Peace Research in Pacific Islands: Bridging the Gap between Theory and Practice

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Abstract

Conflict is one of the major obstacles to the achievement of both the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and national development goals in any war-torn country. As conflicts are increasingly recurring in the Pacific region, many are seeking answers to deal with the underlying causes. Turning to peace research is one alternative to address problems that gave rise to conflict. However, this paper argues that a peace research that ignores indigenous knowledge and practices is likely to be resisted. Therefore, a practice-based inquiry as opposed to disciplinary and interpretive inquiry can fill existing or potential paradigmatic gaps in peace research. A practice-based peace research in the context of this paper refers to peace research that harnesses the indigenous concept of peace as portrayed in the example of nowe – the Temotu Nendo concept of peace. Theorizing peace as nowe signifies the worldview of Pacific Island people. As such, peacebuilding initiatives that are not culturally grounded would not contribute to sustainable peace. The aim of this paper is to inform readers about the practical issues relating to peace research in Pacific Islands' context.

Keywords: peace, peace research, Pacific Islands, Solomon Islands, theory, practice.

Introduction

Some researchers have argued that the field of peace studies is fundamentally challenged by the breadth of theoretical diversity it supports[1]. Such individuals suggest that lack of a single unified theory and discipline to act as a foundation from which knowledge can be built is a fundamental issue for peace researchers that preclude the extension of 'established knowledge.' The bodies of established knowledge that have guided peace

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[1] Paul Rogers & Oliver Ramsbotham, "Then and Now: Peace Research - Past and Future", *Political Studies, XLVII*, (1999), pp. 740-754.

research are commonly associated with fields of jurisprudence, philosophy, psychology, anthropology, politics and international relations, but peace studies has the central concern with issues of peace and conflict[2]. Thus, peace research can be multi-disciplinary and trans-disciplinary. Hence, Rogers and Ramsbotham [3] add that peace research is holistic in nature: combining quantitative and empirical methodologies and with a normative commitment to the analysis of conditions for non-violent social and political change.

Setting the context

The aim of this paper is to inform readers about the practical issues relating to peace research in Pacific Islands with particular reference to the context of peace research and practices in Solomon Islands. This is a preliminary analysis designed mainly to raise issues for further work. Therefore, it is not intended to provide a rigorous discussion on peace research theory and practice. Like any research, bridging the gap between theory and practice in peace research is a complex task. However, understanding key issues, such as the nature of indigenous knowledge and practices upon which the principles of peace sit, could help researchers to identify appropriate protocols to aide data collection.

Definition

Critical to the discussion about peace research are the concepts: peace and peacebuilding. These concepts are examined first with the aim of providing the conceptual clarity of what it means to bridge the gap between theory and practice in peace research in Pacific Islands. Whist the theoretical and practical underpinnings are central to this paper, their related issues are empirically and ethnographically grounded and so they have to be understood within a particular cultural context.

What is peace?

Peace research literature highlights different approaches which may influence people's view of what peace means. Within cultural context, peace holds different connotations in which peace is practised. Galtung [4] distinguished peace as inner and outer peace. An inner peace is a state of being which revolves around accommodating reverence for others, while outer peace relates to environment, the culture and other outermost interrelationships. Within these two spheres comes different meaning and concepts about peace. This author [5] further defines peace within the parameter of positive and

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[2] Rogers & Ramsbotham, *Then and Now,* p740-754.

[3] Rogers & Ramsbotham, *Then and Now,* p740-754.

[4] Johan Galtung, "Violence, Peace and Peace Research", *Journal of Peace Research,* 6, (1969), pp. 167-191.

[5] Galtung, "Violence, Peace and Peace Research", pp. 167-191.

negative peace. To him negative peace is cessation of violence and positive peace is establishing standards for justice, human rights and sustainable development in communities.

