view. The reality of Melanesian methodology is made more concrete through the following discussion of Melanesian research ethics, as the practical implementation of what is specifically 'Melanesian' in a Melanesian research methodology.

Societies in Papua New Guinea are often described in terms of strongly culturally defined gendered roles. Recent work has deconstructed some of these earlier ideas and demonstrated that women's roles in many PNG societies are not as subservient to men as was once believed. Goddard (2005) offers evidence that women's oppression local village courts is a misunderstanding. Golub (2007) demonstrates that recent land ownership discussions and contracts have shown PNG societies to be "proactive, dynamic, and innovative, and a cold fixed content" (Golub, 2007, p.46). Within land and land use discussions there are differing levels of consent, and men and women play different roles within this consent nexus (Macintyre, 2007). The principle here is that Papua New Guinea societies are changing and these changes are chosen, at least in part, by the local people. Donnelly, describing how as a white male he successfully undertook research incorporating women's views in a traditional Aitape society claims:

> The integrity of research depends upon the people involved and where there is direct contact between the researcher and the researched, the relationship between the two is critical. This researcher-researched relationship is also dynamic and liable to change (Donnelly, 2007, p.41).

What becomes important, especially in Melanesian research methodologies is not to suppose that the society and interpersonal dynamics are fixed or rigid, and to focus on the centrality of relationships for all successful Melanesian transactions, including research.

Methods of research are employed in all methodologies. While methodologies validate methods, it is unlikely that methods are distinctly different between methodologies, at least as far as data collection. Data collection is itself within the complex of ethical systems, of permissions, confidentiality and mutual respect (Vallance & Tchacos, 2001). These have been formally defined in the Belmont Report (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1979) as well as numerous ethical guideline statements of professional bodies (American Educational Research Association, 2000; American Psychological Association, 2002; Antle & Regehr, 2003; National Health and Medical Research Council, 2001; M. B. Smith, 2000). Cultural perspectives of power and authority, the balance between individual and communal rights and ownership are individually and collectively relevant.

Melanesian research ethics

Research in Melanesia is no more or less ethically challenged than in other locales or cultures. There are challenges in accomplishing research in Melanesian societies, and these challenges are fully worthy of the efforts required. A Melanesian research methodology will employ ethical commitments to ensure that respectful, ethical social research is done in Melanesian context. Ethical research demands that ethical research questions, research processes, analytic processes and data management and result dissemination all be accorded rightful priorities(Vallance, 2005). While in methodological literature validity is considered the gold standard of research, ethics is the sine qua non of all research that aspires to trustworthiness and usefulness.

The following sections of this paper explore some of the practical matters that will be relevant to an ethical Melanesian research methodology. For the sake of clear explanations, this material will be divided into factors pertaining to data collection and factors pertaining to data analysis, acknowledging that this division is an arbitrary one.

Factors Pertaining to Data Collection

There are a number of factors pertinent to data collection relevant to Melanesian research contexts. The division of factors into those pertaining to data collection and those concerning data analysis is a dichotomy created for the convenience of explanation rather than a theoretical or practical difference. It is understood that overlap between these factors occurs. However, for the sake of organisation, the different groups are useful as an aid for discussion.

Language

Papua New Guinea has extreme linguistic diversity. There some 800 or more languages today current in PNG itself (CIA FactFiles, 2007) and these languages derive from at least two different language groups, Austronesian and Non-Austronesian, so that there may be little similarity between neighbouring language groups (Foley, 2000; Whiteman, 1984). Some of these languages have only a few hundred mother tongue speakers (Kulick & Stroud, 1990). While tok pisin is usually described as the linga franca, the peoples in the south of PNG often speak Police Motu1 rather than tok pisin as a common language, although English is common in most towns across PNG.

