CULTURAL DIVERSITY
AND
THE UNITED PAPUA NEW GUINEA
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by

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PREFACE

Cultural identity in one Papua New Guinea nation-state has become a subject of debate in recent times (Lindstrom 1990; Iamo 1990; Narokobi 1980). The central question is how could it be possible to have one national identity when there is no dominant culture and 'diversity' devalues and discounts any common cultural attributes (Lindstrom 1990).

In this Discussion Paper, we attempt to argue that diversity should not be perceived solely as a discounting factor in our search for a common national identity. We showed that social systems of Papua New Guinea before contact were isolated, yet there was evolution of 'culture areas' which were sufficient to form confederacies of isolated communities despite diverse, distinct languages and cultures. Cultural groups were able to interact and communicate across social and geographical cleavages.

Today, cultural diversity and distinctiveness are largely facilitated through education, communication and social interactions. Communication and exchange across cultures has taken place more intensely because people acknowledge and respect each other's existence and uniqueness (or distinctiveness).

We propose that cultural diversity should be a key concept in Papua New Guinea's cultural policy, as at the local and regional levels, because of the 'cementing' role that this diversity has served in forming a true basis of the now Papua New Guinea nation-state.

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INTRODUCTION

The construction and maintenance of national identities and cultural policies invariably differ from one polity to another. As is the case in the United States of America, it is taken for granted that there is such a phenomenon as the ‘Melting Pot’ — an assimilation process through which all ethnic minorities are expected to go in order to be accepted as Americans (see Glazer and Moynihan 1975; Henry 1976). Similarly, in the case of China, being a Han Chinese is to be a Chinese to which all other fifty-six ethnic minorities are to be assimilated (Wu 1990; Ma 1990; Yang 1990). Wu argues that Chinese assimilation policy has shifted towards a more flexible 'laissez-faire' approach, whereby minorities fluctuate between their own ethnic identities and that of the Han Chinese. Yet, the Chinese assimilation model has been severely criticised and opposed in many critiques.

Japan's cultural model is quite unique compared to those of China and the United States of America. For the Japanese, nihonjinron is the cultural model in which the natives are the creators (Befu 1990). Nihonjinron is premised on several primordial factors. First is the assumption that Japan is culturally homogeneous (toshitsu or doshitsu). This perceived homogeneity dismisses heterogeneous elements or minority ethnic groups as insignificant, and this is a conscious decision on the part of scholars, writers, and policy makers in Japan.

The process of cultural construction and maintenance of cultural identities in the Pacific region have recently received considerable attention from many scholars (see, for example, Crocombe 1976; Howard 1989; Keesing 1982, 1989; Keesing and Tonkinson 1982; Lindstrom 1982; Linnekkin 1989; Loiskandl 1988). It has been argued by Keesing (1982) that the process of colonialism was crucial in making people self-conscious of their culture:

Perhaps it is only the circumstance of colonial invasion, where people have had to come to terms with their powerlessness and peripherality, that allow such externalization of culture as symbol (Ibid.: 301).

In New Caledonia, where the French are still upholding the European legacy of colonialism, the indigenous Kanaks have, for the past twenty years, been demanding independence from France. The Kanaks have combined political rhetoric of colonial injustices and subjugation by France with cultural recognition and consciousness in their quest for an independent Kanak State for New Caledonia (Winslow 1991). In Vanuatu, Solomon Islands and Fiji, 'kastom' and 'tradition' and the hierarchical chieftainship system have been incorporated in the political and administrative structures of the nation-state and have been used as a hegemonic force over their peoples (Lindstrom 1982; White 1992; Jolly 1990). The Solomon Islands and Vanuatu are predominantly populated by Melanescians and, while there may be no dominating cultural groups, the elites have employed custom and tradition in their administrative and political structures in order to unite diverse peoples. Indigenous Fijians, comprising
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Melanesian, Polynesian and Indian elements, have used the hierarchical chieftain system as hegemonic force to subjugate the minority Indian population. Unlike other Melanesian groups, Fiji's customary land tenure was codified by the British Government, and chieftainship was recognised to have existed hand-in-hand with the colonial administration, thus enhancing cultural nationalism.

Cultural construction and national identity policies in these polities and in other cases appear to forge a mainstream and dominant cultural model, to the detriment of the ethnic minorities. The will to accommodate the ethnic minorities appears to be the root problem in their (conscious or unconscious) cultural policy making. What is intriguing and, perhaps enlightening, is the existence of an assumption that there must be a primordial cultural basis of a nation-state to which ethnic minorities should be assimilated, whether by conscious or unconscious decisions. Thus there are two strands of the Western model. The first is the French Model of the modern nation premised on the principle of equal rights and freedoms and equal access to government resources because the citizens are entitled to their rights and freedoms as they belong to a nation with demarcated political and geographical boundaries. The other is the Italian Model or the 'irredenta type' where the idea of nation is not based on a geopolitical boundary with a colonial history, but on history and language (Loiskandl 1988).

