Who Were the Papuans?

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Abstract

Popularisers and scholars almost unanimously present a standard view of the origins of the name *Papua*. Many scholars associate other forms of the name with the now standard *Papua*: *puwa-puwa*, and even *papu-papu*. The name is either standard Malay, or else Moluccan dialect and it means 'frizzy-haired'. While this is clearly the view of westerners in the 19th and 20th centuries, evidence for it in the 18th, 17th and 16th centuries is lacking or highly doubtful, and the name is older than that. Following the Dutch officials J.H.F. Sollewijn Gelpke and F.C. Kamma, the writer of this article explores the likelihood of the word Papua having first been a Biak term for the far West of New Guinea, a dialectal place name, this by at least the 14th century. It first referred to the Raja Ampat Islands, between the New Guinea mainland and the Moluccas (Halmahera). In European times the term extended its area of coverage. Only in later centuries did it pick up denotations of the more characteristic populations of the Far East of Indonesia and shifting connotations, whether derogatory or complimentary.

It is difficult to describe where 'Papua' has been, but it verges on the impossible to give a responsible answer to the question of who the Papuans were, or even are. There is a standard view of this latter question. 'Papuan' comes from a Malay or a Moluccan word for 'fuzzy-wuzzy' (to quote the most reputable generalist, Lach 1993, p. 1467). The problem is that a respectable source for this claim is never quoted (usually no source is quoted), and a deeper problem is that sufficiently old sources for this old word do not seem to exist today.

Donald F. Lach (1993: III.3, 1467) notes that fairly early writers like Argensola, emphasise blackness of skin and that the native word 'papua' means 'black',[1] but he goes on: 'Most seventeenth-century observers, however, describe Papuan hair as kinky or frizzly'. In fn. 349 Lach asserts on his own authority and without further reference, either bibliographical or temporal: 'Papua (Malay, *papuwah*) actually means 'frizzle-haired'.

[1] Miguel Roxo de Brito in a Sino-Spanish codex completed in Manila 1590 and unknown to most of the great scholars of this area before Charles Boxer. De Brito's journey to the Raja Ampat was an early one: 1581-82. Apart from illustrating the common use of 'Indians' for all indigenes (*yndios* p.177, 178, 191, 192 for New Guineans), there is mention of yet another 'Rey Papua' (p.182) of types of 'papuan' food, and constant back reference to 'Guinea' – 'La gente de esta provinçia son todos negros como los de Guinea, y son todos mercadores' (The people of this region are all negroes like those of Guinea and all are traders) – this of the Maccluer Gulf region, it seems: p.185 (and p.186). Their use of decorations made of feathers is like that seen in Guinea (p.187).

Also another voice of some authority: 'The Malayan term for crisped or woolly hair is 'rambut pua-pua'. Hence the term 'pua-pua' or 'papua' (crisped) has come to be applied to the entire race'. (Earl 1853 p.3 – an expert on the area in the mid 19th century, as one of the founders of the short-lived Port Essington, and speaking of the situation in that century.)

It is a sign of how severe the problem is that so many suggestions have been made by people from different traditions and periods. We will risk some listing of suggested origins or, given their number and frequent inaccessibility, select some of them. Not many popular books give more than two variant forms of the name, and we will give more. We will also show that scholars from early times too deep into our own lifetimes have failed to find in any of the Malayo-Austronesian languages of the Spice Islands area a word qualified to be the uncontested ancestor of 'papua'.

One wonders then why there has been so much confidence for 500 years! Actually, evidence for the 'fuzzy-wuzzy' meaning for the word may be much younger than that, about 200 years old (Sollewijn-Gelpke 1993, p.329, ending his backwards search at Marsden's dictionary of 1812). While hair type is often mentioned in early reports and descriptions, it is not the prime mark of a 'papuan' in the earliest sources. Blackness of skin seems always to have been more important, and geographic *location* may also be a prior meaning of the name. We repeat, the word Papua is old, older than the colonial period, and consistently used since then in western languages. Seemingly it has been back-translated into many languages of the Indian Ocean area.[2] Its actual meanings may have vacillated widely over the last four centuries.

In Early Germanic Europe the tribal names (Franken, Franki, Franks, which themselves have interesting origins) generally gave to places their toponyms (Francia, France). Thus, the names of the people ended up naming the area where each people settled, after long or short periods of 'wandering' and war (Jensen, in Blok 1966, p.243 ff.). The best-argued study of the origins of 'Papua' so far known to me claims that in our area the opposite happened. A place name became used for the name of the peoples associated with that place (the Raja Empat islands), and this mixed name for the place and its peoples[3] gradually became used far beyond the islands off the west tip of the mainland of New Guinea, ending up being used for a large oceanic gulf, and then for British New Guinea.

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[2] Which is how I prefer to take the entry *poea-poea* (=/puapua/) in the *Kamoes Soenda-Malajoe*.

[3] The first application to the *population* of this area which I found in Lach's account (1993, p. 1471) came from the May 1625 issue of Wassenaer's newspaper *Historisch verhael*, from the voyage of Jan Carstensz(oon) 1623, though in Wichmann's long abstract of the records of this voyage I found nothing of the sort. However, in the Journal of Captain Don Diego de Prado y Tovar, of the de Quiros voyage of 1606, I find (earlier) mention of both 'indios' and 'papuas' in the sense of the inhabitants—'estos papuas'. I am not interested in the reference here, only in the term, its use, and its date (Stevens & Barwick 1930, p.172-3). And in a letter of Torres, p.232 of the same collection, we read, of the region between 'nueva guinéa' and 'las Malucas', about: 'Moros…[who] van conquistando esta gente que dicen de los Papuas'. Here the date, the reference, and the (masculine) gender are all highly relevant to the priority of terms meaning 'the Papuans'. Dourado's atlases (e.g., 1571, see Roncière map #59, 'os papuas') have 'costa dos papuas' c. 1573.

