

## 2. *Yumi Piksa* – Developing a community-responsive way of filmmaking in Melanesia

### COMMENTARY

This article explores the collaborative application of media and arts-based research practices involving students from the University of Goroka (Papua New Guinea) as co-researchers. It critically examines the processes of developing a community-responsive approach to filmmaking in order to challenge preconceived notions of media and research practice in Papua New Guinea. The analysis draws on results from a film workshop run at the University of Goroka over a duration of six weeks through which a team designed a Melanesian approach to filmmaking practice. The research study found that stereotypical perceptions and understandings of Papua New Guinea communities could be challenged by respectful and community-responsive ways of making films involving local community members. It presents filmmaking as creating a meaningful space for exploring community relations and practices. Papua New Guinean co-researchers acted to bridge dialogue between rural communities, media technologies and the national and transnational media sphere.

Keywords: Community media, Indigenous research, Papua New Guinea, Melanesia, arts-based research, filmmaking

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THE SUCCESS of video or filmmaking as a process to engage communities in new dialogue is well recognised (Riano, 1994; Gumucio-Dagron, 2001; Rodriguez, 2001; White, 2003). In the last few decades the active engagement of community groups with video has been emphasised as a tool to amplify community voices and strengthen local identities by constructing stories about issues that are of concern. This increase

in the use of alternative media is due to the availability and accessibility of media technologies and the questioning of an increasingly homogenised mass media, which often simplifies cultural expressions in its representations. Some of these local media have also created global movements, most recognisably Indigenous media (Wilson & Stewart, 2008). By developing their own media, indigenous groups have explored more culturally appropriate forms of media. This includes not only the final media product, but puts emphasis on the process of making media.

Indigenous media theorist Ginsburg (1994) has highlighted that ‘for many Aboriginal producers, the quality of work is judged by its capacity to embody, sustain, and even revive or create certain social relations’ (Ginsburg, 1994, p. 368). She uses the term ‘embedded aesthetics’ to describe the inseparability of a ‘textual production’ and its broader social conditions of production. Within each text is contained its conditions of production. The notion of Indigenous media as activist media, working to challenge dominant social and political representations of particular groups, operates both through process and product.

The increasing interest in the ‘process’ of local media production can be attributed to a number of factors. Firstly, scholars began to highlight the potential for empowerment in people recording their own media, realising that the process of engaging media assisted them in finding out more about their own identity (Gumucio-Dagron, 2001, p. 17; Rodriguez, 2001, p. 116; White, 2003, pp. 65-66). Secondly, local media are often directed to local audiences who understand the languages and contexts. Meadows writes that the strength of community radio broadcasting in Australia is ‘to create “communities of interest”, based on criteria determined, for example, by social, cultural, linguistic, or geographical boundaries’ (Meadows, Forde, Ewart, & Foxwell, 2009). Thirdly, mainstream broadcast standards have traditionally created technical ‘rules’ regarding style and quality of footage that local media processes begin to break down. Salazar (Salazar, 2004) uses the term ‘imperfect media’ to describe the intentional choices by the Mapuche in Chile to move away from mass media production values as an active distancing from these dominant forms. The focus on ‘process’ in this general discussion highlights the intention of giving voice to local groups, without privileging production quality.

When filmmaking projects are facilitated across cultural boundaries, the

points of reference for production will need to be discussed with the production team. In addition, questions such as sustainability of on-going production and training mechanisms for people in Indigenous cultural settings might be raised. The active introduction of technology into communities raises questions of potential dependencies of such groups. Video or filmmaking technology can be seen as dualistic in its function: it can be used as a tool to further entrench dominant thinking and diminish cultural diversity, while at the same time it can be used for cultural activism and re-integration of indigenous values (see Ginsburg, 1991). As such the technology does not predetermine the outcomes of its use, and it exists in a complex myriad of cultural and social relationships and engagements.