The construction and maintenance of any national, Papua New Guinean identity presents a new look in the making of national identities and cultural policies. It should be stated that Papua New Guinea's case is unique and does not fit any one model. However, it may be a model for culturally and linguistically diverse ethnic groups that have been historically amalgamated into a nation-state. Colonially bequeathed institutions were the fundamental basis upon which the gem of the nation-state of Papua New Guinea gave birth and from which independent and self-evolving cultural groups were influenced (coerced) to communicate, socialise, interact and congregate as a loosely fragmented union (see Keesting 1968; Narokobi 1980). Essentially, the political and economic colonial discourses integrated the fragmented, isolated, small-scale kinship social systems into a Western nation-state model. Created basically as a plantation economy, a system of indentured labour compelled young men to leave their natal village communities to work for the foreign plantation owners and return home again when their term of indenture ended. It was during these initial plantation contexts that, by historical accidents, the diverse peoples — Papuans and New Guineans — were thrown together to become conscious of their cultural differences.1 As the pacification process began, the first colonial administrations were properly established, and government institutions and services permeated cultures and societies. This

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1 For the history of plantation economy and culture and people, see Fitzpatrick (1980); Amash, Good and Mortimer (1979). On questions of labour and culture contact in the plantation and urban migration contexts, see Levine and Levine (1979).
brought people together and the process of cultural integration and awareness became more rigorous.

The decades leading up to self-government and eventual independence on 16 September 1975 were predominantly geared towards economic development, which glossed over cultural growth. It was not until 1974 that cultural development was perceived as a cornerstone to nation-building, with an Australian grant of $3 million to set up a cultural policy and program and the accompanying administrative mechanism. The function of the Cultural Act and the attendant policy was to establish national cultural institutions with the specific functions of preserving, reviving and maintaining as well as disseminating cultural identities and cultural artifacts of the diverse groups of people in Papua New Guinea (Crawford 1977). At independence, it was presumed by many leaders at different levels of society that we were a community, which would represent the general will and interests of all but one sector of Papua New Guinean communities.

In Papua New Guinea's case, Lindstrom (1990) presents a different scenario (see Lindstrom 1990). There is no common cultural denominator — all communities are discounted by 'greater diversity'. Until now, as Lindstrom (ibid.) mentions:

"...culture has continued to be conflicted space...these disagreements, in part, relate to several uses of an idea of culture...traditions have been harnessed to the tasks of national unity, development and identity building....this kind of talk also serves regional claims of autonomy and disengagement from national institutions (ibid.)."

Indeed, we do not perceive diversity as having discounting or disintegrating effects, although it can. Nevertheless, we argue that diversity can still be maintained and may not necessarily have a debilitating effect because these diverse Papua New Guinean cultures have been interacting through a variety of discourses, warfare, conflict trade and exchanges, throughout history. Thus, the educated, such as the elite and the village dwellers, realise that they have a national culture while at the same time they have pride and respect in the maintenance of their localised identities which in turn feed other groups and the wider national culture.

It is not that Papua New Guinea is having difficulty in developing a national identity. The fact is that extraordinary diversity in cultures and linguistic groups within a nation-state presents a new kind of model for a national identity and culture in the making. At the threshold of independence, there were regional claims of self-autonomy by separatist movements throughout the country (Griffin 1975; May 1982; Badu 1982; Nelson 1976). Also, there were moves to establish independent nations such as Papua, New Britain, New Ireland, Bougainville, and other areas. This resulted in a provincial government system giving political autonomy to nineteen provinces, commencing with the
now strife-torn Bougainville, in a unitary State with a parliamentary system of
government. Under the decentralisation schema to share national powers and
functions, each province and their local communities were given the
opportunity to establish cultural centres, with the aid of the National Cultural
Council as the coordinating body. This provided a lot of impetus to foster and
nurture cultural policies and identities at the regional and community levels.

Currently, regional claims of political autonomy abound. North Solomons is
one case in point, where the province has successfully opposed Papua New
Guinea's security forces and has claimed unprecedented independence on the
basis of cultural and physical attributes (see Filer 1990; May 1982). The strength
of Bougainvillian nationalism is premised on their perception that they are
geographically, culturally, racially and economically different from other Papua
New Guineans (cf. Filer 1990). Cultural nationalism is employed by regional
and cultural groups as a right to political autonomy. In our quest for a national
identity and cultural policy, we must discover how to construct and maintain a
national cultural identity overriding all cultural groups, yet not imposing on
them or 'killing' them, while at the same time encouraging and maintaining
varying regional cultural identities. The question is whether this is possible in
the Papua New Guinean situation.

This paper discusses cultural diversity as the conscious or unconscious
cultural policy making of the governments of Papua New Guinea since
independence. It has deliberately pursued this line of discussion as there is not
just diversity but a 'greater diversity' which may evolve into political roles, as
with Bougainville today, and perhaps, others will follow suit. This calls into
question the function of culture at different levels of society in Papua New
Guinea and to what extent national-level culture should function to have an
integrating effect. The paper takes an historical look at Papua New Guinea's
cultural development and policies and what the future holds for Papua New
Guinea in its quest for 'greater diversity' and construction of cultural policies and
identities. Successive governments have, since independence, promoted a
culturally diverse society model (plural society). Therefore, it is argued that
Papua New Guinea must have a national culture that is fostered by a cultural
policy which can exert a hegemonic force over the diverse cultural groups, while
at the same time enabling all cultural groups to maintain their cultural
autonomy, as practised today.