The levels of literacy are often not high in PNG villages. Literacy rates and skills affect PNG development (Booth, 1995), so the lack of literacy is a social issue of significance. Literacy has cultural, social development and cognitive consequences (Akinnaso, (1981), since literacy affects not only how one conceptualises but also what one can conceptualise (Meacham, 2001). One reality of research in village situations is the difficulty explaining one's research and why it is worthy of participation. Many local PNG languages, and tok pisin itself (I have no experience of Motu), lack a vocabulary that is rich in abstract concepts, time delimitations and individualised effects. In some languages the vocabulary is so limited in abstract terms that even in verbal dialogue the context is crucial to resolve the intended meaning for words which have multiple, distinct meanings2. It can be difficult, even for a fluent speaker, to translate the ideas of research into a local language. Furthermore, many PNG people speak tok pisin but cannot read or write in tok pisin, so translated Consent Forms are inscrutable in either language. When these difficulties impede clear communication, the researcher has difficulty gaining informed consent because the information cannot be readily communicated.

Cultural perspective of compensation

Even the casual visitor to PNG soon encounters the word 'compensation'. Yet compensation is not limited to the Western understanding of 'making right'3. There are three different senses of the term compensation in PNG today. The first sense of compensation that operates in PNG is the Western-legal understanding of redressing a particular wrong. Compensation is due to a person wronged and is to be paid by the person who has done wrong (Kepore, 1975; N. O'Neill, 1975). Compensation is also applied to a range of other social interactions like bride price and marriage payments (Jessep & Luluaki, 1994, p.8). The third sense of compensation is applied to activities to restore the social order (Kepore, 1975, p.178; MacDonald, 1984) and is most effective in re-aligning existing relationships (Stralhern, 1975, pp.185-186).

"Melanesian social life is a constant give and take" (Trompf, 1991, p.64) and compensation has different faces and processes when employed between hostile groups and within tribes or clans not normally mutually hostile. So compensation can be understood as either retribution for wrongs admitted (Trompf, 1994, p.107), or "indemnification of one's allies for their services, risks, and serious losses." (Trompf, 1994, p.107). 'Compensation' also includes the exchanges of gifts, which may be token in nature or on the other hand may be substantial, that are used to create, formalise and acknowledge relationships (Mantovani, 1984, p.204). The reciprocity of exchanges can be seen as building relationships. This sense of ritualising relationship is now discussed in terms of research ethics and data collection.

The researcher and the research participants enter into a relationship. Relationships usually have some clearly defined boundaries in Western thinking, even when reciprocity is expected (Russell, 2006). In the Melanesian mindset, relationships can be more pervasive and frequently are more valued. A

research participant may understand that contributing to the research enterprise is, in fact, one part of a ritualised relationship exchange and that person can expect reciprocity or compensation for the information given. Such a cultural perspective has several consequences. Firstly, if unanticipated or unrecognised, this expectation of reciprocity may result in offence and even anger if the expected reciprocal exchange does not occur. Secondly, if information is offered in order to create or cement a relationship, that which is offered might be constructed in ways to maximise the perceived relationship benefit: in other words the discussion may become more a telling of what is thought to be valued, rather than the person's own understanding.

It is not uncommon for some participants to have unrealistic expectations of personal benefits of research. The Belmont Report specifically enjoins researchers to have regard for the beneficence of participants (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1979; National Health and Medical Research Council, 1997, 1999; Sieber, 1992). The Belmont Report does not advocate reciprocal relationships within the research context. It is not claimed that the cultural understanding of compensation will invalidate data collection. It is argued that careful planning of the approach and establishment of the research relationship in the Melanesian cultural context is important to ensure that appropriate and trustworthy data are collected for the research.

Communal consent

Melanesians frequently report a communal model of ownership. This communal ownership usually extends to land and other resources (Trebilcock, 1984). Customary land tenure is never separate in Melanesia from social, political and economic factors (Giddings, 1984, p.150). Allied with this communal sense of ownership is a decrease, relative to Western perceptions, of individual efficacy (Wagner & Talakai, 2007). It is the practice in many communities that decisions are made by community leaders, or big-men, for the community. The big-man is not usually a hereditary leader in Melanesian cultures but one who maintains his leadership through political and economic prowess (Chao, 1984, p.133, pp.137-138). While decision-making is often in consultation with community members, community leaders can make such decisions without requisite community consultation.