What is certain is that the word itself was already being commonly used when Europeans first ventured into the seas around the Spice Islands in the early 16th century. Thus it is at least 15th century in age, and conceivably as ancient as the 8th century. Trade and the movement of peoples can be traced back to that time, and no doubt trade and voyaging of some sort was thousands of years older. Coedes has noted this for the 'Mediterranean' of Asia, the South China Sea. As noted, early uses of 'papua' seem to apply only to the area of western New Guinea and particularly to the near offshore islands, and somewhat later (a century or so?), to the populations in these areas.

Portuguese were the first Europeans to come, and this became the eastward limit of their range. Europeans of many sorts regularly visited these islands, close to the Moluccas, and Spaniards skimmed the north coast of the New Guinea mainland (de Retes giving it its name) on their way to Acapulco in South America. Manila and the seas to the north of Nova (or Nueva) Guinea became the westward limits of the Spanish range, with the backside (the continuation over the poles) of the 'Pope's Line' supposedly dividing their spheres of influence. Portuguese came and went from the West, as did the Dutch in the 17th century. Spaniards came and went (approximately) from the East (and North). In the second century of colonisation the Dutch did some exploration of the south coast of New Guinea, but no one was very interested in the details of the larger area, except for the search for the gold islands of Solomon (1 Kgs 9:26-28) and (later) The Great South Land. We must enter into the perspective of the pre-European traders and the 16th century European visitors and ask ourselves what each group was capable of (their seafaring technology), and more importantly, what each group was currently interested in. But for the first two centuries the evidence for the use, the form, and the meaning, of the varieties of 'Papua' is confused, and the meaning 'fuzzy-wuzzy' is not the most likely.

First, the forms of the word. We will be highly selective. From the 18th century we start finding two or three basic forms, mainly: *papua*, *pua-pua*, and perhaps the latter form with a final pronounced /h/, *puah-puah*. The *puah* form may or may not differ from *pua* by this written \h\ (we use back slash to emphasise written or ideal forms, and forward slashes to emphasise actually pronounced phonemes or forms). If the forms with final \-h\ occur only or mainly in Germanic language reports, Dutch and English (as I think they do), we may conclude with high probability that the \h\ is no more than a graphic sign, indicating something about the vowel quality of the final /-a/. It is almost certain that the \-h-\ in the spelling of the 'Wahgi' river is of this sort. It occurs locally spelt as Waghi, Whagi, and quite naturally so, given the peculiarities of English g/gh and w/wh. More scientifically it has appeared as Wagi/Waki, also quite defensibly, given the peculiarities of voiced/unvoiced distinction in the local languages (effectively being the distinction prenasalised stop/non-prenasalisable stop—Phillips 1972). Of course, no European language actually ends a word with a *pronounced* /-h/, but Bahasa does, so does the classical language of India, Sanskrit, to this day, and so does Arabic, very commonly, in the Muslim Name for God and its many phrase-final uses—'thanks be to Allah' = 'al-***h***amdu 'l-i***ll***ah'. In this treatment we will not attempt an exhaustive

discussion of the final \-h\, for lack of current evidence on that issue, but it will force itself into some other considerations. We will also ignore the \w\ in the middle of many spellings of the word, treating it as a glide between the /u/ and the following /a/, a 'w' which may or may not have had phonemic status in various dialects of Austronesian.

The seeming equivalence of *pua-pua* and *pa-pua* goes deeper, but could be explained by common features of the Austronesian language group. A prefix PA- can be reconstructed for Primitive Austronesian, and it is generally an intensifier, functionally rather like Whaka- (often /faka-/) in Maori. All through the wide area of Austronesian (including Polynesian) languages, reduplication can also have such intensifying meanings, as well as (the related meaning of) plural: Bahasa *orang* = person, *orang-orang* = people; *anak* = child, *anak-anak* = children. It is much more likely that if we are to analyse Papua this way, it should mean '*very* pua(h)', whatever pua(h) meant, rather than 'many puas'. Very what? The main contenders are 'very black' or 'very curly'. However, one pair of scholars doesn't analyse it thus, deriving it from a form *babwa*, for which see below. Evidence could probably be gathered from before the colonial period strongly supporting the equivalence of Pa+pua = Pua+pua. I am not an expert in the languages of the area but in the index of the most famous (and, I think, the latest) poem in Old Javanese, the *Nagarakertagama*, we find two such words being treated as alternate forms of the same word: *patipati* = *papati* (Pigeaud 1963). This pair still exists in today's Bahasa.

These are the idealised forms we suspect to be basic, but the early form \Papoos\ suggests that we must add a non-reduplicated *papu* to our list (and even *papu-papu*!), unless we think the final \-s\, surely pronounced in all languages and thus better written /-s/, was part of the original word, and not just the common European formant for plurality. If we did somehow have an original /papus/ (a word extant in Biak), we might resurrect the form *papuh*/*papuah*, with final (pronounced) /-h/, saying that the /h/ (as it does in many languages of India) alternated with the /s/. But as we have said, we try to avoid the perils of too much discussion of that final \-h\ except to note that it does not survive on the modern form of the name.

Another European linguistic habit is foreign to languages of the local area, grammatical gender. In Portuguese *as Papua* has a different gender, and reference, from *os Papua*. The former is feminine, and refers to islands (in the plural, and it may have final \-s\). When masculine, as in the second example (both *as* and *os* mean 'the'), it refers to the people, masculine by default. A complicating factor is that European habit prefers the names of lands to end in \-a\. A common way of changing the name of a place to the name if (its) people is to end the word in \-an\. We do not find the form *Papu-an* in early texts, to my knowledge, and the Dutch prefer the word *Papoea's* for the people, /papuas/. Perhaps the term was too foreign to acquire such European endings in the first two centuries of exploration.

