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Abstract

The first writing that began in China was carved out of turtle shell, according to the Chinese Ambassador to Papua New Guinea Zhengjun Li, with whom I conversed during the relaunch of the 2005 National Literature Competition in Port Moresby last year. Long before knowing Ambassador Zhengjun Li I was aware, like many of my fellow Papua New Guinean writers, about the power of writing as a liberational tool as expressed in Chairman Mao's famous line: 'the power of words is mightier than the sword'.

STEVEN EDMUND WINDUO

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The first writing that began in China was carved out of turtle shell, according to the Chinese Ambassador to Papua New Guinea Zhengjun Li, with whom I conversed during the relaunch of the 2005 National Literature Competition in Port Moresby last year. Long before knowing Ambassador Zhengjun Li I was aware, like many of my fellow Papua New Guinean writers, about the power of writing as a liberational tool as expressed in Chairman Mao's famous line: 'the power of words is mightier than the sword'.¹

As a second generation Papua New Guinean writer I have the responsibility to encourage other Papua New Guineans see the importance of writing in our land. The National Literature Competition is one of the paths in which writers in Papua New Guinea found their place in the literary history of the country. I am one of those writers who walked that path many times in the past. By the time I began teaching literature at the University of Papua New Guinea I had already established myself as a writer. Exposure to the literature of Papua New Guinea and the world, positive encouragement, and publishing opportunities served as the springboard to my life as a writer.² This experience is what I share with my students and other Papua New Guineans who are writing. Encouraging Papua New Guineans to write, providing guidance, and offering a venue for publishing their works is a challenge I take seriously.

In the last eight years I have developed a course in writing, editing, and publishing to do just that. Through the course I shared my experience, guided students to write, edit, and publish their own stories. The course helped me to uncover the creative impulses and writing skills of many students. Some of the students in this course are fortunate to have their short stories and poems appear in this issue of *Kunapipi*.³ Others have their works published in *Meanjin* and the *Savannah Flames: A Papua New Guinea Journal of Literature, Language, and Culture* and a number of them have won prizes in the 2005 National Literature Competition of Papua New Guinea.

I also used the same model to encourage writers in a rural village to write their own stories for publication in a book. *Zia Writers of Waria: Raitim Stori Bilong Laip* (2004) is a first of its kind, written by villagers and published from a writer's workshop. The lesson from this experience is that the Zia villagers have shown the way for the rest of Papua New Guineans to start writing about their experiences, cultures, and life, which can be published as a book. Writing

is a modern tool that villagers can utilize in this global community. I share my experiences as a writer through public readings in schools, teaching students at the university, or running writers' workshops.

Aware of the difficulties many Papua New Guineans have in getting their writings published I have been working hard at finding ways to help them get their works published. I started the Campus Writers' Group in 1992, which was made up of students studying at the University of Papua New Guinea. The group decided to publish its own journal, but it had no money. However, their writings were collected and published in 1993 in the first volume of the *Savannah Flames*, which replaced the *Ondobondo* literary magazine. The Language and Literature Department saw the next volume published under the editorship of Russell Soaba. The third issue was published in 2001. Melanesian and Pacific Studies (MAPS) of University of Papua New Guinea now publishes the journal. The latest volume features writing by women writers of Papua New Guinea.

In the literary history of Papua New Guinea different literary journals appeared under the editorship of various people with a wide range of experiences and visions: *Kovave* — Ulli Beier; *New Guinea Writing* — Roger Boschman (1960 – 1971); and later *Papua New Guinean Writing* (1972 – 1977) — Don Maynard, Jack Lahui, Soaba, Sally Anne Pipi; *Gigibori* — Georgina Beier; *Bikmaus* — Andrew Strathern, John Kolia, Jack Lahui; *Ondobondo* — Prithvindra Chakravarti, Patricia Hardy, Bernard Minol, Regis Stella; *The PNG Writer* — Kevin Darcy, Loong Wong, Elizabeth Cox; *Sope* — Jack Lahui, *Mazos* — Greg Murphy; and *Savannah Flames* — Steven Winduo and Russell Soaba. The editors influenced the production and continuity of the journals, but generally journals associated with the University of Papua New Guinea have a life span of two to three years before they cease publication. Journals published in Papua New Guinea that began with *Kovave* and *New Guinea Writing* up to the present journals, *Savannah Flames: A Papua New Guinean Journal of Literature, Language and Culture* and *Mazoz*, and international journals such as *Mana*, *Manoa: A Journal of new Pacific Writing*, *Wasafiri*, *Pacific Studies*, *New Literatures Review*, *The Contemporary Pacific*, *Ariel*, *MANA*, *Meanjin*, *Kunapipi* and *New Literary History*, have played a significant part in the development and continuity of Papua New Guinean literary culture. Literary journals have served as the publication venue for most Papua New Guinean writers, providing space for writers to have their works published, reviewed, critically evaluated, and commented on. Indeed, most writers had their first pieces published in literary journals before they progressed to longer prose and single titles.