Nowe

So what is peace in Solomon Islands culture? In natgu language on Temotu Nendo, the concept of peace is termed as nowe which connotes a calm sea or still crystal water. This implies that the calmness of the heart embraces open-arm interaction in the community. Hence, when there is any conflict it has to be resolved so that an atmosphere of calmness overshadows the community again. The coinage of this concept was rooted in the relationship between the sea and any natural disasters like tsunami. A tsunami does not trouble the sea for a very long period but just a brief moment, and the sea returns to its normal state of calmness. It is through this conceptualisation that Temotu Nendo culture views conflict and violence as a brief social disaster to be dealt with promptly so that the calmness of the community is not disturbed. Nowe as a fabric in Solomon Islands peacebuilding has the potential to address ethnic hatred, environmental destruction, interpersonal conflict and structural violence. This indigenous concept of peace has been levering the mediation and reconciliation of conflicts and violence in Temotu Nendo. From a research point of view, understanding the concept of peace in such context could inform the theoretical framework of a peace research project.

Peacebuilding

Peacebuilding is difficult to define and even more difficult to achieve in practice[6]. Peacebuilding as a post-conflict reconstruction initiative in Solomon Islands for example, refers to programmes of action that aimed at addressing the underlying issues to the ethnic conflict and dealing with post-conflict development challenges. This definition edges on negative and positive peace[7]. Taking Solomon Islands beyond the post-conflict era is not a matter of absence of physical violence through the auspices of international invention, but of creating sound standards for harnessing justice, human rights and sustainable development. This paper is further informed by the more comprehensive and cultural definition of peacebuilding:

> those activities and processes that: focus on the root causes of the conflict, rather than just the effects; support the rebuilding and rehabilitation of all sectors of the war-torn society; encourage and support interaction between all sectors of society in order to repair damaged relations and start the process of restoring dignity and trust; recognise the specifics of each post conflict situation; encourage and support the participation of indigenous resources in the design, implementation and sustainment of activities and

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[6] Elizabeth M. Cousens & Chetan Kumar, *Peacebuilding as Politics: Cultivating Peace in Fragile Societies (*Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner, 2001).

[7] Galtung, *Violence, Peace*, p. 167-1191.

processes; and promote processes that will endure after the initial emergency recovery phase has passed [8].

One of the inferences of these definitions is that peacebuilding initiatives in post-conflict environments that are largely driven by military control are just maintaining negative peace and breeding new resentments. Therefore, in terms of Pacific Islands' culture, research that investigates indigenous peace practices could identify the tenets of positive peace. Findings of such research could provide insights into implementing peacebuilding initiatives in any post-conflict Pacific Island contexts.

Theoretical orientation for Peace Research

Miall [9] opposes the 'realist' and 'Hobbesian' theorisations of peace, favouring idealist, liberal-internationalist and structural traditions and has attempted to develop these into transformationist research agenda[10]. This methodological orientation is posited in the words of one of the early peace researchers, the Frenchman Raphael Dubois: "Would it not be wise to endow the science of peace with rich and strong schools, just as done for its elder sister, the science of war?"[11] Such an assertion is enriching, and encourages researchers to anchor peace research in appropriate methodologies and theoretical frameworks as a tool for achieving research aims. For some researchers, discipline-based research has established theories, concepts and methods that provide superiority in understanding reality. This is termed as being that "the faith researchers have come of age in the 'Milky Way' "[12]. Others dissatisfied with the discipline-based approach proposed the interpretation-based methodology. In some respects, the competition between the disciplinary and interpretive based enquiry is representative of a paradigmatic split within social sciences, particularly between subjectivism and objectivism[13].

Whether this split is a weakness or strength of the field of peace studies is a question that is debated. In the Pacific Islands, Wood [14] argues that apart from disciplinary and interpretive-based enquiry, the third competing research perspective is the practice-based

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[8] Rebecca Spence, "Post-Conflict Peacebuilding: Who Determines the Peace?" in Bronwyn Evans-Kent & Roland Bleiker (eds) *Rethinking Humanitarianism Conference Proceedings*, 24-26 September 2001, (St Lucia: University of Queensland, 2001), pp. 137-8.