What about this final /-a/? I see it as a crucial problem. There is no doubt that it has always been pronounced by most Europeans, and mostly pronounced by

the pre-European users of whatever may have been the other forms of 'Papua'. How do we get an ending like this onto *papu-papu*? There seems to be an insuperable phonetic obstacle preventing the forms related to *papu-papu* from ever having been the same as *Pa-pua* or *pua-pua*. By torturing the evidence into submission we might postulate a basic form **puh* (unknown to history or to linguistic science), and explain the /-a/ as a glide vowel to assist the strong and clear pronunciation of the final, voiced or unvoiced /-h/. Thus from **puh* (not attested) we would get *papuh* leading to *pa-pu$_{(a)}$h* and *pu$_{(a)}$h-pu$_{(a)}$h*, with various dialects losing the pronunciation of the /-h/ and keeping the helping vowel /-a/. But this process seems to me to be quite foreign to Austronesian languages, and even to Classical Sanskrit in today's educated Indian pronunciation. My pandit in Pune, S.H. Dhupka, past secretary of the Tilak Society, pronounced every final /-h/ (which derives from final /-s/ in other forms of the same words) quite 'hard', i.e., voiceless, and with a small helping vowel whispered *after* the /-h/, thus, /-ah$_a$ /, and not before it. It is in Semitic languages that gutturals naturally develop a preceding helping vowel, and then it is not the case with the Semitic /-h/, but with the more emphatic ones, particularly *'ain*. All this seems a long way from the Malay world of the 15th century and earlier.

If we cannot derive *pua* forms from *papu* and its recorded relative like \papoos\ we must select one or the other as our basic form and leave the many attested variations (such as 'Papoia', the first) to later consideration. Here we must introduce an old part-time scholar, presumably now deceased, by name J.H.F. Sollewijn Gelpe, and a more noted researcher of the same period, F.C. Kamma. I have a 1950's photo of the former and his son Frits standing on the deck of a boat in the roadstead (harbour) of Sorong, at the very western tip of Dutch Nieuw Guinea. Frits was the administrator there and looks to be in his 20s or 30s. The father, the author of an article published in 1993, looks at least 50 years old. Thus at the time of the publication of his article he would have been around 90, and at the time of my writing he would be, if alive, a centenarian. This has made me reluctant to write to him, though his son may still be handling such correspondence.

All this because his article leaves many gaps, while developing a mere suggestion of Kamma. Its great advances on previous discussions known to me (almost none!) and on those he provides for us make it worthy of close attention. He handles the final /-a/ problem by including such a final vowel in his original form. He handles the highly likely *initial* stress pattern of the early word by omitting the medial \-pu-\ syllable and sticking the /p/ (or /b/) on the end of the first syllable. This leaves any /w/ as a labial glide capable of later being syllabified to /uw/ (though how, when and why remains a minor mystery). And he makes the word a Biak word, like the much later word *irian*. The Biak and the related Numfoor peoples were the main seafarers of the NW of New Guinea in the periods in question, and the NW of New Guinea provided outsiders with the parts most commonly contacted by the Malay (and Chinese) world, and the parts first heard of by Europeans on visits to (even residency in) the area of the Spice Islands, the old Moluccas, more extensive

than modern Halmahera. Sollewijn Gelpke notes that most early mentions of 'papua' seem to refer to areas of or near Biak settlement.

The well-known Dutch official and investigator of cargo cults, F.C. Kamma, in the mid-20th century, heard (occasionally) the Biak phrase *sup i babwa* being used, in Biak island and/or Biak settlements on the shores of Geelvinck/ Cenderawasih Bay and further west around the Vogelkop/Birdshead. The meaning was 'land underneath', the reference was to the islands and perhaps to nearby coastal villages (the Raja Empát—the Malay form, or the Raja Ámpat—the regional pronunciation, or else the Kalana Fat—the 'four kings') at the western limit of Biak voyaging. (Some individual names for them or their sub-divisions and parts: Sarmi, Waigéo, Salawati, Misoöl, Gébé, Gag, Batan Palé, Bianchí, Gaman, Batantá, Suba, Maba, Patani, Weda, and perhaps Doom, the 1950s administrative centre.) The evidence for *babwa* or the like having been an old name is weak, but not non-existent. Some reinforcement comes from the local legends and European stories of a 'Raya Papua', 'papuan rajah', from the 16th century to the later 20th century. (See Pigafetta 1521; Christoforo d'Acosta and Nicolas Nuñez 1569, who said that the 'gentili papui di terra firma' had many kings; all in Wichmann 1909 sub nominibus.) We must imagine that a Biak word for 'land', i.e., 'sup' and what looks like a predicate marker 'i' (common all over New Guinea, and apparently here introducing either a brief predicate, 'land which-is underneath', or a simple modifier, 'land-underneath') dropped out of many uses of this term 'by abbreviation', and that the word *babwa* was used alone. In some dialects this would have been pronounced *papwa*. This *babwa* referred to distant, non-Biak territory still accessible to them by canoe, and certainly not to the mainland of New Guinea.

We are encouraged to interpret 'underneath' as 'western' by a non-quoted Biak idiom which uses a word meaning 'to rise' for 'to go eastwards'. It is assumed that there would be a term complementary to 'to rise' (in this horizontally travelling use, rather like English 'to go up the road' where the road is flat), i.e., to go underneath, down, to sink. The main contender for such a counterbalance to 'rise = East' seems to involve *babwa*. And we now have Sandaun Province of PNG, using the same devices and shifts of meanings. A rather weak support for this is provided in the form of the phrase which Numfoor people are reported to have used to refer to themselves on arrival at Tidore: 'kawasa ori sar', 'people from the sunrise'. Of course, the ancient name 'Timor' for the easternmost large island of the Malay chain indicates a natural tendency to name by East-West location—*timur* still means 'East(ern)' in Bahasa.

