1997

Voicing the voiceless: textual representation of women in Melanesia

Anastasia Sai
University of Wollongong

UNIVERSITY OF WOLLONGONG

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Voicing the Voiceless: Textual Representation of Women in Melanesia

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment for the award of the degree

Honours Master of Arts
(Post-colonial Literatures)

by

Anastasia Sai
B. Ed- Inservice (University of Papua New Guinea)
B.A. (Pontifical Urban University, Rome)

from

University of Wollongong

English Studies Program: Texts and Cultures
1997
DEDICATION

To my parents: Pia and John Kong. Mum, you taught me to speak;
and Dad, you taught me to listen.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Working on this project affirmed that I was not an island. If it had not been for many wonderful people, I would not have seen this work come to completion. Therefore, I would firstly like to thank my supervisor, Dr Paul Sharrad, for his patient editing of this work and keeping me in focus. Thanks also to the other staff of the English Studies Department who have taught me much in my brief but fulfilling year at the University of Wollongong.

My thanks are also extended to other members of this academic institution for their various assistance and for showing interest in my project: Professor Edward Wolfers from the International Relations Department for helping me with materials; to my colleagues in Literature Studies who shared many ideas with me. Thanks are due to Saeed Ur-Rehman for helping me in overcoming my technophobia and the anxiety of giving final touches to my thesis.

My sincere gratitude goes to my friends Regis Jose Stella and Medi Tovue Reta for their moral support and help with materials. Thanks to Linda Crowl at the Institute of Pacific Studies - Suva, for the resources on South Pacific women writers. My heartfelt thanks to Rona Nadile for helping with resources. Thank you for the friendship and support of the many friends and wantoks in Wollongong; to Sela Fukofuka and Maria Kanari.

I extend my heartfelt thanks to my family: Mother and Father, all my brothers and sisters for their love and support. Thanks also to my friends in PNG.
I am greatly indebted to AusAID for awarding me a scholarship. My special thanks go to the Melanesian Women Writers whose work I have used in this study.

Last, but not the least, I thank God for his divine guidance and for blessing me with all these people who have helped, encouraged and inspired me both directly and indirectly. I am forever grateful.
DECLARATION

I certify that this dissertation does not incorporate without acknowledgment any material previously submitted for the award of a degree or diploma at any university; and that to the best of my knowledge and belief it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.

Signed: ____________________________

ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines literary representations of women in Melanesia. In particular, it seeks to assess the nature and extent of a minority female voice in Melanesian literature.

Through the writings of the Papua New Guinea male and female writers and the writings of women from the other Melanesian countries, this dissertation examines the male image of women in society; and the women's view of themselves. It considers the difference between the male and female voice. The main focus is on the Papua New Guinea women's self-expression through literature and the common elements they share with the other Melanesian women's writings. It concludes that the majority of women in Melanesia are muted by the patriarchal tradition and illiteracy. Only a few educated ones choose to write. However, not all of these engage directly on women's issues. Some of them indirectly voice issues affecting their well-being by critiquing inadequacies of the social, political and economic life of the society where male dominance is paramount. Women still undergo various forms of colonization and in many circumstances remain self-effacing. Their voice calls for democracy not only on the political level, but also on the domestic level.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHAPTERS</th>
<th>PAGES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chapter One – Introduction</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rationale</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Position of Women in Society</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple Colonization</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writers' Beginnings in Education</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chapter Two – The Male Writers’ Representation of Women</strong></td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women are Strong Characters</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Archetypal Woman, Wife or Mother</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Archetypal Wife</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Archetypal Mother</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woman as the Sexual Other, the Sex Object</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chapter Three – The Female Voice</strong></td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Injustices of Civilization</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Through Teenage Eyes</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motherhood and Parental Responsibilities</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-realization</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Betrayal: Vulnerabilities</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inadequacies</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chapter Four – Other Melanesian Women Writers</strong></td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From Vanuatu</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From Solomon Islands</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From Fiji</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Conclusion</strong></td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Rationale

'Voicing the Voiceless' seeks to assess the nature and extent of minority female voices in Melanesian literature. However, the focus of my project - women - are not just a minority presence. On the contrary, women in Papua New Guinea (the central focus of my study) constitute half the country's population.

'Voice' defined in the dictionary means not only the sounds made when someone is speaking or singing, but also entails the power to make such sounds or utterances. Having a voice is having the right to express opinion, judgement or will. 'Voice' also gives the right or privilege of speaking or voting, or taking part in or exercising control or influence over particular matters.\(^1\) Having the physical capacity to speak is only part, therefore, of having a voice. To have a voice one must also have the capacity to be heard in a community. To have a voice is to have the power to express oneself and therefore to make oneself present within a communicative group. But to have the power to act, one must have the ability to 'speak.'

Moving from the literal to the figurative sense, a voice is more than just the ability to produce sounds. It is an expression of one's thought processes and beliefs, the privilege to express an opinion. We

know that thoughts are not always expressed through speech. They
can be demonstrated through other art forms or through action,
hence the cliche “Actions speaks louder than words.” If one is
voiceless, one becomes invisible, absent and a nonentity. In short,
having a voice gives one the power to exist within one’s discursive
space.