TWO MODELS OF DIVERSE SOCIAL SYSTEMS IN PAPUA NEW GUINEA

Despite its small population of some 3.5 million people, Papua New Guinea
is culturally and linguistically the world's most heterogeneous and complex
country. If ethnic diversities are identified by language, it is estimated that
there are some 700 to 1,000 language groups. Hence, if they are further
categorised, there are tens of thousands of linguistic and tribal groups. To date,
there still has not been any accurate count of the number of tribes in Papua New
Guinea. Many geopolitical boundaries were demarcated by the colonial
administration, and were either redesigned and carried over to the Independent State of Papua New Guinea or were further redrawn by the government for electoral purposes.

The diversity is so extraordinary that hypotheses are still needed to successfully explain the puzzle. Two explanations are offered to articulate the diversity theory. One theory suggests that the diversity has resulted from successive waves of immigration from South-East Asia, which first led to the settlement of mainland New Guinea and later the outer islands. However, a second theory proposes that it was an independent evolutionary occurrence.

Cultural pluralism and identities abound in Papua New Guinea. Diversity—pluralism—is maintained by a repertoire of cultural attributes, and these are maintained by group members as social boundaries upon which selection, incorporation and rejection of group members are effected. Identification is anchored in small-scale village communities or cultural groups, and these are embodied in common language, shared history, shared mythical legends, kinship, customs, traditions, rituals, and shared land and sea boundaries. Contact, integration, communication, contact and interaction did occur before Western-induced contact, through trade and exchanges. Colonialism, through its institutional infrastructure crisscrossed geographical cleavages and sociopolitical boundaries to encourage diverse peoples to interact. This contact was important because in different social settings (mission schools, plantations, government stations, during the Second World War and so on), indigenous people became more conscious of their diverse cultural attributes. These repertoires of cultural identities were not forged to blend into a common superculture. Rather, groups socially ascribed their status in comparison with others, through stereotyping physical attributes such as physical make-up, skin colour, language, histories, customs and traditions.

A sketch of pre-contact cultures shows how they evolved as communities unto themselves yet communicated, exchanged and crossed geopolitical boundaries. This continued until their inception as the independent nation-state of Papua New Guinea, and continues today.

Our case is illustrated with two models of social systems, with differing degrees of diversity as the crucial factor which distinguishes them. Model 1 comprises self-evolving and self-regulating social systems, and what separated them from other social systems were the physical and spatial barriers as well as war and conflicts. In Model 2, social systems are perceived as loosely amalgamated cultural groups linked by trade and exchange relations despite the linguistic, political and physical barriers. It is argued that these loosely amalgamated cultural groups can also be perceived as culture areas which expand and incorporate others, but are not exclusionist or isolationist, as is the case with Model 1.
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Model 1: Self-Evolving Social Systems and Isolationists

Prior to contact with the outside world, the people of Papua New Guinea lived in small isolated communities. In reality, they may even be alluded to as isolationists of the extreme type. Contact and communication were relative, depending on the nature of their sound relations and geographical settings. The pre-contact isolation is evident — that the people of Papua New Guinea live on 400 islands and speak more than 700 different languages. The relative isolation was because of a number of reasons which included geographical cleavages, and fear of warring tribes and sorcery. For example, when discussing trade in inland New Guinea, Hughes (1973) mentioned:

The trade delegations that travel so widely since pacification are a new phenomenon in this area; formerly, armed parties rarely moved more than 8 to 10 miles in closely settled parts, and even among the scattered hamlets of the southern lowlands travel rarely exceeded 12 to 15 miles. In general, the closer the density of settlement, the more restricted was individual movement, showing that the presence of enemies rather than physical distance was the principal obstacle (Hughes 1973:108).

Only after contact with the outside world was the isolation for many groups reduced, with the colonial intrusion, missionary pacification, and the introduction of modern means of transportation. This meant that it was then possible for Papua New Guineans from different language and cultural groups to communicate with each other in a larger geographical and territorial scale, through newly developed common languages — mainly Tok Pisin, English and Police Motu — in new imposed Western social institutions.

Socially, the people lived in villages and hamlets and other kinds of settlements. Some large villages had populations of a few hundred people, while some hamlets had no more than thirty people. These villages and hamlets were organised along lineage, clan or alliance groupings. Apart from the isolated cases of chieftainship found in Madang, Mekeo and the Trobriand Islands, political organisation was based on the Melanesian 'big-man' system (Sahlins 1963; Harding 1965). Political groupings ranged between a few hundred and a few thousand. Some of these political groupings were based on language and some shared languages with neighbouring political groupings (Chowning 1977).

Isolation meant that village communities remained as social systems, almost as self-evolving polities — micro-nations unto themselves. This would have given land, sea, customs, and traditions important functions in the maintenance of a homogeneous social system. Thus deviation from the group norms and values was limited and if it did occur, individual culprits would be vanquished or rehabilitated in the interest of the community welfare.
Model 2: Loosely Amalgamated Confederacies

Contact, communication and exchange were relatively intense amongst some groups, mainly through trade networks and exchanges. Indeed, it can be argued that despite the linguistic and cultural diversities enhanced by sociopolitical and geographical conditions, Papua New Guinea was now like a spider's web, which connected its main cultural groups through trade links, and peripheral groups were indirectly bonded into loosely fragmented confederacies. Also, there may have been social systems of the largest type compared to the micro-isolationist model already discussed. Malinowski's (1915) Kula Ring was connected to Seligman's (1910) Mailu-Aroma trade and this was further connected to the bigger Hiri trade between the Motuans of the Central region and the Keremas of the Gulf of Papua (Leach and Leach 1983). Not only was the trade in the Papuan region between seagoers but it also expanded inwards to touch the peripheral groups in the Gulf region and the Highlanders of New Guinea; the Motuans and their hinterland neighbours; the Koitas and the Goilalas; and the mainlanders and island peoples of Mailu and Southern Massim regions.