But our troubles are not over. If the dominating trading people not only visited islands in the Raja Empat but also settled there, they may have carried the name in their heads and used it for what was no longer a distant western area but the environs of their now-current villages. Around the back of the spidery island of Halmahera (anciently Gilolo, Batochina &c.) there were the ultimate eastern sultanates of Ternate and Tidore, which had regular contact with NW New Guinea. Their (non-Biak) sailors must be supposed to have picked up the

term and carried it back westwards, its meaning by now being lost. 'Papwa' was now a non-transparent place name, or so we must believe. Thus it will have entered the port vocabulary of the mobile Malay traders all over the archipelago and then become understood to be a Malay, or even a West Malay word.

When Europeans first ventured to the west of Halmahera (their 'Moluccas') they enquired, as did foot travellers up the Wahgi valley, about the unsighted lands ahead. They were told that this place (usually interpreted as the islands further East) was 'papua'. Later 'the isles of the papua(s)' became 'the people of the Papua(s)', the article only slowly changing from feminine gender to masculine gender in Portuguese. Thus there was a Papua before there were Papuans but Europeans quickly rectified that (Torres 1601 'los vientos los echaron a la de los Papúas' note the accent; Wichmann 1909 sub nomine). Then we must assume that changing attitudes to these peoples gave changing shades of meaning to a now opaque word. These people were (in general) blacker than those to the west, being perhaps the survivors of an older, negrito population wave. They had (quite often) very tightly curled hair.[4] They went (more or less) naked. They were chiefless, and they were often despised.[5] If we want to see such shifts of meaning at work, under the pressure of changing social attitudes, we only have to look at what happened to 'Irian' over its much shorter life-span.

It is very important to note that the more Melanesian peoples of East Timor were never called 'Papuan' by anyone. This supports the hints in the early colonial records that the main meaning of Papua was geographic. Today *orang Papua*, with, to my ears, no clear accent favouring either the first or the second syllable, is standard in East Indonesia for all typically New Guinean people.

A note here on yet another distractor—Defert (1996, p.16, fn.3) opens up the possibility of a connection with Bahasa *papa miskin*, the *miskin* unmentioned by him but mentioned to me by Fr. Franco Zocca and others. The loose connection is Defert's unreferenced claim that (I translate) 'The word 'Papu-' could have originated in the Moluccas where it might have meant 'fatherless'', and the interpretation Defert puts on 'fatherless' is 'acephalous-anarchic'. The common Bahasa word *papa* means poor and miserable (Melanesian Pidgin *tarangu*!) and with the addition of *miskin* seems to mean the same. We will sidle away from that half-open door to wider paths of investigation.

I had always felt that Irian was a recent word. If it is, it has collected quite a remarkable cluster of 'meanings'. Apparently, it was suggested in 1945 as a (brand?) new name for Papua because of the growth of derogatory meanings

[4] Van Linschoten, in van den Boogaart 2000. The former reproduces plate 22 from van Linschoten 1596 (repeated in the *Icones* of 1604) as well as his Dutch text: 'De negers of Kaffirs [of Mozambique and inland from the Cape] lopen vrijwel naakt', and as expected they have 'geschroeid kroeshaar'— they run around naked and have tightly curled hair. ZORC in PAWLEY & ROSS: 558 looks for similar attitudes reconstructed for Primitive Austronesian cultures.

[5] Many of these aspects are pejorative as early as the travel books of the 16th century, applied to any population (Turner & Ash, p.246).

around that old name. In 1950 the Rajah (Raja, Raya) of Salawati, Abu Kasim Arfan, put his own 'spin' on the name Papua. To him it meant 'subjected land' (Sollewijn Gelpke 1993, p.327), and the subjector was none other than his own legendary ancestor, Gurabési. Etymology in oral societies is as much poetry and legend as it is history. In more recent times, *Irian* has in its turn been replaced by *Papua* because of the derogatory meanings imposed on the more recent term by the Indonesian elite!

The man who suggested the new name (how new? few names are totally invented) was M.W. Kaisiepo. A similarly named F. Kaisiepo, a 'Papuan delegate' to the Malino Conference (1947; plenty about the two in Schoorl) officially proposed the name, and after the 1963 armed take-over of Dutch New Guinea, 'Irian' entered officially into use even there. Its meaning, something like one (arbitrary) interpretation of *niu gini*, was 'rising up', even 'soaring spirit': Biak iri+an, *iri* meaning land (this meaning is a constant in many different explanations), and *an* meaning 'slowly rising' (rather than 'hot', though these may be related meanings of the same word, both from a cooking metaphor), like steam from a cooking pot, or like land appearing from below the horizon.

History has not been kind to Irian itself or to 'Irian' the mere name. The same elements have been interpreted as 'land+hot',[6] not uncomplimentary to Biak island, but perhaps a little denigratory of the climate of the mainland. Its homeland has also (against the flow of history) been transplanted to the south coast, to the Fly area, around Merauke, where it is supposed to have meant 'origin-territory'. Just why is not explained. There were prisons there which were not situated in the land of origin of their inhabitants, and the native inhabitants of this area seem seldom to have gone roving seaward, unlike the Biak. After the Conference of Malino in 1947, I.R.I.A.N. was pressed into nationalist duty as a supposed acronym: Ikut Republik Indonesia Anti Nederland; 'follow the Republic of Indonesia against Holland'. This has been recited to me by two people from Flores as still being very much alive in oral culture. The less said about its ancestry the better.

As we have just been flirting with the changing connotations of names and with bad attitudes to foreign ethnicities, we may note that Australian reporter Pat Burgess admits his own countrymen's negative attitudes in his memoirs of 'hot news' gathering:

> Back in Irian Barat in 1963… [to cover the strong discipline of Indonesian troops and the possible execution of an Indonesian paratrooper for raping a Papuan girl] A great story, for a day. But not the big story, not the sending back where they came from of the last of the Dutch colonialists from the last of the Isles of Spice, after years. Not the important story of what was going to happen to the

[6] Defert 1996, p.12 fn.5, quoting a 'Koentjaraningrat 1963 p.4' (apparently *Penduduk Irian Barat*, and apparently for 'land of origin'), mentioning Frans 'Kasiepo', and '1946' for 'the' Malino conference, given the date 1947 by Sollewijn Gelpke. Maybe they were annual events.