### **Visual representation and media in PNG**

Papua New Guinea has always had a strong culture of visual representation through various art forms such as performance, painting, carving, dance and others. Artforms manifest a close connection with the natural environment, ancestry, and social relationships. Since contact with the West, new visual representations of Papua New Guineans have been produced. Photographs and films produced by outsiders have often rendered Papua New Guineans as the 'exotic other' in narratives for overseas audience consumption. From early photographs of colonial encounters of explorers and missionaries, to Australian or international documentaries on the 'Land of the Unexpected', visual representations of Papua New Guinea and its people have, to a large extent, been created by outsiders (Molnar & Meadows, 2001; Quanchi, 2007). Media institutions have been set up and controlled by European colonisers, leading to indigenous people being constructed as 'the Other' in their own country (Hau'ofa, 2008). While there is no lack of Papua New Guinean visual representations, the effect of the perspective of the 'other' to a larger public audience is problematic.

In Papua New Guinea today, internal as well as external media have been used as extended arms of power and to spread Western knowledge. Mass media in Papua New Guinea is centralised and foreign-owned (Papoutsaki & Rooney, 2006). Institutional media structures emerged during the colonial period on a British-based model and have now become global media and telecommunication organisations (Hau'ofa, 2008). These media institutions, established by an elite seeking to homogenise society and promote

nationalism, have failed to provide equal access to media for the very diverse and fragmented Papua New Guinean society (Papoutsaki & Rooney, 2006), in particular those in the rural areas.

In regards to visual mass media, for a long time EM-TV, the Fiji-owned commercial television station, was the only TV station in the country. Its content is mainly bought overseas from Australia's Channel Nine. In September 2008, the Papua New Guinean government established a new television station, Kundu2. Its purported intention was to represent the multiple voices of Papua New Guinea. Early progress has been slow and Kundu2 has experienced technical difficulties. Set up as an arm of the National Broadcasting Corporation (NBC), it has not yet formed itself as a separate institution from the well-established NBC radio. It currently broadcasts a limited number of hours of television a day and experiences technical challenges in delivering broadcasting services beyond urban areas. Radio has been more accessible and more affordable than television, however few alternative media groups have emerged in Papua New Guinea. Where there are local media, they are often owned by churches (Eggs, 2008).

To date, the media landscape in Papua New Guinea has provided little opportunity for participation and representation by the population, in particular in rural areas. Increasing communication networks and emerging ideas about involving communities in the production process provide new opportunities for Papua New Guinea to use media for its own needs and to counter media misrepresentations predominantly produced by outsiders. An important role in sustaining this shift is might be played by educational institutions. The following case study illustrates a group of students designing and investigating local ways of working and filming in PNG Highland communities.

### **The *Yumi Piksa* project**

#### *Conceptual approach*

The *Yumi Piksa* project is grounded in an indigenous research philosophy (Smith, 1999; Weber-Pillwax, 1999; Cardinal, 2001; Weber-Pillwax, 2001; Wilson, 2001; Steinhauer, 2002; Bishop & Glynn, 2003; Porsanger, 2004; Louis, 2007). Knowledge is regarded as relational, emerging from the relationships that are formed with the participants of the research project. For Wilson, this becomes a question of 'relational accountability' (Wilson, 2008), which he regards as the central element of an indigenous research

methodology. He writes that ‘rather than asking about validity or reliability, you are asking how am I fulfilling my role in this relationship? What are my obligations in this relationship?’ (Wilson, 2008, p. 177). Research is guided by potential benefits to the communities and allows the researchers to engage in reciprocal relationships (Weber-Pillwax, 1999).

Increasingly there is a call in the Pacific for the incorporation of Pacific epistemologies into research endeavours (Gegeo & Gegeo-Watson, 2002; Huffer & Qalo, 2004; Hau’ofa, 2008). In the case of PNG, this meant being guided by community relationships, entering relationships of exchange and understanding the oral tradition of Papua New Guinean communities. These relationships were played out through an arts-based project application, in which collaboration and creativity allowed participants to record and reflect on collaborative creative process. The initial idea to use participatory action research was expanded to using what has been termed as ‘a/r/tography’ to use the creative process to understand knowledge as relational within the moment of creating new art together (Springgay, Irwin & Leggo, 2008). Here, ‘theory is understood as a critical exchange that is reflective, responsive and relational, which is continuously in a state of reconstruction and becoming something else altogether’ (Springgay, Irwin, & Leggo, 2008, p. xx).

