

PRIVILEGING INDIGENOUS GEOGRAPHY KNOWLEDGE OVER IDI SPACE IN MODERNITY

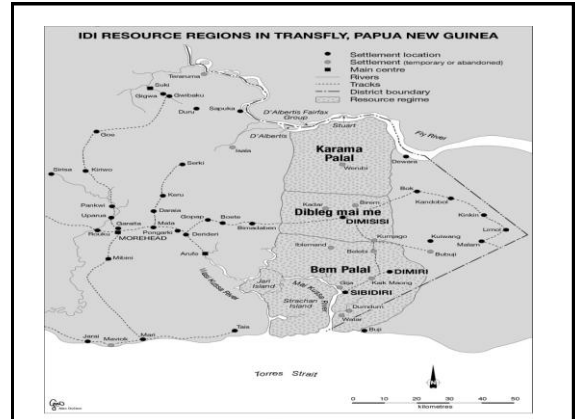
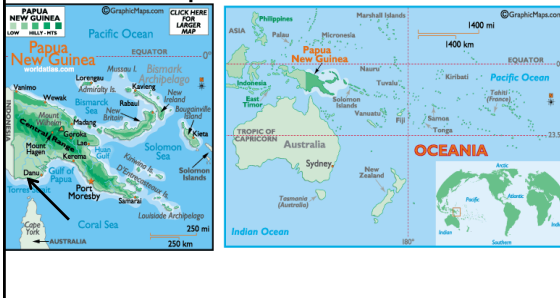
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ABSTRACT

- Paper discusses the purpose of privileging indigenous geography in a given Idi space in modernity.
- Discussions center on indigenous resource use in which those uses become differentiated by the application of environmental indicators.
- Then indigenous geography is discussed as a privileged knowledge sourced by Idi children through informal education from their parents and extended families.
- They become the strategic positions from which to contemplate indigenous geography and Idi worldviews.

Location of Papua New Guinea and area referenced in presentation



(1) INTRODUCTION

- Author discusses topic & related rubrics of indigenous geographies of resource use that have been influenced by;
 - pre-colonial,
 - colonial &
 - post-colonial interactions & organizations in Idi Society.
- In essence, following will be discussed;
 - a) spatial and modernity context,
 - b) application of envtl geography indicators in resource use,
 - c) indigenous geography's role in informal education &
 - d) cultural constructionism in indigenous geography.
- Some nexus is established between each of these components in the context of the conference theme.
- Idi Society is located in southern part of the Western Province in Papua New Guinea. It has a small population of less than 2,000 people.
- Area is general known as Transfly at a height of 56-60m asl.

(2) SPATIAL AND MODERNITY CONTEXT

- Production of geography knowledge involves claims about space & to fix events, objects, etc, on to locations often with constellations of power & knowledge (Johnston, et al, eds, 2000).
- Time is a source for change; however, it can marginalize space. Furthermore, there is dualism between real, material space and non-real, imagined space (ibid.).
- Thus, both space & time are produced through actions & interactions of people.
- . Both modernity & eurocentricism are closely related often linking it to Europe with a distinctive new social order.
- Modernity emphasize novelty, change & progress. It is debated & transgressed around 4 pillars as discussed in Johnston, et al, editors, (2000)
- Indigenous cultures are closely related to natural environments and ecologies that surround them creating social constructions of the environment.
- Contemporary cultures tend to dominate the natural environment and exploit it with their knowledge and technological systems.

- There are still fields of productions and continuities in geographical knowledge in indigenous societies which tend to be produced for sustenance of livelihoods.
- Like other 800 plus ethnic groups in PNG, Ili people play a role in this process, too with its own unique ways of doing things.
- Inspiration to write this paper is drawn from presentation by Marilyn Strathern, (2009) titled, *Perspective on a contemporary Melanesia – Privileging one kind of knowledge over another.*

- Indigenous geography has a sub-discipline began to proliferate globally after 1990s *United Nations Decade for Indigenous Peoples.*
- Statement by Chalmers & Greensill (2006) that recognizing local geographies is an important global issue & they make reference to Maori land & communities in Waikato Region of New Zealand, is worth noting in time & modernity context .
- Indigenous geography is essentially noteworthy because it progresses through modernity with a particular ways of ontological and epistemological processes.
- To talk about modernity conjures axiomatic associations of eurocentrism since there is a nexus.
- The author does not want to delve on it now to reduce interpretation problem that may surface.
- But rather quote statement from Strathern's (2009:3) presentation which may help inform this paper on indigenous geographies of resources, one way or another, & that is:
 - "eurocentrism & indigenous knowledge [tend to be] existing in the same time frame".
- This quoted statement can be articulated in the context that indigenous geography knowledge from Ili Society, for this matter, exists in same time frame as contemporary geography & this time frame is the modernity.