Even Jacques Derrida’s theory of deconstruction points out that the
social power of the ‘logos’ (word) and its authority in print is seen
only as a contaminated and impure form of speech. In everyday
practice, then, voice is orality and therefore presence: “when we hear
the speech we attribute to it a ‘presence’ which we take to be lacking
in writing. The speech of the great actor, orator, or politician is
thought to possess ‘presence’; it incarnates, so to speak, the speaker’s
soul.” In traditional oral societies, having a voice is being a person, a
leader. Before contact, the Pacific was an oral culture, and writers
still work to incorporate a sense of ‘voice’ or orality into the print
text. For example, John Kasaipwalova’s ‘Betelnut is Bad Magic for
Aeroplanes’ uses the style of oral story-telling in writing his story
(with first person and a lot of colloquial dialogue). The shift to the
new print culture was primarily controlled by men (as can be seen in
photos in New Guinea Writing where a group of UPNG writers
assemble - 1970). A survey of the standard literary journals and
anthologies of Papua New Guinea will clearly reveal that most

2. Selden, Raman and Peter Widdowson (eds) A Reader’s Guide to Contemporary
3. Ibid., p.145.
4. Kasaipwalova, John ‘Betelnut is Bad Magic for Aeroplanes’ in Powell, Ganga (ed)
Through Melanesian Eyes, The Macmillan Company of Australia, Melbourne,1987,
pp.69-77.
Moresby, December, 1970, p.5. The first group of writers were all male as the photo
shows on page 5.
published writing is by males. This reflects the sociological fact that men are ‘present’ and control the power of speech in what is still largely a society based on oral communication. The few texts by women, however, show that their apparent ‘absence’ through silence may use the media of modernity to create a ‘voice’ through which to gain a greater ‘presence’ in society in general.

This study specifically looks at selected written texts that signify a move from the oral to written literary discourse. Literary works from both male and female writers will be used, although, my main focus is on women. This marks a significant dislocation of power of speech predominantly controlled by men. While some reference will be made to women writers in Melanesia generally, Papua New Guinean writers are the particular focus. The thesis asks how the male writers portray Papua New Guinean women, and how female writers represent themselves. This study posits that women are the voiceless half of the population who have men writing for and about them. Then there are those few women writers who have emerged in the literary scene. We can ask, “What are they writing about? Are they writing about themselves as individuals and women collectively in their society? Do they see themselves and their realities from a female perspective? Do the female writers from Solomon Islands, Vanuatu and Fiji share similar or different views of women in their societies? How much influence do they have over particular matters in society?”

The first chapter gives an introduction to this thesis. It explains the choice of topic, then provides a general overview of the position of Papua New Guinea women. The second chapter presents some
representations by male writers of the female characters. The texts I have chosen are Vincent Eri's *The Crocodile* (1970); Russell Soaba's two novels *Wanpis* (1977) and *Maiba* (1979), some stories, plays and poems from various other writers. Chapter three examines a selection of works from women like Nora Vagi Brash, Loujaya Kouza Dunar, Joyce Kumbeli, Medi Reta, Luddy Salonda and others. In chapter four, works from other Melanesian women writers are used as points of comparison to clarify common issues raised by Pacific women of relatively similar backgrounds. The conclusion attempts to identify concerns specific to women in PNG and the other Melanesian women. It also considers areas not yet dealt with and possibilities for a stronger voice for Melanesian women writers.

**Position of Women in Society**

Papua New Guinea is very much dictated to by its customs and traditions. The perception of women is still ruled by these societal norms. It is a common understanding that women in Papua New Guinea have always been and still are relegated to a position of domestic labour. They are treated as inferior to men. The colonial rule was also male-dominated. While the colonialists attempted to 'domesticate' the wild savages, they feminised the native male in relation to the white male. We see examples in male natives employed as 'houseboys' where they are made to sweep, wash dishes and clothes, as we read in Eri's *The Crocodile*. Despite offering women schooling, they were further displaced from social power, so when decolonization began men rushed to grab male 'power' in the

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trade and government sectors, women only got to be nurses and teachers. For instance, in 1982, statistics for employment by major occupational groups, sex and citizenship, show that there were only 374 female citizens occupying administrative and managerial positions while there were 3,793 males. In traditional societies men carried spears and walked in front of a woman to ward off possible enemies while the woman walked behind with bilums loaded with food, firewood and baby. Now, men have dropped spears and moved into the modern workforce occupying leadership positions, but women still keep the bilum and child.

A woman’s worth is measured by the role she plays as a daughter, mother, wife and just being a woman. As a daughter she is an economic asset when she brings bride price to her family when she marries. As a wife and mother, a woman is valued for the number of children she bears. The birth of male children bring more pride than the female. A female in the society has significance in the society in relations to her father, brother or husband. For example, in her interview with Ann Turner, Dr Naomi Tulaha shares the information that as a little girl she “enjoyed the privileges of being her father’s daughter.” Although Tulaha’s Buka society is matrilineal, she is not identified by the fact that she is her mother’s daughter; on the contrary, she is respected because her father is a paramount chief.

The Tolai people are also matrilineal, but men have and exert more power over women as Banks’ study shows. Women were excluded from men’s secret institutions because men controlled magical powers and sorcery. Women were severely punished if they engaged in moral misconduct. Even today, their role is of extreme subservience. In many myths like ‘Kulubob’ in Wabei Turuk’s play, the founding culture heroes are often brothers and the central agents. The women’s roles are peripheral; they are either just wives, prizes, witches or threats to the men or the society.

Some traditional societies did value women. Banks states that the Orokaiva women participated in initiation ceremonies and the society ‘shamed’ men who ill-treated their wives. She goes on to say that Arapesh women were valued in that they were given an equal role in procreation and “an individual’s blood was considered the property of the woman’s relatives.” But as with every other cultural grouping, these women were predominantly confined to ‘supportive’ roles such as garden and childbearing.