> Melanesian, newest sons of the Indonesian Republic – black, bare-footed and fuzzy-haired; not brown and dreaming like the older sons of Java – Melanesians whom the planters and recruiters and public servants on the Australian side were still calling 'rock-ape true' (p.174).

In the few, dramatic years of his presidency, Abdu 'r-Rahman Wahid added another etymological blow to those oppressing the native population of Indonesia's newest province. It now meant 'stark naked', a derogatory meaning in Indian and Malay mouths. True, Hebrew, Arabic and Persian do have such a word, based on the Semitic letters ᶜain+Ra+Ya. Arabic *ᶜariya* means to take off your clothes, the passive verb *ᶜuriya* means to be stark naked. In Indonesian the first guttural ᶜain consonant would not have been pronounced by any but the most educated Muslims. But the etymology is as false as the majority of such efforts are in cultures (like those of the early Christian Fathers of the Church!) where etymologising is a popular and common practice.

There is no easy Malay contender for 'papua' with the required meanings. The modern term for 'frizzy' hair is (*rambut*) *keriting*. In Tetum (common language of Timor Leste, and connected with foreign trading since before European times) there are verbs for winding, knotting (e.g., of hair), but they are distant forms: babula, bobar, babur, fafeli, fafirun, fafiruk and fafitun. Sollewijn Gelpke turns up closer forms, and reports of meanings without any quoted forms, some of which could (apparently) mean combinations of 'chicken' and 'black', 'vegetation' and 'tangled/curly'. He mentions some outlandish suggestions which he had picked up in his reading (and conversation?), and one favourite theory of his own, later sorrowfully discarded. Most importantly, like myself, he found none of the standard explanations of 'Papua' to be backed up by any evidence, and could not understand why they survived relatively unchallenged. The great contributions of his article are his detailed analysis of the dictionaries of Malay, his convincing criticism of contending etymologies,[7] and some toponymic forms from the late 19th century which are relevant: the Kofiau Islands were called Popa, or Poppang, until a century ago, and around 1900 the southern cape of Gag island was recorded as Papuapu (p.326). This again raises the spectre of an original *papu*, as *apu* is a local word for a Triton shell used as a horn, as was common along the north coast of PNG as well (unless the word be divided *papua+apu*, with /-a+a-/ being reduced to /-a-/, by 'crasis'). In the latter case we can rest with *papua* and leave *papu* to nightmare territory.

European etymologising began, it seems, as early as António Galvão, Portuguese Captain of the Moluccas from 1536-1539, and has continued regularly since. Notable for their strangeness and unfoundedness are (Sollewijn-Gelpke, p.319):

[7] 'The origin of the word Papua has never been the subject of systematic and comprehensive research,' p. 319.

- Papûa (with what is claimed to be the Malay and Protestant Christian accent, on the middle syllable),[8] supposedly a New Guinean name for the pawpaw, or the papaya fruit, hence the place where these grow luxuriantly and well.
- Amboinese Malay \papoewa\ = /papua/ meant 'tangled' (like Tetum *babula* etc) as of a fishing line. Sailors from Amboina supposedly used this term for Papuans, referring, apparently, to their hair.
- Sundanese \poea\ = /pua/ means an ants' nest in a tree, a squirrel's nest that looks untidy, again apparently connoting 'untidy' and meaning 'untidy papuans'.
- A Biak word *papús* means 'riches, imported goods', and was used to greet, or to exclaim over the visit of foreign ships—this recalls the etymology of Chimbu/Simbu province in PNG: from an expression of greeting, 'sipuuu', though Leahy (1994) implies that (he thinks) the river had that name before any European was given a 'sipuuu' greeting. His recorded greetings are /wenduli/ and \e-shon-a\ (pp.71, 82, and p. 85 where Kundiawa was a new name for an airstrip previously called Chimbu 'after the river'). It may recall our tortured speculations on the final \h\ of puah! A modern Biak dictionary indeed gives *papus* as a word for 'things', goods commodities, wares: Kamus Bahasa Biak-Indonesia 1977—meaning I—barang, harta benda: meaning II—sampah, 'dirt, offscourings', and this line of investigation leaves the door to historical truth still open, at least by a small crack.
- In the late classical author Procopius there is mention of a mountain in Numidia (Berber or Negro territory in Africa), where the Vandal king Geilimer fled into the arms of a tribe of black barbarians in AD 512 to escape the Byzantine general Belisarius. This is apparently from a Greek form like □□□□□□□□. Perhaps, thought the younger J.H.F. Sollewijn Gelpke, the history-hungry Portuguese wanted to use a suitable African (and Christian-/classical) name for this negroid corner of their empire.

If a Dutch official whose thesis was in the historical field and whose mature life was spent in Dutch New Guinea still allows for the word *puah-puah* to have been a West Malay word (once possibly used of negritos and/or Africans), I too must leave that door a little open. Words a little like this (taken from early texts and dictionaries) meaning various types of fowls and plants (not all 'black' or 'tangled' either) are treated seriously by Sollewijn Gelpke (p.322) as contenders for the honour of naming the Papuans. Some Sumatran chickens (with names like *papua*) had black meat; some hens possibly named rather like *papua* were described as having feathers *curled* in front; but no suitable linguistic forms are connected with these descriptions in his sources. A shrub

[8] Medial accent is shown (either by an acute or a circonflex accent mark) in Marcus Prancudo 1561 (as in Wichmann), in de Torres 1606 (ditto), and in the dictionary of Moraes e Silva, 1832 in the version available to me, but first in 1798, and surely the accentuation was no 1832 innovation of ed.2. Sollewijn Gelpke exaggerates both the 'Malay and Protestant' medial accentuation (at least in the mouths of natives of modern Flores, my informants), and the lack of early evidence for it. Dutch, English, German, Spanish and Italian seem to have a stronger word accent (today) than Malay, except for the highlighting of a full vowel occurring in the same word as, and as a partner to, a syllable containing the unaccented /ĕ/ of Malay.

of the ivy family is called *papua* in the Philippines, and the form *pua-pua* is recorded as Indonesian for the casuarina tree. At least such *forms* are attested. But there is no ancient Austronesian root beginning PU- in Blust (1988, appendix 2).

