1995

The work of Russell Soaba

Maretta Kula Semos

*University of Wollongong*

---

**UNIVERSITY OF WOLLONGONG**

**COPYRIGHT WARNING**

You may print or download ONE copy of this document for the purpose of your own research or study. The University does not authorise you to copy, communicate or otherwise make available electronically to any other person any copyright material contained on this site. You are reminded of the following:

- This work is copyright. Apart from any use permitted under the Copyright Act 1968, no part of this work may be reproduced by any process, nor may any other exclusive right be exercised, without the permission of the author.

- Copyright owners are entitled to take legal action against persons who infringe their copyright. A reproduction of material that is protected by copyright may be a copyright infringement. A court may impose penalties and award damages in relation to offences and infringements relating to copyright material. Higher penalties may apply, and higher damages may be awarded, for offences and infringements involving the conversion of material into digital or electronic form.

---

Unless otherwise indicated, the views expressed in this thesis are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the views of the University of Wollongong.

---

**Recommended Citation**


---

Research Online is the open access institutional repository for the University of Wollongong. For further information contact the UOW Library: research-pubs@uow.edu.au
THE WORK OF RUSSELL SOABA

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the
award of the degree

MA (HONOURS) IN POST-COLONIAL LITERATURES

from

UNIVERSITY OF WOLLONGONG

by

MARETTA KULA SEMOS

ENGLISH DEPARTMENT
1995
Declaration

I certify that this dissertation does not incorporate any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma at any university; and that to my knowledge it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.

Signed

Date 24/02/95
Russell Soaba is a major writer from Papua New Guinea whose work has been neglected because of its perceived 'difficulty'.

This dissertation seeks to review this assessment in the light of postcolonial literary theory models of marginality. When Soaba's writing is seen in its historical and cultural context, his complexity can be explained as arising firstly from the modernisation of the artist's role under decolonisation in a still largely traditional-oral culture, and secondly, from a regional marginalisation within the emergent national frame that complicates the binary centre-margin structure of postcolonial theory.
Acknowledgment

Firstly, I would like to express my gratitude to my supervisor, Dr Paul Sharrad for his time and assistance in enabling me to fulfill my course requirements through the final completion of this thesis. "Thank you very much Dr Sharrad". Secondly, my appreciation and thanks also to my family - my husband Jerry and my children Irene and Jerome - for putting up with me those times when the pressure was really on. To Grace and Kichawen Chakumai for their time and support in getting this thesis binded on my behalf, "tenkyu tru". And lastly, but not the least, to the Sinebare family, the Bakani family, and Lynus Yamuna (HOD, Language & Literature dept.- Goroka Campus) for their help one way or another. Bkpela hamamas bilong mi igo long yupela olgeta.

Maretta Kula Semos.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CONTENTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Introduction</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bio-Bibliography</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criticism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soaba and Post-Colonial Literature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Existential Literature Focus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chapter 1: The Historical Context</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The establishment of English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chapter 2: The Cultural Context</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Myth in PNG</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tales: World War II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oral Conventions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visual Art</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dance and Drama</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chapter 3: Decolonization Literature</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The African Influence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Modernity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 4: The Role of the Writer 52 - 64
Melanesian Identity

Wanpis: The Role of the PNG Writer
Lusman: The Crisis of Identity
Wanpis: The Displacement of Identity

Chapter 5: Maiba: The Writer and Society 65 - 77
Magic Realism

Conclusion 78 - 82
Target Audience
Publication
The Destiny of the PNG Writer.

Bibliography 83 - 98
THE WORK OF RUSSELL SOABA

INTRODUCTION

Bio-Bibliography

Russell Soaba is a well-known Papua New Guinea poet, playwright, and a successful novelist who has so far produced two novels, Wanpis (1978) and Maiba (1979, reprinted in 1985); and a wide collection of short stories and poetry. His major short stories include a winner of the 1970 Short Story Contest titled: "A Portrait of the Odd Man Out" (1970); "A Glimpse of the Abyss" (1971), "The Victims" (1972), "Natives Under the Sun" (1973), and "Portrait of a Parable" (1982). He has also published a play, "Mass Mania" (1975), and a collection of poems, Naked Thoughts (1978).

Soaba was born in Tototo, Milne Bay Province, Papua New Guinea (PNG) in 1950. He did his secondary schooling at Martyrs Memorial High in Popondetta, PNG and in Australia at Balwyn High School, Victoria. After that he enrolled at the University of Papua New Guinea (UPNG) in 1970, but left in 1972 to seek employment in the Public Service. His lack of qualifications forced him to return to studies and he eventually earned a BA in Literature in 1980. Soaba later obtained his MA in creative writing at Brown University in The United States, in 1985.

Russell Soaba's home province is a small coastal province geographically isolated from Port Moresby, the capital of PNG. Within the province Soaba belongs to the Anuki, a minority language group, of which he says: "you'd be lucky to find 200 or 300 speakers" (Gilian Gorle interview, 1992:4). With the threat of the
language becoming extinct, Soaba writes in English in order to reach a wider audience and also, paradoxically, as a means of understanding Anuki better. He describes his upbringing as a traditional one of an "aristocratic Anuki family, the Warakouta, who were the rulers of the Anuki people for centuries". Such hierarchical set-ups were (some still are, although most have disintegrated with the coming of missions) commonly found in the southern Papua region that Soaba comes from. The Warakouta, according to Soaba, finally came to "its lonely end" in 1969 when his father died.\footnote{Interview with Kirpal Singh, \textit{Westerly} 29(2), 1948: 2.} The lonely end that Soaba refers to is mentioned in all his works, particularly in his second novel, \textit{Maiba}.

\textit{Maiba} is dedicated to the memory of Romney Soaba Bogerara Gaesasara, the author's father. The story is also about the loss of a family heritage when chief Magura dies leaving his sole survivor Maiba, a physically disabled daughter, to fend for herself in a society that is fast changing from being traditional to "modern". The title of the book is taken from the word \textit{Maiba} which is a common form of Anuki communication expressing truths only through parables and riddles (Acknowledgment section of the book). This is the way the author deliberately constructs his narrative.

In the novel, Maiba the protagonist is on a soul-searching mission to discover where she really belongs because she is considered a misfit by the community. However, in the end, she becomes the heroine by saving the community from the demagogue Doboro Thomas and his followers. The community's respect for heritage and tradition wins over the desire for material wealth that the new
order tries to introduce. So from a basis in real family history, the story becomes an allegory for nationalism too.

Most of Soaba's themes are centred around the individual who is in search of his own identity in a changing PNG society. The individual is presented as a loner, an odd character who is very much alienated from the rest of society. In his book *Wanpis*, the hero returns home only to discover that he does not know his own sister Mary and that many changes have taken place. He realises he has been away too long for him to remain in the village and feel that he belongs there. He is lost; he has become a "wanpis", an individual with no sense of direction, a lost soul. The individual could well be the author himself, and if we take that further, the search for an identity could be the national search for a replacement for lost culture, and language.

**Criticism**

As a writer in PNG, Soaba has achieved more success with his short stories than with his other works, in so far as they are used by schools as reading material. Soaba himself admits that he does better with prose than verse. He gave up writing plays after 1974 due to lack of interest shown in his work by the local theatre and publishers (although one of his plays was accidentally produced in 1979). Soaba claims that the publishers and directors of plays could not stand his long and complicated dialogues and sees their preference for simple texts as part of a "self-conscious inferiority complex about them".

---

For most Papua New Guinean readers, Soaba's work is difficult. As his critics say of some of his work, *Wanpis* makes more demands on the reader\(^4\) than any other literature produced in PNG; and one should not turn to *Maiba* for light entertainment.\(^5\) The difficulty seems to be located in both the "private" nature of the work and its indirect engagement with national issues. Much of Soaba's work however has been criticised from outside of PNG as well. Zak Tiamon, a New Guinean, who reviews Soaba's novel *Wanpis*, describes Soaba as a very existential writer. Much of the Literature that he produces is fully committed to the society, the individual's functional interaction with the society.\(^6\)

and according to William McGaw, "Soaba sees problems as essentially human, to be dealt with at a strictly personal level".\(^7\) In his analysis of Soaba's novel *Wanpis*, McGaw had this to say:

> it is philosophical and prophetic in approach. Its vision of society is complex, often critical, and open ended.\(^8\)

---


\(^8\) Ibid.
Soaba and Post-Colonial Literatures

Definition

Post-colonial Literatures according to The Empire Writes Back, "emerged in their present form out of the experience of colonization and asserted themselves by foregrounding the tension with the imperial power, and by emphasizing their differences from the assumptions of the imperial centre". Papua New Guinea Literature is no exception, having originated out of such an experience. The writers and the writings attempt to break away from the colonial culture by exerting their own differences through various means, either by falling back to the traditional culture or by taking on board the imported culture and adapting it to suit their own situation. Russell Soaba attempts both but goes further to create a different mode of writing.

Apart from Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, Norman Simms also has this to say specifically in relation to post-colonial texts and their critics:

if we could find a way to see the cultural texts produced in relation to the processes of their emergence, then perhaps not only would we find sophisticated and imaginative minds at work, where before we only found naivete, our own perceptions, emotive grids, and intellectual counters.10

Whilst Simms supports The Empire Writes Back in its definition of post-colonial literature (that all post-colonial texts are produced as a result of some colonial intrusion but from the perspective of the

---

colonised), he takes it a step further by implying that how and why the text is produced does not necessarily have to do only with a historical event. Instead, an insight into the productive dynamics of cultural knowledge systems is necessary for critical purposes.

Social critique and prophetic visions are not unknown in PNG life, modern or traditional. It is the notion of the individual being the site of conflict that makes Soaba's writing "odd" and different from that of other Papua New Guinean writers. Within a communal society like the one Soaba lives and writes out of, the collective view takes precedence over an individual view. Besides, the traditional individual is usually either the boaster or the hero who hides away in "shame". Simms refers to this as the "Shame Culture" in the Pacific.

This means that culturally an individual must hold back his/her knowledge in public spaces, as individuality or uniqueness is considered shameful. An individual however is expected to speak for all, and in so doing, he/she upholds the status quo. To represent a consensus view is the most politically correct thing to do. However, Soaba's characters proclaim their lack of heroism in a "shameless" way. For instance, in a short story "Portrait of a Parable" the narrator recalls how as a child he did really weird things that caused the villagers to stare in disapproval, hence the shame he caused to his family.

When no one else spoke I ran and kicked the knife with my right foot. The women screamed, some of them burying their

faces in their palms and turning away... My mother came and slapped me hard on both cheeks. "Cry!" she ordered. I disobeyed her command and smiled. She fled, screaming and tearing at her hair... "Oh shame, shame be upon my household", I heard my mother wailing in the distance.  

From the point of view of the mother what the son had just displayed was culturally unacceptable. As the mother of the child, she too must hide in shame.

Contrary to the above situation, in "The Villager's Request" the narrator is a sixty-year-old villager who comes to town bearing the expectations of village traditions and norms, one of which is respect for elders. However he is soon to discover that no man is above the western law:

"Aha! ha! ha!" laughed the inspector. ... And he walked out on me! Me! Me!, a 60 year old village elder, respected by many, being walked out on? O shame! O guilt! O terrible shame! (p.72)

Two assumptions can be drawn from the old man's anguish; one, that the inspector ought to be ashamed of himself for treating him, the village elder, that way. This is firmly implied when he repeats the words "Me! Me! spelt with a capital letter M, the focus being on the old man's selfhood and pride. (Though this selfhood is defined in terms of social rank rather than personal dignity.) The other is, whatever crime he had committed must have been that serious for the inspector to dishonour him, hence the shame and guilt he (the old man) had to live with. Again a repetition of the words "oh

"shame!" signifies the extent of the old man's shame and guilt. Soaba inhabits a post-traditional world in which communally induced shame no longer serves a purpose.

Soaba concentrates on the present to tell his own story differently. The continuity with the past that allows respect to attach 'automatically' to age has been broken. Soaba says it is up to individuals to seek for answers within themselves to interpret the present. In doing so, they present us with fiction that in a general sense helps readers to understand their society. Stephen Slemon has argued that allegory is a characteristic mode of expressing post-colonial experience, and in Soaba's case we can see that his characters are both individuals and representative of a nation in search of an identity. This doubleness may arise out of the doubly marginalised situation in which Soaba exists and writes, but in any case, his complex blend of existential solitude and national modernity makes his work seem 'hard' to both nationalist and traditionalist readers.

Slemon argues further (in support of Frederic Jameson's The Political Unconscious) that:

our expectations concerning genre, mode, form, and language are tied to the institutions and ideologies that generate such systems of classification, ...(so that) the challenge is for criticism to learn to read this new "revised" mode of representation in all of its diversity, its plurality, its cultural and political difference.14

---

14 Slemon: 166.
The italicised in brackets (so that) are my own words.
Nationalist audiences look for collective identity and social cohesion; traditionalist ones assume both. Soaba, however, offers only multiple and isolated selves, incorporating the western philosophy of existentialism into a society of contending cultures and a diversity of languages.

