An Overview of Psychology in the South Pacific

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Rationale for assembling this collection
This book contains a selection of articles from the South Pacific Journal of Psychology, which began publishing at the University of Papua New Guinea in 1984. The original aims of the journal were, and remain, to disseminate locally relevant, and theoretically challenging, psychology to the broader community of communities, including the community of psychology itself. This collection has been assembled primarily with those twin aims in mind. Research on the number of “hits” on the journal’s website indicates that there is interest out there in what the journal has been trying to achieve (Watters, Watters, & Carr, 1998). Until now however, our website (http://spjp.massey.ac.nz/) has been able to feature only abstracts rather than full-text articles. Even the journal’s paper-copy readership, with access to our full-text articles, has not so far been large, despite its evident relevance and uniqueness with respect to the contemporary issues that face us all. This means that students and scholars of Psychology in the South Pacific do not have ready and free access to material that is directly relevant to their interests. An e-publication of this nature is designed to help remedy that shortfall.

Having decided to e-publish previous material from the journal, our next task was deciding what to publish. In practical terms, we are not yet able to e-publish all the articles that the journal has ever produced. That is our next project! For the meantime, we have had to be content with concentrating on just one major issue, that has increasingly surfaced in the journal’s contributions. The issue we have chosen in that regard is global change. This is not by any means the only issue we could have chosen, and is not the only criterion we could have used to compile the selection we did. Our modest hope, therefore, is that this sample of papers will stimulate a broader interest in the journal, both in its past contributions and in its potential for future contributions.

Organisation of the book: Analysis of the theme of global change
There have been and are three meta-influence processes going on in the world today, and these are increasingly relevant to psychology as a whole (Marsella, 2000). These meta-influence processes are globalisation, localisation, and glolocalisation (Robertson, 1995). Although the precise labels given to each of these processes, in the social sciences and elsewhere, may vary, there are certain underlying conceptual convergences, as well as numerous examples of them within the development of psychology itself (Gergen, Gulerce, Lock, & Misra, 1996). These three process-categories interface with the twin aims of contributing towards development in general and development of the discipline of psychology itself.

The first of these meta-processes - globalisation - carries many definitions in the wider literature. Many of these however centre on the idea of movement towards a monoculture, which includes for instance consumerism, Westernisation, capitalism, “the free market,” and increasing individualism (Marsella, 1998). In his seminal paper on the psychology of globalisation, Marsella identifies a whole spectrum of social issues that are being promulgated by this process, and many of these are reflected, and reflected on, in the contributions within this volume. Thus, Part One of the collection focuses on issues that include change and loss of cultural identity; urbanisation and crime; disempowerment and suicide; and attempts at reconciliation between whole communities of “haves” and “have nots,” who are increasingly living within eyeshot (and sound-bite) of one another. The major conclusion that emerges from this section of the book is that globalisation cannot be left unbridled, either for the greater good of society or the sustainability of a predominantly Western psychology.
As the psychologist Henri Tajfel often reminded us, cultural norms are very tough (Tajfel, 1978). Just as the forces of globalisation will keep advancing, local norms and values will simply not be crushed underfoot. They serve too invaluable psychological functions, chief among them perhaps being provision of a sense of social identity. Such identities have not evolved to be where they are because they were un-adaptive. Any community whose norms are assailed will eventually, according to Tajfel, reassert itself and its particular and unique social identity. Any attempts at globalisation, and its social psychological counterpart of assimilation into a global monoculture, are only ever “part one” of the wider change process. Countering such processes, Tajfel argues, we will invariably witness a backlash of localisation.

This has already happened in psychology itself, as “Indigenous” psychologies have risen in defiance of the promulgation, and inherent assimilation-ism, of Western psychology (D. Sinha, 1989). In wider society too, we have had, and are having, multiple conflicts globally, centred around the revival of group and cultural identity, and the reassertion of traditional, Indigenous values. Some powerful recent examples of these, outside of the South Pacific region, can be found in Mays, Bullock, Rosenzweig, & Wessells (1998). The contributions in Part Two of this book therefore provide some exemplars of what localisation has looked like, and will look like, in the South Pacific region. These examples span both community development and the development of psychology itself.

