

ARCHIVES AND NATIONAL IDENTITY IN PAPUA NEW GUINEA

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Nancy Lutton opened her paper to the June 1991 ASA Conference by quoting B. Delmas as follows:

Archives are documents bearing on man as a social being; they are proofs of his continuity and of his adaption to the deep-seated changes in his living conditions on earth. Thus archives are the foundation of that conscious memory that man has of himself, through history. Whatever adds to the history of mankind enables us to know more about man and understand more of human nature. Such is the basic social role of archives.¹

In this slightly edited version of that paper, she shows how Papua New Guinean identity is gradually evolving and what role archival institutions, primarily the National Archives, are playing to encourage this.

What is identity? It is knowledge of oneself. In the *Macquarie Dictionary* it is defined as 'To adapt one's ideas and behaviour, usually unconsciously, to fit in with those of a person or group regarded as a model'.

In Papua New Guinea, national identity is still very much evolving. You will know about the 700 different languages, the almost impenetrable mountain ranges, the swollen and dangerous rivers and swamps, the thousands of small off-shore islands, the endemic tribal fighting, the attempts at secession particularly Bougainville, the uneven economic development, the lack of roads — none at all which cross the second largest island in the world north to south. You may not be aware that only 60% of primary school age children are actually able to get into school as education is neither free nor compulsory and there are not enough facilities to go around and that of those who complete primary school, only 34% go on to secondary school.² The literacy rate for the whole country is still about 50%.

Certainly, before colonial contact in the 1870s and 1880s — the missions and some traders arrived before government — national identity was non-existent. There was some regional contact through trading rings. In the Papuan Gulf area there was the annual Hiri expedition³ when the Motu of the Port Moresby area sailed in large canoes called lakatoi to the Gulf taking earthenware pottery they had made. These they traded for sago and logs (to build more lakatoi). In the Louisiade Archipelago — that string of islands that seems to be attached to the tail of the island of New Guinea — there was the Kularing⁴ described by Malinowski, where the various island groups, particularly the Trobriands, traded necklaces and armbands made of shell in ceremonial fashion as they traded their goods and made friendships.

In most regions there *was* endemic warfare — fights between tribes over land — particularly in the Highlands where it continues today. In New Britain, the Tolais were a strong homogeneous tribe which have always pressed upon their neighbours the Bainings. However, it was German colonialism which alienated a great deal of their land in one of the most fertile areas of the country. In the Morobe district, early gold discoveries exposed the people there to outside commercial exploitation. But these same people had been raided by an extremely savage group called Kukukukus in the mountains for a very long time.

As a consequence of all this, identity in Papua New Guinea is very strong with your own group or your 'wantoks', the people who speak your language. The next stage is the Province or District or even the region depending on your level of education and your opportunity to travel or work in another part of the country. Regionalism is not confined to PNG or other underdeveloped countries. There are plenty of people in Australia who still put State before Commonwealth.

Missionaries and their Records

The earliest permanent contact with outsiders was by missionaries, those from the London Missionary Society (LMS) first settling in the Port Moresby area in 1872 and the Methodists in the Rabaul area in 1875, with the Catholics, Anglicans and Lutherans all following soon after. Although histories are full of the difficulties and dangers faced by the first missionaries, in general they had tremendous impact on the lives of Papua New Guineans.⁵ It was missionaries who provided the first education, and much attention has been paid in recent histories in criticising and comparing the various policies — some taught in English or German, others in the vernacular, or pidgin or in Papua, Motu.⁶

Most soon had trained pastors and studies have shown that the descendants of those pastors became the elite of the 1960s and 1970s

when Papua New Guineans were beginning to move into leading positions.⁷ In Papua, regionalism was encouraged because of a 'spheres of influence' policy,⁸ where for about the first forty years, the London Missionary Society, Methodist, Anglican and Catholic missionaries were each confined to an area. Consequently, regionalism today tends to follow religious lines. In New Guinea there were no spheres of influence and much more friction between the Methodist, Lutheran and Catholics. Most other religions, such as Seventh Day Adventists, did not get established till the late 1920s.⁹

