

## Foreword

### New Guinea research: the need for reciprocity\*

Since the second world war, the batteries and battalions of armed forces which descended on New Guinea between 1941 and 1945 have been replaced by batteries and battalions of researchers. The value of their studies, however, is mainly felt on a macro-scale - the scale of governments and academic institutions. Relatively little comes home to those people who have often been most directly concerned - the village informants. They may, unknown to themselves, receive some generalised benefits; but since researchers make their reputations and careers out of the informational raw material these people provide, they, like the Bougainvilleans, might naturally expect rather more in the way of locally usable royalties.

This point was most explicitly made at an East-West Center conference in which one Asian delegate divided foreign researchers into 'miners', digging their spoil and making off with it, and 'planters', who ensure that research will be as fully and usefully available as possible in the researched country, so that some at least of the profits of processing come back. Even in Southeast Asia, the invaders have such advantages in finance and in their general conditions of work at home and abroad (not to mention their training) that they tend to take the cream of research topics to produce the more spectacular results, and to throw local workers into the shade. The same is true in Latin America and, in the nature of the case, even more marked in the Pacific. Since, clearly, the value of research depends very much on retaining full confidence among the researchees, these increasingly voiced reactions, sometimes amounting to resentment, are danger signals; and researchers must take such avoiding action as possible, and as soon as possible.

This is, of course, most difficult at the unsophisticated local level; yet something can and should be done here. As a matter of principle, it should be incumbent on researchers to make available articles summarising their work and its local significance, in simple

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English (better, if possible, with Pidgin or vernacular versions), for local newspapers, radio stations, and schools. Even a few duplicated copies circulated among contacts would 'show willing' and, if carefully written - neither talking down nor 'over their heads' - would be not only a desirable courtesy, but of much value as showing that these strange activities have a meaning.

The use of local radio, where available, could be of very great value in this connection. Most local broadcasting agencies would be only too glad of contributions which are, as it were, at once local and 'from outside'; and a broadcast at the beginning explaining the object of the research, stressing that the researcher is there to learn himself, and appealing for help in this task, could be invaluable. And surely a farewell broadcast, giving the gist of findings and saying Thank you, should be obligatory.

Beyond this is the admitted obligation to make some feed-back of published results or theses. While there are obviously financial restrictions on fully comprehensive distribution, much work - perhaps generally in shortened form - should go to others than administrators, missionaries, and commercial people who may have helped. Recipients, even in these groups, often should not be confined to those immediately interested in the locality or even the territory concerned. Should shortened versions be prepared (as would often be preferable), it might sometimes be desirable to cut down on local detail, which the locals could take for granted, and expand on matters of more general bearing, for example lessons in marketing economics drawn from the local experience. Even if not all is understood, all will be appreciated.

It should also be regarded as standard practice that whenever and wherever possible researchers should be willing to devote some of their time to local educational institutions for lectures, seminars, or general consultations. This need not invariably be closely tied to the research project or specialism of the worker. The reward surely comes not only in creating good public relations, but in a feeling of participation.

It is clearly desirable to do all that can be done to involve local people in research, not only as passive informants but as active enquirers. In some places and on some themes very little, if anything, can be done in this way; but with increasing educational standards, the possibilities of getting good local research assistants are probably greater than is often realised. Senior school students, teachers in vacations, MA students in local universities, could often very soon get the general point of enquiry, and would not only themselves benefit from the in-service training so provided, but often act as most useful lubricants and indeed suggest new lines of enquiry and unsuspected inter-relationships. It goes without saying that where this is done, full acknowledgment should be given. At the Thai Hill Tribes Research Center it is required that foreign researchers should have an indigenous trainee-assistant. In Thailand, also, at least some written report is

required before the researcher leaves, and failure to provide it might prejudice not only later visits by the person concerned, but possibly by other people from his institution.

Even in the suggestions already made, it would be necessary to tread delicately: well-meant efforts at feed-back, at helping local education, and even at involving local trainee-assistants, could easily slide over into patronage. To make research really reciprocal, it would seem desirable to bring people from research areas back to work in overseas universities. There are quite a few indigenous people in administrative or educational service who could benefit greatly from a few months working on some short-term research topic concerned with their own countries; research which at home they would not have the leisure to carry out, nor perhaps wide enough sources of information, and least of all the research atmosphere.

More could be done to stress and to explain the value of work already done. This is as a rule clear enough to administrators and educationists, but it does need bringing home more generally, and there will often be opportunities for this in informal discussion with local leaders, literate or not. Simplicity is the key-note, but this does not mean writing-down or talking-down; it is rather an exercise in the difficult art of translation.

These suggestions are put forward as matters worthy of serious discussion in the agenda of research strategy and tactics in a period of rapid change of attitudes. Misunderstandings and resentments are perhaps only incipient in the Pacific. Nevertheless, it seems highly desirable to give some earnest advance consideration to these emerging problems, even in researchers' own interests - the interests of their image, on which the smooth flow of vital information in turn depends. Beyond this, there is surely a moral obligation to avoid anything which might look like an exploitative cultural imperialism; more positively, to give some tangible and particular returns for the raw material from which researchers draw their own livings, and much of the enjoyment of their lives.

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