In regard to the Highlands region, similar patterns of trade relations existed between the Highlanders and some coastal groups in the Papuan region, and also groups in parts of mainland New Guinea. The Islands region was also heavily crisscrossed with trade links which connected with the people of mainland New Guinea. Groups from Siassi and Umboi — being the centre of the Vitiaz Strait exchange — traded with people in New Britain; the people from the islands off the coast of Manus traded with neighbouring groups in New Ireland, who in turn had trade links with groups in New Britain, the Tolais and the Bukas of Bougainville; and they also traded with groups from the West Sepik and East Sepik regions.

Hughes (1973) described a very extensive trade network, much of which was localised in the New Guinea Highlands but which also covered parts of the lowlands region hundreds of kilometres away:

The highlanders produced polished stone axe-blades and used domestic pigs as a means of converting garden staples into valuables. Axes and pigs were their main exports. The trade areas of the main quarries are shown in Fig. 5.2 but the products are known to have reached as far north as the lower Ramu and the Adelbert Divide, west to Lake Kopiago and south to the deltas of the Papuan Gulf. To the east, they met competition from the Eastern Highlands, but there was some overlap. The highlands and adjacent regions had a vigorous salt trade, dominated in this area...by a "factory" in the Wahgi Valley. However, many highland groups made potassium salt from plant ash and exchanged it locally...Pottery from the hills region penetrated as far as the north side of the Wahgi Valley. A valuable tree oil reached the upper Wahgi from the south-
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west, and lowland woods and fibres entered the highlands periphery from both north and south (Hughes 1973:101-104).

The Vitiaz Strait trade was centred in the Siassi Islands but also covered parts of the mainland and the island of New Britain, as described by Harding (1965):

"...the Siassi is at the center, an inner right of coastal villages, and an outer right composed of inland peoples. They are thus defined within northeastern New Guinea which includes the Tami Islands, the coast of the Huon Peninsula as far south as Finschhafen; the Rai Coast to its western end at Astrolabe Bay, together with the hinterlands of these coasts which are bounded on the south by the Sarawaged and Finisterre Ranges; Arop (Long), Tolokiwa (Lottin) and Umoi (Rooke) Islands; the Siassi Group; the northwestern tip of New Britain (Cape Gloucester) and the south coast of New Britain as far as and including the Arawe Islands (Harding 1965: 10-11).

Despite the general isolation of these pre-contact societies and the differences between them, there were some areas which were recognised as 'culture areas'. They were considered as such because of shared cultural similarities and fusion or exchange of ideas and knowledge. Some of these 'culture areas' were consistent with those areas in which there was interaction between communities, such as the trade networks mentioned above. For instance, there is the Massim culture which is found in the south-east of New Guinea. This area covers the islands in the Trobriand group and nearby islands. The classification of this area into one culture area is based on a number of cultural factors, the outstanding one of which is material art. These culture groups were not mutually exclusive, although they may have expanded through trade and warfare. The Korwar culture area is centred on the islands between New Britain and mainland New Guinea, particularly the Siassi Islands. Again a very strong factor of similarity in this area is the material art. As already shown, there was much interaction between the peoples of the highlands for this area to manifest certain similarities between groups.

The cultural areas that existed before contact with the outside world were distinct from each other and may have been unknown to each other, although it was possible for distinct cultural and linguistic groups to exchange as evidenced in trade exchanges. Trade relations among cultural groups of non-Austronesian and Austronesian linguistic groups was a marked aspect of exchange. Either there were multilingualists as translators, or communication was intelligible between distinct cultural groups. This is evidenced by Southern Massim groups and Mailus, Mailus and Aromas, Motuans and Keremas, Siassi Islanders and groups in New Britain, inhabitants of Madang and Highlanders, and the list continues.

All of these cultures were representative of the areas in which they were found and could not be said to be representative of Papua New Guinean
culture. In other words, as unique and diverse as they were, the linkages forged through trade and exchange relations did not amount to a national culture. Instead, they existed in their separate spheres of cultural influence and affected others as much as they were in the varying degrees of exchange and trade networks. For instance, Massim culture is representative of only the southeastern end of New Guinea, while the Huon culture is only representative of the middle northern New Guinea and offshore islands area.

They remained, as a consequence, loosely amalgamated social systems which transmitted, within them, ideas and knowledge, arts and cultures, and intermarried despite the fact that linguistic and geopolitical boundaries existed. And, while maintaining their localised identities and cultures, they interacted as partners in trade and exchanges.