Multiple Colonization

Women writers focused on here, experience marginalisation and oppression. Before they emerge from colonialism, their experiences are already tainted by cultural, socio-economic, political and religious practices. Once they enter the modern postcolonial space

12. Ibid., p.152.
they are mapped out as being from a ‘developing’ or Third World country.

Firstly as colonized by the monolithic white culture, the women together with their male counterparts correct the negative stereotype images of “uncivilized...savages with tails”\textsuperscript{13} or the native women as sex objects. Women under colonialism, when noticed at all, were taken merely as sex objects. For example, John Bailey’s colonial novel \textit{The Wire Classroom}\textsuperscript{14} portrays the native girls and women as sex objects. The narrator and the main protagonist Mr Charles Cummins, feasts his eyes on a bare breasted woman (p. 59) whom he eventually gets sexually involved with (pp. 115-116). On the first day of school, Cummins’ attention is drawn to a young female school pupil’s breasts (p. 20), and later he fondles her (p. 56). In \textit{Hapkas Girl}\textsuperscript{15}, a white Patrol Officer has an affair with a native girl, Oga. She bears a mixed-race child. The woman is there as a figure of temptation or of domestic virtue. For example, in 1979, there was a controversy over a nude photograph of Angeline Tukana, (a woman who had won the ‘Miss PNG” contest), advertising some commercial products. This was the first time for a photograph like that to occupy the public billboards. The colonial mind thought a woman could be used to tempt consumers, especially men, to sell a product. The local people saw it as something shameful and it was banned. But in both cases the assumption was that the woman was merely a passive object: males were the market and could be seduced

\textsuperscript{13} Krauth, Nigel (ed) \textit{New Guinea Images in Australian Literature}, University of Queensland Press, St. Lucia, 1982.
\textsuperscript{14} Bailey, John \textit{The Wire Classroom}, Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1972, pp. 20, 56, 115 & 116.
\textsuperscript{15} Porter, James \textit{Hapkas Girl}, Cassell Australia Ltd, Stanmore/Melbourne, 1980.
Under the Colonial Administration, while native women were open to sexual assault, the Colonial women were protected by the "White Women’s Protection Ordinance" which was passed in 1926.\textsuperscript{16} This diverted attention entirely from native women to white women, consequently it denied the native women the right to equal protection. It is little wonder why, when sexual assaults are regular occurrences in the country now, the Legislative arm of the PNG government, modelled on the colonial system, cannot ensure enough protection for women.

Secondly, education as I mentioned earlier, is a medium by which women can access knowledge and therefore power. On the other hand, education is oppressive. The current system, however much it tries to narrow the gap between the output of girls and boys in high schools, colleges and universities, cannot succeed. The education system has unconsciously established social stratification in the modern society. The class system consists of the educated and employed oppressing the uneducated and unemployed women. This pompous attitude comes out strongly in Nora Vagi Brash’s plays. The mix of modernity and tradition entrenches inequality. Working men prefer to have village girls to avoid not only high bride price, but also, wives that are subservient and acquiescent. In so doing, the educated men remain as the role models and agents of change, ‘taming’ the women to domesticity and keeping them away from the village. Away from the village and the extended family, the town man can further exercise his control of the woman.

\textsuperscript{16} Inglis, Amirah ‘Not a White Woman Safe’: Sexual Anxiety and Politics in Port Moresby 1920-1934, ANU Press, Canberra, 1974, p.57.
The social structures are such that men are free and women are not. Schooling offers both opportunities and limitations for women. It enables them to be literate and more self-confident, but it restricts them to doing more of social jobs like clerical, teaching and nursing which streams and labels women as achievers or failures. The high achievers can go on and get white collar jobs, while the low achievers stream to typing, nursing or domestic servants.

Thirdly, language is another limitation. In the traditional society, women were storytellers. Village orality does not require writing, let alone writing in a foreign tongue. Writing implies moving into a national sphere. It also entails a command of English; and this means schooling beyond grade 6 and at least secondary school. This excludes most women. One is not only required to write in English, but to write good English or work will not be published.\(^{17}\) So even the possibility of publications is controlled by the colonial language proficiency.

A good education, for most, means leaving home for long periods of time and travelling over vast distances. All except a few urban high schools, are boarding schools, so girls have to leave home for long periods. For colleges, transport costs are high. Leaving home, girls are threatened by accidents, and increasing law and order problems in the country. This is the kind of landscape that hasn’t been conquered with sufficient roads and related infrastructure. Besides, in a society

\(^{17}\) Linda Crowl is the Publications Editor at the Institute of the South Pacific Studies, Suva. When asked what qualities make any piece of creative writing publishable, she said that good English (free from grammatical, spelling, structural) mistakes is what will get published, besides content. This is from an informal interview.
without social services, children support their elders and the family economy. Since males no longer carry spears to protect the community in warfare, they have a greater room to move away for schooling and work. Girls on the other hand, are still structurally confined to home and garden. Thus both landscape and social structures hinder freedom for women.

Women are oppressed by the socio-economic and political conditions of the society. They are subjugated by customs, male hegemony and poverty. These conditions permeate their whole livelihood and they have to find courage to cope with their realities everyday. If colonization is about control, money, decision-making, then men are the modern colonizers of PNG. It is important to note that it was the men who were forced into the cash economy by colonialism. For example, men were recruited to work in plantations or employed as domestic servants. However, as the cash economy penetrates further into all levels of PNG life and subsistence farming becomes less widespread, women will have more freedom and will indeed be pushed into the labour market. Education will then become more open to women and so they will inevitably gain greater access to written literary expression.

