

Inside out: methodological issues on being a 'native' researcher

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Introduction

There is increasing concern, certainly in the area of health research regarding the question of who is best suited to be researching Pacific peoples and communities. In the current climate of political correctness and cultural appropriateness in New Zealand as elsewhere in the Western world, issues such as these are being raised not only by the organisations and institutions who are funding research, but also by the subjects of enquiry, viz., Pacific peoples and communities themselves. Indeed it is embarrassingly becoming obvious that this portion of New Zealand's population are the most 'unhealthy' according to all health indices¹. The concern which is raised in the following paper focuses on the importance of qualitative health research — who is best equipped to do this research, and how should it be done?

This paper is based on excerpts from my PhD dissertation², and deals with the concepts of insider/outsider/native research. Although focused on these concepts in relation to anthropology, there are useful insights contained therein which will provide space for those of us involved in the research process to sit back and reflect on what we are doing, who are we doing it for, why we are doing it, and what we will be doing with the results. That is to say it provides a space to consider qualitative methodological issues as insiders, outsiders, or natives³.

your way
objective
analytic
always doubting
the truth
until proof comes
slowly
quietly
and it hurts

my way
subjective
gut-feeling like
always sure
of the truth
the proof
is there
waiting
and it hurts

Konai Helu Thaman, in *Hingano*⁴

From my reading of the burgeoning scholarship on insider/outsider anthropology⁵, three points are significant. The first is the apparent collapse of the boundary between insider/native, the second is the confusion of some native/insider anthropologists about their identities which leads to the necessity for clarification of native as opposed to insider anthropology, and the third is the need to reconsider the relationship between native/insider anthropology.

Insider = native?

In her introduction to the National Association for the Practice of Anthropology (NAPA) Bulletin 16: *Insider Anthropology*, Cerroni-Long states that with the demise of the comparative approach in Anthropology:

...efforts aimed at de-reifying culture end up eliminating an indispensable element of cross-cultural comparisons: cultural boundaries. Without cultural boundaries there is no clear way of defining the relationship of the cultural analyst with the phenomena under observation; consequently, the differentiation between alien and native also disappears, and, as it does, anyone studying a social setting becomes an insider by the mere fact of "being there" to study it⁶.

This development is largely attributed to the influence of Geertz and his interpretive approach⁷ which argues that each culture is "an ensemble of texts, themselves ensembles, which the anthropologist strains to read over the shoulders of those to whom they properly belong"⁸, and that "anthropological writings are themselves interpretations" (ibid.:115). This has far-reaching implications. Geertz put a literary metaphor at the centre of the anthropological enterprise⁶. Together with the postmodern deconstructive approaches and concomitant doubts cast on anthropological representation, the most significant result has been the erasure of cultural boundaries. Ethnographic research in this view becomes the analysis of meaning as subjective, poly-

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phonic, and "...a view of culture as disjointed, unbounded, and inchoate..." (ibid.). Moreover, the debate within anthropological circles about ethnography and the representation of culture, of identity, the 'self' and the 'other', has made ethnography more about the ethnographer than the people under scrutiny.

The 'native' once again has been objectified. Kuper states, "If the focus is upon the experience of the ethnographer, the native may enquire why ethnography should serve as an exotic accompaniment to the psychotherapy of the Western self..."⁹.

The 'native' strikes back

Native protest against metropolitan ethnographers has been around for a long time, especially among African intellectuals—and others—from the 60s onwards¹⁰, and is not merely a product of the postmodern turn. Certainly writings from a non-Western world view abounded. It is my contention that postmodernism is the West's way of finally acknowledging non-Western intellectual frameworks, albeit by claiming them as their own 'new' intellectual movement. However, the idea that only natives can study or write about natives is also problematic.