The power of the local community leaders is pervasive and persuasive. It is frequently required by local custom that a researcher gain access to potential participants through the local community leader. When a researcher gains research access through the approval of the local leader/s it may be difficult to determine whether individuals have offered real assent to the research, or more importantly can realistically choose to not consent if the community has consented. If the community assents to the research, even if solely through the decision of the local leader, it will be rare that community members can freely not participate in the research. This nexus has implications for the collection of research data. If a participant is not fully consenting, or does not know how to express lack of consent, then the quality of the data offered to the researcher is compromised. Clearly, community consent cannot be presumed to mean that all community members are willing participants. If all participants are not fully willing, the researcher needs to be mindful that the data she/he is collecting is of mixed quality and may need to employ further one-to-one discussions to determine the extent of consent.

In some traditional communities, the concept of consent is subsumed under broader issues of trust or relationship. The exchange of token gifts can signify the building of such a relationship, be that betel nut in Melanesia or tobacco as might be used in indigenous Australian communities (Davison, Brown, & Moffitt, 2006; Ellis & Earley, 2006). This aspect of exchange can mitigate the quality of informed consent that may be desired in well planned research.

Epistemology

It has been shown the Melanesian people have a non-Western epistemology. If the potential research participants have an epistemology that is very different from that of the researcher, the threat of miscommunication in data collection is high.

> Indigenous peoples have a distinctive way of looking at the world, thinking about it, relating to it, and

> experiencing it, with the result that indigenous peoples' epistemologies can no longer stand behind or outside mainstream methodologies, but in front or beside as the situation demands. (Fleras, 2004, p.118)

In addition, it is not unknown that some cultures resist research (Gibbs, 2001, p.675; Hudson & Bruckman, 2004). Whether due to bad experiences with researchers or a world view that does not validate or honour research into people's lives, some cultures are resistant to research (Beresford, Partington, & Gower, 2003; Gibbs, 2001; Ryen, 2004).

A number of factors impinge upon data collection that is ethically and methodologically sound. These factors include, in the Melanesian context, the languages of the people and researcher, the local community's understanding of compensation and communal versus personal consent. Wherever differences in world view exist, and the differences occur between researcher and research participants, there are grounds for caution that the messages being given are being received in the same sense that they are transmitted.

Factors pertaining to Data Analysis

The previous section of this paper has explored some issues that pertain to the collection of valid or trustworthy data. This section addresses a number of issues that pertain more to the transparent and meaningful analysis of research data. While the distinction between data collection and data analysis is not always an unequivocal one within the qualitative methodologies, it is employed here as a means of order and priority for conceptual clarity.

Answers that might be valued

As earlier noted, compensation can become an exchange to develop or cement relationships. This culturally approved practice develops a social habit of agreement, and in Melanesian cultures, agreement with superiors or those of higher status is often the currency of reinforcing these relationships. Within normal discourse, this cultural norm makes for politeness, social harmony and effective bonds within the community.

When a researcher enters the Melanesian context, social compliance with the views of another can be problematic. In the previous sentence, it might be easier to write; "when a Western researcher enters the Melanesian context", but this construction would be misleading and unnecessarily biased. Melanesian peoples encompass an extremely heterogeneous group of languages, cultures and even races such that PNG people, for instance, can often feel culturally out of tune in their own country by simply moving some few kilometres from where they grew up or live. So just being a citizen of PNG, or being an indigenous born person in PNG, does not mean that one is culturally in tune with the research field. In fact, with over 800 languages, frequently only tok pisin or English are shared languages and mother and father tongues [tok ples] are diverse. Just being Melanesian does not guarantee cultural sensitivity, and indeed, as the history of anthropology suggests, being aware of one's cultural differences might heighten one's sensitivities to those very differences and make them visible to observation.

Every researcher arrives with expectations. The community also has expectations, and in many communities there is some deference to the outsider even if he is just as a visitor. Deference and a concern to be hospitable and welcoming can sometimes incline participants to 'give the answers that make the researcher happy'. A social discourse that seeks to establish or confirm relationships, if not appreciated and understood, can impede the search of personally held opinions and socially constructed attitudes that persist beyond the space of the research, and social, encounter.