Education is deemed to be the major avenue for encouraging and re-empowering women to exercise their self-hood in participating in the literary arena. The constitution of Papua New Guinea clearly declares as one of its five National Goals, 'Equality and Participation', which the Matane Report also integrates into the
Philosophy of Education. If the green light is given, what is there to stop women from participating fully in education and therefore literary expression? Being able to write and publish stories and poems may not seem like a major step towards women’s liberation, but V.S. Naipul said in a wider context, not seeing yourself in literature can instil embarrassment and self-deprecation. If men do not see women writing or women in writing as active intelligent creatures, they will not change their everyday attitudes and behaviour towards them. If women do not find role model, they may not imagine alternatives.

Gross socio-economic, cultural and other related factors hinder adequate enrolment and retention rates in schools and continuation to higher institutions of learning where most of the creative writing is exercised. High school fees (recently (1996) tertiary students have to pay some fees that they did not pay before), violence and harassment on campus are some hindrances for female students. For example, female students at the University of Papua New Guinea have been raped and there are many cases of pregnancies where women’s education is interrupted.

Writer’s Beginnings in Education

The first generation of PNG writers like Vincent Eri, Leo Hannet, Kumalau Tawali, Arthur Jawodimbari, John Kasaipwalova, Regis Stella, Nora Vagi Brash and many others reached the university level before their talents as writers surfaced. However, many newer writers like Steven Winduo and Loujaya Kouza were already writing in

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high school. Schools that produce school magazines always have a 'poets' corner' or creative writing space. The sense of an audience is a major stimulus to writers and audiences have been actively generated since PNG Writing was first developed for schools in 1967 - the same year Ulli Beier joined UPNG and helped to establish a Creative Writing course. That year, a syllabus in Literature was formulated. If people are writing, then our shelves should be overflowing with books and literary materials to read. Why aren't they? There are several factors contributing to this, among which are the politics of printing and finance.

In attempting to write about women writers in PNG and possibly those of the neighbouring Melanesian countries of Fiji, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu, I am faced with the problem of having a limited body of women's literature to study. The major reason is that few women have reached the higher level of schooling which has empowered them with writing skills and enough vocabulary and sense of the English language in order to write with less difficulty. Few women have reached "beyond domestic chores" to being writers. Few women have risen to work at levels where there is a sustaining writing and reading culture with access to promoters, editors, journals and publishers. Where such systems exist, the agents of production have almost always been men (with the notable exception of Majorie Crocombe at the University of South Pacific).

Grace Molisa has recently joined this ‘men’s club’ to be a publisher managing her own company, *Black Stone Publications*.

Statistics show that the literacy rates for women in Melanesia are lower than those for men. Of the four Melanesian countries, PNG has the least percentage of women who are literate.\(^\text{21}\) While Fiji’s literacy rate for women (92 per cent) is above the 72 per cent average rate in developing countries, PNG and Solomon Islands are substantially below the international average. PNG female adult literacy rate is currently 58 per cent of the male rate and this is a worse relative position than ten years ago.\(^\text{22}\)

In PNG, the overall enrolment in grade 1 is high. But as the level increases, the enrolment declines. The National Department of Education graph shows a greater dropout rate among females than males.\(^\text{23}\) Boio Daro’s presentation of enrolments in primary, secondary, vocational and technical schools also shows fewer females in schools from 1961 - 1972.\(^\text{24}\) This implies that women in PNG are educationally disadvantaged. The bulk of the females who drop out of school naturally goes back to the villages where conditions are not conducive to much reading or writing and most certainly they would not be able to communicate in English - the ‘desirable’ language for writing poetry and prose. Of the few females that

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\(^{22}\) Ibid. p.10.

\(^{23}\) Commonwealth of Australia, *Australia’s Relations with Papua New Guinea*, Senate Publishing and Printing Unit, Canberra, 1991, p.46. This graph shows the progression of first to eleventh grade.

manage to continue to higher studies, most pursue other interests than writing. If they do write, they do not know how and where to publish. A good example of this is Luddy Salonda’s work. Literary magazines like *Ondobondo*, were popular in their time and did publish plays, poems and short stories from female writers, but when these ceased to appear, their voice once more became silent, at least in the public sphere. And when women’s writings are not published and read, they appear as absent from public social sphere generally.

Papua New Guinea women writers and those of Fiji, Vanuatu and Solomon Islands have to grapple with traditional and modern forms of patriarchy compounded by barriers originating in imperialism. They are silenced by all these components, yet the women whose texts we will look at have made a break through in the literary world. Studying their work and the issues they raise will lead us to a better understanding of their struggles, give us more insight into their realities and their progress in coping with their positions in society. Although there are silences, gaps and contradictions in relation to the active participation of women as writers, these silences are significant. Eagleton states, “It is in the significant silences of a text, in its gaps and absences that the presence of ideology can be most positively felt.”

Traditionally women did have power even in their subservient domestic positions. Some have broken barriers of illiteracy and entered the modern post-colonial discursive space to have their voices

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heard. The silences are being broken; the gaps are being filled and contradictions ironed out, so let us listen to their voices.
CHAPTER TWO

THE MALE WRITERS’ REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN

Papua New Guinean male writers were the first on the literary scene as they were the first ones sent to school. Just as it was traditionally, they became the first keepers of modern knowledge. It is interesting to look at their representation of the thoughts and images of women in the society of their generation. Not all the pieces produced by these writers portray female images, but where they do, I try to analyse the images the dominant patriarchal society has constructed of women. While there is little mention of women as strong, for example, these writers say that their strength should be dispensed for the good of the patriarchal society. If read critically, one can notice that the texts about women display the stereotypical male view of a woman’s place: how she should dress, carry herself as a woman, wife, mother and daughter. Unfortunately, this typical male attitude about women is also the norm for judging and woman’s worth in the society. Where a positive image of a woman is shown, it is always downplayed.