Existential Literature

Broadly speaking, we can say that the common interest which unites Existentialist philosophers is the interest in human freedom. They are all of them interested in the world considered as the environment of man, who is treated as a unique object of attention, because of his power to choose his own courses of action. What his freedom of choice amounts to and how it is to be described ... these are of central concern to all Existentialists.15

Soaba is quick to argue that PNG fiction should be existential in nature as,

it is the only way Papua New Guinea as a country and the people can hope to acquire for itself the honour of being viewed and talked about enthusiastically by the outside world.16

He concedes his interest in existential literature and philosophy came about as a result of several factors. His early childhood years (in his grandmother's house) were spent in loneliness, which led to his selfhood and independence. In addition to that, the schools he attended (either church or private) were geographically isolated from his native surroundings. It was at these schools that he learnt to live up to certain expectations, amongst artists, and generally Europeans of the middle and upper middle class. From them he

learnt to be courageous and confident to face the outside world. The most influential factor however, was growing up in the Great Anuki Savannah, hence the sense of isolation, emptiness, and abandonment. He first heard of Camus, the French existentialist, at high school and immediately responded to him:

I felt that I was reading the French existentialist (in English translation) not only to learn a new idea, a new philosophy, but to also re-live what had already been my past, my inheritance as it were. 17

So although existential literature is originally a western ideology, Soaba brings his own experiences into it and reconstructs that modern thought to become specifically a PNG thought. And he does this through the characters he constructs, who find themselves confused and alienated. William McGaw explains it this way:

Through a juxtaposition of two pidgin terms, 'lusman' and 'wanpis', and the concepts which they come to represent, Soaba develops ideas from Camus and Sartre as fundamentally Papua New Guinean.18

Because of this, McGaw and his fellow western critics will find that the task of criticism appears straightforward, although some insight into Soaba's culture is essential. Unfortunately, Soaba's compatriots are disadvantaged in that the genres and ideas that Slemon talks about are unfamiliar to an average Papua New Guinean. It is not surprising then that most of Soaba's critics are outsiders.

Focus

It is therefore my intention to analyse the work of Russell Soaba as a Post-Colonial writer according to the definition as given in *The Empire Writes Back*, but to move one step further (since post-colonial theory, despite the general application, insists upon close attention to specific local conditions) to consider his work as doubly marginalised - once at the level of the decolonizing nation, and again by geographical and linguistically marginalised origins *within* the nation. Arun Mukherjee argues that,

> When post-colonial theory constructs its centre-periphery discourse, it also obliterates the fact that the post-colonial societies also have their own internal centres and peripheries, their own dominance and marginals.\(^{19}\)

Mukherjee is right when she critiques the limitations of the definition as given in *The Empire Writes Back*. The point she makes in the above quote is precisely what this dissertation also attempts to show, using Russell Soaba's work. Soaba tends to focus on the *Self as Individual* in his work. And because critics tend to foreground the period and problems of decolonization, and readers find Soaba's work so unusual, it is worth explaining some of the general conditions in PNG within which writing in English occurs and against which Soaba's work must be set.

---

CHAPTER 1: THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Language
Traditionally, the people of Papua New Guinea (PNG) lived scattered in large self-sufficient groups throughout the tropical rainforests and the rugged terrain. Over 700 languages are spoken in PNG, which is reflected in the diversity within the various ethnic and cultural traditions. First contact was frequently with missionaries.

According to historical documents the missionaries were faced with major problems in carrying out their work because of the different languages. For them the only way to reach most people was to use the vernaculars, but because of administrative needs and the economics of printing Bibles and instructional materials, the missions tended to work in regional or trans-regional languages. Peter Smith notes that the missions had to

adopt one or two of the more widely spoken languages in their area as the mission language for teaching and preaching. The Neuendettelsau Lutherans for example adopted Kate and Jabem while the Methodists in New Britain finally decided on Kuanua.

---

Language policy differentiated between the missions and the administration. The missions did not recognise English as a widespread language to be used as a literary language; the resolution of the meeting of the London Missionary Society is typical:

we cannot at present make English the literary language of the mission. That the probability that it will be many years before English will become the most widespread language in New Guinea and the fact that our South Sea Island and native teachers are uninstructed in English prevents us from accepting the suggestion of the Directors.23

Some of PNG's early writers were educated by the missions. Allan Natachee, a poet from Mekeo, recalls how he'd sing songs after listening to the elders, and that was at the age of three. He was named Avaisa Pinongo born to a "peace chief" and a mother, who was the daughter of a warrior. However, after the death of his mother he was given to the Catholic Nuns to raise, who renamed him Allan Natachee, because he looked like the American Indians. Natachee was then educated in English by the Nuns where he discovered the art of poetry and writing. This led to his success in translating Mekeo history and songs into English. This is the first song he learnt which he later translated as it appears below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mekeo</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aia kearai e vea</td>
<td>Aia walks on the road</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aia iviruvua</td>
<td>Aia all naked</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kearai e vea!</td>
<td>He walks on the road</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aia imau sanea</td>
<td>Aia my hand is faultless,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aia tivania rereva-rereva</td>
<td>Aia in war decoration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aia iviruvua</td>
<td>Aia all naked</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tivania rereva-rereva!</td>
<td>In war decoration.24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

24 Taken from Singh, K. "Allan Natachee: Poet from PNG" in Bikmaus. Vol iv,
Natachee used his skill both to engage creatively with the modern world, and to preserve the traditional lore of his people. The above war chant places emphasis on the warrior who is the hero, not only because of his strength, but also because of his pride in displaying his heritage publicly.

Natachee's traditional hero is contrasted to Soaba's St James Nativeson in *Wanpis*. Originally named Jimi Damebo, he changes his name to St James Nativeson. His new name represents three cultures; St is short for Saints which is the name of the school he attends, and which also symbolises Christianity, James is adopted from James Baldwin whose novels inspired Jimi, hence the interest in creative writing and also the liberation of black people, and finally, Nativeson simply means "a native's son", his traditional heritage. Nativeson is also an allusion to the Black American Richard Wright whose 1940 novel was called *Native Son*. The similarity in both Wright and Soaba's writing lies in their attempt to be non-conformist. With all three names representing his whole being, Jimi Damebo — turned St James Nativeson — is constructed as a universal western figure. And by being universal, St James Nativeson is unattached to a particular cultural group, nor an institution. He refuses to be either traditional or modern, but is his own self. In a traditional context St James Nativeson becomes a person with a lost identity. As such, he cannot be seen as a hero in the way Soaba has constructed him. The hero that the PNG reader is most likely to relate to is the traditional one that Natachee presents as opposed to Soaba's existential modern man.

*No. 4, December 1983, p.18.*
English

The administration, on the other hand, saw the approach taken by the missions as a weakness in their teaching. In their view:

if there is ever to become an English-speaking country, now is the time to encourage the use of that language, ... All government officers have been instructed to see that English is used as the language of the different stations among police, native employees, and prisoners. This, together with contact and association with miners, traders, etc., would probably eventually make English the common language of the coast district. The missions, by teaching English, could greatly assist this movement.25

Although the missionaries were responsible in setting up schools, it was the administration, the colonial government that actually enforced the idea of literacy in English. The administration distributed newspapers and reading material about public health, agriculture, local government, and small business procedure to the people. It also subsidised existing mission schools, besides setting up its own schools, in order to impose its own policies, one of which was generating literacy in English. For the indigenous people, English was a difficult language to learn. Testimonies to this claim are contained in Albert Maori Kiki’s autobiography Kiki: Ten Thousand Years in a Lifetime.

Kiki recalls how as a child he was forced to go to school to learn English, a strange and puzzling language, even though he had already been initiated into the ways of both his mother’s and

father's tribes. In his words: "... it was not until they dragged me to school that I came into contact with the hard reality of the white man's world". And he adds, "Our teachers were very ready with the cane, and beat us for the slightest mistake or offence. We were taught simple English and arithmetic, but by the time I left I could not speak much English, except for "come" and "go" and such simple, basic things".

Like Kiki, Hoiri, the hero in Vincent Eri's novel The Crocodile, is puzzled by the white man's language and knowledge. As Hoiri is handcuffed and led to the prison cell at the end of the novel his thoughts are of his son, "Maybe this money will send Sevese to the white man's school, maybe he will grow up to understand the things that baffle me". Hoiri would have to send Sevese to school to be educated in the ways of the white man, appropriately, using the white man's money that he had saved in the passbook he was carrying in his pocket.

"The Victims" by Russell Soaba is also a short story that exposes the conflicts of two opposing cultures; that of the west and the traditional one. In "The Victims", the breakdown in communication is due to the language barrier and the confusion of cultural markers that are transmitted through language. Whilst the Sinabada (white woman) thinks she is only trying to do her job "effectively" and "efficiently", Stephen the young Papuan man interprets her actions as an attack on his culture and an undermining of his self-esteem.

27 Ibid. p. 57.
What the sinabada takes for granted is Stephen's dilemma, and what Stephen takes for granted is the Sinabada's ignorance. Like he says:

She must understand the situation we are in. ...Really this sinabada is from the mountains and primitive parts of Australia, that's why she does not do her job properly. (p. 18).

However, the sinabada's attitude in failing to understand Stephen reflects the attitude of the colonials towards the natives.

Studying the English Language and English Literature went hand in hand. Whilst most of it was taught by the missions, it was the administration that made sure of it. The Empire Writes Back argues that:

the study of English and the growth of Empire proceeded from a single ideological climate and that the development of the one is intrinsically bound up with the development of the other, both at the level of simple utility and at the unconscious level, where it leads to the naturalizing of constructed values (e.g. civilization, humanity, etc). 29

Whilst Eri and Kiki had difficulty in trying to comprehend the English language and worse still, to relate to it, Soaba on the other hand found it comforting. Whereas Kiki and Eri were taught by Samoan and Fijian LMS missionaries, Soaba attended an Anglican school where he had European missionary teachers who were also very influential. Hence, his introduction to English Literature and other western schools of thought. For Soaba, the childhood experiences that he had harboured could be channelled through writing, just like the European artist. It is not surprising then that in

his development as an artist Soaba has always regarded writing as an art, and that is, one writes for purely aesthetic reasons. This is what makes Soaba's writing different from his co-writers.

Today, although in PNG there are two linguae francae, Tok Pisin and Motu, neither of these is officially used in formal situations such as in administration, the judicial system, or in education at all levels. To choose one language over the other(s) would not be in the national interest, for it would not truly reflect PNG culture and its people as a whole. The formal official language therefore remains English, the language of the colonisers. The choice to adopt English not only links the nation with its colonial administrator, Australia (a supplier of funding, textbooks, and advisers); as summed up in this document:

The Royal Commissioners, in so far as they considered educational provisions for Papuans at all, were strongly in favour of the teaching of English, mainly because of the value this would be to the extension of Australian influence and white settlement.\(^\text{30}\)

but also because it is the international medium of trade and diplomacy.

Whether he was modernized under mission or government auspices, Soaba, as a member of a tiny language group, was destined for major change. In his case, although he went to a mission-run school, he was of a generation under government funding and policy controls, so his move was to English. He says: "I had some excellent English

\(^{30}\) Ibid, pp: 48-49.
teachers who were predominantly English and "English" Australians. Hence, the unconscious eagerness in choosing to write in English"\textsuperscript{31}

For the PNG writer, the choice to write in English is inevitable considering the linguistic diversity, the high rate of vernacular illiteracy within PNG; and the audience requirements of publishers. Whilst someone in Kenya like Ngugi wa Thiong’o has the choice of writing in his vernacular instead of in English, Soaba finds himself in an awkward situation. He lives and works in Port Moresby and so is alienated from his target audience if he were to write for them in Anuki. And with an audience of just 200 - 300 speakers of Anuki, he would only be writing for a small group of people, most of whom would also be illiterate. Soaba’s plight with the choice of language is also the PNG writers' dilemma. However Soaba acknowledges that the more he writes in English the more he gets to discover his own language and how to use it. In his words: "I write in English as a way of inviting people from outside to come and realise the significance - and the dangers - there are in seeing my own language die out".\textsuperscript{32}

In attempting to reproduce Anuki, Soaba uses weird syntaxes which makes him different from other Papua New Guinean writers. Such an example of his unorthodox style can be found in his story "Ripples".