These problems are highlighted in the writings of some non-Western anthropologists. Lila Abu-Lughod talks about problems of representation and advocacy in the introduction to her *Writing women's worlds: Bedouin stories* (1992), Medecin considers *Learning to be an anthropologist and remaining "native"* (1987), Jones reconsiders the meaning of social advocacy for a black intellectual studying a black social enclave characterised by internal conflict (1995), and Narayan asks the provocative question: "How native is a 'Native' Anthropologist?" (1993).

There have been other interesting critiques written by native ethnographers—and also by 'halfies' (a term that Abu-Lughod (1991) and Narayan (1993) use of themselves). Kuper states:

*They have expressed reservations about the privileged insight ascribed to insiders pointing out the difficulties that may confront the anthropologist working in his or her home country (though, almost always, among people to whom he or she is an elite outsider), and protesting against the chauvinistic rejection of foreign expertise...*⁹.

Indeed Cerroni-Long states that Narayan promotes a postmodern view of social fragmentation, where cultural boundaries become erased, and where "we can glorify in the

*accidents of birth or material conditions that provide us through our hybrid self, with easy access to multiple realities"*⁶.

Narayan states: "That my mother is German-American seems as irrelevant to others' portrayal of me as 'Indian' as the American mothers of the Tewa' Alphonso Ortiz, the 'Chicano' Renato Rosaldo, or 'Arab' Lila Abu-Lughod"¹¹.

Thus in Narayan's view, the insider/outsider contrast is secondary "to the issue of dismantling objective distance to acknowledge our shared presence in the cultural worlds that we describe..." (ibid.:680).

How 'native' is insider?

I refer here to the apparent identity crisis that some 'native' anthropologists are experiencing. Obviously Narayan is appealing to the idea that somehow 'outsiders' and 'halfies' can be equally objective, but is this really possible? The answer lies partly in how you identify yourself, partly in why you are doing the research, partly in who you expect your audience to be, and partly where you consider your home to be, all in

relation to who you consider to be your 'people'. In other words we need to examine the differences between social identities¹² as an aspect of the social self, and personal identities and the roles associated with these.

Merton argues in an important paper¹³ that individuals have not a single status but a status set. Consequently

to suggest that "one must be one in order to understand one" is fallacious since one is not just a woman, or white, or a college graduate, or middle-aged, but may be all of these and more. The key point is the difference between native and insider. As Cerroni-Long points out:

*...status sets involve some that come to us through birth – providing us with native membership – and some which we enter – thus becoming insiders – either by choice or by natural progression through life. Knowledge does not flow automatically from either type of conditions, but access to knowledge does....In the case of culture, the learning touches so many areas of our cognition, emotion and expression, and in some fundamental ways, that while a person can learn how to survive...in a culture different from the one in which he or she grew up, this "simply adds another layer....It doesn't eliminate what's underneath"*¹⁴.

Merton's status sets can further be clarified by a closer examination of social identities and associated roles. Kopytoff talks about social roles as either immanent existential identities or circumstantial existential identities in gender roles

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among the Suku¹⁵. He writes that, "Some social identities are culturally defined as having to do with what people 'are' in a fundamental sense, indicating a state of being (...in the West, father, woman, or priest)...in contrast to social identities that are culturally perceived as being derived from what people 'do'...identity based on their roles (...physician, teacher, or policeman)..." (ibid.:80). He defines immanent existential identities as: people do X because of what they are, and circumstantial existential identities as: people are X because of what they do. The latter implies that a circumstantial identity lapses when the role is shed whereas an immanent one is relatively immutable.

While Kopytoff's analysis focuses on social identities only, I contend that it could well be extended to explain personal identities also, in particular, ethnic identity. To go back to Merton's example of a status set above, while one may be a woman, white, college graduate, middle-aged, married, mother etc., each status can be broken down into an aspect of either social/personal identity, or immanent/circumstantial existential identities. Moreover out of all the statuses outlined in this example, relatively fewer statuses can be regarded as aspects of ethnic identity, i.e., white, woman.