Women are Strong Characters

Melanesian women are stronger characters than men would like to admit. These women have the capacity to carry loads on their heads and backs - loads of food in string bags, bundles of firewood on top of that and a child on the crown. Women on the coast gather dry coconuts for making copra in big string bags. I have seen this
growing up and have always wondered where my mother got all her strength and vitality from. It seldom occurred to me that she would quickly age and lose this tremendous physical strength.

Steven Winduo expresses the strength of a mother, a woman in his poem “Different Histories”\(^{26}\)

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{I remember those years of my childhood} \\
\text{Papa in front with his piece of firewood,} \\
\text{Me in the centre} \\
\text{And mama at the rear loaded} \\
\text{With string bags of wood, food and water.} \\
\end{align*}
\]

\text{(Different Histories, p. 3)}

Although this is a story of one woman, it talks about thousands of other women in the rural areas whose livelihood revolves around this way of life. One has just to take a ride out of the provincial towns to see this typical sight of rural life. If there is no time to take a ride out, just sneak a glance at the town market area when women come in from the villages with bilums loaded with produce to sell. Here one can easily witness the meshing of two cultures- the urban women walking upright with money to buy food and the rural ones bent over trying to support their heads from bending backward from the weight. Whether the woman is a highlander or a coastal, she is like a ‘beast of burden.’ Benjamin Umba’s ‘The Fires of Dawn’ is set in his highlands society. The women are used to carrying loads. One

\(^{26}\) Winduo, Steven Edmund, \textit{Lomo'ha I am, in Spirit's Voice I Call}, The South Pacific Arts Society, Suva, 1991, p.3.
scene talks about one of the chief’s thirteen wives who enters the men’s house with a heavy load of food on her back.  

As a mother and wife, a woman’s first and foremost duty is to her family. Therefore, she needs to be physically strong to work the garden and carry the food and to support them. Besides carrying loads, women do men’s jobs like clearing and cutting down trees for new gardens, or felling sago or making fences. In the case of a widow, she does all that if she doesn’t have sons to help her. This is mentioned in Vincent Eri’s *The Crocodile*. Mitoro’s mother, Masoare, “never shied from any task however hard” (p. 48), or she could “cut the iron bark of a sago palm with a single stroke of her axe” (p. 49). Surely the society says that if a woman had such physical strength, she has the strength of a man and works like one (p. 48). But, the stereotypical image is that a woman is physically weak and the man is strong, therefore if she works hard, she must be a man. For instance, “Masoare was a man-like woman who ignored the sharpness of mosquito stings and never shied from any task, however hard” (p. 48). Here we see that a woman is always measured against a man.

A woman has to work so hard because this is expected of her by the society. Her reputation is on public display in the local community. Mitoro’s mother “had often said that people did not care whether she had a beautiful garden up the river or not: one’s perseverence and willingness to work was judged by the small village gardens” (p.

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One of the qualities a man looks for before marrying her is whether everyone knows she is hardworking. Hence, Hoiri the male protagonist and his cousin Meraveka in *The Crocodile* make this observation about Mitoro the young woman he intends to marry.

"What sort of a woman would she make for a wife?"
"It depends on what you want of her. For work, she is just the right sort. People speak favourably about her attitude to work" (p. 52).

As the first-born daughter, Mitoro has to make sago and fish for family meals as well as to maintain a vegetable garden. She minds her younger siblings, which should give her practice for looking after her own children when she has them. As for children, she already contemplates that her physique and her strength would give her no trouble with having healthy babies (p. 48).

In the modern society, Kanekane's short story re-writes the female history by changing the role of men and women. Alicia is portrayed as the breadwinner; she walks out on Charles, her husband, and their son, Phanty. She leaves Charles to take care of the child. Women's strength can be seen if they are given the space and freedom to be themselves. However, a woman possessing power threatens male control and power. Although Kanekane breaks a new ground for the educated working-class female character, he also implies that she is immoral and has neglected her domestic duties. Thus what Samuel Richardson says is true to the Melanesian attitude, "marriage should mean companionship rather than female slavery, but the wife

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should never be independent of her husband; ...women should be educated, but good for nothing if they neglected their domestic duties.”

The Archetypal Woman, Wife or Mother

Male writers often portray a female as the archetypal woman, mother or wife. The term 'archetype' according to the dictionary (OED), is a prototype; an ideal form regarded as pattern not to be changed. Much of this depends on what the society teaches about what a woman should or should not be like. Whatever the image that is convenient and comfortable for the dominant group will be maintained.

A distinction needs to be made between 'female' and 'woman' "'Female' here is used more in the sense of having a sex, of being born a boy or girl. In other words, being sexed persons is biological; science or nature gives that physical structure of a female. The term 'woman' is to be understood more in the sense of gender roles. Simone de Beauvoir says that one is not born a woman, one becomes a woman.31 This means that the geographical, social, cultural, economical, political and religious settings of a female person make her into a woman. It is her geo-temporal location that forms her and defines her roles in society. Hence, the general perception of women in Melanesia and the status they have is not immutable but is the product of the largely patriarchal structure in our society and

the whole world. Among the many gender roles specified for women, three of the recurring ones in the literature of our male writers are that of girlfriend, wife and mother. Writings by men make women believe that these are fixed roles they cannot break, lest they upset their customs.