Institutional support provides incentives for new writers to have their books published. Most writers in Papua New Guinea are associated with institutional publishing programs — a trend that began with Ullie Beier and continues today. Ullie Beier's experience with publishing the Papua Pocket Poet series is a wonderful example. The Papua Pocket Poets series produced cheap pocket size

booklets of individual writers and co-authored books, and a poster series featuring poetry by Papua New Guinean writers. Students bought each others booklets and ‘discussed them and eventually they were stimulated not just to collect oral literature, but to write their own poetry’ (Beier 44).⁴ The project lasted only four years, but allowed the emergence of a number of Papua New Guinean poets such as Leo Hannet, Kumalau Tawali, Apisai Enos, Bede Dus Mapun, Peter Kama Kerpi, and John Kasaipwalova. Though these writers no longer write, their poetry is still being read in literature courses at the University of Papua New Guinea. Creative spirit and the political energy, however short lived, accomplished much that is now a milestone. The Papua New Guinean writers contributed significantly to the development of a literary culture, the political destiny of their nation, and to the overall creative, innovative, and productive spirit of Papua New Guineans. The writers wrote what they wanted without fear, sanction, political persecution, and punishment. Anti-colonial literature was produced alongside culturally sensitive literature.⁵

Apart from editing the *Savannah Flames* and *Wanpisin* I have begun a publishing program within the Melanesian and Pacific Studies (MAPS) centre of the University of Papua New Guinea. This program encourages Papua New Guinea scholars and writers to publish their works. Three new books: Melissa Agilo’s *Falling Foliage*, Regis Stella & Lynda Maeaniani’s *Melanesian Passages*, and *Zia Writers of Waria* were published under this program last year. The *Savannah Flames: A Papua New Guinean Journal of Literature, Language, and Culture* and *Wanpisin: The Journal of the School of Humanities and Social Sciences* are also published under the same program. These publications are now distributed throughout Papua New Guinea in the education system and public library system. The Melanesian and Pacific Studies (MAPS) centre has attracted many young Papua New Guinean writers to submit their books for publishing, which I hope will continue to be the main venue for new writers to have their works published in the years to come.

A wave of new Papua New Guinea writers will have their works published through the support of the National Literature Board. A total number of three hundred and seventy-four entries were received in all fourteen categories of the National Literature Competition. Significant to this competition is that six novels were submitted by new Papua New Guinean writers. This is an indication that more people are writing and hopefully we will see more books published in the near future.

The four stories by Papua New Guinean writers that appear in this issue were selected from the many students who enrolled in my course over the years. Each woman writes from a woman’s perspective about women’s lives. In all the stories there is a sense of passion and respect for the main characters who are either vulnerable, cursed, or made subject to traditions that should have changed by now. The strength of these stories lies in the writers’ ability to capture the bravery, strength, vitality, and power of a woman. Each story began from a paragraph of

imaginative writing that was developed over the period of the course. As I write this I am reminded of Drusilla Modjeska's observation of writing in Papua New Guinea: 'Yet people *are* writing; there's imaginative energy and there's intellectual commitment to the task of finding paths through limitations' (50). The imaginative energy is there; all it needs is the right support, direction, and incentives.

NOTES

- ¹ Mao's words are derived from *Richelieu*, II.ii, by Edward Bulwer-Lytton, 'Beneath the rule of men entirely great/The pen is mightier than the sword'.
- ² See Steven Winduo, 'Transition and Transformation'.
- ³ I acknowledge the support given by Anne Collette, Editor of *Kunapipi* in selecting these author's works for this issue of the journal.
- ⁴ See Ulli Beier's chapters on 'The Papua Pocket Poets' and 'Finding Their Own Voices' in *Decolonising the Mind: The Impact of the University on Culture and Identity in Papua New Guinea, 1971–1974*.
- ⁵ Regis Stella, 'Reluctant Voyages into Otherness: Practice and Appraisal in Papua New Guinean Literature'.

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