The essential difference between action research and a/r/tography for this project lies in their engagement with the ‘participants’ of the research. Although participatory action research is inclusive of participants in the project design, they are still involved as ‘others’, as a group removed from the researchers, who manage their involvement and the ultimate product or outcome. Although participatory research does not actively ‘other’ a group of individuals, it seeks to incorporate them as an already constituted group. A/r/tography, on the other hand, focuses on emergent processes and outcomes that spring, not from an already existent ‘researcher’ or ‘participant’, but from the dynamic *combination* of these groups to form a third, distinct group. It does not take as given the two groups and work to form alliances between them, but moves immediately beyond these initial conditions to produce a novel assemblage, a new ‘we’. In this sense, it accounts for the emergent and productive nature of creative collaboration, and is thus more suitable to reflect on these processes.

### *Project design*

The case study is a six-week filmmaking workshop that took place at the University of Goroka. 12 students, mainly from the Expressive Arts Department,

participated. *Yumi Piksa* sought to provide a forum, an encounter, which allowed university students as well as community members to investigate the use of visual technology to record local knowledge and stories. In continuing Papua New Guinean traditions, *Yumi Piksa* presented a space for telling stories and presenting the collective consciousness of communities, both to these communities themselves, and to outsiders. During the workshop the participants became actively engaged as researchers in reflecting on their own practice and developing a local approach for research and media as well as strategies to visually present community narratives.

The communities that eventually participated in the filmmaking were nominated by the student participants during the *Yumi Piksa* workshop and confirmed through group discussions and negotiation with community elders. An extensive component of the workshop was the teaching of conceptual and technical skills in video production. The training approach could be considered a mixture of documentary training (Rabiger, 2004), video for social change (Duchesne, 2005) and participatory video training (Lunch & Lunch, 2006). The focus of the study, however, was on the interactions between the student participants and communities, as well as the engagement and learning experience of the workshop participants. The research project focused on the spaces of exchange, interaction and communication between different actors and participants involved in the process of media production or mediation.

Workshop discussions as well as community interactions were audio and at times video recorded. Rather than looking at ‘data’ the thematic analysis sought to capture a contextualisation of experience. It becomes a living inquiry where ‘culturally coded identities’ come together in a process of meaning making through the arts (Springgay, Irwin, & Wilson Kind, 2005). During the workshop three short documentaries were produced that were eventually presented to a variety of audiences (see Figure 1). Audience feedback was captured at a number of national and international screening events.

#### *Workshop and Filmmaking Processes*

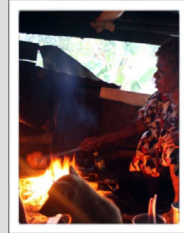
In the following section, the results from the workshop process are described. While the author facilitated the workshop the participating students were co-researcher and are referred to here as either student researchers or workshop participants. All participants consented for their names to be used.

The early sessions of the workshop was for the participants to get to know

Figure 1: *Yumi Piksa* film descriptions

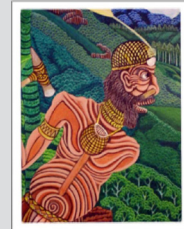
***Mama Bilong Down Under*** (13min)

The film tells a story of Mama Lucindo who lives at the Down Under settlement near the University of Goroka. We join her as she goes about her daily life providing food for her children, and their children's children. As a determined woman, Lucindo is the *Mama Bilong Down Under*, taking care of everyone who lives with her, no matter where they come from.



***Nokondi's Morning Call*** (9min)

*Nokondi's Morning Call* tells the story of the mythical figure Nokondi, custodian of the environment and well known throughout the Eastern Highlands Province. George Sari, a local artist, documents Nokondi in his paintings to preserve the knowledge of his grandfathers, which regains new importance within the discussion about current climate change problems.



***Levekuka Clay*** (13min 30sec)

Ataizo Motahe is a wise man from Masi village in the Eastern Highlands who earns a living from making traditional clay artifacts. While making his art, Papa Ataizo comments that he is the only one with these skills and that the younger generation is not learning this process of art-making. What will become of the future generation if young people today do not have these skills? *Levekuka Clay* is about the use of traditional knowledge and skills and how they are developed and preserved.