The Melanesian woman, especially a Papua New Guinean, is only pictured as wearing clothes that are the usual long skirt or dress that cover her body well - shoulder to ankle or below the knees. Any form of dressing that exposes some part of her body between these specific regions becomes problematic for the men. It means that women are tempting and provoking men. The male position on this subject is ambivalent, because in the villages, women, especially mothers, are bare-breasted and it is not a problem. The neo-traditional theatre or the traditional dances have women topless and it is acceptable. Many people complain about the dress code in the editor’s corner of newspapers and magazines. Sorariba Nash Gegera picks someone to blame and justifies men’s reason for harassing women who wear shorts of trousers.

The fault lay in traditional Melanesian values of male dominated society -- a terrible misconception reinforced by the introduced ethics of the missionaries, which gave way to a confused perception that shorts and trousers were only meant for men, and the women were supposed to be well covered by missionary-type dresses or long skirts.\(^{32}\)

Those who enter into the literary discourse, express their views in that way. Yet many more in real life express their opinions in verbal assaults, misogynistic remarks and simply through body language.

Salonga Panga in his poem “The Modern Girl”\(^\text{33}\) blatantly dislikes the change of the innocent traditional dress to a more worldly, Westernised way. He is in total support of Melanesian women’s stereotyped dress. This modern style of dressing threatens the male author because it is a form of liberation of the woman’s self expression. The man doesn’t appreciated this venture because fashionable global modernity dilutes the strength of his traditional power control. The man’s definition of what is natural and his satisfaction, expressed through his gaze, is the central concern. The woman is just as object who must return to conforming that status.

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Girl!
Sometimes
You make
me
wonder

How could someone pretend to be
somebody other than a pure girl of
Melanesia and Pacific with your mini
skirts, shaved eyebrow, with painted
[lips] and painted toe and finger nails

Girl! Girl! you are losing your identity,
Girl! Girl! you are asking me to hate you,
for you have lost your natural beauty;
the one God has given you,
the one I most admire you with.
Girl! Girl!
I beg you just stop for a moment and think.
(The Modern Girl, p. 14)
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This is a display of a typical Papua New Guinean attitude. When women wear lipstick, mini skirts, high heeled shoes, a pair of trousers, shorts, or nail polish, neaten their eyebrows, men and even other women shun them. Another similar poem 'Yupela Meri i senis Hariap Pinis' by Baluwe Umetrifo expresses the same kind of negativity towards the change to modern attire.

Not long ago I used to go up the Heklaka hill
...  
And I could see you young girls
...
In your traditional pulpuls
...
But now...
I can see you young girls
In blue jeans and jackets
With high heel shoes and stinky perfumes
...
With your breasts sweating in breast bags
(Yupela Meri i Senis Hariap Pinis, p. 84)

In short stories, the same attitude towards women's dressing is evident. For instance, Jerry Daniels' 'Boroko Saturday Morning' observes women in a busy shopping suburb in Port Moresby. Note that at the time this story was written, many town-dwelling working-class women were beginning to wear cosmetics, slacks and shorts. This became the topic of street talk. In the story, the male character is also the first-person narrative voice who observes the women. After all their derogatory observations, the narrator and his male friends conclude that the women who dress up like that act like European women.

34 Umetrifo, Baluwe 'Yupela Meri i senis Hariap pinis' in Powell, Ganga (ed) Through Melanesian Eyes, Macmillan, Melbourne, 1987, p.84.
Joe said, "That kind of girl is what I call a black European." John said, "No, she is giving it sixty, conforming or changing ahead of PNG pace. Adapting that’s the right word." (p. 16)

As women get more and more exposed to the fashion industry, they begin to take an interest in their looks. They want to look good. The way they dress, gives them an air of self-esteem and confidence which is constantly denigrated by the male hegemonic society expressed in this younger male generation. While the women make progress in embracing the inevitable - change - men seem to resist it, though they are not walking around in "malo" and "as tanget." They see change as threatening because it empowers women to rise above their subservient domestic space into a public sphere.

In 'Shattered Dreams' Peter Frazer reveals similar attitudes towards keeping women where they belong. In this short story, Lucy, an ambitious village girl, dreams of marrying an educated or a working man who lives in town so she may not have to work hard in the garden, raise pigs or do the other household chores anymore. This shows the shift between tradition and modernity. Lucy is shocked and disappointed when she discovers her husband Albert is unemployed. Her dream of a ‘good life’ to live like a white woman (Missus) is shattered. Lucy symbolizes many young people who have this misconception that urbanization and modernity offer a better life.

36. "Malo" is the traditional bark, loin cloth apron men wear. "As tanget" (arse tanget) is the leaves men drape around the malo, to cover their buttocks.
One interpretation of the story could be that it ridicules a woman’s wish to free herself from the traditional village space and enter into a modern, progressive space and live like a European. She is reminded of her lowly place by making her marry someone who cannot give her the luxury of a modern life. The writer has cut her wings to prevent her from flying to freedom. Thus, the message is that women should remain where they belong, at home, in the village, by their mothers. However, Lucy as a woman, makes a passive statement, that her traditional village environment is suppressing therefore, her marrying out of the village means that she can escape to freedom from the patriarchal dominance of her society, which is also enforced by her mother. Compared to a Papua New Guinean, a European woman is more free, and this is a luxury a village woman does not have. A male writer like Peter Frazer does not want to see women change from the vital role they play in the village: namely in being the backbone of the traditional economy. Women are needed in the village to raise children, pigs and work gardens.