Collectively, these fascinating contributions indicate that localisation is a necessary but not sufficient condition for development, in both senses, to proceed. What is still required is a third step, towards recognising the incompleteness of any psychology that is either purely “cross-cultural” (positivistic, universalistic, globalistic) or purely “cultural” (Indigenous, revivalist, localistic). Instead, what the psychology in Part three of the book advocates is a constructive engagement with the complexity of modern life; with the global and the local (Hermans & Kempen, 1998). In broader society, Tajfel saw this third stage as being part of the natural process of social change; and as consisting of the redefinition of self to include both global and local repertoires. Thus, my behaviour can include both individual competitiveness and respect for group cooperation. I can be a “local” just as much as a “global” citizen. To D. Sinha, writing about the same process within psychology itself, our discipline needs to embrace the ever-changing complexity of its subject matter - people and peoples - and to become more pluralistic. The contemporary writer Robertson terms this combination of global and local, aptly enough, “glocalisation.” At a more psychological level, the process is succinctly encapsulated in the idea of “Global Community psychology” (Marsella, 1998, p. 1282).

Part Three of the book therefore concentrates on projects and psychologies that think and act both global and local. Such psychology can be constructed and practised in diverse ways, and is inherently dynamic. Using a model of methods autochthonous to the South Pacific region, the contributions in this section outline six complementary pathways for thinking and acting “glocal.” These contributions may help to inform both theory and practice in the new Millenium. To the extent that globalisation (and localisation, and glocalisation) has been going on for centuries, and accelerated particularly perhaps during the latter part of the previous century within Indigenous communities, some of the keys to future development will lie hidden in that particular time and place. Our glance over the shoulder, at South Pacific psychology in the latter part of the 20th century, may therefore provide some unique lessons for global community development. Those lessons are illustrated in the following overview of the book’s contents.

Globalisation

Assimilation?

The opening contribution reports from Bellona in the Solomon Islands, where it employs cross-cultural field psychology to focus on cultures of honour and respect. Based on an overview of traditional normative systems, which was recently commended by the Bellonese community for recording valued island traditions, the authors Rolf Kuschel, ‘Angikinui, and Kiu ‘Angiki consider how successive waves of globalisation, from colonial administrations and missionaries to urban migration and unemployment, have placed strains on traditional ways of upholding honour and mana.
For instance, the modern-day Hakahua (or man of honour) is expected not only to be well-educated, but also to provide materially for unemployed kinsmen and relatives in urban centres such as the capital, Honiara. These dependents can include for example young men, who have been lured to the city by the promise of joining a modern economy but are then under-delivered on that expectation. In several ways therefore, attempts at assimilation into the global economy backfire.

**Fragmentation**

A further way in which globalisation can under-deliver on its promises, concerning participation in the global economy, is through forcing industrial closure and mass redundancies inside the local community. Our next contribution, by Velma Kameoka and Anthony Marsella, examines the human costs of one such closure - of an entire sugar plantation on Hawai‘i - to the Japanese-American community living there. In this contribution, the issue of social identity is placed centre stage, and the case study details for us how global economic pressures have broken down a priceless part of people’s lives - the sense of meaning and purpose that comes through everyday participation in the life and work of a community group. A central theme that emerges from this unique case study is that, change which means disregarding people’s affiliation and community needs is the antithesis of true development. It is change that represents destruction.