It is true that early reports frequently mention hair, styles and basic forms of hair growth. Such mentions generally occur in among a whole cluster of characteristics, using words from a loose family of related terms whose precise meanings are difficult to recapture today, and where matters of hair are seldom the main focus of attention. The terms for what might or might not mean 'fuzzy-wuzzy' (itself a slightly childish term, perhaps unconsciously condescending) are never clear: *crespo* in Portuguese, *crespo* in Italian, *geschroeid kroeshaar* in Dutch, English: *woolly, frizzy, frizzly, frizzled, kinky*, appearing as *kraushaarig* and *krauses haar* in German, and as *cheveux laineux et frisés* in French. Physical anthropologists do not see a link between black skin and tightly curled hair, though these features in fact occur together in two areas of the tropics, Africa and New Guinea.[9] Blackness of skin is adaptive and hair type apparently not. The other 'negroid' features of West and SE Africans to whom Papuans were readily compared do not form a neat cluster—legs, lips, nose and general massiveness or gracility of frame. Of course, the Portuguese in particular, the masters of Africa, readily ran through a whole palette of descriptors for every new people they met, and between New Guinea and Africa there were no negritos, at least on the coasts. Thus to see anything like the tropical Africans again was worthy of note after leaving the last negroids as slaves in Goa (cf. van Linschoten's *Icones* and the legends thereto attached)[10] and traversing Insulindia near its coasts. Sollewijn Gelpke tends to down play the number of the early mentions of unusual Papuan hair, because he is arguing against hair type being an original or main meaning of 'Papuan'. However, in 1527 and 1529, Gomes de Sequeira and Alvaro de Saavedra (Wichmann, sub nominibus) are reported as noting the Papuan hair, and the island of 'los Crespos' frequently found on maps and portulans, and mentioned by de Retes in 1545, is suspected to be Biak itself. 'Crespo' can only refer to frizzy hair.

Surely the Malay traders of their far east, such as those from Banda and Tidore, were almost equally surprised as the later Europeans by what lay over the ethnic Wallace line, in the New Guinea area. There must originally have existed a varied collection of terms and expressions for the more primitive peoples of the East. Could the success of the term 'Papua' have killed most of them off before western recorded history entered on the scene (or this scene was unwillingly plunged into its foreign stream)? Then local deformations or

[9] Tightly curled hair is regularly found associated with black skin, but Loring Brace, in Lefkowitz (1996) consigns it to 'adaptively trivial traits and regional clusters' hardly deserving of mention.

[10] And in the *Itinerario*, (ed. Kern & Terpstra 1957) p.178 Capittel 41, the text describes the best-known negroes of Goa, those from SE Africa, in terms that would have been applied, wherever possible, to far easterners looking anything like them: 'Zijn alle int ghemeen peck swert, met ghekrult versengt hayr of t'hooft ende baert, die seer weynigh is, plate breede en stompe neusen, groote dicke lippen, …' – summarily, 'they are generally pitch-black, frizzy-haired, with wide snub noses and large thick lips'.

elaborations of *babwa* could have arisen, forms not native to Biak, e.g., *pua-pua*, even *papu-papu*.

But who were these Papuans?

We are relying on arguments of likelihood. There is no certainty, but I think I have a reasonable grasp of the debate and the following speculations seem to be the best that an amateur scholar can come up with. More professional investigators are invited to slash, burn and rebuild, if they can.

- Originally there were no 'Papuans', only a place called Babwa, which was a name used only by the Biak for the islands just off the west coast of mainland NG—the largest of these being Waigeo and Misoöl, and a scatter of smaller ones between them. The sultanates of Ternate and Tidore lay on the far, western, side of the extended island now called Halmahera (to the west of the Raja Empat islands, supposedly the real home of 'Papua'). These sultanates traded and slaved eastwards, while the Biak travelled, traded and paid tribute mainly to their own west.
- Somehow the Biak name became the general 'Malay' (or dialectal Austronesian) name for this unimportant and isolated place, perhaps through Biak colonists and settlers there, saying that they actually lived in '(san-)daun land', were currently 'in the west'. The name may long have remained transparent (meaningful) for them—colonists might have mentally preserved the perspective of their previous home, particularly if they travelled to Biak from time to time to refresh that perspective.
- There is a long tradition in this area of big men being called 'Raya Papua', 'Papuan Rajah'. These Rajahs may not have been ethnically Papuan, nor may the majority of their subjects have been ethnically Papuan either.
- While Austronesian languages, and common Malay in particular, ruled the seaports, it is unlikely that a bare 'papua' meant a man of a certain ethnicity or the ethnicity itself. A phrase like *orang* (+*orang*) papua, or even *bangsa papua* would have been required. Thus I believe that the Papu-ans had to wait to be invented by more ignorant visitors, the Europeans.
- Helped by European ignorance and simplification of local terms, the distinctive peoples of the very West of Nueva Guinea began to be given the name of their place (and not yet vice-versa), even when these peoples were not themselves ethnically negrito. The physically 'papuan' types in Timor were never called 'Papua(n)', only those in the home of 'Sup i babwa', the *sandaun* land of the Biak.
- The name Papua seems to have swamped other names in this much-travelled area and become the common term for the NG mainlanders. Traders dealt with the coastal peoples, but trading items came from the deep interior, so knowledge of inland peoples would have been widespread. All these peoples were now increasingly 'Papuans', living in a much extended Papua.