While condemning women for their shifting attitudes from tradition to modernity, these male writers also expose weaknesses in women’s nature which they themselves may not foreground. For instance, Joe Kanekane’s mystery story ‘Who Killed Nancy Kupson?’\(^{38}\) may just tell an ordinary detective story, but in a subtle way it foregrounds women’s aggression towards their own kind. In the story we see a number of prominent guests attend a cocktail party. The women dress in their finery as determined by the world of fashion. They also drape themselves with jewellery. One woman

walks in alone and all eyes feast on her. Nancy Kupson is casually dressed in a pair of jeans over a mini-top exposing her lower abdomen. She is single, young, beautiful with a promising future, already nominated for the associate judge position in her law firm. This already poses a threat to the many wives present because they know their husbands are promiscuous. Nancy has other rivals like the Justice Minister's female bodyguard who wants to outsmart her in whatever she is doing.

Firstly, the reversal of roles for a female bodyguard definitely raises eyebrows. It is not clear if the author was fantasizing a reversal to enhance equal participation; it does look like an impossible dream for women to be bodyguards for men. There is a suggestion that the female bodyguard is his mistress or that a man of power will need a woman to keep all the other women from mobbing him. Secondly, it seems that he is ridiculing the female gender by giving them an idealized role. Thirdly on a more positive tone, Kanekane is prophesying a toleration of women who eventually break through institutions predominantly held by men.

The author stages these rivalries to suggest that women are their own worst enemies. They hurt and even kill another woman out of jealousy. They feel threatened by the other’s beauty, social status, academic achievements. Joe Kankane makes a point that modern women contesting and negotiating for liberty and equality will never see the cause materialize because they lack support from their own kind. Women smother each other’s motivation to strive for equal rights in society.
But this story further implies that women have their own inferiority complex and insecurity. For example, Mrs Maria Tamo confronts Nancy Kupson at the party and tells her to keep her hands off her husband - the Justice Minister. Although Kanekane counters the usual cliche that men are more dominant and oppressive in society, he shows the women’s aggression towards each other in order to condemn them instead of the patriarchal system which produces their aggression. This short story brings out the violent side of women normally believed to be powerless and therefore helpless, but it hides the source of this violence. Men have status and power: wives only gain either by association with their husbands. They know that they are objects to be discarded or exchanged and so fight viciously any threat to their fragile position. The men remain above the fray, leaving the women to fight amongst themselves like gladiators before Caesar. A report on female prisoners shows that “sexual jealousy” is the most common reason for women to commit an offence. Sometimes violence among women is fatal. The same report says, “Institutions in the Highlands have a higher number of women detained for murdering co-wives or other incidents caused by sexual jealousy.”

While the writer debunks the wicked side of women, he in a subtle way elevates the male ego in society. The fact that the wives are jealous of their husbands and the other women these men are attracted to, makes the men feel they are worth fighting over. The

40. Ibid., p.22.
market place, a bus stop or a sporting field are some places where women get into fights over their husbands or boyfriends.

A Melanesian woman is called to keep to her position in the society and that position is defined in relation to men. If she behaves or thinks otherwise, she is said to have lost her Melanesian identity and as a result, she is ostracised. She is a victim herself and an agent of destruction of other women. No matter how much she wants to advance, and make progress on the 'caterpillar pillar' she finds two forces pulling her down; the male hegemonic structure and other non-liberated women.

The Archetypal Wife

A woman's second role is to be a wife. As a wife, she belongs to her husband. He consolidates his relationship with his wife by paying the bride price. In Frazer's "Shattered Dreams", Albert pays Lucy's bride price of K250.00 ($250.00) and pigs. Mike in 'Tears of my Soul', is expected by Linda's family to pay K10,000 ($10,000) as bride price. For some wives like Linda, a bride price is a bond that secures a marriage and guarantees a father to her children. It stabilizes a Melanesian marriage. For other wives, it secures a lifetime of selfless labour and sacrifice. Pascal Waisi, unlike other male writers, is sensitive to the inhumane treatment of women. He sees the Melanesian way of marriage as a form of slavery of the woman. The wife must work hard to serve her husband. We see this sentiment in the following poem.

42. Gegera, Sorariba Nash, 'Tears of My Soul' in Chakravarti, Prith and Hardy, Patricia (eds) Ondobondo, No.5, Ondobondo Buk Haus, Port Moresby, 1984, pp.4-9.
Humanity

This bedrock of defined role
Strips one part of her soul.
Day and night she cooks for him
While he chews betelnut and is merry

The child she carries to wash sago
She returns with child on top of sago load
Her back heavy with pain
At night she [lies] awake massaging her back.

Talk to her about reciprocity
Talk to her about humanity
This talk is too heavy
This talk is too mysterious.
(Humanity, p. 19)

Sometimes the landscape seems as if it is colluding with the husband to keep the wife caged. Kumalau Tawali paints a landscape which gives no hope of escape for any of the wives in this polygamous marriage. Here is a male writer voicing some realities many wives go through. The first stanza paints a landscape that should be soothing to the soul, but there is a sense of confinement.

In the heart of the forest
Cool air descends
Twisting the early morning mist
Bringing quiet discordance to the spirit

In the huts women dwell
Sentenced with hard labour to polygamy
They toil each day in the garden and pigsty
- Their wifely chores.
(In the Heart of the Forest, p. 17)

43. Waisi, Pascal 'Humanity' in Chakravarti, Prith and Hardy, Patricia (eds) Ondobondo No.5, Ondobondo Buk Haus and UPNG Literature Department, Port Moresby, 1984, p.18.
44. Tawali Kumalau 'In the Heart of the Forest' in Minol, Bernard and Hardy, Patricia Ondobondo, No.3, Ondobondo Buk Haus, Port Moresby, 1983-84, p.17.
Polygamy here allows one man to have access to all these women and uses the cage-like landscape to keep a surveillance on the harem. He must live like a king and have all these wives serve at his court, like chief Bomai in ‘The Fires of Dawn’\(^{45}\), who marries thirteen wives and they all work like a big tribe of people to cook for their husband’s visitors. Having many wives is a sign of wealth and prestige. In this case the man not only uses the wives for work, but also to earn him status.