CULTURAL AWARENESS AND IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION

The years prior to political independence saw Papua New Guineans becoming aware of their diverse cultures, especially on a wider scale through electronic and print-media, through increased communication and interaction by educated people from coastal regions and the highlands, and from the mainland and the islands. Many early nationalists such as Bernard Narokobi, student activists such as John Kasapwalova, John Waiko, Arthur Jowadimbari, Leo Hannet, Kumalau Tawali, and so forth, began a literary campaign juxtaposing Melanesian nationalism against everything colonial and Western. More than anyone, Narokobi, in Melanesian Voice — a weekly forum in the Post-Courier in the 1970s and commentaries of which were later incorporated in a book The Melanesian Way (1980) — saw his mission as a philosopher and literary critic of colonialism to influence minds and thoughts of diverse nations of peoples (this would include Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, Fiji and New Caledonia) as peoples within national States. In his literary endeavour he writes:

Some people say this nation of ours will be united through Parliament, public service, roads, bridges, armed forces and the like. I say, maybe, maybe not. The one thing that can unite us is ideology, or philosophy. My writings may be no more than meandering. They may be romantic or even apologetic. But I make no apology. Every race, every nation needs an ideology or philosophy. What I say wrongly today let the learned of tomorrow, or even this very day, set right. But if I do not say something today, those of tomorrow will have nothing to go from, even to correct (Narokobi 1980:v).

Even the pioneer Professor of Anthropology and Sociology at the University of Papua New Guinea, Ralph Bulmer, saw diversity as a responsibility of the discipline of anthropology to facilitate in nation-building in Papua New Guinea.
In his inaugural lecture at the University of Papua New Guinea he went on to propose the following:

Cultural diversity, then, and problems of communication and translation between peoples of different cultural background, provide the central reason why social anthropologists have a necessary future here, in studies of change as much as in studies of tradition (Bulmer 1969:27).

Nevertheless, anthropologists were just as concerned as the pioneer political leaders of the cultural diversity; early leaders began to develop some interests in Papua New Guinea to have some 'cultural unity'. 'Cultural unity', as the basis for national unity became the slogan of early politicians and nationalists. In the first and second Houses of Assembly, leaders such as Oala Oala Raria, Lepani Watson, and the late Dr John Guise wanted early independence and a united Papua New Guinea. In the 1970s, it became a famous slogan for the United Party coined by Mathias Toliman who referred to diversity as 'United we stand, divided we fall'. In more forceful rhetoric, Narokobi had to re-echo at independence:

Papua New Guinea's political independence in 1975 did not necessarily mean that Papua New Guinea was united once and for all (Narokobi 1980).

Instead, he goes on to say that culturally the people of Papua New Guinea had always been united:

Without the wheel, gunpowder and kings, queens, emperors or high chiefs, PNG maintained a fine sociological balance based not on large nation states, but on small communal autonomy. Some people call this disunity, anarchy, even chaos. I say it is an aspect of unity, because no one group can claim on the basis of its technology that it is better or superior to another.

All of us had a common belief in the living reality of our ancestors. We believed even the trees, the rocks and natural life had souls or entities to which life can be attributed (ibid.: 24-25).

Second, culture was seen as a possible source of national identity and pride. For instance, Michael Somare, an early nationalist, when speaking about the need to develop a national identity out of the diversity of cultures, said:

The task cannot be achieved merely with goodwill or sensible legislation. It requires, above all, knowledge. We must know who we are. We must understand our past, appreciate our traditions. We must discover how much we have in common (far more than most of us think we have) but at the same time
we must be aware of, but tolerant of our differences (IPNGS Annual Report 1974-75: 2).

Third, the interest in 'cultural unity' was due to the belief that there were common elements of Papua New Guinea's traditional cultures which could be used in modern-day developments. Again, Narokobi discusses this belief:

We should spring from our cultural values to forge ahead in a world that is moving more and more towards a confused uniformity, monotony and insensitivity to the fine, subtle and sublime beauty of diversity. It is the simplistic imperialist who seeks uniformity as a technique to command obedience in a land of division, of disunity, of 700 languages and thousands of cultures (Narokobi 1980: 11).

Beginning in about 1974, during the years of decolonization, Papua New Guinea went through a rigorous period of soul-searching. Among many issues, such as political systems, national identity was an issue of discussion, with focus on culture as one of its bases. At this time, Papua New Guinea had an influx of Africans, South Americans (mainly from Caribbean countries), South and South-East Asians and many liberal academics from Western developed countries. These people mainly converged on the University of Papua New Guinea and became deeply involved and were very influential in shaping the thinking of the early leaders of the nation. Perhaps because of these people's experiences in their respective countries, which appeared to be similar to those of Papua New Guinea, the leaders preferred their advice to that of the colonialists.

From the experiences of the above-mentioned foreigners, a main body of ideas developed that the emerging new Papua New Guinean State should not emulate any foreign definition of 'national identity'; we should not be too hasty to adopt foreign concepts of identity which had become catch-phrases, but allow a 'national identity' to develop out of the diversity of cultures in the country. For instance, the foundation Director of the Institute of Papua New Guinea Studies, who said:

...and arising from this is the desire and the need to make Papua New Guinea a unique nation, not merely a blueprint of Australia or the Western world.

But how can people assert this uniqueness, when every day the economic, social and political changes force them to conform more to the rest of the world? An easy answer is to create rhetoric without bothering to define the core of the problem. It is a problem common to the Third World. 'Negritude', the 'African Personality' and now the 'Melanesian Way' are such phrases. They serve a useful function, in that they create much-needed enthusiasm, and pride and they act as temporary
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...morale boosters. But they fail to define the identity which the users of such phrases are actually seeking. To create a sense of identity then is a task of the utmost importance, for it involves the complicated way of welding a new, a national identity of the hundreds of local identities that have existed in this country in the past (IPNGS Annual Report 1974-75:2).