- This situation must have developed by slow change, punctuated by sudden spurts, with European (and 'Malay'?) attention moving it to apply to the peoples. This was particularly along the southern coast, up to Merauke, as the Dutch approached the Moluccas increasingly from the South, and interest in the South was stirred up by the search for The Great South Land.
- The country, whose outline was discovered with painful slowness and with many dead periods, now seems to have become open to getting its name in reverse from the name of its predominating ethnic type—i.e. from its people.
- The Gulf of Papua thus got its name, rather than being called the gulf of New Guinea, perhaps because it was in the then area of focus, in the South, which was attracting more interest than the forgotten North, and perhaps 'New Guinea' was then used in an extended sense, covering the west coast of The Great South Land and therefore not clearly enough localised. There would be sources on this matter which I have not yet reached.
- As with the word 'indian', 'Papua' was occasionally used for other non-European peoples, such as in some pages of the 1820's journal of John Lhotsky, of Australian Snowy Mountains Aboriginal peoples (1979, but only throughout pp.103-107).
- In the second period of colonisation, in the later 19th century, Dutch Nieuw Guinea, divided from the eastern half of the great island by an approximation to the 'Pope's line', seems to have commonly been called Papua by non-Dutchmen (and by local Malay—see Earl, from the beginning onwards).
- In the very early 20th century the new Federation of Australian states replaced the name British New Guinea (i.e., SE New Guinea) with Papua. This was a different name from that of the Mandated Territory, the NE, previously Kaiser Wilhelmsland (Greenwood & Grimshaw 1977, pp.465 ff.).
- Meanwhile, in the revolutionary aftermath to World War II, the independence factions of the Dutch Indies were planning an independent, unitary state. A Biak representative thought up 'Iri-an' as a new name for (Indonesian) Papua, apparently because the low opinion held of these easterners by the Malay speaking (and mostly Muslim) petty officials had increasingly rendered the name Papua pejorative, derogatory. This new name was adopted, and when Indonesia captured Dutch New Guinea by force, was used officially. Irian Barat = 'West Irian', and suggested (perhaps deliberately) to the Australians that there would soon be an Irian Timur.[11] Was it the end of Sukarno's *konfrontasi* which led to the honorific and possibly irenic 'Irian Jaya'? 'Jaya' can mean 'victorious', but I believe it can have vaguer meanings like 'great' or 'glorious'. Each to his own, perhaps.

[11] Though Defert (1996, p.7) says that 'Papua Barat' is used or has been used by the anti-Indonesian OPM and the majority of Papuan nationalists.

- After generations of forced immigration, discrimination, brutal oppression and contempt, the remaining Melanesian peoples of Irian province wanted to return to their previous, once unwanted name, Papua. The problem was there was now an (ex-Australian) Papua to their East. Thus they would have to call their country West Papua. This seems to be changing to the simple 'Papua Province', though some confusion may currently obtain.
- Meanwhile, linguists, perhaps since Dempwolff, have lumped together all non-Austronesian languages of New Guinea under the name 'papuan'. Thus, the non Papuan Highlanders, Sepiks and (some) other Northerners speak 'Papuan' languages without being Papuans themselves.
- And I am informed by residents of today's Moresby that few inhabitants of Central Province (from Central District, from MacGregor's Central Division, see EncPNG svv.) call themselves Papuan these days. Apart from the 'central…' names competing to designate the place, only coastal Hanuabadans and Motuans seem to be happy with that designation as a class of people. They are Austronesian in language, not 'papuan', but their physical type is indeed 'papuan'!

Addendum - Fragment 'Melanesia'

While supervising a student's work on regional issues in the Indo-Pacific, I chanced on a suspicious statement in Garrett (1994, 161) that as of '24 November 1839…[t]he very name Melanesia, distinct from Polynesia, had yet to be coined'. Garrett is right on the greater age of 'Polynesia', but not on the non-existence of 'Melanesia' in 1839.

Garrett is at least 5 years too late on 'Melanesia', knowing of the establishment of a Vicariate of that name in 1844 (he mentions it) and perhaps not enquiring further back.

Fr. Kruczek's in-house and provisional notes *Christianity on Melanesian Soil* GSC 2002 gave 1834 as the date of the 'coining' of the name Melanesia, apparently relying on Polish encyclopaedic sources (one or other version of the *Encyklopedia Powszechna*). The 1997 EncyBrit (4, 269-70) gives the 1826-29 voyage of Jules-Sébastien-César DUMONT d'Urville as the trigger for a 'rapid revision in charts of South Sea waters and redesignations of island groups into Melanesia, Micronesia, Polynesia and Malaysia'. 'Rapid revision' after 1829 would not stretch up to and beyond 1839. Wiltgen's great work (*The Founding…,* 1979) is full of mostly French and Roman discussions from before 1839 which show that the name *Melanesia* was widely known in the Catholic world before (and after) 1839. See, first, the useful map on p.536, indicating events from 1825-50. In the EncycBrit 1997 (25, 231, col.1: *Pacific Islands*) the authors go further in attribution than the biographer in vol.4 and say: 'Jules-Sébastien-César Dumont d'Urville…classified the islanders as Melanesian,

Micronesian, and Polynesian', and he died in an early train crash soon after 1834.

The ill-fated Bishop Jean-Baptiste Epalle was using the term 'Melanesia', probably before the 1840s. He had access (as did every educated European) to the flood of travel and geographic literature, a source which had never stopped gushing since the beginning of the 'Age of Discovery'. In particular he had his own personal copy (probably of the 5th ed. 1843) of the regularly re-edited and updated work of Conrad Malte-Brun (1775-1826) *Précis de géographie universelle* (Wiltgen, 287). Malte-Brun had founded the first academic society of geography, the Parisian *Société de géographie*, in 1822. Epalle also had access to a great atlas of the current knowledge of the Indo-Pacific kept in Rome, Vandermaelen's *Atlas universel* (Wiltgen, 291), and this specialised in indicating all the known islands of Melanesia and Micronesia. As we know from investigations into late 18th century Göttingen university (McCallum and Judge), there was a constant hunger in continental Europe for recent exploration reports, coming from any country.