Missions did more than educate Papua New Guineans, they kept copious records and while their survival is patchy, it is possible to research them for information on the earliest contact. Missionaries also often wrote books or papers on the customs of their people, missionaries who had lived among them for thirty years and more.¹⁰ They compare very well with the observations of professional anthropologists whose fieldwork might last one to two years. The Anglican and United Church (i.e. LMS and Methodist) are housed in the New Guinea Collection at the University of Papua New Guinea. The Catholics have large archival holdings at their various locations cared for by conscientious priests who are active at library and archives meetings. The Lutherans have an establishment in Lae which is microfilming the Lutheran archives of the entire country. This is an overseas Lutheran funded project.¹¹

Patrol Officers and Patrol Reports

Most colonised African or Pacific Island countries had social structures which included chiefs, and missionaries or government controlled whole populations by converting or bribing the chiefs. This was not possible in Papua New Guinea with its population dispersed throughout and often living in small isolated hamlets of thirty or forty people. The government was therefore obliged to establish control through the slow painful process of patrols.¹² A patrol officer was an official trained in the elements of law and social control, and some medical knowledge. Larger patrols might include two or three officers each more specialised. There would be a detachment of police and a line of carriers with food and equipment (remember radios weighed a ton in the early days) for the length of the patrol which might last six months. Most were shorter. For longer patrols, fresh supplies might be dropped by aeroplane, or in some cases the patrol would build an airstrip for the plane to land. Thus we have the anomaly that so many Papua New Guineans saw the aeroplane before they ever saw an automobile or even a wheel, and even today, if they have never been overseas, they have never seen a train.

The patrol officer was not only commandant of police, magistrate and medicine man, he was anthropologist, census collector, diarist and

report writer too. He could not go to bed at night before he wrote up the day's events. It has not been possible to establish how many reports altogether were written, but it could easily be eighty to 100,000. At National Archives we have thirty to 40,000 and most of those are post-war. Up to 1000 pre-war Papuan patrol reports have survived as they were sent to Australia in 1942,¹³ but probably less than 100 pre-war New Guinea. As four copies were written and the patrol officer kept one, isolated copies do tend to turn up in strange places.

In the Patrol Reports alone we find all the elements given by James B. Rhoads¹⁴ that foster national identity.

1. *They document the origins and migrations of the people.* It was standard practice to ask for origin stories and ownership of land.
2. *The successes and failures of their leaders.* A village was not only contacted once, but many times over the years. Luluais (in New Guinea) or village constables (in Papua) were appointed and their activities reported.
3. *The economic and social development of society.* What sustained the village before contact? What crops did they plant at the suggestions of the patrol? What education was available? How many villagers went to work on plantations, or in mines, or on roads, elsewhere? What changes were observed in each subsequent visit? Village books were kept. These recorded everyone who lived in the village in family groups. It was inspected by the patrol officer each visit to ensure it was up to date. Unfortunately, not many of these have survived.
4. *Wars and natural calamities.* The patrol officer was certainly concerned with wars or inter-tribal fighting. He stopped it where he could with greater fire power. Natural calamities abound in Papua New Guinea — landslides, floods, droughts and volcanic eruptions have all taken their toll. Such disasters mean special visits and reports.
5. *Relationships with other peoples.* In the early days, the other people might live only ten miles away, but if it was on the other side of a mountain it might take two days to get there. What each considered their land boundaries would be sure to have been noted.