From my research, the case of Samoans born in New Zealand throws some light on this matter. There will be very few persons in this cosmopolitan and globalising world who can lay claim to be a pure-breed or one-blooded. The status sets that each individual is provided with through birth and through early life experiences provide us with native membership, but only if the individual is *emotionally tied* to those status sets:

In the case of my research group¹⁶, not one individual was not of mixed blood, i.e., most were part-*palagi*, some were part-Chinese, but not one of them identified themselves as part-anything. All of them either identified as Samoan or New Zealand-born Samoan. The point here is that blood quantum and continuity of cultural traits has always been reified by foreign researchers and governments. What is relevant is how these people identify themselves and why they continue to identify themselves in certain ways. Ethnic identity, in the context of opposition and conflict is therefore personal with emotional long-lasting attachments experienced in the economic, spiritual, historic symbols that one is exposed to during a lifetime, and must be differentiated from the status-sets which are transient and not emotionally-binding but a mere fact of circumstance. Therefore although my status-set

is woman, native of New Zealand (by nature of being born in New Zealand), of Samoan parents, university-educated, teacher, anthropologist, pianist etc., I must separate my social identities from my personal identities in some contexts. Therefore my ethnic identity would be a NZ-born Samoan woman because I am *emotionally tied* to these immanent existential identities—the other statuses or identities are circumstantial or transient—merely facts. Another way of saying this is that an ethnic identity must be one that you can live

with. As one member of my focus group stated: "...I know I am part-Chinese as well as Samoan...but while I acknowledge my Chinese side, I draw more strength from being Samoan. I identify myself as a NZ-born Samoan".

Where does this strength come from? My answer to this is that if history is "the art of remembering"¹⁷, then identity is the art of remembering who our mothers and grandmothers told us we

were, and how these memories have impacted on our life experiences, and vice versa¹⁸. Our ethnic identity is thus situated historically, socially, politically, culturally, but more importantly *emotionally*.

Native anthropologists therefore need to know where their loyalties lie in terms of their personal and social identities. And this is complicated for native anthropologists who are members of minority ethnic groups, but born and bred in Western nations. In my case it is my ethnic identity which influences much of my social identity. To put it simply I am a Samoan who does anthropology, rather than an anthropologist who happens to be a Samoan.

Native anthropologists need to decide what their personal ethnic identity is before they can meaningfully write about or for their people, i.e., whether they are native, insider or outsider.

What is native v insider v outsider anthropology?

Native anthropology should be research by a native that people of his or her community want to get done and should result in research that "*ameliorates the human condition*" given that all native anthropology requires grappling with issues of power⁶. The primary concern of native anthropologists according to Jones is social equality and social justice. The starting point for a native anthropology therefore is to understand that non-white populations in pluralistic Western societies, and the people of most Third World countries share

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a history of colonisation and other forms of domination, rooted largely in racial, ethnic and cultural differences¹⁹. He states in his original explication (1970):

Thus it was my view that an individual who has experienced domination and oppression could probably add a new dimension to the anthropological description of the oppressed people....[A] black man in this century cannot avoid identifying emotionally with his people. I am an intrinsic part of the social situation that I am attempting to study. As part of the situation, I must also be part of an attempt to forge a solution¹⁰.

While Jones' position has not altered over the last 25 years, understandably he now adds the caveat that the concept of "one's people" is problematic (I agree). He points out the need for a native anthropologist to distinguish between commitments to one's people, commitment to ideas about one's people, and commitment to political goals for one's people. He also talks about the contradictions and dilemmas faced by native anthropologists studying their own communities in terms of the political and ideological choices that one has to make¹⁹.

Truth comes in portions, some large, some small, but never whole. Like our ancestors, we are expert tellers of half-truths, quarter-truths, and one-percent truths.... Truth is flexible and can be bent this way so and that way so; it can be stood on its head, be hidden in a box and sat upon.... Those who believe that truth, like beauty, is straight and narrow, should not visit our country or they will be led up the garden path.... Only Manu [a local eccentric] treads the straight and narrow path, followed by nobody because that path lies entirely in his head. Most real roads on our islands are very narrow, very crooked, and full of pot-holes²⁰.