- Ownership, management & user rights of stocks of resources are often to do with identifying privileging clans & sub-clans that own them & have rights.
- Howitt, Connell & Hirsch (1996) support this statement when they comment that stocks of resources & non-resources have correlations with defining & redefining indigenous identities & rights to use.
- It is in the process of defining and redefining that one can privilege indigenous geography knowledge.
- Possibly without indigenous geography knowledge, there would not be knowledge reproduction and communication to sustain indigenous communities.
- As Howitt, Connell & Hirsch (1996) further commented that resources, together with culture, help in the construction of identity and defining what things become resources .
- Indigenous geography is not remedy to environmental related problems that the Melanesian & Pacific Island Countries are going through.
- Congruently, on national level, indigenous geography is not panacea to environmental problems in PNG encountering.
- In modernity there are competing indigenous claims of resource ownership in Ili speaking villages.
- Since 2000, new sub-settlements at Kaik Maong, Iblemend & Birem have been created (see earlier map).

(3) APPLICATION OF GEOGRAPHY INDICATORS IN INDIGENOUS RESOURCE USE

- In Ili Society, main indigenous activities are:
 - subistence based revolving around fishing, food gardening & hunting on a daily basis.
- Gender divisions of labour force take place around these activities.
- While in gardening both male & female participate, hunting is primarily masculine job & fishing is conducted by both males and females.
- There are cases where local geography & culture dictates which gender may participate in activities especially in the neighbouring tribes.
- In each of three subsistence activities (where indigenous geography knowledge is applied to harvesting of natural resources.
 - Those resources are distributed by resource regions namely;
 - a) Bem Palal, (In Ili language meaning towards the sea),
 - b) Dibleg Mai Me (meaning in Dibleg Tribal land) &
 - c) Karama Palal (meaning towards the Karama.
- In specific is to discuss geographical indicators (environmental & cultural) that Ili people have established over many years to inform them when to start harvesting resources.
- This is privileged knowledge that becomes transferred to Ili children at an early age by direct participation with their family members or extended families.

- Cultivated food & other resources are harvested in the area, such as;
 - sago (*Metroxylon sago*, *M. rumphii*), yams (*Dioscorea alata* and *D. esculenta*), taro (*Coleocarpus esculenta* and *Xanthosoma* Sp.), bananas (*Musa* Sp.) and cassava (*Manihot esculenta*).
- To supplement diet other plant resources are additionally harvested;
 - *Livingstonia* palms (*Livingstonia* Spp.) collected from savannah woodland &
 - forest palms (*Gulubia costata*) from monsoonal forests, respectively.
- But before involving in harvesting of resources there are indicators (both environmental & cultural) that Ili people can see & interpret that it is time to conduct a specific resource utilization task.
- These are represented in Table 1 below.
- It is also similar case for harvesting fresh water fisheries & animal resources.
- Application of above methods are survival strategies that people have used over hundreds of years in which children have learnt through observations and imitations.
- Indigenous geography is utilitarian in approach. It deals with immediate survival values and skills in a given Ili space that the children are used to over the years.

TABLE 1 – INDIGENOUS GEOGRAPHY INDICATORS OF INDIGENOUS RESOURCES

(A) CULTIVATED AND BUSH FOOD RESOURCES	
INDICATOR	WHERE INDICATOR IS APPLICABLE
Yams flowering	Means that yams have healthy tubers
A tree called 'beyat', in Ili language, blossoming with yellow flowers	People warned not to strike match. Yam leaves can be healthy and bear healthy tubers
Ritual ceremony	It is time to harvest yams
Northwest trade winds	It is time to harvesting bush 'cadamon'
Cultural taboos removed after traditional ceremony	It is time to exploit natural resources from the forest
(B) FRESH WATER FISHERIES RESOURCES	
<i>Eucalyptus</i> Spp. in blossom during Southeast Trade wind	There is abundance of fresh water fisheries
<i>Barringtonia</i> Sp. in blossom	Plenty of freshwater barramundi (<i>Scleropages jardinii</i>) in the rivers
<i>Acacia Mangium</i> in blossom	Plenty of freshwater barramundi
<i>Acacia crassicaarpa</i> in blossom	Plenty of yabbies and freshwater crocodiles
(C) ANIMALS RESOURCES	
Isolated thunderstorms in savannah areas	Agile wallabies (<i>Macropus agilis</i>) are plenty in the savannah areas
Foot prints around fruit trees during Northwest trade winds	Cassowary (<i>Cassuarinus</i>) are feeding on the fruit trees as early as 6.00 am
Foot prints in the food garden	Rusa deer (<i>Rusa timorensis</i>) eating yam leaves thus need to ambush them in the night