National Unity

National identity can only follow national unity. Until World War II — the beginning of which was less than fifty years ago in Papua New Guinea, national unity was not possible. Although Australia governed both Papua in the south and New Guinea in the north, they were two quite separate administrations which differed in policy and ideals. In 1942 the Australian New Guinea Administrative Unit (ANGAU) was established as the first national government, but by then the Japanese

had practically overrun New Guinea and the north coast of Papua. The war was startlingly educational for Papua New Guineans. Thousands of foreign troops came to fight it on the Kokoda Trail, Milne Bay, and the beaches of Buna and Gona. They fought in the New Guinea islands and on the New Guinea mainland. At Manus, the Americans built a huge naval base, through which a million men passed. The soldiers were not 'government' as the patrol officers had been and consequently were perceived to be more friendly and Papua New Guinean confidence was built up.

The ANGAU government was followed by a single civil government in 1945 and so it has been ever since. In 1945 it could never have been conceived that Papua New Guinea would be independent thirty years later. Those who knew the fractured nature of the country had their doubts, but a Legislative Council was established in 1951, then a House of Assembly in 1964.¹⁵ Probably most influential of all in bringing the Papua New Guinea elite together was the establishment of the University of Papua New Guinea in 1966, just twenty-five years ago this year. From then on, it was a rush, helped along by a Labor Government which refused to play the role of colonial master. Independence Day was euphoric as power was handed over to the lucky elite. However, in a sense it was artificial, as PNG had never become unified through a need to fight together for their independence. The elite had found expatriates in the way of their ambitions, but the common man was merely exchanging a white government for a black one and the new masters were often, to them, equally as foreign.

Archives and National Identity

Archives has played and continues to play a pivotal role in encouraging national unity and identity. The National Archives was established in 1957¹⁶ originally as a records centre, but by the time the University was established it was geared to supporting the research of academics. There were very few published works suitable as textbooks for students, so the lecturers researched and wrote their own, often with the help of students. The students became the subjects of all kinds of surveys, but also were used to record history and customs and other observations. The beneficiary of the material collected this way was the University Library and its New Guinea Collection, where every possible variety of resource material was sought out and collected. Because the University was well funded for at least the first ten years, rare books and microfilms and other expensive items could be purchased.

The National Archives was far less fortunate financially and in terms of staff and accommodation, and indeed for the latter half of the 1970s had no qualified archivist. It had negotiated with Australian Archives

for the return, after microfilming, of those Papuan records which had been taken there in 1942. The captured German New Guinea records prior to 1914 had also been sent there in the 1930s, and these were the subject of a special microfilming agreement signed in 1990 and carried out in 1991.¹⁷ It was not till the early 1980s when a well qualified Chief Archivist (my predecessor) was appointed that the National Archives began to expand. Priority was given to attracting graduates onto the staff, now that those graduates of the early years had filled all the top government positions, and to getting a new building. By the time I arrived in 1989, both these aims had been achieved. There are five graduates, three of them already with diplomas from the University of New South Wales and two more expected in 1991.

The changed pattern of use of the Archives is very obvious to me after a gap of nine years. In 1970, the year the University produced its first graduates, nationals made up 2% of the researchers at the Archives. By 1980, this had risen to 20% and in 1990, 63%. The nationals who do use the archives are by no means all academics or students. In 1988 52% of nationals were non-academic or student and were researching land matters, or matters relating to village of origin and its people. By 1990, this was 56%¹⁸ and is expected to increase yearly, in much the same way as genealogists have come to dominate western Archives. A big difference however, is the purpose of such research: this is to lay claim to land rights and compensation for its alienation, or to dispute the claims of a neighbouring group. Papua New Guineans are well aware that the Archives may contain information that will bolster their identity and give them documentation to present to courts of law.

Automation

Because of this increase in use by nationals, many of whom have only secondary or less education, automation has become essential. When the average level of education is lower than that in western countries, it might seem that computers would be frightening to Papua New Guineans. Not so. I left the University of Papua New Guinea in 1980 before automation was started. By 1985 when I returned for a visit it was an accomplished fact with my former protégés proudly showing me how it worked. In the same way that Papua New Guineans became accustomed to the aeroplane before the car, they have had no hangups about computers superseding paper, which was always hard work for them. Western nations have been handling paper for centuries, while Papua New Guinea has used it for only one century. Writing in electronic form seems more magic, and Papua New Guineans are even now only one or two generations away from a belief in it, while Europeans exorcised it three centuries ago.