[9] Hugh Miall, (1999). "What do Peace Studies Contribute Distinctively to the Study of Peace?" *Paper presented at the Political Studies Association Annual Conference*, 24 March 1999, (Nottingham: UK, 1999).

[10] Miall, *What do Peace Studies contribute?*

[11] Quoted in Peter Dungen van den, *Initiative for the Pursuit and Institutionalisation of Peace Research in Europe during the Inter-War Period (1919-1939)* (Bradford: Bradford University Press, 1996) pp14.

[12] Timothy Ferris, *Coming of Age in the Milky Way* (New York: Morrow, 1988).

[13] Gibson Burrell & Gareth Morgan, *Sociological Paradigms and Organisational Analysis*. (London: Heinemann, 1979).

[14] Houston Wood, "Three Competing Research Perspectives for Oceania", *The Contemporary Pacific* 18(1) (2006), pp.33-35.

approach, which some scholars refers to as 'the practice turn' [15]. Some Pacific Islands scholars support practice-based research because in reality, while something may be learned through disciplinary and interpretative approaches, such knowledge is meaningless unless practised[16].

The broad base from which methodology can be constructed allows the researcher the opportunity to navigate and apply critical consideration to the theoretical foundations in the context of the Pacific Islands. This is particularly crucial with respect to this paper serving as an encouragement and a contribution to 'Writing the Pacific', by Pacific Islanders. As an indigenous Solomon Islander, understanding what these theoretical frameworks include and exclude appeals to defining research contribution on the 'inside'. In the case of peace research, there are clearly grounds for considering cultural implications alongside the theoretical framework upon which the research has a bearing. There are also grounds for considering the implications for advancing the 'civilisation of peace' through the 'claim of cultural transformation' canvassed by a unity-based worldview, culture of peace and culture of healing[17]. Drawing on the relationship between issues associated with peace research and the competing research paradigms for the Pacific, the author insisted that these theoretical and methodological insights must be tested in practice, to ascertain the extent to which they can inform policy and peacebuilding. Hence, an empirically grounded approach that considers these issues and activities 'in practice' and 'in the everyday' living is best suited to overcoming orthodoxies relating to peace research in Pacific Islands. However, some distinctions remain to be made between the approach adapted in this research and the practice-based research methods. These distinctions are set out in the following section.

Peace Research in Pacific Islands

One of the critical features of peacebuilding is that it must be practical in order to address the underlying causes of conflicts. Fitting to this is the move towards practice-based research in the Pacific. The overall emphasis of practice-based research is on studying phenomena 'in practice'[18]. It is therefore important to have cross-country analysis of peace practices, so that peace research can draw from a number of different approaches. These include various peace-oriented activities aimed at peacebuilding in post-conflict environments. Researching peace in Pacific Islands warrants critical analysis. For example, the

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[15] Theodre R.Schatzki, "Introduction: Practice Theory", in Theodre R. Schatzki, Karin K. Centina & Eike von Savigny (eds), *The Practice Turn in Contemporary Theory* (New York: Routledge, 2001), pp 1-13.

[16] Edward H. Ayau & Ty K. Tengan, (2002). "Ka Huaka'i O Nä 'Ōiwi: The Journey Home" in Cressida Forde, Jane Hubert & Paul Turnbull (eds), *The Dead and their Possessions: Repatriation in Principle, Policy and Practice* (New York: Routledge, 2002), pp.171-189.

[17] Hossain B.Danesh, "Towards an Integrative Theory of Peace Education." *Journal of Peace Education,* 3(1) (2006), pp. 55–78.

[18] Wood, Three Competing Research Perspectives.

analogies offered by Teaiwa[19]: 'Rethinking the Pacific in a Global Context' and by Wood's [20] practice lens create a sense in which there is a defining context in which to research peace in practice. Wood, [21] in emphasising practice-based research, contends that this approach facilitates and encourages more continental disciplinary and interpretive dialogues. As practices are rooted in culture, some accept the idea that "culture is a verb, not a noun, a process, not a thing in itself"[22]. Niezen further adds that:

> …culture as a dynamic process [is] conceived as collection of practices. Practice-based researchers in Oceania will be able to talk to researchers around the world, but their conversion will centre on the articulation, disarticulation and rearticulation of practices, rather than on disciplinary or interpretive concerns[23].