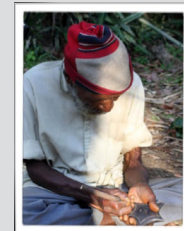
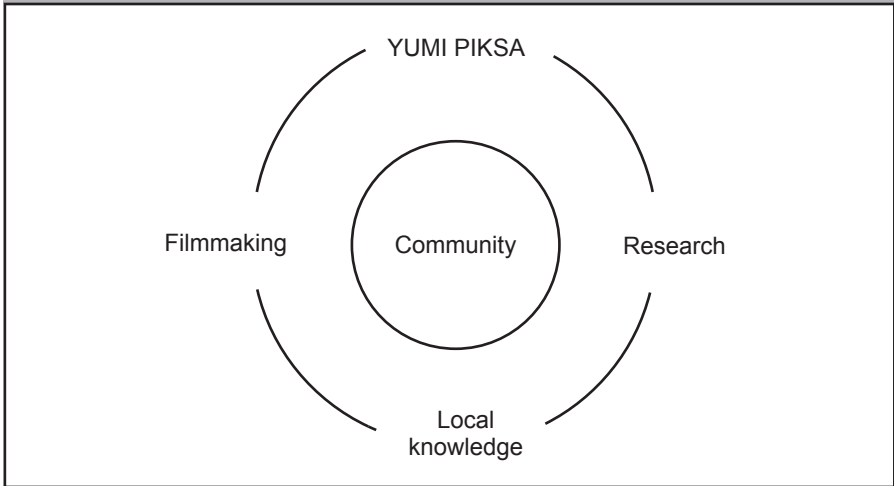


Figure 2: *Yumi Piksa* research and filmmaking approach



each other and to develop a common understanding of what we were trying to achieve. Apparent from our first discussions were the strong identification of participants with their communities, and the idea of traditional knowledge. People expressed the wish to ‘record their own art’ (Kelly Gauwa), ‘the stories and myths from the communities’ (Franky Rissanimo). They also highlighted issues around contemporary living, such as ‘life in the settlements’ (Arthur Hane-Nou) or ‘illiteracy’ (Dilu Okuk). The eagerness of the students to use the new technologies to preserve traditional cultures and to record community life emerged through dialogue and group processes, and the enthusiasm felt in the group during that session indicated the strong potential of video to foster collaboration with PNG communities.

While the first week of training focused predominantly on technical and conceptual ideas of the filmmaking process, the team began in the second week to discuss what a Melanesian approach to filmmaking might look like. Overarching this process, as identified in our discussions in the workshop, was the conviction that at all stages in the production process, we as researchers must show respect to the community and conduct our research in consultation and collaboration with the community (see Figure 2).

In designing the process of negotiation with the community, workshop participants agreed on the following steps:

- Identification of elders



- Agreement from elders to undertake the project
- Public community introduction
- Re-framing of our research ideas and community assessment
- Informing the community about our research process
- Involving specific individual community members in the visual research process
- Asking the community participants for feedback on the material
- Incorporating feedback into the editing process
- Approval of edited product from community participants
- Approval from elders to screen the finished product
- Invite everyone to a public screening, acknowledge the community and participants and provide a DVD copy of the material produced
- Return to community to discuss their experience of the process

The process outlined here was developed to fulfil a number of core values that emerged as of significance to the students, and as complementary to Melanesian values. Primary to the process were *respect for traditional community structures, collective engagement, transparency of process, collaboration, iterative consent, communal 'ownership' of outputs, and ongoing engagement*. What was key to maintaining these values was building good relationships with individuals and groups in the community. It became evident through the workshop discussions that each of the communities we intended to work with was different in their structure and organisation. Discussion then focused on how each team would approach their selected community, and what elements of that community were relevant to our project. A distinction was drawn early between settlers' communities and established village communities. The identification of elders involved understanding the context in which the land was owned originally. Increasing migration in Papua New Guinea means a far higher level of complexity in ensuring this process is carried out appropriately, and as workshop participant Arthur Hane-Nou put it, 'the clash of traditional landownership and modern influence needs to be balanced' to ensure that the all the necessary individuals are informed and represented in any negotiation process taking place.

Student input in considering the specific cultural aspects of engaging communities proved invaluable. Franky Rissanimo commented on the fact that 'most of our [PNG's] stories traditional ways they are noble so if we would like to do something traditional they might want something or expect something

from us...’. In the context of increasing dependency on the cash economy, as well as the history of outsiders entering Papua New Guinean communities, the idea that money is given for any additional activity is widespread. While the workshop participants were insiders to the communities we went to, the fact that we were using video equipment generated expectations among community members. The attempt to reduce expectation from community members of money from the group was approached in two ways. The direct connection of the students to the community and the fact that their presence was as university students undertaking training, and thus gaining skills for their own communities, were both emphasised. In addition, we made it clear that we would return the film in form of a DVD to the community. It needed to be established that our relationship with the community was one of exchange and that recordings would be returned to the community to document aspects of their everyday lives.