**Self-destruction**

Perhaps the most disturbing of such “developments,” not only in this region but also in the rest of the world, has been the rise of suicide rates in general, and Indigenous suicide in particular. Joseph Reser is a recognised authority on this particularly disturbing phenomenon, and in his scholarly overview manages to sensitively peel away some of the myths surrounding Aboriginal suicide in contemporary Australia. Very disturbingly, his analysis reveals that many of the apparently “accidental” deaths, among today’s Indigenous peoples (e.g., through alcohol-related road deaths), are actually quite deliberate acts of self-destruction. Moreover, many of the so-called “other” issues of community life in rural and remote Australia (where “community” is often a synonym for Indigenous community), such as binge drinking and domestic violence, can be seen as part of a wider picture of community fragmentation. Such destruction and disintegration has arguably been precipitated and facilitated by successive waves of globalisation, including the psychological pressures to assimilate that often accompany it. Our second reading on Indigenous suicide, by Nicole Coupe from Aotearoa/New Zealand, also discusses the importance of preserving a sense of identity. In this contribution, the possible buffering factor of having a positive sense of Indigenous identity is discussed alongside more ‘macro’ issues like societal prejudice, employment prospects, and socio-economic status. In this way, the contribution adopts a balanced analysis of suicide in community context.

**Re-building**

On Australia Day 1998, one such community was without warning destroyed by another increasingly global phenomenon, flash flooding. Tracey Tann’s chapter, on the aftermath of a 100-year flood in the desert, gives us a uniquely sharp insight into some of the psychological consequences of sudden, ferocious, and totally unexpected natural disasters. In particular, this chapter focuses on the consequences of one community attempting to “aid” its neighbours towards a recovery. Emergency assistance and other forms of aid are often undertaken as “helping people to help themselves” (Kellogg Foundation, 1992), but in this case that philosophy, along with many of the supposedly “global” psychological theories of helping that drive it, proved inadequate. Instead of the experience forging closer links between helper and helped, the occasion and its superordinate challenges fostered at least some perceptions, in the eyes of the helpers, of unworthiness and ingratitude among aid “recipients.” In the process therefore, we do not really know whether social capital was finally enhanced or in fact undermined.

**The Media**

Such doubts are not uncommon in aid projects generally (Carr, Mc Auliffe, & MacLachlan, 1998). One of the major reasons for “resisting” aid efforts may once more be the need to assert control over one’s own development. With that community need in mind, being “aided” can be psychologically
constraining, as indeed can feeling obliged to help those who do not appear to be appreciative of one’s assistance. Nowhere perhaps is this concept of constraint more applicable than through global media advertising for international charities (see, Marsella, 1998 for a detailed discussion of the global media). In her chapter on aid advertising, Kylie Griffiths focuses on one acutely constraining, “high pressure” form of aid advertising. This is the increasing presentation of harrowing “eye-bites” of abject child poverty, broadcast contiguously alongside scenes of relative privilege enjoyed by children growing up in communities that are affluent. Griffiths’ paper provides a first, and therefore unique glimpse of some of the social psychological consequences of this juxta-positioning, and of the extreme social inequities that characterise our age. The data that emerge from her study present some serious food-for-thought for international aid organisations, both here in the South Pacific, and indeed elsewhere in the global community.

The Internet
As the century develops, it is likely that these conventional “mass media” (television, print, radio) will continue to be eclipsed by the Internet. That megalithic communication channel, in theory at least, may eventually transform the entire global community into one giant communications network. As such, the Internet has the potential to give voice to all local communities, however disenfranchised they may have previously been. That is the exciting theme explored by Maya and Paul Watters, in the context of Filipino language development and rejuvenation. As the authors themselves point out, in some countries outside of the South Pacific region, the Internet has helped to stimulate new interest in languages Indigenous, and the community bridges that they can re-build. It has provided sites for on-line discourse and practice in the relevant, and otherwise forgotten, tongues. In the Philippines however, this does not appear to have occurred. Instead, English language sites have been preferred over Filipino ones. As Watters and Watters point out, this apparent reluctance may have much to do with the psycho-historical consequences of colonialism, and therefore an earlier form of globalisation. Evidently therefore, in this instance global technology on its own is not sufficient for local communities to find or flex their voice. Initiatives more pro-actively “local” are required.