Working in such a cultural matrix, the researcher needs to take care accepting the first-offered thoughts. The researcher needs to self monitor what clues are being sought by participants and what clues are being offered by the researcher herself. Sometimes researchers offer non verbal clues that reinforce certain messages, at least as perceived by participants: noting some words in a book, or writing notes at one point of the talk can be seen to be approving or validating such a communication and may encourage a participant to offer further such ideas, 'since the researcher likes these, because

they are being written down'. Conversely, to stop note taking at a certain point might be perceived as research disinterest in the participant's views. Similarly, non verbal expressions of approval, smiles and sub verbal messages, can subtly influence and guide the participant along lines that are perceived to be approved by the researcher.

Temporary nature of answers

The temporary nature of expressed attitudes is sometimes remarked upon by initial researchers in PNG. While no social scientist expects attitudes to be unchanging and completely permanent, within Western thinking there is an assumption of some consistency over time of attitudes and opinions. The Melanesian mind, immersed in concerns for social harmony has less trouble adjusting expressed opinions to match community mores (Gesch, 2007). This flexibility can be noted when the context changes, possibly from working-day or modern occupation mindset to a traditional perspective.

The social researcher in Melanesia needs to take special care to shift and sort evidence of attitudes reported. In this situation, the researcher needs reflexively to consider contextual and complementary evidence that might substantiate the consistency or firmness of expressed opinions over time.

Embedded cultural perspectives such as sorcery

Traditional Melanesian societies are alive to the spiritual world where notions of tambu, sorcery and witchcraft are still current. Indeed in traditional societies today sorcery and witchcraft are the objects of conflict and the resource of the ill (Gesch, 2007, pp.19-20).

Different tribes have different totem objects or animals, tambu, and special sensitivities surround these cultural imperatives. Similarly, cultures have sensitivities about particular issues, bodily functions, and means of interpersonal address or association. Some societies are very sensitive to the relationships between opposite genders, and even social gestures can change meaning when gender becomes a factor: within some areas of PNG the almost-ubiquitous hand shake on meeting new people is strongly discouraged between men and unmarried women.

Any research, especially amongst people living traditionally, has cultural perspectives. Social research that does not include the deliberate and thoughtful awareness and sensitivity to cultural mores in the local place will always be threatened by the possibilities of conflict, and even more importantly, of not clearly hearing the messages spoken by participants. Hearing the spoken messages requires awareness of the cultural context in which the messages are spoken.

Literacy and culture

The adult population in PNG has a declining rate of literacy. Recent estimates of the nett school enrolment at primary levels of schooling has shown that fewer than 35% of school age primary level students attend on a regular basis (Kombra & Webster, 2006). Even literacy in tok pisin, which may be the language of rural primary level schools (Department of Education Papua New Guinea, 2003) cannot be expected to be high. Hence, written communications and written instructions to participants are increasingly problematic in PNG today. Researchers will need to be aware that even simple written directions may be beyond the reading skills of many people in either tok pisin or English.

Much of Melanesia remains a culture of oral stories. The rules and interpretative protocols of oral stories are different to those of the written form: both in flexibility of expression and adaptability of meaning. As researchers approach projects from a perspective of written literacy rather than oral stories, the interpretative potentials change from the oral form to the written forms. It is possible that researchers might think that they are being told 'literal truths' whereas the participants might be communicating 'moral or social truths' in the oral tradition that sound like the reporting of actual accounts.

Guidelines for ethical research in Melanesian cultures

Methodology determines not only how but also what findings are constructed in research (Bird, 1995).

Ellis and Earley propose a four-fold approach to respectful research with indigenous communities. Modifying their American-focussed schema a little, it is suggested that these four approaches of community, collaboration, compassion, and courage create the hallmarks of ethical Melanesian research methodology (Ellis & Earley, 2006, p.8). The tacit sense of balanced reciprocity (Russell, 2006) is implicit within this schema presented. These four approaches are human qualities. The human interactions of qualitative research do not limit its effectiveness nor its usefulness. "Neutrality in qualitative research, or in any situation where there is direct human contact, is a fallacy" (Ellis & Earley, 2006, p.7).