The workshop participants from the selected communities hosted the introductory sessions in their respective communities, and other team members were invited to speak by the host as appropriate. Community leaders were present at all introductions, in midst of the public audience. Students on several occasions shifted from *Tok Pisin* into *Tok Ples* (local dialect) in order to be better understood by the community.

... once we speak the local language it links us to people and it becomes a kind of bridge and it attaches us to them... And anything that worries them and anything from their heart they will express it in their own language. When I speak in local language, I also feel that I belong to them and they belong to me. It is part of our identity that links us and strengthens our relationships.

— Klinit Barry, workshop participant, July 2009

It is difficult to assess the connections that are created through the use of local language. This connection, it could be argued, is stronger in a country like Papua New Guinea with a large linguistic diversity. The idea of the *wantok* system as a clan system and a way of belonging was originally built around language groups. The large number of languages in PNG therefore suggests a strong identity is established through language.

The basic premise of entry to communities in search of film subjects was that the story would emerge from the community. While there were specific

interests from the researchers initially, the story and characters would be identified through engagement with community members and discussions around what they felt was important, exemplary, or unique to their community. In the Down Under community, to facilitate this process, researchers decided to initially separate men and women. Here, media provided an opportunity for often silenced feminine voices from the community to be heard, and the separation of the men and women in early discussions allowed researchers to hear these stories in a way that was appropriate for the community members. It was through this process that the researchers made the decision to use the story of Mama Lucindo, exploring the daily life of a strong mother in the settlement. From this experience, the research team learned that it was important to have a mix of genders in the team in order to allow equal opportunities for people to tell their stories. This kind of *in situ* learning was what moved our process forward, as we learned from the experiences of the teams in the various communities (Figure 3).

Feedback sessions with the immediate community participants involved were an important feature of the process the team set out to undertake to ensure iterative and ongoing consent processes. In line with this decision,



Figure 3: *Yumi Piksa* crew shooting at Massy village.

when editing was done the teams took the films back to the communities to screen them to the film's subjects. George Sari, the painter from the nearby Okiufa community, had been involved in the editing process and had provided ongoing feedback on the film (Figure 4). He had therefore seen much of the footage, and had already had considerable input and editorial licence. This was not so for the two other communities, the participants of which had not yet seen the material in an edited form. In these communities, the first screening was a much-anticipated event.

We had the first feedback today at the down under settlement with Mama Lucindo and her family. Mama Lucindo agreed with the cut of the film and gave her blessings for it to go ahead. Question: Are we doing justice to her when she agrees so easily? I somehow feel that more than an okay would have been better, maybe a few negative comments would help to compare our view on her and the location.

—*Yumi Piksa* web diary, 10 July 2009

After our intensive engagement with Mama Lucindo's story and her visual material for about two weeks, her lack of critique of the film seemed



**Figure 4:** Nafaro Ere-Epa (left) and George Sari view the film.

unsatisfying to some of the students. We discussed the reasons for the lack of critique and the students' concerns that her agreement was gained too easily. The presentation of Mama Lucindo's story on screen seemed to overwhelm her. It was suggested that having her everyday life shared was so unfamiliar to Mama Lucindo and her family that the technicalities of the film, and the specifics of the editing process seemed unimportant. It was decided that following screenings of the film in the community, the research team would follow up again, to yet again gain consent to continue to screen the film. In this way, should unanticipated outcomes change Mama Lucindo's mind about the editing or dissemination of the film, it could be withdrawn or altered. With this determined, Mama Lucindo and her relatives' approval to screen the film to the involved communities was accepted. The next screening was held in Papa Ataizo's community in Massy village.

When we were showing the film, I wasn't feeling anything in particular; I was just watching the reactions from my family and from my grandfather. And I didn't know what they would say after watching the film... And after I asked them about what they felt, they were all very happy which made me very very happy... This is something that I made and took back to the community.