The date of 1834 is indeed a highly likely one for the birthday of 'Melanesia', because the publication of the account of Dumont d'Urville's great voyage was completed on that date (EncycBrit): *Voyage de la corvette 'l'Astrolabe' 1826-1829*, published from 1830-34. The term 'Melanesia' and its fellows may even have appeared in some earlier volume of this work, i.e., as early as 1830, in the company of three similar-sounding sisters, all of which are surprisingly still alive and well in 2004!

But had 'Melanesia' actually been born later than some or all of the other '-esia' and '-asia' group of 1830-34? Garrett is right that Polynesia was much older; it is the oldest of the four. All Frenchmen would have known of the collection of their compatriot Charles de Brosses, who had used the then current knowledge (and obvious ignorance) of the Great South Whatever to argue for more austral exploration by the French. It was in a work of 1756 (2 vols, Paris, Durand) that de Brosses published his *Histoire des navigations aux Terres Australes*, over 70 years before Dumont d'Urville's *Voyage*. In the preface of this *History of the Navigations to the Austral Lands* the political purpose of the work is made clear—to encourage more French exploration. A friend in Göttingen has just sent me a snippet from the preface which includes de Brosses's own division of the poorly known area he writes about. The past tenses in my selection could also refer to some older work, but the term 'mémoire' suggests *recent* appeals to the French authorities—there was an original 'mémoire' to which 'he' (de Brosses or someone whom he is backing up) joined two others. I translate some of the little I have (probably from p. ii of the Préface):

The other [mémoire = the third such] gave some idea of the nature of the climate and the manners of the nationals such as they are in the three principal regions of this immense part of the terrestrial globe, situated towards the south of all the known continents, in the three seas, that of the North, that of the South, and that of the eastern Indies. The division of the Austral land was made

in this [i.e., the third and most recent 'mémoire'] in relation to these three seas, into Magellanique, Polynésie and Australasie [i.e., Magellanica, Polynesia and Australasia]. The mémoire contained extracts of three famous navigators: Narborough for la Magellanique, Roggewin for la Polynésie, Deampierre for l'Australasie. [Translated from a hand-typed transcript of the French recently e-mailed to me]

Thus de Brosses or his source divided the Great South Something-or-Nothing (quite provisionally) into three huge parts and named them after 'the seas', showing the very early stage of exploration in mid 18th century. And he created three such regions, only two of which have survived in modern use, Australasia and Polynesia. No Micronesia or Melanesia just yet.

It may be useful here to list the skeleton of the 19th C organisation of (mainly Catholic mission in our region:

1668	Spanish Mission to 'Guam' (Ladrones, renamed Marianas)
1797	First Protestants to Tahiti
1804 (Jan 29)	Apostolic Prefecture of New Holland
1825	Apostolic Prefecture of Sandwich Islands (Hawai'i) to Picpus Fathers
1830 (Jan 10)	Apostolic Prefecture of The South Sea Islands
1833 (Jun 2)	Apostolic Vicariate of East Oceania
1836 (Jan 10)	Apostolic Vicariate of West Oceania
1842 (Aug 8)	Apostolic Vicariate of Central Oceania
1844 (Jul 16)	Apostolic Vicariates of Melanesia and Micronesia (cut off from that of West Oceania)
1852	Vicariates of Melanesia and Micronesia transferred from Marist Fathers to PIME.

Further to 'The Papuas'

In the course of checking the origins of the name *Melanesia*, a particularly interesting detail emerged from Wiltgen (236-37) in his photo-reproduction of a MS letter from the Marists dated 26 May 1842 but apparently never sent. I first transcribe the French (expanding abbreviations, capitalising more consistently, and correcting the occasional diacritic) and then give my English version, with explanatory additions. The extract records attitudes to New Guinea and an understanding of the precise, peninsular, location of 'land of the Papuas' which were current around 1840.

> La Nouvelle-Guinée est une terre considérable longue de 400 lieues du sud-est au nord-ouest, sur une largeur ordinaire de 130 lieues. Elle est échancrée dans la partie septentrionale de manière à former une presqu'île qu'on nomme la terre des papouas. Rien n'est comparable à tout ce que l'on dit de la fertilité et de l'admirable végétation de cette contrée. Sa population est inconnue. Les habitants sont une assez belle race d'hommes à la peau noire, aux cheveux laineux et frisés. Ceux de l'interieur sont réputés sauvages et féroces, mais ceux qui habitent aux environs du havre dori [sc.] par le 131° 30' de longitude orientale à 1°. de l'équateur, ont eu de fréquentes relations avec les navires européens…

Translation:

> New Guinea is a land of considerable extent, measuring 400 leagues from the SE to the NW, with an average breadth of 130 leagues. It has a deep indentation in its northern part [from the inset map, this is clearly Geelvinck or Cenderawasih bay, in which are the islands of Biak and Numfoor] so as to form a peninsula which is called the land of the Papuas. Nothing can compare with what we are told about the fertility and the admirable vegetation of this place. Its population [figure] is unknown. The inhabitants are a fairly good-looking race of men with black skin and with woolly, tightly-curled hair. Those in the interior are reputedly wild and savage, but those who live around Dorei Harbour, from [long.] 131° 30'E at 1° [degree lat.] from the equator have had frequent interactions with European ships…

Readers of 'Who were the Papuans?' should find considerable interest in the fact that even in 1842, 'the land of the Papuas' was still firmly restricted to the Birdshead peninsula, at the far West of the mainland of New Guinea, even in writers completely up to date with the newest opinions, discoveries and maps.

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