(3) INDIGENOUS GEOGRAPHY'S ROLE IN INFORMAL EDUCATION

- Indigenous geography has a significant role to play in Idi Society or other many ethnic groups in PNG.
- It has contributed to immediate involvement, observation and personal learning of survival skills in the lives of children.
- Indigenous geography knowledge becomes more meaningful in developing the informal education process of children away from formal classrooms learning situation.
- Informal education and learning are quite common in tribal societies of the developing world.
- Papua New Guinea has this kind of learning occurring in currency in conjunction with formal education.
- In addition, indigenous geography knowledge on forest types, rivers, swamps, navigation and mapping natural landscapes & many other cultural parameters, as well, enhance children's learning.
- Idi children develop attitudes of appreciating of indigenous geography has having values and ethics in the community which they carry onto informal education sector in Papua New Guinea.
- To some extent, it maybe similar situation in some of the indigenous communities around the world.

- It is for reasons given above that indigenous geography has a space to occupy alongside other sub-discipline in geography in modernity.
- It is also significant for children to 'listen to culture', in words of Macfarlane (2004) when he wrote about Maori children's pleas to educators.
- David Suzuki - 'Wisdom of the elders'
- Children participate in daily activities at an early age of 3-7 years.
- Some children may go hunting, food gardening or fishing with their parents, extended family members or the community members.
- They learn the strategies, wisdoms and skills.
- Privileged geography knowledge is acquired through observation, involvement & imitation.
- Over time, Idi children begin to become familiar with these processes & representations because everyday they are always acquiring resources from 3 resource regions.

(4) SOCIO-CULTURAL CONSTRUCTIONISM IN INDIGENOUS GEOGRAPHY

- Indigenous geography is not a given knowledge. It has to be learnt informally.
- Acquisition and informal learning of the indigenous geography knowledge at an early age by children is influenced by a number of environmental & cultural parameters.
- In environmental context children's minds are always focused on the natural environments that surround them in which they are always in constant interaction to sustain their livelihoods.
- Indicators and their application strategies are neither being scientifically been tested nor have they been validated by some other means.
- On the other side, social and cultural forces also influence the children in which those constant interactions become the norms of the society.

- The interactions help the way that indigenous geography is perceived & defined.
- There is little empirical research being done, by author's understanding on indigenous geography knowledge and its values to tribes where the knowledge is produced, reproduced and applied.
- Task by every researcher involved in indigenous geography, is to further document & research it.
- Researching of Melanesian geography is largely marginal, if not little is known in New Zealand, about our indigenous geographical position in the South Pacific.
- These are "images and [some of the] realities" in the words of Bourke (1994) that other people, have of indigenous Melanesian geography.
- Whilst we may call children's learning in tribal cultures & societies as informal education, Rogoff (1990) calls it 'Guided Participation', where children watch older people perform specific tasks and they build gradual linkages through their own involvements in certain activities.
- Those observations and involvements become essential processes tribal children performing them, although some of them maybe complex tasks.
- This kind of geographical knowledge acquisition and learning defies Piaget's theory of explanations in education that are used in many countries around the world.

(5) SIGNIFICANCE OF INDIGENOUS CULTURES IN EDUCATION

- First National Goal & Directive Principle of PNG declares for Integral Human Development and in there the specific tenet asks for family unit as the fundamental basis to promote culture, moral, economic and social standing in the Melanesian ways (Government of Papua New Guinea, 1975).
- Culture is important to survival of any society and cultural component in the National Goal and Directive Principle is a testimony for continuity of PNG cultures into the future.
- Culture is an important part of education.
- It influences how people will learn from early age than by pedagogy. Culture may also expect a certain outcome from learning that children go through an educational system.
- Papua New Guinea having over 800 different languages and cultural groups, suggest 800 plus different cultural views being present.
- Mission to bring together 800 different cultural groups through one type of educational process, is a formidable task for educational planners in the country.
- Elyford (1996) states that educational provided in PNG, has been developed in such a way to replace indigenous cultures in the country, the product is a cultural alienation.
- Earlier on Avalos (1991) makes a similar type of assertion that PNG with over 850 languages posits a complexity of problems that policy makes are confronted.
- Clearly education system oscillates between education for modernity and education to equip a student for the village community.

(6) CONCLUSION

Indigenous geography knowledge is discussed in spatial and modernity context.

Then further discussions are conducted on the geography indicators of indigenous resource use and socio-cultural constructionism of indigenous geography to demonstrate the value of informal education that Idi children learn through their family members as well as through their interactions with the surrounding natural and cultural environments, prior to their enrolment at the formal education system in Papua New Guinea.

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Joe & Siet de Jong, Paeroa, New Zealand

Seneah Greh & family, PNG National Museum

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QUESTIONS