—Dilen Doiki, workshop participant, July 2009

Papa Ataizo then adds that he did not see a title for the film and that it should be called '*Levekuka Clay*'. Papa Ataizo's thought came at the right moment, and provided the final title for the film. After receiving the agreement from the community members involved in the film and the leaders of the community, we organised for a public screening for members from all communities to attend.



Figure 5: Papa Ataizo and his wife reviewing the *Yumi Piksa* film.



A public launch of the final films took place at the University of Goroka auditorium. All participating communities were invited. The intention, apart from sharing the stories, was to bring the communities together and to acknowledge their participation in the project as a community. After each screening the main characters were asked to come on stage and share their experiences of working with the students. There was an emphasis on the collaborative nature of the *Yumi Piksa* films, and this was met with approval from community participants and audience members alike. For the students, who began to realise the potential to represent stories on film about Papua New Guinea, the films they made garnered respect from their communities and they were proud they had made it to the end of the workshop. The relationships they formed had a lasting impact and many later highlighted their increased awareness of what community life is all about.

This workshop brought me into communities and it shows me that our communities have lots to tell and by words we won't value that but through video we can value them. Words will fade away and change but through video we'll value those stories... They really made me think because I was thinking of myself and not them but when I get into the community there's lots to tell and working with them is like they are developing me up and I really like that.

—Stella Lukula, workshop participant, July 2010

At later interviews, each of the community participants saw a different value in the films for themselves. For both artists, Papa Ataizo and George Sari, the film was a way of promoting their work and stories and to preserve their art.

This craft I do, the young ones they are following the white men and forget about our traditions. When I die, this craft will die with me. But this [film] will be there for a long time... once I will have stopped doing this, they can still watch it on film.

—Papa Ataizo Motahe, Massy village, March 2010

It's the first of its kind to see themselves involved and their great-grandfather who is also in the film and I as his son and his offspring, the children, they are excited, they enjoy it and they are looking forward to seeing more films, they want to expose themselves and myself, as well as preserving our culture.

—George Sari, Okiufa village, March 2010

This is something others have not done and I did it and others will tell their story as well. My hidden story has been revealed to the public.

—Mama Lucindo, *Down Under Community*, March 2010

In the *Down Under* community, however, we found that Mama Lucindo had not been without pressure from her relatives. When the film was distributed to wider audiences Lucindo's relatives enquired if she had received anything (material) for her participation in the film. We continued our discussion with Mama Lucindo and her community and still continue to try to find ways in which we can practically share ownership of the film and its distribution. This process had highlighted a gap between what the film means to Mama Lucindo and what it means to the researcher/filmmaker, exposing consequences of distribution for the community members that we had not foreseen in the planning and execution of the production. It emphasised for us the importance of returning to the communities in which the films had been produced, and in maintaining an ongoing dialogue with community participants to ensure that they are aware of the film's distribution and not adversely affected by their involvement.

Managing local and a more global distribution was one of the challenges of the project. The resulting collaboration sacrificed some ownership by student participants and community members in order to achieve this balance of local and global media. While realising the difficulties with wider distribution outside communities, the issues in the case of *Yumi Piksa* were to some extent resolvable through the strong relationships that were built at the beginning, and the involvement of the community in a transparent production process. Our dialogue, however, can never stop or come to completion. The continuation and strengthening of these relationships is perhaps the most valuable lesson learnt over the long-term of the *Yumi Piksa* pilot. In the Melanesian context, they demonstrate respect for communal community structures, the culture of artistic production and the centrality of the interpersonal and the collective in Papua New Guinean life.

### **Visualising cultural and social practices**

A photograph is never 'just' a photograph. It is the manifestation of a relationship between the photographer and their subject. It belongs to a certain context, time and situation. Banks (2001) has described this as the 'external narrative' of a photograph. He further argues, 'all films, photographs and

artworks are the product of human action and are entangled in varying degrees in human social relations' (Banks, 2001, p. 12). In what I term community-responsive films, information is never simply transmitted from a subject or respondent to an 'author', one who records the story. The process inevitably becomes a negotiation, through which information is co-constructed immanently to the relationships formed between participants. How then do these issues of relationality, cultural values and negotiation impact on the film being made? How in/visible are these processes of media making within Indigenous media products? When Elder (1995) wrote about a process of 'lateral collaboration' she described