One of the criticisms of a native anthropology is that cultural knowledge is internalised in the native but not understood²¹. The outsider on the other hand may reach understanding, but can never acquire true knowledge. Another valid criticism and one that perhaps Narayan¹¹ has fallen prey to is that ideas presented by native anthropologists often embrace the same perspectives found in mainstream anthropology although they are purported to realign or overthrow the discipline's ethnocentric formulations just because anthropology is currently practiced by native anthropologists¹⁹.

The bottom line is that native anthropology is a problematic perspective just as outsider anthropology is, but for different reasons. So why do it? Jones offers an explanation: "It is by confronting, analysing and working through the multiple social

realities, dilemmas, constraints, and choices that native anthropologists participate in as actors and observers that potential rewards of the undertaking exist" (ibid.:69).

What Jones demarcates is the idea that native anthropologists are native by the fact that they have experienced racist contexts and are committed to work towards change in the status quo for their communities. What I add to Jones's explication is that in my own context, native anthropologists are native also by the fact that they concomitantly identify with and are part of the persistent identity system of their parents, grandparents and their 'aiga (family, extended family) and church, thereby maintaining strong links with the homeland. Native anthropology, according to my definition then is practiced by those natives who live and work in ethnic minority situations and not in their countries of origin, and who are committed to working for their people and communities. I acknowledge that there may be multiple persistent identity systems to which different native anthropologists might be differently connected, and providing that the commitment to alleviate the subordinate position of their people is there, then the definition is a workable one.

An insider anthropology is a reflexive form of indigenous anthropology, not simply 'practicing at home'. It involves drawing heavily on the work of indigenous though not necessarily native anthropologists as I define above, coupled with outsider anthropology. By this definition then, an insider does not necessarily have to be an indigenous person. Comparing indigenous and non-indigenous anthropological

analyses of the same settings allows us to understand the culture-specific biases that affect both insiders and outsiders.

In the fieldwork context for non-indigenous insiders, it should include interaction between outsider with 'local expertise' and local expert or native, and the results should be specifically

offered for inspection to the people being studied as well as the academic community.

Needless to say, an outsider anthropology involves the traditional approaches of the objective, scientific, ethnocentric cultural relativist kind contained in the dominant theoretical discourses of the West, and also the not so traditional approaches of the postmodern turn, which in my view unsuccessfully attempt to discover the 'native point of view'.

From the perspective of a researcher then, one can take on outsider (purely objective and scientific) perspectives and methodologies, or an insider (which incorporates both indigenous and outsider perspectives), or a native. In my research

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context, using the reformulations above, I am both native and insider. The native aspect is that the research I have undertaken is focused on a community of Samoans, an ethnic group in New Zealand which is politically, economically and socially subordinate to mainstream New Zealand society. But more specifically, a community of NZ-borns who are also politically and culturally subordinate to their island-born 'aiga and Church elders. My work is to conscientise and emancipate this group of people. On the one hand I have experienced racial discrimination and institutionalised racism, but on the other hand I have also experienced the persistent identity system of Samoans in New Zealand². Identity thus becomes an issue of extreme importance not only for me but also for this group of NZ-borns, not only in terms of New Zealand society but also in relation to Samoan 'aiga and elders of the Newton Church community. This native perspective is further enriched by insider perspectives which are incorporated by using an eclectic approach. For Western resources, while drawing heavily from anthropological insights, I have also incorporated materials from other disciplines. I have also drawn heavily on both academic and non-academic resources written by Samoans, and other New Zealand-born Samoans.

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As a native and insider then, I have no claim to objectivity but as Wendt states: "...objectivity is for astronauts and moon flights; history is for mortals; and mortals, my friend, are not flawless and objective gods"²². To balance this bias, I have also drawn heavily from objective Western histories, sociologies, theories and discourses.