DIVERSITY AND SOCIAL INTEGRATION

Cultural diversity has become a key factor for national identity amongst Papua New Guineans. A common political philosophy, if you will, that reverberates amongst the educated and political elites is 'united we stand, divided we fall' (see Yagi Ambu, 1974, Vol 1, No. 3). Despite its political connotations, Papua New Guineans acknowledge that their country is divided according to old colonial boundaries — Papua versus New Guinea; as according to contemporary regional/ethnic divisions — Southern, Highlands, Momase and Islands; and as culture-specific groups — Motuans, Tolais, Trobriands, Chimbus, Hagens, Taris, Markhams, and so on.

Cultural diversity has been largely facilitated through education, social interaction and communication. In the post-colonial era, Papuans and New Guineans were directly or indirectly forced to work together in plantations through the indentured labour system, or conscripted as war carriers and fighters. Within these varying social settings they interacted and learned each other's cultures and languages to communicate, or they devised and used Police Motu and Pidgin to communicate across cultural barriers. Communication and social interaction and exchange expanded with Western education, provided both by the colonial government and missions. Given the fact that different cultural groups have existed in space and time in relative isolation, but forging them together in the new social setting, was not a hindrance. At schools, colleges and later universities, ethnic regionalism was exhibited in sports, mutual associations, festivities and other social avenues where people could compete and display their cultural artifacts through dances and festivities.

Attachment to culture-specific groups and ethnic regional groupings is stronger because the carriers identify shared primordial attributes; and while one can have influence over these shared cultural attributes, they are not mutually exclusive or expansive. Having their own sphere of influence, they can be incorporated or they can incorporate cultural artifacts of others. Much borrowing of cultural artifacts has occurred between groups that have had trading and exchange relations. It was widely held that one's sphere of cultural influence should be respected and acknowledged as territorial space to maintain self-identities and outlook.

It is the acknowledgement of one's cultural space and perpetuation of self-evolving identities which accommodates cultural diversity on the whole. Trobriands, Tolais, Motuans, Chimbus, and so on, are all given equal opportunities in festival avenues to maintain their varying identities through...
dances, songs and other cultural items. Nonetheless, it does not mean that they cannot incorporate people from other cultural groups, either as acquired through marriage or as friends, to enact their cultural items. It has become a common thing for Papua New Guineans to do this.

Diversity is accommodated by social integration maintained through reciprocity and communication. Because groups have mapped out their cultural spheres of control and influence each group can incorporate or reject attributes as well as members. Papua New Guinea has no superculture. If there is a national culture, selection of attributes or motifs is usually done from ones that stand out and depending on who does the selection. Motifs used in contemporary designs of structures or clothes are the Sepik Haus Tambaran, Trobriand Canoe Prones, Oro tapa designs, Mekeo and Motuan Body Tatoos, and others.

Despite the acknowledgement of the cultural diversity, the educated Papua New Guineans do have a 'national culture'. Diversity in cultures and languages is talked about as having a unifying effect. Cultural groups have their bases in village communities which have their own cosmos, histories, legends (mythical), shared land, shared descendants, shared customs and traditions. An educated Papua New Guinean who has no affiliation with villages, having been born in urban areas or provinces other than their parents' natal place, learns from his village 'wantoks'. It is not a disuniting factor to be a senior public remnant from Sepik, Motu, or Chimbu, to have pride in displaying among their colleagues a unique culture which they possess, no matter how old or modern it may be. Conversations are centred more around what they have in common than the derogatory aspects of their culture. Commonalities are centred around tracing their kinship roots back to a village and land, having faith in beliefs in magic and sorcery, death after life, and customs and traditions, and despite possessing different physical attributes they see themselves as blacks with gradations in their skin colour and physical features as compared to Caucasians or Asians.

A concept which may not be uncommon or unfamiliar to other Pacific cultures, but is practised by many educated Papua New Guineans in urban and rural settings is the shifting of identities in a pendulum of urban-rural continuum.

In urban lifestyle, you live like a 'master'. It is seen as an amalgam of people not just from Papua New Guinea but from the world over living in one big village. Your business is as a full-time wage-earner. Your workmates are from Papua New Guinea and elsewhere. English is the primary language although Tok Pisin and Motu can be spoken at any time. At work and in public places you observe dressing codes, unless there is an excuse to put on your 'bilas' from your home. Leisure times are spent with the family watching EM TV, flabbergasted with soap operas or commercial ads for consumer items; or if engaged in sports and recreation you are outdoors perhaps the entire weekend; or one may prefer nightclubs and womanizing; or civic activities for community
or church groups. If you belong to a denomination, whatever day of the weekend is your Sabbath, you are at church begging for forgiveness — as kinsmen, workmates, sportmates, schoolmates, or acquaintances and friends you meet in different social settings and institutions uniting you all as the urbanites.

But being urbanites doesn’t excuse one from not visiting your kinsmen in your natal place in the Highlands, Islands, Southern coast or Northern coast of Papua New Guinea. There is kin pressure from family members to share a bit of your earnings. When you do return to your rural villages, one behaves just like the village folks; eats the same food, sleeps in the same house, talks the same language, sings the same songs, tells the same mythical legends and oral histories, wears the same costumes as they do, and engages in all work activities as they do, no matter how laborious or tiresome and boring they may be.