...a space for filmmakers to learn to pose the questions they do not originally know to ask, a place where film subjects select the fragments of their reality they deem significant to document, and a moral place where subjects and image makers can mediate their own representation. (Elder, 1995, p. 94)

Understanding the impact of relationships on the filmic output is complex and difficult to apprehend. It is felt and experienced, present without being visible. To categorise or analyse these affectual responses is to alter them, to remove them from the field of intensities within which they reside and impose exterior structure on what is essentially an embedded experiential whole (Massumi, 2002). During the screenings of the *Yumi Piksa* films and the subsequent feedback collected, the process of making the films and the attendant relationships emerged as extremely significant to how these films were experienced and received. They were commended for their intimacy and honesty, their portrayal of 'everyday rural people', and as 'reality films' or 'real stories'. I argue that the process of making the films is inherent in the product and the community values abided by during production became an intrinsic part of the final films.

The camera is often described as a 'catalyst' or a 'bridge', promising that if we can understand how we engage with this tool we will understand more about ourselves and others, discuss things we would not otherwise discuss, and indeed 'ask the questions we did not know to ask' (see Elder, 1995). It can act as connector for social and cultural practices either by allowing them to exist in the moment of creative collaboration or being recorded and manifested in a certain place at a certain time. Working in the visual or creative medium, particularly in collaborative fields such as filmmaking, highlights our



connections with others and challenges these relationships. Working in a collaborative environment forces us, as media makers, to question how we approach the production of content. It requires us to justify our ideas to others and build relationships that are conducive to an environment for such production.

### **Working in a Melanesian context—the value of relationship**

As mentioned earlier, in an indigenous research paradigm relationships with research participants are foregrounded (Cardinal, 2001; Weber-Pillwax, 2001; Wilson, 2001; Porsanger, 2004; Vallance, 2007). To whom the researcher or filmmaker is finally accountable is subject to the specific and localised dynamics developed with the community participants. The idea of ‘giving back’, returning a favour or helping a relative or extended family member is highly valued in Melanesian culture (Montovani, 1991; Sillitoe, 1998; Franklin, 2007). Actively building relationships of reciprocity is a significant part of this culture, and the *Yumi Piksa* project sought to utilise this strong focus on relationships to maximise its engagements with communities.

The divide between researcher and researched has been much discussed in social research. Issues of representation and dichotomies of self and other have inevitably been created, discussed and challenged (Atkinson, 2007). Indigenous research approaches have attempted to shift their focus from producing stories about others to co-creating stories with researchers and communities. Investigating the relationships formed during these processes is a significant part of this shifting paradigm, as relational approaches gain currency in indigenous research. Wilson’s concept of ‘relational accountability’ (Wilson, 2008) becomes a key approach here in understanding relational and shared knowledge. The importance of such relationships has been emphasised in qualitative (particularly ethnographic) research (McKinley Brayboy & Deyhle, 2000; Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007) in order to acknowledge the subjective voice of the researcher and to better understand the impact of relationships on research data. Indigenous research approaches extend this concept, drawing it out so that relationships no longer serve to merely contextualise data, but become data themselves. This approach builds ‘a research group as if it were an extended family’ (Bishop 1998, p. 204). In this setting, relationships might be formed long before and continue long after the actual research process is occurring.

For the student researchers in *Yumi Piksa*, renegotiating relationships with their communities was a particularly challenging element. When Papua New Guinean researchers enter their own communities, a new relationship is negotiated, as the role of researcher is considerably different to that of community member, and involves a very different dynamic. Tools such as video cameras, and the presence of a research team, immediately bring new elements into play in community relations. Fostering or engaging with pre-existing relationships is important to many Papua New Guinean researchers, as their research perspective draws on these relationships and failure to engage with them may lead to a devaluing of the research for both the researcher and their communities.