These four guidelines presume a human interaction that does not assume neutrality (Tom & Herbert, 2002). Melanesian research cannot be neutral since it is informed by and involved in Melanesian values and world-views.

Community

Primarily, ethical Melanesian research requires a community approach. Ethical research projects will inform the community, seek permission from the community and include community perspectives in data collection and analysis.

Traditional Melanesian life is centred on the village. Village leadership is frequently a matter of extensive consultation with members, and researchers must build such extended consultation into their research plans and timetables (Davison, et al., 2006). Even those Melanesians who live in urban environments frequently have a strong sense of identification with village, which in turn creates bonds with family, kin and tribe. Therefore, researchers need to inform the whole village community about the aims and processes of the research, as well as inform all community members of potential outcomes and possible consequences of the proposed research.

Permission for the research must be gained from and of the community. This task is two-fold: the community needs to have a voice to assent to the research, and the researcher for his/her own ethical responsibilities must ensure that each individual participant also fully assents to the research process. The acquiring of informed individual assent will usually require signed Consent Forms, such forms attested by a personal mark where the participant is not literate enough to make a signature, and usually the Form being bilingual. Both community consent and individual consent are required because the individual researcher has her/his own ethical standards to maintain which are not to be lowered or ameliorated in communal research situations.

The research must include a community perspective. To be true to the Melanesian world-view of community, and respect the Melanesian epistemology, research must be respectful of community and must foster community (Walker, 2007; Wihak & Merali, 2007). This statement is stronger than 'should not harm community' since community is a positive force in Melanesian epistemologies.

Collaboration

Ethical Melanesian research will be collaborative. Collaborative research has a number of levels. The first level of collaboration is to involve the participants as more than sources of data. Researchers will find collaborative question-making useful to enable participants to reveal their realties. Collaborative question-making involves people in what questions need to be asked and how to ask those questions so that people can respond informatively.

Collaborative research can include collaborative meaning-making. While the researcher has her/his own perspective on the meaning told by participants, the community members themselves can add an extra dimension if they can contribute to the reflection on their realities. Appropriate safeguards for confidentiality or anonymity will need to be employed, and there are numerous guides to suitable safeguards (Clarke, 2006; Goldstein, 2000). Collaboration can also include shared dissemination of research outcomes, clear acknowledgment of the contributions of the community and acknowledgement that the community has some ownership of the research outcomes.

Compassion

Some authors have positioned compassion as a quality intrinsic to feminist methodologies (Thompson, 1992). This paper argues that active compassion is an essential orientation for the social researcher who is seeking to understand the 'other'. Other-ness is never easy to encounter, and researchers might avoid the challenges of other-ness (Witz, 2007). Without compassion, ethnography becomes less than the emotional and human account to which it aspires to be (M. O'Neill et al., 2002). Without compassion, the ethnographer risks becoming some type of voyeur who is distanced from the research scene and by that very distance is dislocated from much of its meaning. In a real way the immersion and prolonged fieldwork of the classical anthropologist was an extended protocol to allow compassion to develop and interpret the research field through eyes that felt with the research participants. Ashworth and Lucas (2000, p.299) claim that empathy is a fundamental attribute in order to perceive the meaning that the other communicates.

When the research context includes cross cultural parameters, the need for empathy and compassion becomes even stronger. There are two different calls for empathy and compassion. The first and possibly more obvious call is for compassion with the people in the research context; their experiences and feelings should evoke compassion. The second call is an internal one; that the researcher deals compassionately and patiently with his own difficulties of enculturated understanding.

Courage

Ellis and Earley propose that the researcher needs courage to "have strength to be who one is and to seek one's vision" (2006, p.8). The researcher does need courage (Dickson-Swift, James, Kippen, & Liamputtong, 2007) to be an individual, although in concert with the requirement of compassion, individualistic courage is not enough. Courage is also required to acknowledge and abide with differences, discontinuities and even contradictions between the research and the research context (Hubbard, Backett-Milburn, & Kemmer, 2001). Values, assumptions and even fundamental perceptions of the value of life may call for courage to be encountered rather than these discomforts be overlooked or diminished in their power (Wolgemuth & Donohue, 2006). This courage enables the researcher to stand on the edge of uncertainty and to acknowledge that one does not have all the answers and sometimes cannot understand the answers of the other.