He cleared his throat again. "Okay. Here goes. And even in just saying this I am afraid, you know. I say I am afraid here simply because I am suddenly conscious of the fact that I am allowed by the world to express myself freely, with the royalties going to someone elses pocket, of course. Probably my employer and his whore. He picked up his

\textsuperscript{31} Singh interview: 1.
\textsuperscript{32} Interview with Gilian Gorle, \textit{new literatures review} 26, 1993:71.
whore from the streets, you see, after she had been thrown out of a certain department for theft. And he now employs her as his accountant-engineer. If they were both caught in bed, embezzling government funds, they'd no doubt deny the act. So... what we shall say it her him towards I have come? I feel-am. Ripples. This river-of is it she he negative cosmic-unmentionable brown-of-it-her-him for bridge-with doing-heart-forget reason-for or earth likeness-doing-depression soul interior-at it she he would run it she he would go it she he would breath-release or it she he would be heart calm-of.\(^{33}\)

Whilst other PNG and other "Third World" post-colonial writers are essentially realist and mostly work from the "creole continuum" from standard English through street English to Pidgin but don't experiment with languages except for dropping in the odd word here and there, Soaba chooses to be different by incorporating weird syntax in his writing as displayed in the example above. In most of his work, and especially in "Ripples", Soaba tries to reproduce his mother tongue, Anuki through the unconventional use of English.

Unfortunately for Soaba, it does not work as well Raja Rao's Indian novel *Kanthapur*, or Gabriel Okara's West African *The Voice*. In *Kanthapur* Rao uses direct translation as in oral to written,

Our village — I don't think you have ever heard about it - Kanthapura is its name, and it is in the province of Kara.

....

Till now I've spoken only of the Brahmin quarter. Our village had a Pariah quarter too, a Potters' quarter, a Weavers' quarter, and a Sudra quarter. How many huts had we there? I do not know. There may have been ninety or a hundred - though a hundred may be the right number. Of course, you wouldn't expect me to go to the Pariah quarter, but I have seen from the street- corner Beadle Timmayya's hut.\(^{34}\) (p.11)

\(^{33}\) Soaba, "Ripples", *inprint* 3(2), 1979: 21.

Likewise, the West African Gabriel Okara begins *The Voice* with:

Some of the townsmen said Okolo's eyes were not right, his head was not correct. This they said was the result of his knowing too much book, walking too much in the bush, and others said it was due to his staying too long alone by the river.\(^{35}\)

In spite of their unconventional use of English, both Rao and Okara give us insights into their social, spiritual, and cultural set up so that the reader is able to draw from the text certain specific information in order to interpret it. Whatever their intentions are, the texts are directed at specific audience groups with specific purposes. Whereas Soaba writes with no particular audience in mind and his texts are mostly written to express his personal and philosophical views. This is so with "Ripples" when he begins:

The Topu River flows on, quietly, but appearing stolid and massive, like mercury eager to sustain the weight of a sixty-tonne sheet of platinum. The nipa palms, supported by tall virgin jungle wood, cast reflections of dense green upon its calm waters. Along either bank, withered pitpit stalks seemingly spring up from the depths of the water — more like fleshless and desperate reaches of the wrists for the sky... (p.18).

**Literacy**

Written Literature emerged under three main conditions: colonialism, westernisation and national modernity. Colonisation for PNG began in the late nineteenth century. With it came spiritual,
social, economic, and political change. Like all other post-colonial societies, PNG was also faced with seeing its culture disintegrate.

Samoan author, Albert Wendt had this to say with regard to colonisation and literature:

"Colonialism, by shattering the world of the traditional artist, broke open the way for a new type of artist - an artist not bound by traditional styles and attitudes and conventions, who explores his own craft individually, experiments freely and expresses his own values and ideas".36

Wendt's view can be taken further to say that not only does it apply to an artist working out of a colonial experience and an oral tradition, but also to any "Third World" artist who strives to be recognised in the literary world that is dominated by the conventions of the west.

Unlike his colleagues in the writing arena in PNG, Soaba has moved outside of the traditional conventions to "experiment freely and (to) express his own values and ideas" (Wendt's quote above). To use McGaw's words, "the difference between Soaba's novel and the work of other Papua New Guinean writers lies in his unwillingness to be narrowly didactic".37

As an indication of his difference, it is worth examining closely some of his work. In one of his earlier works, "The Villager's Request", the reader is positioned to perceive events from the perspective of a

60-year-old villager. On the one hand, Soaba gives the speaking voice to this village elder who rightfully in PNG tradition, deserves to be given the role of the main character and narrator. But then he undercuts that by making the elder speak through a young educated man, so that the voice is no longer traditional even though the narrative continues in the "oral" first person. The transcript then becomes a mere translation which the old man himself cautions us about:

Well, I don't know how you say it in English but I hope the young lad who is now translating and transcribing my narration into your language uses the right words so that you'll know what I'm trying to say.(p.72)

By applying this technique in his writing Soaba exposes a number of things. First and foremost is the shift from oral narrative to the written form in which the speaker — audience relationship is no longer directly inclusive or unproblematic. Secondly, whereas the old man who also represents the village orator is an authority figure in tradition, he becomes a minor figure in the written translation. And this is clearly displayed in "The Villager's Request". Finally, by creating a confused village character who comes to town, Soaba is only reiterating his view about humanity in changing times, particularly in a society that is changing from a traditional lifestyle to a modern one.
CHAPTER 2 : THE CULTURAL CONTEXT

Myth in PNG

In traditional PNG, the forms of creativity can best be categorised under three major types, none of which was in the written form: oral narrative and song, visual art, and dance and drama. Like other Pacific Islands and indigenous literatures, PNG's also originated out of an oral literary tradition. Storytelling played a significant part in the socialising process of PNG societies. Its functions went deeper than mere entertainment. Tausie Vilsoni Hereniko of Fiji echoes most Papua New Guineans when he says: "Story-telling, singing, and dancing were very much part of my upbringing".\(^{38}\)

Myth in the traditional form according to the *Encyclopaedia of Papua New Guinea*,

emphasised three main dimensions: *Content*: ... deals with supernatural beings, transcendental issues, or origins of living beings and important natural and social features, resources, and practices. *Attitudes*: : it is believed in and taken seriously, it is not false belief. It is sacred history, not legend in the sense of dealing with events during the ordinary human era. *Action-orientation* : it is linked with religious or magical rites, including sorcery; or, more controversially, with moral rules or with socialization processes; or with both.\(^{39}\)

---

Myths about creation tell of the spirits who are responsible for the origins of the sun, the moon, the sky, the earth, and water and authorize certain rituals to ensure social harmony. These encompass the management of certain crops, plants, and animals, and the physical environment in general. Some of these myths are translated into contemporary fiction and even drama. For example, Arthur Jawodimbari, a well known playwright, adapts a traditional legend into modern drama called *The Sun.*

**SCENE ONE**

*Outside BUNANI'S hut. Early morning. It is dark. Enter a group of children singing.*

CHILDREN

Sun, why do you hide so long?
Sun shine, oh shine on us.
Come out of your lime pot.

Sun, why do you hide so long?
Come out, we have slept enough,
Come out of Tunana's lime pot.

Several factors in this opening scene with the children indicate that it is based on oral tradition translated into modern form. First the song itself is translated from the playwright's language into English. This is obvious in the pattern in which it is presented; line 1- sun, line 2- sun shine, oh shine. Repetition is an element common in traditional songs, chants, and laments to place emphasis on the subject, and to inspire the audience. Jawodimbari is only drawing on that traditional influence to capture the interest of his audience. The lime pot signifies the lifestyle of the people; that the people

---

come from a coastal society where betel-nut chewing is an integral part of their lifestyle. The lime pot is also the place where Tunana (the owner of the sun) keeps his magic sun; which is later to become the sun that shines above the land.

The story about how Tunana sets the sun free to be fair both to his adopted clan, and also to his blood sister who still resides in their homeland, is typical of most PNG myths about creation and the origin of the universe. The sun or the moon has a keeper or an owner who gets driven out of the village through jealousy or some kind of feud. He (the owner is always male) travels to another land with his magic sun/moon and immediately becomes the leader in his new environment. His leadership is attributed to the special power he possesses, which in traditional terms is considered wealth because a leader is chosen by the amount of possessions he has. However, before he sets the sun/moon free, he must first of all punish those that have deceived him by depriving them of the need which he carries. In this case Tunana's sister comes to beg Tunana to return to their homeland where the sun rightfully belongs, which Tunana obligingly does. After feasting, Tunana breaks the lime pot and sets the sun free. As he does so, he says:

No man is big enough to keep the sun a prisoner. ...
Released from bondage the sun shall roam the sky, removed from human reach. And he will wander, from place to place and shine on everyone in turn! (p.27)

Unlike Jawodimbari and most other writers, Soaba rarely uses this "recreation"/myth mode. To show the contrast, "Mass Mania" is a play that Soaba writes in honour of the Anuki martyr called Stephen M. Historically known as Stephen Gorumbari, he was hanged in Port
Moresby for the rape of a European child during the colonial days. His death, although a long time ago, is celebrated by the Anuki as "a martyrdom and a way to akoa (wisdom)". Until it was made known to the rest of Papua New Guinea by Soaba through "Mass Mania", only the Anuki knew of this occasion. Whilst Jawodimbari begins with "Outside Bunani's hut. Early morning. It is dark.", presenting a calm and pleasant scenario that he knows the audience will immediately relate to, Soaba does the exact opposite and begins with "A SERIOUS SORE". As a play, "Mass Mania" is difficult to follow. An explanation at the beginning, before the dialogue, reads:

A SERIOUS SORE. Cold swollen flies perched, laid loathsome eggs on its dignity. Tropical ulcers remain incurable through bacardi-party recollections of a famed elder rubbing his bottom against boroberised trees after bush excretions. ... (Mass Mania, p.295)

and it goes on in the same turgid "poetic" tone. The scene constructed is dull and gloomy; one feels a sense of nausea.

The serious sore symbolises the mass mania, the brutal killing of Stephen M, a victim of colonial rule as the author saw it. Stephen is a 'real' character, but his name also invokes the first Christian martyr and thereby the history of colonial missions; it is also the name given to the first Anuki martyr, hence the binary opposition that Soaba constructs. Stephen M is also culturally anonymous in the sense that he is referred to as Stephen M, a kind of existential everyman. The dialogue in "Mass Mania" mixes local images with portentous phases of metaphysical import:

41 Taken from the explanatory note in Meanjin Quarterly, 34 (3), PNG Issue, 1975: 294.
"Elders" seems to be another favourite phrase that Soaba uses which also sets him apart from the other writers. Soaba chooses to use the term "Elders" to describe those in positions of "modern" authority, where there is corruption and lack of respect. He says "when I say 'The Elders' I mean the Big Brothers who run the country".[42]

In the traditional sense, "Elders" is used to show respect, whereas Soaba uses it rather loosely to indicate disrespect and this is again displayed in "The Next Resort". Septimus, the narrator gives us an insight into his family circle; with a father who is a priest, and an un-named sister who returns home with the guilt of carrying an unborn child. Without looking at Septimus, she asks him who his father is, to which he replies: "Father Gabriel, my elder" (p.69). Septimus then explains to us the readers, "In Anuki we always address those older than us as our elders" (p.69). However, those who have gone away and lost touch completely with their kinship and tradition are referred to as the "Elders" in Soaba's work, as well as the bureaucrats depicted in "Mass Mania". In "The Next Resort"

[42] Interview with Chris Tiffin, Span April 1979: 19.
Septimus' un-named sister is likened to the politicians that Soaba refers to. She has only come back because she has nowhere else to go to, hence, her loss of identity. Soaba sets up this binary opposition of modern/traditional, respect/contempt, superior/inferior, and English/Anuki, but, unlike other writers, refuses a clear and consistent valorisation of one set of terms.

Mythic elements of oral tradition entered other literary forms as well when literacy took a hold. They are also displayed in The Crocodile by Vincent Eri, and Kiki: Ten Thousand Years in a Lifetime by Albert Maori Kiki. Myths associated with sorcery contribute to building up the plot whilst Moveave humour naturalises the negative aspects of colonial control in Vincent Eri's novel. In Kiki's autobiography childhood experiences are recalled and told as they happened. Kiki also talks a lot about traditional beliefs which he still believes in. Although both works are in written form, the content is descriptive and very much of an oral nature. Even Benjamin Umba's short novel “The Fires of Dawn” is described by Mike Greicus, an expatriate who worked in PNG, as uniquely 'Niuginian' because of the elements of oral tradition that are consistently present throughout the narrative. Soaba, however, chooses to be different by focussing on his artistic talents and skills to construct his own narration, much of which is also very difficult to grasp.

**Tales: World War II**

---

Oral tradition extends into modern times as well. Myths about tribal origins and identity, about coding of behaviour and values merge with tales about journeys across distant lands and dramatic events that took place, for example, in World War Two. The events of World War 2 (WWII) have found a place in the tales of many PNG societies. For example, in the film Tukana, there is an episode in which an old man, supposedly the village orator and comedian, tells a story about the war to a group of mainly young people. This episode is incorporated into the film not only for authenticity, but also to show the significance of oral tradition in PNG.44

In prose, The Crocodile focuses on the war as a major event that changed the lives of the people of Moveave and PNG. Eri presents the events of WWII as a new and frightening experience. Much of what he describes in his book reflects actual historical events: for example, villagers were recruited as carriers which led to large-scale movement beyond village boundaries. This is also shown in a documentary film, "Angels of War". Each community has its own tale to tell about the war, about how it was fought and how they got to meet people from other parts of the country. Through friendships people learnt to speak each other's languages. In that sense, the war played a part in unifying people as Papua New Guineans. Such historical events have become recreated myths, which in turn, become fiction as in Eri's novel and Albert Toro's film.