Localisation
Leo Marai’s opening chapter in this section is in many ways a response to the woes and contradictions highlighted by Maier in Chapter 1. In the culturally diverse setting of PNG, Marai traces for us a litany of historical problems with a psychology that is inherently universalistic and global. At the same time however, he outlines a vision of the kind of psychology that could “make a difference” in the context of development within his country. Such a process-based initiative would be based on what Indigenous people themselves define as appropriate psychology, and would be constructed socially, through the participation and inclusion of local people themselves. A culturally appropriate psychology would thus, according to this contribution, be thoroughly community-driven and localised.

Reassertion
A cogent example of what can happen when such local norms and traditions are disregarded is given in the next chapter. L. Bau and M. Dyck’s study of the utility of selection tests, in the PNG military, offers what at first appears to be an alarming conundrum. Performance on ability tests, at selection, correlated negatively with performance appraisals conducted later in the candidates’ organisational careers (for a similar finding in the PNG context, see Price, 1984). One possible interpretation of these initially perplexing findings is in terms of local backlashes, against overly individualistic definitions of what achievement is, and how it should be expressed (Carr & MacLachlan, 1997). In many relatively collectivistic societies, such as one finds in PNG, social achievement would often be a salient social norm. To that extent, individuals who draw attention to their individual talents and abilities (for example with the “help” of individualised tests of ability) may be subject to centripetal (gravitational) social forces, designed to bring them back into the socially valued middle. Thus in theory, a negative correlation between selection tests and appraisal scores could indicate that the
selection tests are valid, but that the particular organisational system, and the values encouraged within it, require rethinking.

In the next chapter, that proposition is explored empirically, within a contemporary Australian context where centripetal “mateship,” or loyalty to the group before the self, is traditionally valued. On the Pacific coast of Australia, such centripetal norms have been found to have potentially catastrophic influences on attempts to introduce “Americanised” systems of working (McLoughlin & Carr, 1994). There, a local “tall poppy syndrome” means that high achievers are chopped down and reined in. In that particular kind of social context, Smith and Carr find that attempts to “impression manage” one’s résumé, by highlighting one’s personal achievements (as globalisation is urging us all to do), may result in reduced ratings from selection panels. That kind of reaction is especially likely, these authors observe, from panellists who are male and who score negatively on measures of anti tall poppy attitudes.

Indigenisation
More locally appropriate systems of selection, motivation, and appraisal, might not have created so many problems for those who aspire to work within them. That theme of localisation is taken up and developed further by Graham Davidson, in the context of Indigenous psychologies within Australia. In his chapter on developing an applied Aboriginal psychology, Professor Davidson uses group-based and inductive techniques, as well as narrative approaches, to glean some glimpses into what Indigenous psychologies might look like. At the time of writing, Davidson argues that Psychology was too assimilation-driven; too much locked-into its own worldviews and methodologies. Regrettably this is still largely true, although there have been some recent promising steps towards the kind of community development first articulated by Davidson’s Aboriginal respondents, both here in Australia (Sanson & Dudgeon, 2000) and elsewhere (Marsella, 2000).

Resolution
Implicit in Davidson’s approach is the idea that all communities are developing, and that each (including our own community of psychologists) stands to learn much from the other. That particular theme is highlighted poignantly in P. Wolff and R. Braman’s treatise on dispute resolution in Micronesia. There, a most sophisticated and socially effective system, of retributive justice, has evolved over the course of centuries. Such systems would never even be there unless they were socially very adapted to their particular - South Pacific - domain. While Wolff and Braman do find signs of the kind of social disintegration highlighted in Part One of this book, they also find much to commend, as well as preserve and build upon, in the remaining vestiges of traditional justice systems. The implicit message of their chapter, and one that resonates with recent events in our region, is that traditional concepts of justice, including mediation and restitution, still hold sway. Compared to more modern and perhaps punitive systems like mandatory sentencing (Drever, 2000), they may produce more socially acceptable, and therefore sustainable pathways to community and inter community justice.