Processes engaged in during the *Yumi Piksa* fieldwork supported Russell Bishop's point about Māori research, which highlights that the level and nature of personal investment is not dictated solely by the researcher (1998). He writes: 'The investment is on terms of mutual understanding and control by all participants, so that the investment is reciprocal and could not be otherwise' (Bishop 1998, p. 2002). The contextual elements that dictate relationships and hence the research are guided by the participants and their cultural principles. When student researchers were researching the story for *Levekuka Clay* there was a great deal of discussion about art as sacred to Papua New Guinean society. The students decided that Papa Ataizo must grant his permission for filming to take place of his art-making processes. This strongly guided the researchers in the way they approached the topic. They would have never pushed the artist to reveal his art just for the sake of their student research project. Their actions were guided by their understanding of cultural norms and respect for community elders. This was prioritised in their research approach and could have easily changed the direction of their topic. This decision making process evidenced a flexibility of approach and a trust that relationships would serve to guide the research process for the better.

The concept of reciprocity and relational exchange holds much relevance in Melanesian culture. Increasingly this also includes monetary gifts and expectations among community members to receive these are high. Managing community expectations to receive some kind of payment for their engagement with the teams was particularly challenging in the early stages of the research. Reciprocity emerged as a key concept for mitigating the sense that monetary payment should be provided. It was negotiated with community members,

to establish what (other than financial remuneration) they would consider as appropriate for their time, stories and hospitality. The idea of giving a DVD, as a record of the community's story, was offered by us at an early stage, as an exchange. As relationships between the *Yumi Piksa* team members and the communities matured, further acts of reciprocity were undertaken by the researchers. These included, as mentioned, 'the sharing of technology', on-going food exchange, respectful treatment of community members, time given for people to share stories, to listen to their stories and to tell our own stories in return. The visual format also provided us with a way of giving back something 'exciting' to the community in an appealing format, and one that they may not otherwise have access to. Traditional research has relied greatly on text-based formats, making results frequently inaccessible for largely illiterate communities in Papua New Guinea. Here, films provide an opportunity to play back the recording and share the stories with many others, particularly those normally eschewed in research outputs.

## Conclusion

I think one of the things why us telling our own stories is important is that we see things differently, we are looking at it from the outside the stories are coming from inside from within and out this way, the pace of our story telling is different. Our own language is being heard, it gets to be heard, and I think because it's our people talking to our people they tell us more I think, they talk true and it's not just sitting in the film but it's when you take it back and edit everything up how you put it together really, I think really truly is starting to reflect our own way of telling stories from this rich country of many stories.

Tania Nugent, *Pacific Pulse* presenter, Australia Network

This research study has demonstrated that stereotypical perceptions and understandings of Papua New Guinean communities can be challenged by respectful and community-responsive ways of making films. It has proved filmmaking capable of creating a meaningful space in which to negotiate new relationships and co-construct messages with communities that go beyond their sphere of regular communication.

Key to this project is that it makes an ethical commitment to being accountable to participants, which I have discussed within the examination of understanding relationships as key to a Melanesian approach. By committing themselves to work collaboratively with communities, the actions of

the students became inherently political and gained momentum through this collective approach. The opportunity to challenge dominant ideas about Papua New Guinean communities sparked a new activist agenda. The overcoming of difficulties around handling the technology provided additional confidence to participants. Here, Yumi Piksa presented the potential for a richer engagement around issues of concern to the communities, sparked by an interest in media technology as new tools for self-expression and self-representation.

Within Papua New Guinea, the media landscape is changing rapidly. Further studies are urgently required to explore how these technologies can be utilised to further research and embrace culturally appropriate representations, particularly the changing telecommunication landscape of mobile phones and the internet. The *Yumi Piksa* project confirms that despite the much-cited 'Faus-tian dilemma' inherent in media technology (Ginsburg, 1991), the opportunities that emerge through the use of these media within specific cultural settings are immense. As these technologies spread and become increasingly popular in Papua New Guinea, they provide opportunities for self-representation and participation by rural communities and various civil society groups. The *Yumi Piksa* project, and in particular the films, demonstrate how stories might be told differently when a relational accountability between makers and communities comes to bear. The distribution of the films to organisations and institutions can serve to heighten their awareness of community-responsive approaches in their various fields. Institutions in Papua New Guinea need to recognise the complexity of engaging with such technology in a culturally appropriate form and begin to support mechanisms that enable this to happen.

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The Pacific Media Centre (Te Amokura) is the only media research and community resource centre of its kind in Aotearoa/New Zealand and has a strategic focus on Māori, Pasifika and diversity media and community development. It was established by AUT University's Faculty of Design and Creative Technologies in 2007, having evolved from a cluster of research and community collaborations within the School of Communication Studies.

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