The war was the basis for national consciousness and so for decolonization efforts that were an after-effect. Most writers grew up as part of this process and wrote about the experiences of the

44 Albert Toro & Chris Owen, Tukana, Boroko: Institute of PNG Studies, 1983?
war in an attempt to create national unity. Kiki's autobiography is a good example of a text that is all about nation building. It traces the events and experiences of a child growing up in a "primitive" society with no knowledge of the outside world. For Kiki and his mother, moving from her tribal land down to the coast where his father's people lived was quite a culture shock. It was even shocking for Kiki when he first ventured outside of Kerema. But the experiences enabled Kiki to rise above and beyond his boundaries to become a successful politician and senior statesman. Although Soaba was amongst the post-war generation of writers, he chose to concentrate on the present rather than depict historical events. There is the one exception of "Mass Mania", but that is Metaphorical rather than historical in its form.

McGaw draws our attention to *Wanpis* in which Soaba's view is inherent: "the author's duty is not to promote national unity, but national consciousness". In "A Glimpse of the Abyss" the narrator stops to pick up a hitchhiker and they enter into a philosophical discussion (as is typical of Soaba's style) in which the other says:

"You are happy as you are - a blind conformist just because you want to stay alive". (narrator:) "Blind conformity to what?"."Social conscience - the establishment - ownership of nice luxurious things which the white man has bought like this car - what else? (p.7).

Soaba consistently uses such phrases as "blind conformity", and "social conscience" in his texts. Whereas others of his generation

---

like John Kasaipwalova worked to dramatise a sense of anti-colonial national identity, Soaba questions the historical constructs from the ethical viewpoint of individual non-conformity. In choosing to do so, Soaba isolates himself from the rest of his colleagues in the writing arena, and to a large extent, from his PNG readers as well.

**Oral Conventions**

In oral narrative most of the narration was carried out by the eldest in the tribe. In some societies it was a task performed by the woman; in others, it was solely the right of the man. However it was carried out, the main aim was to pass on the myths and tales to the younger generation so that they were not forgotten. It was an informal means of educating the younger generation about values, beliefs and practices that were important to the kinship and clan. And since decisions were made as the result of group discussions based on traditional wisdom, the power of the word lay in the hands of the orator and in the debating community. So long as this continued to be accepted, and in so far as it translates into the modern world of politicians, local and national, the writer is a secondary figure at best, the writer who has lost touch with clan and politics, doubly so.

Soaba's narrative structure is very unconventional in the PNG context, which is one of the several reasons why readers have difficulty interpreting his work. If we take an example from his poem "Wattles: Paga Hill", although the title is in reference to a setting or place, the poem itself is hardly a description of landscape. Furthermore, there is no overt political comment, nor any historical references in the poem.
Stanza 1

The wattles
in their season shed
their petals around their own
feet. The young man riding down
to this sanctuary of the high savannah
on a bicycle jumps down and says
"Hi!" He has just turned
nineteen and does
not care.46

Most of modern PNG poetry is in "unstructured" free verse like this, but more "accessible" for having a clear story and moral, and a "public" address to an audience. "Wattles: Paga Hill" is an imagist poem that "speaks" to no one with no apparent social function. The last line which reads "he has just turned / nineteen and does / not care" reflects the narrative structure; it is disruptive and open-ended, characteristics that are typical of Soaba's writing.

The young man who has just turned nineteen is analogous to the wattle that the author describes at the beginning of the poem. As is the case with most of his work, in this poem, Soaba leaves the reader to infer the symbolic connection between tree / location, and the young man. By contrast, Zak Tiamon's "The Good Woman of Boroko I" comments on social changes in urban PNG, specifically in Boroko where partying, drinking, and prostituting go hand in hand. This is explicitly implied in the title of the poem as well.

You lie sprawled on the corner
of Alu-Signs opposite the police station.
You sit up as lights illuminate the streets of Boroko
Dirty garments cover your body.
People say you look like a village pig in your sleep.

Drunks mount you on your dark corner when the pub across the road closes.

Is there no one to care for you?47

Whilst most other writers choose to use elements that are culturally or socially familiar in their writings, Soaba advocates his western philosophy of Existentialism as the answer to the writing scenario in PNG. What he is suggesting is that, rather than dwell on past events, or on traditional myths writers should be different by concentrating on the individual human response to experience. To create an "individual consciousness", as McGaw puts it. "Natives Under the Sun", a short story reflects on this theme of human significance. The title is fitting, in that, it packages all humans, in spite of their race and origins, under the one umbrella, the sun. But the irony lies in the word "native" which was a derogatory term used during colonial times to refer to an indigene. According to Soaba, an insight into humanity is vital in order to live together, so we can all become natives under the sun.

At the Skyline Drive-in we came across a few expatriates who had parked their cars outside the entrance and stood talking. A young white woman strayed away from the group, lost in their conversation, laughing too as she talked; and as soon as she saw us approaching she ran back to the group like a frightened white child will run back to its parents on seeing natives.

"You bitch!" cried Romney, aloud in English. "What do you think we are? Savages? Bloody whites! Running away from us as if we were wild animals".

"Those are the white people who can't even understand themselves", said my cousin in Anuki. (p.90).

The point made by the narrator's cousin is precisely the point the author wishes to bring across to his readership. That we should all understand ourselves rather than group people together. As his narrator later says, "I'm not a racist. It's just that I hate the arrogance and stupidity of humanity"(p.91). As the main characters continue to walk cursing the crowd they have just left behind they pass another white man. "We said goodnight to him and he returned the greeting warmly. God bless him"(p.90). It is the individual response that determines the meaning of the encounter.

**Visual Art**

Visual art is a characteristic form of traditional creativity. Art work involved carving stories, animals, tribal totems (those that would not cause any harm to the carver), and other significant symbols on canoes, buildings, dance platforms and even on bodies as tattoos. Art also reflected the complexity of the PNG society out of which it came. As Bernard Narakobi puts it:

> The study of art in Papua New Guinea is central to the discovery and the proper understanding of the richness of our souls.48

The carvings and other art forms, however, remain the property of the tribe or clan from which the artist originates. Again Narakobi affirms such a view when he says:

A finely carved piece of wood becomes a being, the guardian spirit of an entire clan. A mask becomes the power behind all the great deeds of the tribe. A figure with varying colours from the mother earth becomes the centre place for meditation and serenity.\(^{49}\)

In other words, the art work produced is not a private property of the artist but rather a public symbol of the society out of which it originates. The artist works with conventions communally set that he or she must follow, unlike modern art forms in which artists create their own work using their own imagination. The writer is marginalised in such a communal structure, but despite this, Soaba continues to create his own art by focusing on the novel as his literary genre.

Ian Watt discusses the nature of the novel as realist; that is, "the novel's realism does not reside in the kind of life it presents, but in the way it presents it".\(^{50}\) It is not dependent on history or tradition, but rather on individual experiences of the author(s), with the emphasis on originality. The novel is therefore for private rather than public consumption. These aspects of the novel isolate it as a literary genre in a communal society which is bound by set conventions.

**Dance and Drama**

Dance and drama were a major component of traditional cultures, serving as an enactment of myth and as ritual markers of social processes such as harvest or initiation. F.E.Williams, the

\(^{49}\) Ibid, p.220.

government anthropologist during colonial days, recognised the significance of performative culture when he focused his study of the Orokolo people on their drama. In his introduction he said: "I am well aware that I have been so much taken by Hevehe, a finer thing than I imagined any Papuans could do". Later on Ulli Beier re-institutionalised drama's cultural dominance by naming his literary journal after the Orokolo Kovave performances.

Today modern drama plays a significant part in promoting that art form in PNG. Initially drama was produced as radio plays, with the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) putting to air plays and stories performed orally by Papua New Guineans. This captured a large audience who could easily associate with that oral medium. Radio not only promoted orality, but the kind of drama that was being broadcast was anti-colonial, and carried the same kind of message that most writers, excluding Soaba, advocated. Soaba is very critical of this when he asks:

What is the NBC trying to prove if it spends so much money, the people's tax money, on promoting the type of drama that is politically, and to some degree racially, partial and biased? These are unfortunately questions that no longer interest me, as I have long since abandoned the local literary scene and I am now searching for new horizons elsewhere.

Radio continues to serve the public, emphasising that aspect of performative culture and in doing so, "backgrounds" the writer and reader. Soaba's frustrations expressed above only confirm the status and role of the writer in PNG's literary scene; that the PNG

52 Interview with Singh, 1984: 4.
writer has always been a minor figure and continues to be on the fringe. And such writers as Soaba, are doubly marginalised first as writers in PNG, then as people who work mostly outside of drama.

Although radio drama has since lost popularity modern stage productions have become very successful in translating traditional myths, as well as plays that have been created by individual writers. Kirsty Powell is right when she says that,

> the plays based on myths represent an attempt to draw inspiration from the traditional cultures, but they are also a reflection of the emerging culture of modern Papua New Guinea which is being formed from a blending of diverse elements.53

There are two main theatre groups; The National Theatre Company and RaunRaun Theatre. Whilst the former uses scripts as in modern production, the latter prefers not to, emphasising tradition. The drama, dances, and mimes that the theatre groups perform appeal very much to most Papua New Guineans because of their links to traditional orality and performative art. The plays are also taken to the people, and in a country with a rural-based population who cannot afford often to buy books even if they happen to be near a bookshop, the art of dance and drama is widely accepted and appreciated. It is this general oral/performance context that continues to dominate conceptions of art and culture in PNG in which the non-dramatic writer is again a minority figure. And Soaba shows that he is well aware of this when he says,

---

Perhaps the future of creative writing lies in the hands of those currently studying literature at the University here. But for the moment, I cannot say what direction creative writing is taking in PNG, particularly in the genres of prose and verse. ... Perhaps what we might be sure of here is drama, which has certainly captured the local imagination and is itself thriving as a literary genre. 54

CHAPTER 3: DECOLONIZATION LITERATURE

Western Education

Western education is by far the most powerful force to disintegrate traditional cultures, including orality. Through primary, secondary, and tertiary level, western education has already found its footing in PNG. Creative written expression was given official recognition when Ulli Beier was recruited from Nigeria to develop and teach courses in Literature at the University of Papua New Guinea (UPNG) in the late sixties. For the first time, Papua New Guineans were taught the creative art of writing. Later on the emergence of journals such as Kovave, and The Papua Pocket Poets, which Beier also established, showcased the plays, poems, and short stories that were produced. Beier was very aware of the importance of publication in written literature, so he made sure that his students became aware of it too. Kirsty Powell describes Beier's influence in shaping PNG literature:

Ulli Beier knew what he liked, what seemed to him to have some kind of artistic integrity...; and what he did not like he did not publish. ... He knew the publishing game, and he worked with speed: a speed which sometimes led writers to be surprised to find themselves in print; and which sometimes prompted publication of work which in another era would not

54 Interview with Singh: 4.
have deserved publication.55

With the emergence of written literary expression, PNG writers were able to reach a wider audience than just their kinship audiences, as in oral narrative. Their themes also had to be creatively sought unlike those that are already constructed by society as in storytelling. As Beier puts it,

As New Guineans they wish to define what this new identity is: how much do they owe to the foreign culture that was imposed on them? And to what extent are they still part of the tribal culture they have been educated away from."56.

Nora Vagi Brash's popular play, "Which Way Big Man?", which was also adapted for radio, reflects the kind of modern society PNG has become. Brash uses puns as names of her characters; for example: Gou Haia (go higher) — Public Servant, and Sinob Haia (snob higher) — his wife. Gou Haia is a senior public servant who is ambitious and looks forward to a promotion; his wife Sinob enjoys the material luxury that goes with her husband's position that she loses touch with "reality" (PNG culture), and becomes a snob.

SCENE ONE
SINOB: (calling) Gou, darling? Do you prefer the plain or the stuffed spinach olives? I'm just making up the shopping list. GOU: Oh I don't mind, Sinob! Listen, come in here to the lounge and have a drink. Vodka and tomato or something different? SINOB: (sighs) I'll have some Martini vermouth.57

56 Taken from Beier, U. Black Writing from New Guinea. St. Lucia: University of Qld Press, 1973: xiii
The opening scene contrasts PNG culture with western culture which Brash deliberately constructs in order to make a point about the kind of post-colonial society that PNG has/will become. The playwright's concern is directed at the PNG elite who prefers "spinach olives" to betel-nut, for example. "Which Way Big Man" is well received by the PNG audience for a number of reasons; it is saucy, humorous, satirical, and performed orally - all elements that are characteristic of PNG culture. Even Soaba acknowledges Brash's writing as a step forward in creating an awareness about the kind of society Papua New Guineans would like to live: "We need that kind of critical approach in our creativity".58 For a writer like Russell Soaba, the questions posed by Beier were challenging and interesting because of their novelty. Moreover, and more so for others, the written form was also an effective way of telling their stories because not only would the writer reach a wider audience but here was a great opportunity to tell the story about the negative effects of colonialism using English, and partly directed at a 'European' audience.