With the new building and graduate staff available, my priority is to achieve intellectual control over the archives. The finding aid system is extremely cumbersome, thousands of lists of files very much in the order in which they were received at transfer and filed loosely in departmental order. Few administrative histories or series descriptions had been done. The only person who always seems to know where to find a particular file is one clerk who has been there eighteen years and who is the least well educated. We therefore went straight into series description onto a computer, using one at the National Library with their kind consent. I spent the whole of 1990 begging for a personal computer from donor groups and funding bodies and was happily successful by the end of the year when the Friends of the National Library gave us one. It will take time to convert everything, but already we have over 700 series described with subject access as a bonus. We are using CDS/ISIS, UNESCO's free software package, and find it very satisfactory to our needs. We use it for several other programs besides series description. Six months after that donation we are desperately in need of another computer.

As I check through all the series descriptions done by the staff, the value of the archives is brought home. For instance, the Health Department records contain many files on how malaria has been fought and to an extent, brought under control.¹⁹ Then you read a report in the newspaper, how with communication cut off from Bougainville, malaria has once again increased on that island. The value of the patrol reports has already been mentioned. Many of these are very fragile, mainly because of overuse. Again, with the assistance of an outside donor, the University of California, San Diego, Melanesian Studies Resource Center, who are providing the films, they are being microfilmed. A copy goes to San Diego and they index them on computer and send us copies of the disks.

Documentation Programs

There is an institution for the creation of archives in Papua New Guinea, and this is very strong on encouraging national identity. The Institute of Papua New Guinea Studies has a *Music Archive* and a *Film Archive*. It employs full time researchers who visit all parts of the country recording music, which is very diverse. Some of you have probably seen films by Chris Owen who has worked for the Institute for many years and produced many excellent documentaries. These are ongoing and seem to have a reasonably secure future.

Oral History in Papua New Guinea has sadly fallen on hard times. In the earlier years, both academics and students at the University were recording historical stories, legends and customs, and were usually persuaded to deposit copies in the New Guinea Collection at the University of Papua New Guinea. It is no longer happening, whether

because academics and students are no longer doing so or whether they are not being asked to deposit their tapes I have not been able to find out. The Institute of Papua New Guinea Studies did have an oral history program in its ethnic department.²⁰ However, that department also processes the applications for permits for foreigners to do research in Papua New Guinea and no longer has time to do oral history. I would dearly love to set up an oral history program at the Archives, but even if we could get equipment donated, either the present staff have to find time to carry out interviews, or we have to pay others to do so, and there is no budget for that.

Oral history is so important in Papua New Guinea. When I was writing a thesis on the exploits of a Resident Magistrate in the Northern District of Papua, a fellow student, a Papuan, who was researching the same area through oral history, was able to give me the other side of the story. My 'hero' had published three books, basically telling the world what a strong leader he was in putting down a great deal of tribal fighting and bringing recalcitrant peoples to justice. In fact, my fellow student, now himself Professor of History at the University, was able to show how the men of one tribe had very quickly seen that the magistrate's guns were superior, so they had joined the police force and became the magistrate's most loyal supporters. They would then point out which tribes were misbehaving, and so the magistrate would lead a punitive expedition against people whose traditional enemies were his own police. Thus the stronger tribes manipulated the colonial master to carry on their own fighting.²¹

Photographs are also important to fostering *National Identity*. The New Guinea Collection at the University has the largest and best organised collection, totally computerised. The Institute of Papua New Guinea Studies also had a collection which it had created and which were passed over to the National Library a few years back. The National Archives has the old Office of Information collection. The Office, which existed under various names since the War, was closed down in 1982. Its collection consists of tens of thousands of negatives, contact prints and colour sides, but its finding aids are primitive and patchy. There are also many unsorted photographic prints. As the professional staff have so much to do in records and archives work, for the time being we are encouraging volunteers to help with descriptions. These are usually expatriate wives without jobs though we have had some Papua New Guineans too. They fill in work sheets which after checking can be fed into the computerised description program.