This, an urbanised Papua New Guinean can do — shift his or her identity from urban base to village and from culture to culture. In cases where there are intermarriages, there have been success stories and some not so successful. In many successful stories and cases we know of from marriages between Tolai-Central, Manus-Central, Morobe-Mekeo, Chimbus-Tolais, and so on, the understanding of one’s cultural norms is important. The couples through their families educated themselves and their children in proper etiquette and they behave appropriately, if they are residing or visiting one family or another. In urban settings they are more liberated and are free to behave like every other urbanised person.

DIVERSITY AND CULTURAL POLICIES

The first source of inspiration from which cultural policies received their force, or legitimation, was from the National Constitution. Knowing that diversity is a factor to be accounted for, The Preamble makes reference to the following:

We, the People of Papua New Guinea....Pay homage to the memory of our ancestors....The source of our strength and origin of our common heritage....Acknowledge the worthy customs and traditional customs of our people....which have come down to us from generation to generation....Pledge ourselves to guard and pass on more who come after us our noble traditions that are ours now.

Similarly the fifth goal of the National Constitution calls for development to take place primarily through the use of Papua New Guinean forms of social, political and economic organization.
Given these goals, the early cultural policies of the country were devised with a deliberate bias towards all of the indigenous cultures of the people of Papua New Guinea, with the hope that, given time, a national culture will develop out of this diversity.

The first ever government legislation relating to cultural policy was passed by Parliament in 1974, following a grant of $3 million from the Australian Government for the Cultural Service and the formation of the National Cultural Council in 1973. The legislation passed was the National Cultural Development Act (1974). This Act legitimised the establishment of the National Cultural Council and three other cultural institutions, with the Council as the central coordinating body. Each cultural institution had different functions. These three other cultural institutions were: the Centre for Creative Arts, the Institute of Papua New Guinea Studies and the National Museum.

In the adoption of the National Cultural Development Act 1974, the diversity of cultures in Papua New Guinea was taken into consideration and also recognition of the need for the creation and promotion of a national culture. This is clear in the functions of the Council, as stated in Subsections (c), (d), (e) and (g):

(c) to establish national, district and local cultural institutions and cultural centres; and
(d) to control and regulate a National Cultural Development Service; and
(e) to promote and encourage the development and preservation of national and local culture; and
(g) to foster the expression of a national identity by means of the Arts (Cultural Development Act 1974).

Among the functions of the Centre for Creative Arts, in Subsections (a) and (c), the Act stated that the Centre was responsible to the Council:

(a) for the development of contemporary cultural forms in the fields of expressive, visual and fine arts and designs; and
(c) for encouraging persons talented in any of the Arts to draw on the culture of the past to develop distinctive contemporary art forms.

Two of the functions of the Institute of Papua New Guinea Studies also take into account the diversity of cultures and the need for formulation of national cultures. The 1974 Act stated that the Institute was responsible to the National Cultural Council:

(a) for carrying out research into, recording and interpreting all aspects of the traditional culture of the indigenous inhabitants of Papua and New Guinea; and
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(b) for the development of a publications program to inform the people of Papua New Guinea about all aspects of indigenous cultures.

Since 1974, the National Cultural Development Act has been amended many times, for various reasons, including the necessity to accommodate the creation of other national cultural institutions, such as the National Theatre Company, Raun Raun Theatre and Skul Bilong Wokim Piksa. In the amendments, these new national cultural institutions were also given functions which took into account the diversity of Papua New Guinean cultures and were geared towards the development of a national culture. The National Cultural Development Act existed, in many amended forms, until 1990 when it was repealed to make way for the Tourism Development Act, which legitimates the creation of the National Tourism Corporation. The National Culture Service is now subsumed under this Corporation and its functions are stipulated in the above mentioned Act.

Prior to the establishment of the National Tourism Corporation, the National Culture Service was a division within the Department of Culture and Tourism. In 1998, and prior to the establishment of the Corporation, the Department of Culture and Tourism produced a 'Five-Year Cultural Development Plan'. Among a list of fourteen objectives listed in the plan, two of them read:

1.4 to assist the provincial governments in their efforts to develop and preserve their indigenous cultures; and

1.5 to create an incentive amongst the people in order to ensure the continuous survival of Papua New Guinea's cultures and traditions.

This plan, in addition to the 'Five-Year Tourism Development Plan' (1990), partly formed the basis of the National Tourism Act (1990). In this Act there are fourteen functions which are listed as those of the Corporation. Two of these read:

(b) to take measures to protect the cultural rights and identity of individual ethnic groups; and

(c) to provide effective support towards conservation, preservation and promotion of cultural heritage as an obligation to maintaining national identity.

Much has changed since culture has come under the commercial National Tourism Corporation which identifies culture simplistically as performing arts, visual arts and crafts, and national heritage, but omits a wide array of areas in religious scythes, rituals, magic, architecture, costume, prehistoric sites, plants, animals, fish, dietary patterns, food, agriculture, customs and traditions, laws, social organisations, leadership, and so on. Of all places it only identifies two cultures — urban and rural — as if they are that neatly given.
The policy is well-intentioned but calls for a wholesale marketing of culture in order to provide economic opportunities for village people, and regions which are deemed scenic but backward and where there is the intermingling of human life with nature — fauna, flora and marine life. In his address to an audience the First Secretary of the Corporation remarked in passing: 'our cultures are still virgin and needed rape'.