Reconciliation
Perhaps the biggest ‘obstacle’ to reconciliation is preserving cultural and community pride. In Australia for instance, the damage historically done, and being done to Indigenous communities’ sense of pride, motivated in part by threats to non-Indigenous communities’ own sense of historical pride, seems to be a major barrier to inter-cultural reconciliation. Localised senses of identity, it seems, can have both positive and negative aspects. In her chapter on reconciliation in North Australia, between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities, Michelle Roger explores the influence of strength of non-Indigenous community identity on readiness to feel collective guilt, and willingness to contribute towards current reconciliation initiatives. She finds that stronger identification with the non-Indigenous community, among non-Indigenous Australians, is associated with a reduced readiness to support compensation programs for, and inter-group group apologies to,
Indigenous communities. Such findings indicate quite clearly that localisation, in itself, is not sufficient for development to continue. Something more, again, is required.

Glocalisation
Having found that neither globalisation (and assimilation) nor localisation (and reactionary revivalism) is sufficient in itself as a basis for development, this final section of the book attempts to engage with the process of interaction between the two - glocalisation. As is perhaps fitting for a publication about Psychology in the South Pacific, we adopt a human factors model of development, which it has been argued is appropriate for this particular context (Carr, MacLachlan, & Schultz, 1995; see also, MacLachlan & Carr, 1994). This model identifies a number of distinct and complementary pathways to a psychology for development. In that sense, the model is oriented towards the practitioner. In addition however, these pathways may help to develop psychology itself.

Realisation
The first and most basic step towards such development consists of realising that no aspect of “global” psychology will work if it is inappropriate locally. As Mansell (1995) has cogently pointed out, even in supposedly “hard” field of engineering, all forms of technology, including psychological techniques, are forms of culture. They carry implicit values that will interact with local norms and traditions. In his article on locally appropriate counselling psychology for PNG, Forsyth outlines seven basic criteria for determining the sustainability of any development project. He then articulately relates each of these determining criteria to the field of counselling training, as regards the problems of urbanisation. In the process, Forsyth relies heavily on the perceptions of local and Indigenous counsellors themselves. The outcome of such an iterative process is a matrix of both transnational and local principles for preparing trainees for urban community work, e.g., using Pidgin rather than English in role-play experiential training sessions.

Restatement
Once it has been realised that global practices require local compatibility in order to sustain, it becomes necessary to become cognisant of the various categories of interaction between the global and the local. One of these is the possibility that local conditions will temper or even seriously undermine the practicality of imported principles and techniques. These principles, that is, may require significant restatement, to accommodate the local conditions and climate.

In their paper on providing appropriate forms of community based alcohol and other drugs care in remote Australian settings, Atkinson and Jessen find that no one model is sufficient, in itself, to cover all training and practice needs. Urban-based residential care facilities, for example, do not address the needs of the client once he or she returns to a radically different home community. Community-based field workers are often unable - because of traditional communication channels - to traverse some group lines. Thus, types of care that may work quite well elsewhere may require substantial restatements in the local context.

Refutation
There is another point that emerges from the Atkinson and Jessen chapter, namely the need for human services to become more psychologically pluralistic. Implicit in this line of thinking is the idea that today’s client consumer of community services often lives in at least two worlds, traditional and modern; local and global (for an explication of this in a South East Asian context, see also, Sarwono et al, 1998). In that sense, the “glocal citizen” is increasingly liable, and able, to be complex and flexible. The next chapter, by New Zealand’s David Thomas, takes that point one step further. It extends precisely the same point to inter-community field workers. Thomas argues that these deliverers of community services can improve their effectiveness by fully engaging with the level of diversity in their glocal working environment. Those clients and deliverers who are “bicultural or multicultural, and thus familiar with patterns of social behaviour in other cultural groups, may show different social behaviours in different settings. Such variation can be seen as a socially skilled pattern, rather than being seen as inconsistency.” Thomas’ point here is that intercultural workers who
develop multiple repertoires, for example knowing when and how to respect Māori as well as Western (Pakeha) ones, will become better positioned to avoid many of the communication pitfalls that beset some development projects.