In a short story "Betel-nut is Bad Magic for Aeroplanes", John Kasaipwalova uses ironic humour, to ridicule rules and regulations that are imposed upon a supposedly carefree and spontaneous culture. The chewing of betel-nut is a part of the socialisation process in most PNG cultures and therefore has no boundaries as to when and where it should occur. In "Betel-nut is Bad Magic for Aeroplanes", the policeman comes up to the chewers and cautions them about the penalty for chewing at the airport because Ansett

58 Singh interview: 4.
and TAA flights were due to arrive soon bringing in Europeans who should not be offended by the act of chewing betel-nut. According to the narrator, there was nothing wrong with what they were doing. "We was chewing plenty Buwa like civilized people". The story uses custom to expose the arbitrary exercise of power based on racist thinking that lay beneath colonialism.

As writers became confident in themselves, so their social critique gained force. The peak period of literary production coincided with a general consciousness of the effects of colonialism. John Waiko refers to this period of writing as "The twilight of colonialism". Such writing is again displayed by John Kasaipwalova in "Reluctant Flame". In this long poem the opening stanza shows the superior / inferior binary contrast that came with colonialism:

This is the white cradle, this is the white pool.
This is the white ocean chasm in which we float steerless and captured
Black destination with villages of joyful living seem impossible
Made unreal and distant by the thick white fog
The fog blankets over, it pierces - no black density withstands the flood
I tremble in fear, the cold westerly chills my flesh and bones
Memory of past warmth swims in my heart like stones
What is this chill, where is that flame to warm and melt me?

The poem is a very good example of a native writer using the language of the coloniser to resist assimilation and expose the attitude of the colonial government which viewed the indigenous

60 Initially used by Powell, K. Taken from Waiko, Short History of PNG, Melbourne: Oxford Uni. Press, 1993: 173.
people as inferior not only because they were darker in complexion, but also because they lacked the kind of material wealth and luxury found in the western world.

Like Kasaipwalova, Kumalau Tawali has the same anti-colonial message, but he chooses to make his point using a more traditional style and form:

\[\text{The kiap shouts at us}\\ \text{forcing the veins to stand out in his neck}\\ \text{nearly forcing the excreta out of his bottom}\\ \text{he says: you are ignorant.}^62\]

The above could easily have been words spoken by the storyteller in a village situation or even an old man chanting about the loss of his culture.

Of all the writers that Beier moulded, Soaba is the only one who is critical of his (Beier's) role in how he tried to construct a PNG writer. In his response to the notion of using writing as a political weapon, which Beier encouraged, Kirsty Powell notes Soaba's view:

I had always dreamed (and I still do) of becoming some kind of an independent artist: an artist who believes that true art is neither didactic nor explanatory... With this belief then, I found it hard to conform to Ulli Beier's methods of having to have Niuginian writers express their discontent of being under colonial rule... I don't regard them as wrong for creating such themes, nor am I advocating a denial that I am one of the colonised.^63

---

^63 Quoted in Powell, K. "The Education of the Playwrights" MA Thesis. p. 44.
And in his interview with Chris Tiffin, Soaba says;

Some of our 'apostles' and 'bishops' had regarded Beier as a literary god, the Uncle of the young PNG writers of the time. I too admired him greatly, but I secretly feared that he was a mean politician.64

Whilst Soaba mostly chooses not to express anti-colonial feelings as a means of protest, he suggests that if writers intend to condemn colonialism, then they should also be able to suggest and construct a new kind of society that would be meaningful to their people.65

Influenced by the Black American blues, "Eclipse: The New Blues" is a poem that laments the loss of the old ways which have not been completely replaced by the new but rather, a new situation is created in which all have become losers.

I
A child learning to fly falls at our feet. We pick him up, send him along; on his feet. We look on, humming the Blues.

II
They have their dreams. We have our myths and legends.

III
A Black student introduces a white colleague at Harvard: "This is my friend Sambo; he studies my behaviour".

IV
Have we been speaking in tongues?

64 Soaba, R. in his interview with Tiffin, C. SPAN, no. 8, 1979: 15.
V
This is how it really is:
one either arrives up, or down;
the world's either Wanpis
or Lusman.

The new Blues
The new Blues.

The poem also seems to advance the idea of a "no win" situation
(Lusman or Wanpis) which again positions the reader to infer from
his/her own experiences in order to interpret the poem. "Eclipse:
The New Blues" is another piece of Soaba's "odd" or "weird" writing.

Subsequently, the child in the poem can also be read as a metaphor
for PNG, implanted in the colonial relationship between PNG and
Australia. The first binary opposition is found in the second stanza
when he says, "They have their dreams. We have our myths and
legends". Whilst the west has its dreams and ambitions, PNG boasts
its myths and legends. Then immediately after that stanza, "A black
student introduces a white colleague" so again we get this
black/white, superior/inferior complex which is echoed in the next
line - "This is my friend Sambo; he studies my behaviour". How
ironic it is that a friend should study the other's behaviour; such
things are not heard of in traditional society. But to Soaba, studying
psychology is a key factor in understanding human relations. Stanza
IV which is also the shortest asks the crucial question: "Have we
been speaking in tongues?". The ambiguity there and elsewhere
throughout the poem could imply inspiration/prophesy as well as
confusion. "The new Blues, The new Blues" that the author ends
with in this poem is the new world that he has constructed in this
piece of writing; it is the world of Wanpis and Lusman, the existential writer, and the philosopher.

The African Influence
African Literature also found its place in PNG, again through the influence of Ulli Beier. African texts like *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe, *Weep Not Child* by Ngugi, and *The Voice* by Gabriel Okara, just to name a few, were used to inspire Papua New Guineans to write, the message being there were other black people in other parts of the world who could produce such work in English, so the onus was on the PNG writer to think and write creatively. Kirsty Powell notes Arthur Jawodimbari's words in response to the above as: "If they can do it so can we".66 The African countries had experienced colonisation and were now going through the process of decolonisation, hence their representative members in the United Nations were urging decolonisation for other "Third World" countries, particularly the Pacific Island countries.

Furthermore, the anti-colonial theme in African novels paralleled the historical moment of PNG's decolonization. In view of that, Beier thought that because Africa and PNG were not only both colonised by the British but also had an oral literary background, it would be easy for him to introduce written literature using African texts. Of Beier, Soaba had this to say: "The only influence (if you can call it that) I had from Ulli Beier was the *spirit* in African art and

---

literature that he tried to convey" (Kirsty Powell, p.39). Tiffin makes a point about this in his review of *Wanpis* when he says:

Soaba writes consciously in the world-wide tradition of black consciousness. James Baldwin and Colin Johnson are referred to in the text, the situation owes a little to Ngugi and the style in parts recalls Soyinka's *The Interpreters*, and the struggle for a Papua New Guinea identity is explicitly compared to that taking place in Africa and black America.67

Soaba constructs Just Call Me Joe (JCM Joe) in *Wanpis* as the politically motivated character who eventually becomes the leader of the Black Power Movement (p.45) on campus. However JCM Joe depends on Anonymous to write his speeches for the numerous forums that are held. Later on at the party thrown by Mr Goldsworth, Sophie questions Anonymous in an effort to understand the relevance of the African-American Black Power Movement:

"Tell me, do you really believe in Black Power?"..."I mean, do you really think that the black Niuginian is somewhat undergoing the torments that are very much different from those that the African and American Negro goes through?" "Different? I reckon all blacks are black - they can even be white and vice versa - but the torments, which must be spiritual if not psychological, are always there, within anyone, as a basis of all human suffering; very near to sadism, but not - definitely not - within sadism, since this is Papua New Guinea -.." (p.59).

Sophie's question is an important one in analysing post-colonial texts because it addresses the notion that all post-colonial societies experienced colonisation differently, hence the writings that come out of each society differ. Soaba is unique in affirming racial

difference but at the same time refusing to make it a definitive marker; the nature of one's suffering is the deciding factor and that again is particularised to the PNG setting.

**National Modernity**
The emergence of written literature through institutions such as the university saw a shift from the oral form to the written technology. What was once practised and seen as a communal event by writers was now becoming an individual-oriented task. Writers were no longer directly addressing their audiences and hence could not know what effects their stories would have. Initially, they were more concerned with themes that immediately affected them because they did not have to think hard about what to write. The events and experiences were self-presented and affected all rather than an individual. Although this was the case for most PNG Writers, the same cannot be said for Soaba. So whereas most people stopped writing when the content was compelling and they had to be original or develop a style, Soaba continued to write and still does so. As a 70's writer, Soaba shares certain concerns and topics with his age-mates and because writing itself raises issues of modernity, autonomy etc. But even in this common context of writing and modernity he is still different (marginalised by colonialism as a native and by nationalism as an uncommitted, antisocial loner).

In *Wanpis* one of Soaba's characters is called Just Call Me Joe (JCM Joe), and another Anonoymous. Again, this is typical of Soaba when he names his characters using odd terms, abbreviations, initials, puns, and universal names like Sheila and Vera. This is unlike his
co-writers in PNG who tend to use more local versions or traditional names. JCM Joe in *Wanpis* changes his name to Mr Joseph Bikman:

Since his appointment to his new job in the public service *Just Call Me Joe* had resumed his Christian and traditional names. He preferred Mr Joseph Bikman to *Just Call Me Joe*.... Mr Joseph Bikman deliberately forgot his village, his parents and relatives even though they were still in existence. (p. 137-38).

Bikman is a pun for Big Man, or an important person like Gou Haia in "Which Way Big Man?". In Tok Pisin, Bikman means a village elder or chief, someone who is highly respected. As used by Soaba, Bikman carries a negative connotation, it is associated with someone with no sense of direction or identity, someone who has become a "lusman". Both Gou Haia and Mr Joseph Bikman are ambitious; they desire the western lifestyle as opposed to the traditional one. They have detached themselves from the societies that produced them so that more and more they become alienated and isolated. This is the trend the PNG elite has chosen to follow and this is what Brash and Soaba are critiquing through their play and novel, respectively. Gou Haia and Mr Joseph Bikman are like Mr Biswas in V.S. Naipaul's novel. Their desire to mimic the "other" is bound to be disappointing given the different cultural space in which they operate. As well as occasionally satirizing the excesses of the elite like other PNG writers, Soaba also turns to tradition sometimes in an attempt to explain his being. This is communicated to us in another of his poems called "Looking Thru' Those Eyeholes"

Once an artist went overseas
His father died in his absence
and was buried in the village
He followed a rainbow upon his return and came to a cemetery he dug in search of reality till he broke his father's skull to wear it's fore-half as a mask.

try it/look thru' those eyeholes see the old painting/view the world in the way the dead had done.68

The image of the artist going overseas only to return and find that his father is dead is typical of educated Papua New Guineans who take on higher education away from the village and become alienated from their tradition and customs. The writer or any artist is in danger of being isolated and alienated. The death of the father also symbolises the death of a culture, and the death of the writer. Hence, it is also Soaba's view that writers can only survive in the literary world if they choose to be different; that is, by creating their own styles and techniques.

In **Wanpis** a key moment in the narrator's self-discovery is his mourning for a promising poet, Jimi Damebo. This is related to the legend of the taro in the Binandere tradition.

In the Binandere tradition, as much as in any other, whenever there is death there is a time for mourning and a time for rejoicing. The earth, the virgin jungle, the rivers and the blue sky, follow that tradition. And the taro also respond: a wife walks through the garden with a *bilum* slung from her head and in seeing her the taro mourn, they exchange inquisitive stares amongst themselves, and ultimately weep out the question "Sisters, brothers who is it among us that must be pulled out today?". The question echoes down the multitude of taro, and the wind just re-

echoes the question. Yet there comes a day when the husband walks through the garden: the taro rejoice, they dance and wave their leaves joyously even though the air is as still as can be, knowing that it is the father, the man of the soil, who has revisited them. In the village there is eating and drinking, there is singing and dancing, which marks the end of sorrow and the beginning of happiness. The anonymous Anuki had never been to that part of the country, although through his wife who had spent her childhood there, and through Vera and Jimi Damebo who were Binandere, he had come to recognise the sacred essence of that legend of the taro. Armed with this knowledge he drove his friends straight to the Waigani market. There he bought some taro, a portion of smoked wallaby and some orabu and pumpkin tops. The others joined him with the preparation of the feast. (pp. 174-75).