Courage is required in reporting cultural research. It is an easy matter to report only that which is well understood and under analytic control. It is risky to report gaps or places where understanding is incomplete.

Research Governance

The concluding section of this paper concerns research governance. While a number of Melanesian states are concerned about and legislate regarding mineral and biological research, few have strong governance structures for social research. Yet the research enterprise and cultural values have frequently been miss aligned in many traditional societies (Hughes, Seidman, & Williams, 1993). The discourse of research ethics has been exclusively shaped by Western experiences and values (Halse & Honey, 2007). In terms of research governance, the linear, Western model of research governance that is funnelled into a bureaucratic process (Brunger & Burgess, 2005) does little justice to Melanesian culture. A culturally sensitive model of research governance would include a voice for cultural values as well as the Western values of scientific progress, finance and the modernist agenda.

This topic of research governance was addressed last because it is an agenda still developing. Whether government or universities can lead in this area is moot. The leadership role, in Papua New Guinea of the PNG Research Institute (NRI, 2009) and the PNG Institute of Medical Research (PNGIMR, 2009), is potentially significant. At the same time, the effects of major donor organisations and commercial enterprises are also potent without necessarily being facilitative of culturally sensitive research governance. One might argue that the achievement of a recognisable and defensible Melanesian research methodology depends, at least in part, on the successful evolution of a Melanesian research governance that both values research activity while respecting Melanesian values and promotes

Melanesian communities and their inter relationships between Melanesian values, peoples and hopes for the future.

Conclusion

This paper has attempted to argue that a Melanesian research methodology can be described. Secondly, and in particular reference to Melanesian research, ethics has been argued to be central to the value claims of research. Moreover, research amongst Melanesian peoples must foreground ethical issues in order to represent properly Melanesians' world views. Not all research conducted in Melanesia, or even necessarily research conducted by Melanesians, should be considered as using a Melanesian research methodology. Indeed, a Melanesian research methodology imposes significant requirements and possibly constraints upon the conduct of the research, as discussed in the latter part of this paper.

A Melanesian research methodology must include an ontology and epistemology informed by Melanesian values and be in harmony with Melanesian world views. Melanesian research methodology promotes and reinforces Melanesian values and Melanesian community life. Research grounded in a Melanesian research methodology will be inclusive of communities in both data collection and data analysis. Research access and meaning-making will have community involvements, respecting the ethical perspectives of Melanesian cultures.

This article suggests that four factors are critical in implementing research in Melanesian contexts. These factors are community, collaboration, compassion and courage. These four factors will ensure the culture sensitivity and appropriateness of the research and provide a moral guide to the conduct of the research that is likely to increase the respect the Melanesian people have for research activities. This increased research interaction may have benefits for both researchers and the communities with which they engage.

Whether Narakobi's (1980) "Melanesian Way" allows the successful evolution of a Melanesian research methodology and governance is not yet determined while to date is would be fair to say that progress has been slow.

Notes

1. Tok pisin is the language formerly called 'pidgin'. Motu is the specific language spoken by an ethnic group in the south of PNG. Police Motu is the name of the linga franca, which has some considerable differences from ethnic Motu. However, in common conversation, Police Motu, as the linga franca, is frequently referred to as Motu.

2. In the Roro language the word "wapuka'a" can mean 'bartering system' or 'midnight', depending on the context and the sentence structure in which it is used. Roro is spoken in Central Province by the coastal peoples between Hisu north of Port Moresby to the northern coastal extent of Central Province to Kiuori on the province border with Gulf Province.

3. Macquarie Dictionary defines compensation as 'something given or received as an equivalent for services, debt, loss, suffering, etc.; indemnity' ("Macquarie Dictionary," 2005).

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