In the chapter, Thomas provides two useful models of how such communication skills can be acquired and applied in working alongside Māori and Samoan groups. In that sense, the chapter is practical and relevant. Yet in addition, the arguments put forward by Thomas contribute towards the development of theory, and thereby psychology itself. They do so by cogently raising the possibility of a refutation of the psychological principle of “dissonance” (inconsistency) reduction (Festinger, 1965).

Rejuvenation
The next chapter manages to measure some of that psychological complexity, and capacity for pluralism, within the cognitive and affective repertoires of the citizens of Fiji. In their study of appropriate ways of dealing with family crises, Taylor and Yavalanavanua asked Fijian people to think about these crises in two languages - Traditional Fijian and modern English. In support of the idea of varied cognitive, affective, and behavioural repertoires within the same person, these researchers found that the language of operation influenced the kinds of solutions that people were ready to derive. When thinking in English, these respondents were able to frame the problems, and its solution, in individualistic terms. They considered first-and-foremost the welfare of the central protagonist. When thinking in Fijian however, the respondents were able to re-frame the same problem, and generate additional solutions, that considered the family unit as a collective whole. These participants therefore demonstrated an impressive psychological flexibility, one that we might expect to be matched by local family and other human service systems in that context. When material and personnel resources are low, and some types of resource are more plentiful than others, it is surely helpful to have clients who are able to adapt to, and see solutions in, the forms of care that are practical and available. Over and above that practical demonstration however, Taylor and Yavavanalanua’s study also demonstrates a further pathway towards psychology for development - the rejuvenation, in a local community context, of seemingly “dated” psychological ideas and techniques like linguistic relativity.

Reconstitution
The theme of pluralisation in psychology is developed still further in Leon Earle and Richard Earle’s chapter, on the community development challenge of ageing. These authors extend the idea of tolerance from pluralism in services to pluralism in theory development. With 1999 having been designated as the Year of the Older Person, ageing is now recognised as an issue of global proportions (Healey, 2000). In the Indigenous communities of Australia’s Northern Territory however, it takes on unique (and therefore high resolution) proportions. To help tackle this acutely pressing challenge, Earle and Earle, as social science thinkers, become themselves very pluralistic. Through a process of reconstituting diverse principles, from sociology, demography, social psychology, marketing, and social systems theory, among others, these authors derive an applied model of ageing that can be called “successful.” The salutary lesson of their innovative, reconstitutional approach is that today’s complex social problems, with their multiple facets and multi-disciplinary levels of analysis can only be solved if theoreticians and practitioners themselves can stretch to become as pluralistic as their clients.

Reflection
The final chapter in this volume takes such pluralism to new levels. With an extensive background of living and working in both Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities within Australia, Bill Ivory takes us back through Aboriginal History - to the days before the arrival of the European fleets and other migrant groups. We learn that traditional communities possessed thriving cultures of business, and that their ways of living and working were highly outward looking and entrepreneurial. Bill’s work to facilitate small businesses in the Indigenous communities of North Australia is salutary to those who would deride the “welfare mentality” of Aboriginal peoples (see also, Pearson, 1999).
Ivory’s message is that the way forward is already indicated for us in the past. His thesis is that there is much in traditional, local culture to give it fitness for purpose in the global economy. That indeed is the take home message of this collection as a whole, and the final point of reflection in our journey through psychology in the South Pacific.

References