The legend of the taro signifies the importance of custom and tradition in interpreting the world Papua New Guineans live in, so by choosing to incorporate it into his narrative, Soaba acknowledges its importance as well as its validity. However, he still chooses not to rely heavily on it to construct his narrative. It is almost as if Soaba resorts to the conventional style as a last resort. Otherwise, he writes as an isolated artist. The narrative structure in Wanpis clearly displays Soaba's rejection of the conventional style whereby the style is inconsistent, the plot disjointed, and the ending so open-ended and discontinuous.
CHAPTER 4: THE ROLE OF THE WRITER

After independence the literary scene in PNG began to disappear slowly. Some writers reflected on the changing PNG and focussed on themes such as migration from villages to towns, urbanisation, and even race relations, and the search for a national identity. Siuras Kavani's prose "City Lights" explores the social problem of urban drift whereby people move from their villages to towns and cities in search of a "better" lifestyle only to discover that life in the city is tough and alienating.

The big plane was a great experience as it flew smoothly over the mountains towards Port Moresby. Alam knew that many of his kinsmen lived in Port Moresby. During the flight he thought eagerly of meeting wantoks who had become citymen and who somehow had forgotten their village home. ... Leaving the plane he strolled into the crowded terminal. He searched the faces of the crowd avidly but saw no person of his own clan he knew. ... Alan waited and waited until the sun was sinking... 69

Kama Kerpi's poem "Hohola in the Night" is another example of writings about social change soon after independence. One of the stanzas reads:

Though splendid your beauty

I hear a siren of a police van far to my left
Scream of a raped female to my right
Before me in under dim lights
A woman selling her body to a queue
And five juvenile delinquents
Follow me. 70

Whilst these writers expressed concerns that were affecting the country as a whole, Soaba remained focussed on his own ideas, values and beliefs to govern his writing, like he did in "Portrait of the Odd Man Out".

Melanesian Identity
Melanesian Identity signifies the period of time when PNG was transforming itself into a "modern" state. Activists like Bernard Narakobi began searching for some commonalities that Papua New Guineans could identify themselves with. He advocated the concept of a "Melanesian Way" which would serve as a cultural cement writing various ethnic and national identities to unite Papua New Guineans under the one umbrella called "Melanesians". The point of his argument is that

some people say this nation will be united through parliament, public service, roads, bridges, armed forces and the like. I say, maybe, maybe not. The one thing that can unite us is ideology, or philosophy" 71.

Narakobi's view is that there is such a thing as belonging to a particular ancient cultural group, spiritually bonded in communal interaction and that is what Papua New Guineans should first and foremost identify with. His argument is in opposition to what the

western world considers as "the universal way". Narakobi argues that there is no such thing. He is in agreement with what *The Empire Writes Back* suggests when it states that "it is the centre which imposes its criteria as universal, and dictates an order in terms of which the cultural margins must see themselves as disorder and chaos".72

Franz Fanon's version of the native intellectual accounts for the sentiment that Narakobi and others like him advocate:

this passionate search for a national culture which existed before the colonial era finds its legitimate reason in the anxiety shared by native intellectuals to shrink away from that Western culture in which they all risk being swamped. Because they realise they are in danger of becoming lost to their people, these men, hot-headed and with anger in their hearts, relentlessly determine to renew contact once more with the oldest and most pre-colonial springs of life of their people.73

Franz Fanon's version of the native intellectual accounts for the sentiment that Narakobi and others like him advocate:

this passionate search for a national culture which existed before the colonial era finds its legitimate reason in the anxiety shared by native intellectuals to shrink away from that Western culture in which they all risk being swamped. Because they realise they are in danger of becoming lost to their people, these men, hot-headed and with anger in their hearts, relentlessly determine to renew contact once more with the oldest and most pre-colonial springs of life of their people.74

Although Narakobi's conception about belonging to an ancient cultural group has some validity, in attempting to go back to the past to create a sense of belonging and identity he is in danger of repeating history. To belong to a particular cultural group that is exclusive of others does not bring about change; instead it creates a new centre with those outside of it being left on the fringe, hence the cycle continues. Soaba shows critical distance from nationalist neo-traditionalism in *Maiba* through Siril and Maiba's conversation:

"We are Melanesians, as they call us"
"As who calls us?"
"Anthropologists, anybody. Anything can happen in our lives. We should be prepared at all times" (p.26).

Soaba is yet again a minority excluded by this new centralism because he is not concerned about such issues as regionalism and national unity.

Bernard Minol is right when he argues that there is no Melanesian Way, but rather Melanesian Ways and that if there was a Melanesian Way then "it exists only in the assumptions, dreams and fantasies of the modern prophets" like Narakobi. Minol reiterates that every Melanesian society has its own culture that its people identify with, hence to replace that with "a superficial philosophy like the Melanesian Way" would be problematic. Just as colonialism tried to unite Papua New Guinean societies under one Eurocentric umbrella, Narakobi is attempting the same process by advocating the

---

Wheatsheaf, 1993: 36.
Melanesian Way to unify Papua New Guineans. Perhaps Minol's suggestion that

Melanesian Ways comprise both the uniqueness and similarities in the different cultures at the expense of this region. As soon as we begin pushing one culture at the expense of the rest we are not talking about Melanesian Ways. To me all these cultures put together is our commonality. This means we are accepting our cultures, accepting our diversity as well as our commonality.75

is the way to go. There are evident differences between mountain and coast, Tolai, Kiriwina and Daru people. Soaba's fiction often emphasises kin and language groups as an implicit resistance against national homogenization (though he presumably disapproves of triablism). It is from this perspective that Soaba is discussed in later consideration of Maiba.

Fanon suggests three different levels which he calls phases, that the native writer demonstrates. Of these, Soaba fits the profile of the native writer in the second phase. In the second phase according to Fanon,

the native is disturbed; he decides to remember what he is. ... since the native is not a part of his people, since he only has exterior relations with his people, he is content to recall their life only. Past happenings of the bygone days of his childhood will be brought up out of the depths of his memory; old legends will be reinterpreted in the light of a borrowed aestheticism and of a conception of the world which was discovered under other skies. Sometimes this literature of just-before-the- battle is dominated by humour and by allegory; but often it is too symptomatic of a period of distress and difficulty, where death is

experienced, and disgust too.\textsuperscript{76}

The above symptoms that Fanon describes can be found in most of Soaba's work, particularly in \textit{Wanpis}. However, Fanon supposes a revolutionary progress to a third phase that Soaba seems to reject — there is no "proletariat" to be identified with according to Soaba.

\textbf{Wanpis: The Role of the PNG Writer}

The story is set in PNG which begins at provincial level and ends at the national level in the capital city. The novel traces the growth and development of the characters who are lost to the world of intellectuals and materialism but in the end nothing ever gets resolved. In Nigel Krauth's words;

\begin{quote}
It is a novel about modes of survival, conformity and rebellion, contrasting the confused sensitivities of its characters' inner worlds with the brutality absurd fates dictated for them by history and social pressures.\textsuperscript{77}
\end{quote}

Though \textit{Wanpis} appears in the form of autobiography which gives us an insight into the author's teenage to adult life story, \textit{Wanpis} is also a story about the Papua New Guinea writer who is caught between a traditional and a modern society. The writer's role is depicted in the lives of several characters in the novel who each represent the various types of writers that have evolved in PNG. The novel is divided into three parts; "Lusman" in which the narration is in the first person; "Spilt-yolk nostalgia," which follows through from the

\textsuperscript{76} Ibid., p. 40-41.
first in the same narrative structure, and "Wanpis" which switches to the third person and becomes disjointed.

**Lusman: The Crisis of Identity**

The literal meaning of "Lusman" in Tok Pisin, can mean someone who is poor, someone who is an outcast, or an orphan — basically somebody who does not really know where he or she belongs as a result of being displaced, hence alienated. As summed up in this statement by Anonymous,

"There is nothing much to know, to add, to one's life and history. One is born to be oneself; to live, to die, to have everything, to have nothing. Home, therefore, is a personal preference - of birth, of language, of the sense of belonging and possibly necessary symbolism - before death. (Wanpis, p.37).

The qualities of a Lusman in *Wanpis* are manifested in all the characters. Sheila is Lusman (although she is female and should be called lusmeri) right from the start when she opts for the modern lifestyle, to live in a "modern" conventional house. She also buys only imported food so that when the taxi driver gives her a bundle of pumpkin tops and some cooking bananas she throws them away in the rubbish bin. Another Lusman is the the narrator himself who remains anonymous. Initially, all we are told is that he is born out of wedlock to an Anuki mother and a white father, so he is halfcaste. But we get to learn first his surname (last section of the book) when the news reporter refers to Sheila (his wife) as Mrs Sheila
Willborough (p.172), the surname that the narrator has tried to distance himself from.

Anonymous is the only orphan in the story who tries very hard to be like the rest of the crowd. He is the only halfcast too, hence the feeling of being different and alienated. However his insecurity is counteracted by being married to Sheila, who grew up in a conventional family. Anonymous, who really is Abel Willborough, eventually gives in to revealing his name because the situation warrants it — to rent a car one must give every detail needed, including full name. The concealed identity is then brought to light like the dusk that has so long clouded his thoughts. On two occasions at the very end of the book this is implied. First when Vera replies in Anuki - "Pom gurina" ... and he was surprised to hear her speak Enita's tongue. (p.176). Here was someone whom he thought he knew yet he did not know she could speak his dialect. So Vera did belong somewhere then. The other instance is when they watch the dusk and she remarks:

"You don't approve of dusks much, do you, Abel?"...
"Of course I do" he answered nevertheless, with a smile;
"in fact, without a single dusk of a day in my life I would never feel complete". He could now easily apply a happy look to his own face.(p.176)

Abel surfaces from Anonymous only through a feeling of acceptance or belonging somewhere.

The dusk carries two contrasting associations: that of acceptance, as in the case of Abel Willborough's identity and his relationship with Vera; and that of uncertainty with regard to successfully taking on St
James Nativeson's writing. Nativeson, or Jimi Damebo, is an interesting character because he only appears in the first and the last part of the novel. It is in the last part that he features prominently as a writer but not as a character in the story. Soaba constructs St James Nativeson as an eccentric character whose whole world is interpreted through poetry that when he dies, he "dies like frogs on the road" (p.22). Whilst Nativeson is dying in the hospital, his friends are intoxicating themselves in Gerehu, nor do they revisit him. For a Papua New Guinean writer to construct such a storyline, is considered "odd" and "uncultured". In most PNG societies, paying a visit to the sick or injured is a sign of friendship, honour and respect. Also friends and relatives of the sick/injured in hospital are supposed to be grieving in silence rather than celebrating like Soaba's characters in \textit{Wanpis} do. Here is another reason why Papua New Guineans have had difficulty in relating to Soaba's work. Again Soaba has resorted to projecting his individuality as opposed to a communal consciousness. And he rejects traditional norms to advocate his own values and beliefs in his fiction.

Furthermore, St James Nativeson has been said to be the hero in \textit{Wanpis} by Soaba's critics because it is he (Nativeson) who fulfils his ambition to become a writer before dying. I cannot quite agree with that; for me, Anonymous is the hero who is born with an unknown identity; he becomes alienated from his village and traditions whilst away at a mission school which gives him the courage to go on. He makes it through university and takes up a job in the public service. His home that he shares with Sheila is modest. Unlike JCM Joe, Anonymous is neither arrogant nor selfish, he is considerate and humble. And because of his accommodating nature, he is prepared
to take on the challenge that Jimi leaves behind. Like any other Papua New Guinean, I do not see Nativeson as a hero, particularly when he claims that he writes to represent his people whilst living in seclusion, and then dies unheroically.

**Wanpis: The Displacement of Identity**

"Wanpis", another Tok Pisin term, refers to only one person or a sole loner, an individual. In the last part of the novel all the characters become wanpis. Just Call Me Joe becomes wanpis in the public service, just like John Kasaipwalova did when he discarded writing to become a successful business man. Nathaniel is wanpis without the company of Damebo on whom he had depended so heavily. It is Nathaniel who continues to practise the Christian principles learnt from All Saints High School with the hope of discovering the truth, whatever that is. He calls himself "A free believer of Jesus - without the bureaucratic giamanambaut (lies)." (p.141). Nathaniel is likened to writers like Kumalau Tawali, who has since become a devoted Christian writing for the PNG Times about ethics and morals that a Christian country like PNG needs. Anonymous takes on the task of writing just as Vincent Eri did — accidentally. Of such writers, Vera says: "you are all the same. You enjoy promoting dead artists on the road. ... I haven't changed my thoughts about you being a pack of fleshy wastes of the real Western bourgeois arses" (p.145).

Vera who is critical of Anonymous, knows the world of the writer so well, she depicts someone like Norah Vagi Brash, the first and only female playwright in PNG during that period of time when PNG writing flourished. And she (Vera) becomes wanpis after the visit to
the hospital only to discover Jimi is already dead. Damebo becomes 
wansis when he dies "an alien death, in a foreign soil". (p.126). St 
James Nativeson, the poet, becomes Jimi Damebo when he dies to 
symbolise what he will long be remembered as - not a writer, but a 
Papua New Guinean who tried so hard to become a writer in a 
western sense, only to become a wasted talent. His death symbolises 
the hardships that Soaba faces as a writer in PNG. Symbolically, the 
change that Nathaniel goes through (learning to forgive the whites 
and accepting the conditions under which he must exist) and the 
death of Nativeson are the very conditions that Soaba had to rise 
above to become an artist in the western sense.