My research, complemented by these resources, has been illuminated by insights gained through my research on and continuing life-long involvement with the Newton Church community. My thesis is intended to be helpful not only to my community but also to the academic community and a contribution to the growing scholarship of research on Pacific Islanders in New Zealand.

Tupuola²³ gives us further insight into how to retrieve cultural knowledge by offering alternative native methodological frameworks. She remarks: "For too long non-Western indigenous researchers have been limited in their research because of the 'scholarship' attached to ethnocentric and culturally insensitive methodological frameworks" (ibid.:175). Tupuola goes on to highlight the very rich experiences of alternative methodology in the Samoan context, and argues for the need for the world of Western academia to acknowledge other cultures' perceptions of scholarship and knowledge. Tupuola stresses the necessity for both non-indig-

enous and indigenous researchers to take into consideration the culture of the participants, and to incorporate their culture into the methodological framework and written text.

Another significant example of an insider/native methodological framework is the ground-breaking *faletui* methodology used in Tamasese, Peteru and Waldegrave's qualitative investigation into Samoan perspectives on mental health and utilisation of "culturally appropriate" services in New Zealand²⁴. The authors state:

Constructs of method should emerge from, and faithfully reflect, the intrinsic source of its participants' needs and knowledge bases....The call for legislative and social relief, reflects a community which recognises that it is in crisis. It also raises serious questions for the research community regarding their ability to address their own roles, and appropriate processes of research within communities in crisis." (ibid.:9).

To return to the questions raised earlier — Who is best equipped to research Pacific

Islands people and communities, and how should it be done? The answer is equivocally insiders, outsiders and natives. All perspectives are important and relevant, however a methodological approach which incorporates all three—the native methodology as defined above—is crucial.

The death of anthropology in its reliance on the concept of culture has been prophesied several times. First of all, the objects of study, that is primitive peoples and therefore cultures, were supposed to die off. Then when they did not, the discipline was threatened by modernisation and the death of different lifeways. A further threat now in the making is the hostility of the traditional subjects of anthropology's practice!

Surely after surviving thus far, through the development of so many different theoretical perspectives, and even the onslaught of postmodernist critique, anthropology will survive in some new transformation, and hopefully, people of the Pacific and others will be part of it. It is not surprising that anthropology in New Zealand is proving to be at the forefront of this endeavour. The debates over anthropology in New Zealand do reflect the presence of indigenous intellectuals and there is a greater emphasis on the relationship between the researcher and the researched. We have had the benefit of a New Zealand anthropology that encourages native and insider research (Pat Hohepa on Waima, Kawharu on Orakei/Bastion Point, Walker on Maori society, Mahuta on structure of *whaikorero*, Ravuvu on Fijian ethos, as well as Te Rangi Hiroa and Apirana Ngata).

What we need in the Pacific are researchers who care about people. In all research investigations, mutual trust and understanding must be built carefully and sensitively. As with any human relationship, reciprocity, mutual participation, responsiveness, commitment and responsibility are essential. In turn this relationship will form the basis of our intellectual pursuit—the need to comprehend something in as many ways as possible to construct the composite that finally, more comprehensively allows us to understand an issue, phenomenon, or culture from perspectives of both the researcher and the researched.

Note

This paper is based on the following conference papers:

- Issues relevant to research for Pacific Island peoples: Insider research. Delivered at *Qualitative Methods in Health Research Conference*, Albany Campus, Massey University, 12–16 February 1996.
- Upside-down the more you turn me, inside-out and round and round: Methodological issues on being a 'native' anthropologist. Delivered at *Eleventh Pacific History Association Conference*, University of Hawai'i at Hilo, 9–13 July 1996.

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3. Used here as generic term/concept which emphasises and reclaims its origin as a colonial construct. Also used here to denote yet another category distinct from both 'indigenous' and 'insider' as defined here.
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'A'ohe pau ka 'ike I ka hālau ho`okāhi.

All knowledge is not taught in the same school.

One can learn from many sources. *Ōlelo No'eau #203*