Indigenous Pacific Islanders value knowledge preservation as it is handed down from their ancestors through generations. So the philosophy for Pacific researchers is not mere creation of new knowledge but growing and preserving traditional knowledge through generations. In the words of Wood, "many people in the region value the knowledge of their ancestors more than what is considered new"[24].

A researcher seeking to set the scope of researching peace practices and perspectives in the Pacific needs to draw on the practice-based perspective as it holds practical implication with respect to the research design. Knorr termed this as an "embedded architecture of empirical approach"[25]. Emerging from this discussion is a sense of understanding the framework for indigenous knowledge and skills which are of crucial importance to peace research in the Pacific. Therefore it is important to describe researching indigenous knowledge and practices and the nature of indigenous knowledge and skills as it applies to a context-specific culture. The context-specific culture used in this discussion is from the culture of *Temotu Nendo* in Solomon Islands.

Researching indigenous knowledge and practices

In the recent past, many scholars have engaged in indigenous research, and a number of people have studied indigenous knowledge systems in Pacific Islands[26]. In the

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[19] Teresia K.Teaiwa, "On analogies: Rethinking the Pacific in a Global Context", *The Contemporary Pacific, 18*(1) (2006), pp.71-87.

[20] Wood, Three Competing Research Perspectives.

[21] Wood, Three Competing Research Perspectives.

[22] Ronald Niezen, *The Origins of Indigenism: Human Rights and the Politics of Identity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).

[23] Niezen, *The Origins of Indigenism,* p 50.

[24] Wood, Three Competing Research Perspectives, p.34.

[25] Karin Knorr-Cetina, *Epistemic Culture: How the Sciences Make Knowledge (*Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), p.10.

[26] David W.Gegeo, & Karen Watson-Gegeo, "How We Know: Kwara'ae Rural Villagers doing Indigenous Epistemology", *The Contemporary Pacific, 13*(1) (2001), pp.55-88.

words of Gegeo and Watson, knowledge is generated through "… critical reflection on culture, history…politics, economic…in which [people] are living their lives[27], thus, positioning research in indigenous practices calls for techniques that reflect that culture"[28]. Researchers who want to investigate any aspects of culture and/or indigenous practices must first come to terms with the constituents of that culture as the foundation of indigenous knowledge. Gegeo and Watson in their analysis of Solomon Islands' Kwara'ae knowledge system write:

> *Kastom* embrace culture, tradition, norms and modes of behaviour, ways of thinking, doing, and creating; and of course, indigenous epistemology. Anything born of the land and passed from generation to generation is part of *kastom*. Indigenous epistemology is an inextricable part of *falafala*-custom[29].

In many Solomon Islands cultures, *kastom* canvasses knowledge that is important to indigenous people. Therefore, traditional protocol must be accorded when one wants to research indigenous practices.

The nature of indigenous knowledge and skills in *Temotu Nendo*

Indigenous knowledge and skills is a selfish wealth and commodity in *Temotu Nendo*. Traditional craftsmen selfishly practise their skills because they do not want others to know their traditional trades. To become wealthy in this culture is not a mere material accumulation but rather the possession of life skills and knowledge and how one utilises them to earn a living. Although traditional know-how is selfishly practised, one's derived earnings from his or her skills and knowledge is shared in community obligations. For instance, a skilful fisherman must demonstrate his gainful use of his skills through his number of monetary contributions in 'bride prices.' A boy is not allowed to live with his would-be wife unless the bride price is paid to the girl's parents. Therefore, if Peter contributed the highest amount of money to Tim's bride price, Tim's first child will be named after Peter. So the more Peter *kapele mude*[30] (extends his hand) in paying bride prices, the more Peter's namesakes will be found in the community. This is how one is able to extend his boundary of traditional influence, because

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Barbara M. Grant & Lynne S. Giddings, "Making Sense of Methodologies: A Paradigm Framework for the Novice Researcher", *Contemporary Nurse, 13*(1) (2002), pp. 10-28.