To illustrate the change needed in the writing scene, Soaba draws 
upon the games that children play:

they saw five or six children playing *kung fu* on the road. 
The children stood in two lines, facing each other in *kung fu* 
poses, growling, then yelling and showing neat rows of white 
teeth. "Thieves! Liars!" one line called. "Cheats! Psycho-
murderers!" "That's a new game," remarked Nathaniel, 
forgetting Anonymous' creative effort. "They've grown tired 

Like the children who had grown tired of playing the same game 
day in and day out, the writer who does not seek to be creative 
grows tired too. Soaba is well aware that what he adovates in 
*Wanpis* as the role of the writer in PNG (however appropriate it may 
sound) is a far cry from what is publicy acceptable, but also that the 
people have grown tired of all the old games.

In *Wanpis* it seems like Soaba writes with no particular audience in 
mind, but rather to express his own philosophical values and beliefs.
On the one hand it may appear as though it is meant to be for his local audience because his English isn't standard and his settings are too local; however, his ordinary PNG audience find the book a difficult one to read because it departs from the "recipe" for PNG writing; the content is centred on a particular small group of people like the university students, the plot confusing because it is disjointed, the characters are constructed as "good-for-nothing" elites with no sense of direction, and the narration is always shifting. With such a fiction, the local audience find the book unfulfilling because they are not used to a "novel of ideas". Moreover, the language is too inflated for most readers, and national concerns are not reflected as expected. This is the case with most of Soaba's texts.

Most of Soaba's critics on *Wanpis* have been outsiders who have focussed mainly on his philosophical approach rather than on his general narrative structure, style, and language. Bill McGaw for instance says that:

> According to the existential view which Soaba is constructing, the society, like the writer can only attain selfhood if it is able to come to terms with its whole existence, both its past innocence and its present experience - to be 'one piece': an integrated autonomy.\(^7\)

Chris Tiffin describes the book as

> the most ambitious piece of fiction yet written by a Papua New Guinean. ... It is a national self-acceptance and

---

understanding that the novel points to, and the path is seen to be paved with individual failures and even martyrdoms.\textsuperscript{79}

However Tiffin does admit that "it is a difficult novel for an outsider" (p.68). Whilst focussing on the ideas that the novel explores, both McGaw and Tiffin overlook the actual organisational structure, style, and language that is constructed in \emph{Wanpis}. To begin with, the novel was published by the Institute of PNG Studies in Port Moresby because established foreign publishers had rejected it. No critic has asked why this was so, but Soaba claims it had something to do with the content which is too self-conscious and therefore challenging to prospective readers, editors, and publishers, likewise.

Perhaps the alternative kind of society that Soaba would like to see is best constructed in his novel *Maiba*. In spite of what critics like Jennifer Evans have said about how difficult *Maiba* is, in my view *Maiba* presents a critique on the kind of society that Soaba advocates — a society that is spontaneous, carefree, and modest. It is a society that does not discriminate between religion, race, age, sex, or wealth. Soaba tests all these human qualities in a cultural setting that is supposedly ritualistic and where kinship ties are considered strong. Because of this, respect for other human beings is a top priority. This is not the case when Maiba becomes the victim of discrimination for a number of reasons. She is female, an orphan, born paralysed and therefore cursed, and she happens to be the daughter of the last of the chiefs. The characteristics and personality that Maiba possesses highlight the lapse in values amongst her community.

In many respects, *Maiba* is more typically a Papua New Guinean novel than *Wanpis*: The most obvious factor is the setting of the story which takes place in the village of Makawana where chief Komeroana Magura reins as the ruler till his death. Whereas *Wanpis* is urban- oriented, *Maiba* ("A Papuan Novel" as it is called), is village- oriented and therefore close to tradition. In *Maiba* the clash is between traditional and modern ways, between communal consensus and individual influence, between local dialect and imported language, and between male and female gender roles.

---

Again, the clash is not one of clear-cut opposites. The people value the presence of the mission settlement on the coast, but recognise that its pastors have destroyed the authority of tribal rulers. Boas, a true believer in Christianity, convinces the people not to seek revenge after Christine is raped by Doboro's men. Instead he encourages them to go to church to pray to God, which the villagers obligingly do. So whilst Christianity does play a part in "unifying" the villages when they choose not to seek revenge on Doboro Thomas, at the same time it replaces the traditional laws already in place regarding 'payback' warfare. The people are colonised and the men feminised by Christianity. Over-compensatory machismo, however, is not a solution. Rape is exposed as a very bad practice that degrades all humanity. In any case, the perpetrators, who appear to reassert indigenous tradition, base their power on trade goods — guns and alcohol.

The characters in Mai ba also cover a wider social cross-section than the university student world of Wanpis. Mr Wawaya is the most passive character in the story, in fact he does not get to voice his feelings at all. Mrs Wawaya is constructed as the unfaithful wife who takes her husband for granted, she desires the material wealth of the west and curses her children for not trying hard enough to fulfil her dreams. To a certain extent, Mrs Wawaya is a lusmeri in the PNG context - she becomes rootless, or cultureless. When Mrs Wawaya begins her usual session of denigrating Maiba publicly, Jessica cautions her about the disrespect being shown towards the late chief, who is a symbol of authority.

"Maiba is more of her father than you are as the late
Chief's ill-deserved sister in-law and foster mother of his orphaned daughter. She has more rights to be in the house that you are in than you, Veronica, did you know that?
"Who are you Jessica, to alienate me from my house," Mrs. Wawaya snapped.
"Your own house?" Jessica exclaimed. "Where did this bit of privilege come from for you, Veronica? You speak like a woman who is held up in the air for just the job of screaming with no foreknowledge whatsoever that she isn't even standing on her own two feet. Now come on Veronica, surely you can't be rootless as all that in the house of the chiefs. (p.11).

Several issues are being addressed by the author in the above narrative. The first is to do with respect for tradition, and that includes showing consideration for authority figures like chiefs. The village system operates within its own norms and standards.

The other issue being addressed is a humanitarian one. The author intends his readers to be wary of such practices as gossiping, condemning, name-calling, and basically isolating another human being. Such a practice does not bring people together, but leads to separation and alienation. If it occurs at village level, it is even harder to expect people to think in terms of national unity. The parable that Siril relates to Augustine about the two brothers is relevant in discussing humanity. Augustine remarks that it isn't a good story because the ending isn't as fulfilling as he would expect — the two brothers out of revenge, eat their *dimdim* food without sharing it with their parents, which to Augustine, is so unconventional. Siril replies:

It isn't a good story, I know, but many elders use it because it teaches one a very good lesson. And that is this:
the problem of humanity versus development, process, even history. History can crucify a man, just as a man can defy it. History can lie, it can cheat, it can even mesmerize men into believing that they are gods because history said so. Yet history is necessary...(p.42).

It is also within this context that Soaba constructs his fiction *Maiba* in the hope of understanding the history of his people and his society. In turn, this can be applied to a wider PNG context to explain the present PNG. The book then becomes an allegory of both grassroots and national politics.

Gender roles are also clearly defined in the earlier exchange between Mrs Veronica Wawaya and Jessica. Whilst Jessica represents the traditional/conventional woman whose role is to be a decent woman, fine wife, and adoring mother; Mrs Wawaya on the other hand refuses to comply or conform to the norms of society. Again Jessica's remarks indicate this:

> Your husband must be tired of your words by now. How does it feel for a man if everyday of his life he sees and loves nothing but a woman who does not know what loyalty is, what respect is, what pride of having a home of her own means? And you even have the courage to spread the word like fire that you were married into a family that was cursed by God for good... Really, if I were in your position, I'd be ashamed of myself. (pp.11-12).

The shame culture that I mentioned earlier in my introduction is applicable in Veronica Wawaya's case. Because she chooses to display her individuality publicly, she is shamed by the others and the women must rightly point this out to her.
In *Maiba*, as in most patriarchal societies in PNG, Mr Wawaya typifies the kind of role expected of a man, he must fend for his family and make sure that they do not starve. The woman plays the role of nurturing, and because gender roles are dictated by custom, the woman becomes voiceless/silent. She becomes a minority figure, marginalised, and only recognised through the man. Christine is raped because she is viewed by Doboro and his men as just a woman whose role is to reproduce the next generation of Makawanas. It is therefore important for the author to elevate Maiba to a position of strength and power so that she becomes a living example of a victim turned heroine. In PNG where most societies are patriarchal, writers have focussed on the man. Even Nora Vagi is focussed on the male and satirical of women. However, Soaba reverses this by constructing Maiba the protagonist as a woman full of wisdom and courage who is able to critique her own society. Samson Ngwele in his commentary on *Maiba* says:

*Maiba* is a novel within a novel in that, unlike most Third World male writers (including South Pacific Writers like Albert Wendt) who choose male heroes, Soaba chooses a female heroine.81

Also by doing this the author creates a different kind of text. The existential idea for example, is prominent in *Maiba*. "People only tell stories out of their own experiences. Or imagination. And I am Maiba" (p.63). This is not a traditional hero's boast, but a statement of individual integrity. Life is presented as being so dull and gloomy, with even spiritual comfort proving elusive:

---

81 Ngwele, S. "A Commentary on Soaba's *Maiba*" in Ondobondo, 8, 1987: 1
Life, thought Maiba, whatever it may become, is basically ugly, neglected, frowned upon and mocked, even murdered: it is in the heart of man, the wawaya of us all, who is so busy wishing to be complete as a human being that he cannot communicate with us. (p.85).

**Magic Realism**

The term "MAGIC REALISM" is an oxymoron, one that suggests a binary opposition between the representational code of realism and that, roughly of fantasy. In the language of narration in a magic realist text, a battle between two oppositional systems takes place, each working toward the creation of a different kind of fictional world from the other. Since the ground rules of these two worlds are incompatible, neither one can fully come into being, and each remains suspended, locked in a continuous dialectic with the "other", a situation which creates disjunction within each of the separate discursive systems, rending them with gaps, absences, and silences.82

Maiba is a different fiction from traditional moral tales and modern social realism alike. As with traditional story telling there is always a clear ending, whereas Soaba's moral tales in his fiction do not always have that. And with the national context a moral modern narrative has to be clear to all, unifying and pointing everyone in the same direction. However, Soaba's open ending leaves characters apart and readers alone to work out their different meanings.

Maiba has been described by critics as a parable. It is a story that is told in riddles with no clear message nor meaning, only action-oriented, although the political implications are therein. The narration shifts all the time from traditional to modern discursive

systems without either of these aspects developing or defining each other. In this regard, the text serves as an example of post-colonial magic realism as defined above by Stephen Slemon. For example, after Boas has convinced the warriors not to seek revenge, he addresses them in "tok ples" - local dialect- to which the response is:

"Are you asking us to bend down our heads in shame like women, instead of fighting for our rights?" shouts Cephas from among the warriors. "Ei, Boas? Where did you get this soft woman voice from, eh? From your father and his father before him? Ei? Answer me, you coward". There is silence. Cephas looks anxiously at the faces all around him, expecting applause, but no one speaks nor stirs. He opens his mouth as if to scream at Boas, he takes a few steps forward as if to strike him with his fists but, realizing that the latter is staring at him with folded arms and remembering that Boas earned his reputation as the strongest man in Makawana, after drowning a wild boar in a river with his bare hands, he retreats. He remains standing, but anger soon overtakes him and he begins shaking like a leaf. Then muttering curses under his breath he sits down and sulks. (pp: 100-101).

The above narration is meant to depict realism in the village situation but then it does not work as well as it should because the villagers resort to the modern approach of resolving a conflict through Boas' influence. Boas' response to Cephas is:

"Elder Cephas", ... in a raised voice, "I have no time to give any sermons now. It is late and the wind is beginning to break the surface of the sea into a million ripples of confusion. The sun is high, the sky has changed its blue, and we should be in the chapel by now. However," Boas pauses, looking at the faces around him, at the coconut palms above, and at Cephas, "however, for your sake I have only this to say. See that coconut tree over there?" He points to the tallest tree in the compound. "that tree is old, and has around its trunk some reddish fungi growing to indicate its age. It no longer bears any nuts in
abundance as we can well see. And it remains as it is, retaining its own importance by standing taller than the other trees. But it does not speak..."
The warriors, the students and the women stir, look fixely on Boas. "...no, it does not speak," continues the evangelist. "And although it does not speak - well, apart from the sounds its leaves make on windy days - it has, deep within itself, some kind of mystery, monstrosities in fact, of all sorts. Those monstrosities lie embedded deep down in its roots, waiting with the tree, never seeking a way to take the lives of the other trees, nor to take its own life. When its time comes, the tree dies. And it dies silently, without protest. The monstrosities too die with the tree.

With that the villagers surrender their weapons and leave in silence. The parable about the tree is a characteristic technique that Soaba uses to construct his narrative. It is both traditional (a maiba riddle) and part of puzzling modernity — something no one has heard before, lacking a single, clear massage. The plot then becomes disjointed and hard to follow.