Everyone is suffering from financial difficulties these days, but one advantage in being an underdeveloped country is that well researched project submissions can often attract international funding. It seems to me that the photographic archives and the collection at the National Library could be the target of such a submission.

Provincial Archives

As mentioned above, the Provinces are still often seen as more important than Papua New Guinea as a whole, and certainly there is a need to set up a local resource centre and archives in every province in order to reach the people. So far, we have one National Archives branch in Lae, Morobe Province. It is badly sited and it had been suggested that as it was costing money it could be closed down and its archives transferred to Port Moresby. However, faced with the prospect, there are moves in Lae to re-site it, possibly at the University of Technology where it would enjoy the support of the academic staff and students. The only other province with a resource centre and archives, is the Southern Highlands. Unfortunately, most Provinces have extreme managerial and financial problems and a number of their libraries which were nationally organised before independence but handed over to Provinces later, have been closed down. So long as Archives remains a national responsibility, and pending legislation will ensure that it will, branches could be located in association with established institutions such as university centres or teachers' colleges, or the more viable public libraries. This has been proposed following the pattern of regional archives in New South Wales.

Archival Education

With so few personnel in National Archives and no real provincial organisation, education overseas for the top professionals remains the only viable solution. The real need for education is of the hundreds of records officers in government departments and in the private sector. Apart from the need to improve efficiency, this group needs greater awareness of archives and what it can offer, and a common education for them will give them a sense of national identity and the role records play in that identity. This is now being implemented by a proposal from the Department of Library and Information Studies at the University of Papua New Guinea to establish a course in Records Management at a sub-graduate diploma level. It will consist of a two year part time course and accept only students who are already employed in records or archives. People in such positions can seldom obtain a year's leave to do a full time course.

The course will run over two summer school sessions at the University of six weeks each, called, in Papua New Guinea, Lahara sessions. During the two years there will be four hours tuition per week, at the University for those in Port Moresby, and through the University's Extension Studies for those outside. When established, it is hoped to include Pacific Island Archivists in the latter. Earlier, the Department of Library and Information Studies and the National Archives had jointly proposed to the Association of Commonwealth Archivists and Records Managers (ACARM) that an Archivist trainer

be funded to do some training in Papua New Guinea over a period of six weeks, and this has been acted upon to the extent that Dr Peter Orlovich had been asked by them to consider if he could take this up. The new course is to be funded by the International Development Programme (IDP) and Dr Orlovich will start that off. With such a prominent archivist educator to run the first Lahara session, we believe the course will soon receive national and indeed, international recognition and the students so trained take back to their departments, a real sense of national identity.

Outreach

There is a great need for education of the public about archives in Papua New Guinea, and we are not short of ideas, only the means to do so. We do, of course, play host to touring groups from schools, colleges and university as well as other interests. Other publicity such as publishing projects and exhibitions take special effort when basic needs have to be put aside. However, we have an enthusiastic and loyal staff, and as more of them get exposed to archival theory and practice and attend such conferences as this, where ideas are discussed, we can expect the future of the National Archives to be sound.

Conclusion

National identity in Papua New Guinea, though fragile at present, is certainly being assisted by all aspects of the activities of the National Archives and others who believe in the social role that Archives plays. The future looks very bright in spite of the country's extreme economic, financial, and law and order problems. There are still a great many dedicated people getting on with living, and who are working to achieve a viable economy and a united country. Rome was not built in a day, and no less should be expected of Papua New Guinea.

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