A public outcry, especially a women's liberation group in Port Moresby forced him to apologise to the female population for drawing such a parallel with rape, when rape and violence were the pressing topics of debate.

DIVERSITY IN CULTURAL PRACTICE

Apart from the taking into account of Papua New Guinea's cultural diversity and recognition of the need for the development of a national culture in national policies, this is also pursued in practice in line with some government directives, such as the declaration of national dress day known as Toana Day and the directive for all schools to set aside one day of the week to be known as Culture Day.

On 28 April 1976 the Post-Courier reported the Prime Minister, Michael Somare, declaring Friday to be a national dress day, to be known as Toana Day. The paper reported that the move had been taken to encourage and promote pride in national identity and culture. The Prime Minister was reported to have said that it was not compulsory to wear 'national dress' and that there were no rules about what constituted 'national dress'. The paper reported:

- 'People were free to choose whether or not they should wear national dress.'
- 'He (Mr. Somare) also said there were no hard and fast rules about what made up national dress.'
- 'In the same article Mr. Somare was quoted to have said, "I am hopeful that in time a style will emerge which can be identified as Papua New Guinean."'
- 'For the moment it is up to the individual to define what he or she considers constitutes national dress' (Post-Courier, 28 April 1976).

Following the announcement by Mr. Somare, people wore what they considered to be 'national dress' to work on Friday of every week, which was always reported in the newspapers every Monday. Varieties of styles were always reported in the newspapers. The women mainly wore 'meri blouses' and lalapaps or long skirts and tops while the men came up with mostly 'sulu' or lalapaps and afro-type shirts.

The announcement by Mr. Somare also created some argument about 'national dress' which surfaced in the newspapers. Letters to the Editor mostly
expressed agreement with the idea of having a 'national dress' but many warned against the imposition of rules of what should constitute this 'national dress' and encouraged individuals to take the initiative in the matter. For instance, one writer commenting on Mr. Somare's hope that a national style would emerge, said:

Please let us go as far as that but not having it eventually become a compulsory National Dress (Monkofa Korajanto, 6 May 1991).

The then Chief Licensing Commissioner, John Nilkare, also wrote to the newspaper saying that he would ask liquor licencees to encourage their staff to wear what each person considered constituted 'national dress'. He then added:

By this I don't mean that the establishment should draw up a uniform type dress for their staff, but should allow the staff their own self-expression (J.M. Nilkare, 6 May 1991).

Also, in national and provincial festivities where cultural items are performed, there has been increasing discouragement of rating one cultural group against another. The ruling is that the culture of one group cannot be judged against another because they are all different and all of them are equally excellent in their own ways. This directive is stated clearly in the Cultural Development Plan 1988:

All National and Provincial festivals incorporating either traditional dancing or purely cultural shows must be authentic and the costumes used must be traditional. No competitive judgement is allowed, but all groups taking part must be considered as winners (p.31).

In recent years, diversity has been hailed as a virtue rather than a vice. For instance, this was echoed by Professor John Waiko during the opening of a wing of the Australian Museum in Sydney, in which he said:

Since independence in 1975, Papua New Guinea is beginning to draw our balance sheet of cultural gains and cultural losses. I believe Papua New Guinea realises now more than ever that our identity and survival are anchored in her diverse cultures, some of which are represented in this exhibition (Waiko 1990: Man Without Pigs).

CONCLUSION

In the final analysis we rhetorically ask: while all primordial bases of Papua New Guinea's cultural identity continue to be a conflicted space on the grounds of diversity, can diverse constructions and images, at international, national, regional and local levels be perceived as an integrating force in nation building,
rather than a devaluation factor? Again, rhetorically, should we live in the shadows of Western nations, where there is, simplistically, one way of doing and perceiving things? Should the nation-state not be made up of plural cultures and ethnicity and each given the opportunity to prosper and propagate as well as identify with a national culture while not being mutually exclusive or expansionist? For Papua New Guinean and other Melanesian cultures we are observing how localised cultures and identities are constructed, valorised and maintained, and continually mediate their relationship with other cultural groups, outside influences and the larger nation-state. Bougainville, of all, highlights this scenario better than any other in Papua New Guinea. The resulting effect is that the political and administrative systems have to be redrawn to conform with local-level cultural nationalism and identity.
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_______, (Korajanto) 'Let's have a choice — slacks or laplaps', 6 May, p.2.

_______, (Nilkare) 'Ideas are welcome on Toana', 6 May, p.2.

_______, 'Hohola-Tops Toana', 10 May, p.3.

_______, (Meri Dress) 'Let's look at them once again', 7 May, p.2.

_______, (Tūrūna) 'Comfort, Pride', 17 May, p.2.

_______, (Vunalier) 'Police should dress up, too', 17 May, p.2.


_______, (Petersen) 'Meri dresses? No thank you', 26 May, p.2.

_______, 'Paradise Day', 31 May, p.3.

_______, 'National dress for everyone', 11 June, pp.25 and 29.

_______, (Front Page Girls) 'Cool, cheap and easy to make', 17 June, p.2.

_______, (Girāurie) 'Give meaning to schools', 24 June, p.11.

_______, 'School Uniform - Tusbab style', 25 June, p.31.