The character of Boas is both the traditional warrior as well as the evangelist who plays the role of the peace maker and the orator in the above example. The villagers are quick to listen to him because of his status in the village. The death of the old tree also symbolises the death of Mr Wawaya who dies a silent death, hence the end of the chiefly dynasty. Soaba undercuts Mr Wawaya's role and status that he becomes a victim rather than a hero. Obviously Soaba does not wholly approve of hierarchical structures, such as the traditional chiefly system that he grew up with.

There are four kinds of political systems impacting on the novelistic forms in Maiba: Western, traditional chiefly, cargo syncretic, Maiba's communalism. None of the four systems is developed fully in the
fiction, nor do they successfully operate together to make a complete whole. Instead they come into conflict with one another and in the end nothing is resolved. There is confusion, silence, and death.

Soaba constructs this explicitly in the novel when writes:

The village, under the leadership of Maiba's ancestors, certainly had been rich and powerful. Then had come the Anglicans at the end of the nineteenth century with Christianity as the new gospel, and slowly the villagers turned away from their chiefs. The death of Maiba's father meant that there was nothing more left of the "dark" for them to fear. (p.8).

Doboro Thomas the villain is likened to a cargo cultist leader who seeks to create his own kingdom in which he becomes the supreme ruler. Such leaders existed during colonisation and immediately after that in PNG. For example, in Manus Paliau Maloat initiated what he called the "Makasol Movement" with all his followers belonging to the Paliau Church. He established a "long house" where he kept young women to work for him as his servants. In Buka the "Hahalis Welfare Society" that Albert Maori Kiki talks about in his autobiography, set up the "baby garden" in order to breed a particular race of people. Like the mentioned figures in PNG's history books, Doboro refuses to become subjected to Christianity, a western belief imposed upon his people. He complains about the changes that Papua New Guinea has gone through in such a short period of time, and claims that the changes have benefited only some parts of the country, regardless of whether they have been good or bad. In doing so, he takes on the role of an artist:
"People of Makawana", shouts the old man. "What do you know?" ... We have seen a lot of changes in our time, within the twentieth century. We have evolved from stone age to civilization faster than any nation in the world today. We've gone through our own regimes, we've gone through Christianity, we've gone through colonialism, and we've obtained our independence, we've become self reliant. But what do these things mean to us? While the other parts of this island that is known as Papua New Guinea experienced fast changes, we've remained normal right through - yes normal seems to be the right word here for our current condition.

It is hard to believe that someone like Doboro, the village orator who is not educated in English, should address his people with such an elaborate and liberated speech, but then he is the voice of the writer. But although Soaba gives the voice of authority to Doboro, he does not really approve of him because of his political ideologies. Doboro also represents political corrupted leaders in PNG's history. So by constructing such a character Soaba is making a political statement about the role of writers in PNG.

In addition to his rejection of Christianity, Doboro Thomas also opposes the traditional system which privileges the Chief (ruler) over the rest of the people. He uses his role as the village orator to convince the people of Makawana that the death of their chief means freedom and thus becomes the most respected person in Makawana. This coupled with the prophet in him is enough to convert the people, as shown in this quote:

His prominence as such a man had only come about in a single flare of endless oratorical performances immediately after the death of Chief Magura. Three days after Magura had been buried and the very afternoon Maiba had first started walking, Doboro Thomas had declared openly that
Makawana was entering a new season which would bring about a lot of changes. One of Doboro Thomas' predictions had been that the whole village would no longer need the symbolism of a chief as a near-god figure who watched over his subjects' daily activities, and never questioned by the elders, even by Elder Neville. Today everyone listened to Doboro Thomas. (p.34).

It must be understood that in societies that had the chief rule as the headman, there was always a clear and stable centre and periphery. In the case of a chief being the ruler, his people become the subjects who must show the utmost respect and honour for him. So when Chief Magura dies, the people publicise their long awaited freedom, "Everyone was free now, each to his own family and household, his own wants and needs. ... (the chief was) no longer the symbol of fear or awe in the consciousness of the people" (p.8). It was the chief that made decisions about the welfare of the community, he dictated when they should go to war, and he could marry as many wives as he liked. The people would bring their best harvest to the chief who would then distribute them to the whole community, hence the spirit of communal sharing and living but only through the chief. This is the kind of society that Soaba belonged to and is now critiquing in Maiba.

As for Doboro, if he viewed the chief "as a near-god figure", then he himself is guilty of repeating that history in assuming the role of the chief; however, the difference lies in the circumstances or systems. Whilst attempting to get rid of both the western and the traditional power structures, Doboro Thomas creates the "third space" which proves to be far more destructive than the other two. The freedom that the people of Makawana publicly announce after the death of
their chief becomes a "living hell" under Doboro's regime. Money, guns, and alcohol lead to violent crimes such as rape and murder; the realities of a "modern" society. If they are introduced into an alien setting such as Makawana, there is bound to be much chaos as depicted in *Maiba*. The old woman is therefore right in asking twice, "What evil has come upon us?" (pp.89, 91). The mentality of the people of Makawana is being challenged by this new ideology being introduced. In *Maiba*, nothing eventuates, just like in *Wanpis*. Doboro Thomas is forgiven and still respected as the village elder in spite of the crimes he commits, hence Maiba's human compassionate society.

In the end, *Maiba* remains unresolved in its complexities. Its narrative structure is disjointed at times when the author moves from descriptive narration to complicated tales and parables. Although the characters help build the plot, they are only given very limited space in which they can operate. Maiba may be commended on her courage in standing up to Doboro Thomas, but in the end it is Doboro who maintains the respect of the people. Despite the shame he has caused, he is still the village orator who probably will resume his oratory sessions, and in no time the villages will forget what happened. We can only guess, because the story is left open-ended.

Likewise, "Traffic Jam" also leaves the reader in great confusion because of its weird storyline and language. It begins:

His fingers moved. Along an open desert of clean emptiness. The fingers froze. A fall point pen came to life, laughed, rolled, rose to its one foot, and danced. His fingers met it. The pen panicked. It shrieked, shivered, panted blood. And died in his grip.
He was the Administrative officer. The clean emptiness that surrounded him was his home, his district, his country, his kingdom. And that kingdom was a sheet of paper. Clean. Empty. (p.8).

Again the idea of emptiness and meaningless comes through. The existential idea is evident in "The Traffic Jam" as constructed in the song that comes from the car radio,

no mo poromani
no mo meri
bilongo mi

— the English translation being: 'no more friends, no more wife for me'. In other words, the character has become a loner, a wanpis and lusman. So whilst everybody else is caught up in the traffic jam where there is chaos and confusion, the administrative officer who is referred to as only "husband" by his wife, is lost in a world of his own. It is this sort of "odd" writing that sets Soaba apart from his fellows.
CONCLUSION

Target Audience
The question ‘for whom is the text is being written?’ raises problematic issues such as: on whose terms should the texts be critiqued, does the critic need to have an insight into the historical and cultural background of the text, and where should the boundaries (if there are any) be set?

Post-colonial critics have long argued that post-colonial texts are different in their historical and cultural formation, hence the need to break away from the centre to create their own fiction. The question of language is also important because most post-colonial texts are written in English, which means they are open to the English-speaking nations to critique. This is in spite of what The Empire Writes Back proposes, that there is the standard English with a capital "E", and localised dialects of English with a small letter "e".

If we were to apply these ideas to Russell Soaba's work, we can see that he writes both for his internal (PNG) and external audience, the external being outsiders (European, African, etc). First of all, because Soaba says he writes purely for arts' sake as a universal writer, he is open to criticism by the outside world. Furthermore, Soaba writes in both English and english, the former when he starts addressing complex philosophical issues depending on the characters he constructs, and the latter when he incorporates words and phrases in Anuki, Tok Pisin, and Motu. To illustrate this it is worth examining his short story, “A Portrait of the Odd Man Out”.

The story is written in English incorporating local contexts, hence the creation of a hybrid kind of story. The hero Gwadi walks into the shop and the girl asks in her localised version of English:

"where you from?" "Nowhere," Gwadi answered...
"Nowhere! Mamma oh! You being funny ah?" the girl exclaimed and could not stop giggling. (p.2)

Gwadi returns to the campus at the university where he is a student. A fight breaks out in the billiard room where Gwadi seems to be spending most of his time. And as he argues with the other students he speaks the kind of English that an elite would use;

"O.K O.K. you people think I'll fail my exams because I spend all my time here. Well I'm sorry to say that I spend all my time playing billiards because everything is too bloody easy for me" (p.5)

The polarity in Soaba's dialogues as shown above reflects the ability of an author, who knows when to construct a certain kind of discourse based on the social norms of his/her own society. And in doing so, he gives the text its authenticity. At the same time, whilst recognising the boundaries within which he works, he is able to step outside of that in order to built upon what he already has.

Publication
Soaba's frustrations about not having his work published in PNG are reflected in Wanpis in the scene where Nathaniel and Peter turn Nativeson's poem "At the break of the Dawn" into a song which is presented in a contest. Although all the criteria about originality, and its sentimental value are met, in the end they come fourth.
Nathaniel's reaction to the loss when he cries out: "I'm fed up; I'm fed up! ... I'm fed up with belonging to a group for nothing! I'm fed up with half-educated, underdeveloped, dishonest judges!" typifies the author's plight also. Soaba blames the so-called bureaucrats for the lack of interest shown in the writing scene in PNG. This point is made in his interview with Kirpal Singh in which he says:

The big boys down at the Waigani offices give so much to such and such a literary organisation with the message: "Right fellas, this is your share. You have exactly twelve months to make good use of it. If by the end of that period you're still sitting on it, we'll take it back. And you know what we'll do with it? We'll spend it for ya - that's wot!"...it is hard to get works published in PNG. (p.3)

To compensate for that, Soaba sends his work to overseas literary magazines such as in Australia where he thinks his chances are good. Again in Wanpis it is Vera who makes reference to the issue addressed above when she asks: "How can you get your material published? They won't accept any of Jimi's work up here, and down south they look for high quality stuff" (p.145). Anonymous shuts his eyes and thinks about how to handle the dilemma he is faced with, he knows that a change is needed and only he can turn the boredom into something different.

The Destiny of the PNG Writer

Unfortunately, Soaba's internal audience is limited to those who share the writers' interests and dreams. Kirpal Singh identifies two common problem areas that writers in PNG face. The first one is to do with the rugged terrain of the country83, thus the difficulty

---

writers face in communicating with their co-writers. As Singh points out, "growth can only take place when there is a healthy exchange of views and ideas" (p. 4). Soaba also expresses the same kind of view when he says that he is alone in what he does, and as a result of that he cannot progress in his work as a writer.

The other factor that Singh identifies is related to the problem of readership. According to Singh, "Papua New Guineans are notoriously poor readers; they will avoid reading a book if they can do anything else" (p.4) Although this is very much a reflection of the historical and cultural upbringing, nevertheless people should be encouraged to read widely. Singh is right when he proposes that the school curriculum is the best starting point to introduce literature, from early childhood up to tertiary level. It is hard teaching children to read when they are not used to the practice, but it is harder to teach a grown-up who has already decided his/her destiny.

Whilst Soaba struggles to make contact with his people and country, his local audience is also battling with the task of mastering the English language, verbally and in written form. And whilst writers like Albert Wendt can gain publicity both within and outside their countries, Soaba is still seeking other options outside where he can get his work published in order to be appreciated and recognised. Like others in PNG, his career has arguably been hampered by a lack of good editing; outsiders have been too reluctant to seem "colonialist", while insiders are not experienced enough.
Hence, Soaba is left to contend with the conditions under which he writes; such as limited funds to promote writing, limited outlets for publication, limited readership due to high illiteracy, and limited criticism due to lack of interest shown by both the readers and other writers. As Singh points out:

Criticism and creativity should go hand in hand; with one hand missing only a modicum of success can be achieved. (p.6)

Russell Soaba, as a post-colonial writer in PNG, seems to be living proof of this dictum. However, if we apply the contextual and hybrid-genre theories of postcolonial criticism, we can arrive at a better appreciation of his artistic strategies, see his complexity as exceeding even those centre-margin theoretical models, and perhaps pave the way for greater literary success in the future.
BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary Sources


"The Villager's Request", Mana annual, 1974: 72.


"Seven Poems from Naked Thoughts",


"Scattered by the Wind", Kovave, 4 (1), 1972: 30-42.


**Secondary Sources.**


Coppell, W.G. World Catalogue of Theses and Dissertations


Meanjin Quarterly, PNG Issue, 34 (3), 1975


Slemon, S. "Post-Colonial Allegory and the Transformation of


Tiffin, C. and Tiffin, H. *South Pacific Stories*, St. Lucia, Qld: South Pacific Association for Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies (SPACLALS), 1980.


Williams, F. E. *Drama of the Orokolo*, London: Oxford University Press, 1940.