Unaisi Nabobo-Baba, *Knowing and Learning: An Indigenous Fijian Approach* (Suva, Fiji: Institute of Pacific Studies, University of the South Pacific, 2006).

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Konai Thaman, "Re-presenting and Re-searching Oceania: A suggestion for Synthesis", Paper presented at the *Pacific Research Health Conference*, September 2002, (Auckland: Sheraton Hotel, 2002).

[27] Gegeo, & Watson-Gegeo, *How We know*, p. 59.

[28] Nabobo-Baba, *Knowing and Learning.*

[29] Gegeo, & Watson-Gegeo, *How We know*. p. 59.

[30] Kapele mude literally means extending one's hand which in *Temotu Nendo* culture refers to the generosity of one's heart in assisting in traditional ceremonies such as bride prices.

the more people your name is given to, the more you have influence over the community. This is called being a *Bonie*[31] (traditional wealthy man) in *Temotu Nendo* culture.

It is clear that indigenous knowledge and skills are selfishly practised because people want to become *bonie,* so that they can lay claim of influence over a territory. However, this tradition has caused extinction of some distinctive arts in *Temotu Nendo*. One classic example is the art of making 'red-feather' money. Red-feather money making is near extinction because its art was not widely practised in the last few generations and therefore, in this generation only few people have the knowledge and skills of making red-feather money. This does not mean that indigenous skills and knowledge are not passed on to younger generations. They are actually passed on through the protocols of attachment, obedience and relationship. So if a boy wants to know a particular skill and knowledge from an elder, he has to be attached to the elder obediently and in doing so the elder will initiate the boy into the particular skill. When the elder dies the boy will take over the practice as a will from the elder. The process of younger generations' initiation into indigenous skills and knowledge through the above protocols is called *namno lam ma tepaliki*[32], connoting being preserved for future productive reciprocation.

Given the nature of the *Temotu Nendo's* indigenous knowledge and skills as discussed above, accessing indigenous knowledge is a difficult task for researchers who would like to investigate *kastom* practices of this culture. Therefore, researchers have to consider cultural values and ethics, and protocols of relationship, obedience and knowledge access. This does not come easily as one has to be accepted into the community in order to access the knowledge and skills. In peace research, researchers could face resistance because people, of *Temotu Nendo* for example, selfishly share their knowledge about conflict and peace. The reason is because there is a monetary value attached to waging war and creating peace. For instance, if one of the warring parties is unable to pay for the incurred compensations, a *bonie* usually comes to the rescue and he will be later reciprocated with traditional wealth.

Conclusion

In conflict and post-conflict contexts, the ultimate goal in peace research is to investigate processes and practices that would contribute to peacebuilding and sustainable peace. In the Pacific, particularly the Solomon Islands, the role of external intervention in peacebuilding has been criticized because of its incapability to resolve some of the underlying problems. This warrants the need for peace research in Pacific Islands. However as

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[31] *Bonie* depicts traditional wealthy people who translate their wealth into meeting traditional and community obligations. For instance, a *bonie* would always come to the rescue by paying compensation to reconcile any community conflicts.

[32] *Namno lam ma tepaliki* is a term used to mean preservation of one's good deeds for future reciprocation. For example, a young boy who obediently attached to an elder would be reciprocated by the elder by way of teaching the boy his skills to earn a living in future or paying the boy's bride price when will get marry.

discussed in this paper, peace researchers can address some of the root causes of conflict in the Pacific Islands if their investigations are theoretically sound and practically informed. Bridging the gap between peace research theory and practice in the context of the Pacific Islands, as exemplified in the *Temotu Nendo* culture, Solomon Islands, requires understanding of the nature of indigenous knowledge upon which peace sits. An understanding of the Pacific Islands' indigenous knowledge system would assist a peace research to employ culturally relevant research protocols that in turn add richness to fieldwork data.

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