“The trouble with Bomai was his desire for women and children. Although he seemed a notorious womanizer as far as the village was concerned, he deserved his wives and many parents did all they could so that their daughter would find favour in his eyes.” (p. 11)

Hence in this society, no man like Bomai could be condemned because polygamous and promiscuous inclinations are endorsed by customs and traditions and upheld by the people. These people only sell their daughters to men like Bomai for their own selfish economic gains. Hence daughters are valued for items of trade. This is why Gannicott and Avalos report that some parents keep their daughters at home.

“In some societies educating a daughter may make it more difficult for her to be married, and if an educated daughter leaves home on marriage to live in the husband’s household or village the parents receive little return in exchange for what may have been substantial finical and household costs.”\(^{46}\)

\(^{45}\) Umba, Benjamin op.cited, p.6.

Nonetheless, girls are also devalued and intrinsically useless and a trouble to the family. Umba’s ‘Life is an Equation’ \footnote{Umba, Benjamin ‘Life is an Equation’ in Minol, Bernard and Hardy Patricia Ondobondo, No.3, Ondobondo Buk Haus, Port Moresby, 1983-84, p.10-15.} sees the wife shunned and made to feel guilty because she could not have a son; she only has four daughters. The husband Mr Kimana becomes abusive towards her. He states, “I wanted at least one son, woman. And I wanted him very desperately. But who have you given me? Four helpless and hopeless girls” (p. 13). An archetypal wife gains value and status when she mothers at least one son.

A wife-to-be is expected to be a saint - a virgin when she marries. Hoiri Sevese (The Crocodile) has sex with Mitoro the girl he intends to marry just to be sure she is still a virgin (p. 52). The man expects the wife to be a virgin but he can have the liberty to engage in sexual activities. Where is the fairness and logic in this when the girls they have pre-marital sex with are the very ones they expect to come into the matrimonial chambers as virgins? After marriage, the husband can still have extra-marital affairs while the wife cannot. “It was a different matter when it was a married woman who was involved. I can recall the day when Siarivita was clubbed to death” (The Crocodile, p. 69). Here is the advice which appears to be a custom, Mitoro’s mother gives her after she gives birth to her first son.

I’ve told you often enough about how debasing it is to your family and his when you have children one after the another and there is not much difference in their heights. You’ve just got to look around the village to see examples of what I mean. It is the wife who is responsible for this rather than the husband. Whenever he returns to the house late at night, she accuses him of having an affair with some young girl. ...He stays in the
house night after night and naturally becomes frustrated...he decides to sleep with his wife before the baby is much older...the wife is pregnant again....From now on, don’t have anything to do with your husband...There are a lot of girls who will have him and satisfy him (The Crocodile, pp. 68-69).

The Archetypal Mother

As well as being an impossible combination of virgin bearing sons and submissive hard worker, the archetypal mother is also the one from whom life begins and by whom it is sustained. The male writers whose texts I have looked at, are strongly and unanimously sentimental about their mother figure. A mother is seen to be the one who is selfless and always there for her children. This is strongly expressed from Winduo’s poems (Lomo’ha I am, in Spirit’s Voice I Call) about his mother figure. In ‘Different Histories’(p. 3), the mother carries all that load for the family.

I remember those years of my childhood
Papa in front with his piece of firewood,
Me in the centre.
and mama at the rear loaded
With stringbags of wood, food and water.
(Different Histories, p. 3)

“The Mother and Child’ (p. 4) laments the loss of a beloved child.

This is the story of a woman
Her first child she left on a canoe
To sail downstream to the open sea
The canoe was lost in the flowing stream.
...
For years the woman waited for her child
She believed his return would rescue her
From hardship and labour of her years

The woman died in her mournful tears
Without satisfying her dreams.
(The Mother and Child, p. 4)

This poem assumes the voice of the mother which makes the child feel special and lovingly missed. Yet as a typical male child, he pursues his own dreams and forgets the mother, but the mother doesn’t forsake him. ‘Nuigo Market’ (p. 5) depicts the nature of a hardworking mother who fends for her children. She is a home economist who makes a dollar stretch, who finds ways to make a little money to feed her child. She works the garden to grow enough vegetables to feed her family and the surplus to sell to buy what her family needs.

Each day she lived
she made the Nuigo market her survival
After a day’s earning would march
into the local trade store by the road
(Nuigo Market, p. 5)

Pascal Waisi\(^\text{49}\) is another poet whose poems bring out the best in the mother. ‘Mother Right’ is a teacher. Having given birth to him, the mother continues to

... Watch him grow through storm
She beats him to stay in form
For it is according to our norm
That he stays upright as a good boy.
(Mother Right, p. 17).

\(^{49}\) Waisi, Pascal’s poems in Chakravarty, Prith and Hardy, Patricia (eds) Ondobondo, No.5, Ondobondo Buk Haus, Port Moresby, 1984, pp.17-19.
'A Mother's Lament' is about a mother mourning at the loss of a child.

Memories of my loved one
Passed away on a far away plantation
Linger on in my loved one
Passed away on a far away plantation
Linger on in my dreams.
(A Mother's Lament, p. 19)

The collective archetypal image is of every mother, close and protective and sentimentally connected to every child. The same poet writes in the first person, assuming a mother's position to speak about a childbirth experience. He thinks he can understand the pain a birthing mother goes through. This coming from a male writer affirms two things; firstly, the woman has no voice in the educated literary world and cannot speak for her gender and secondly, it is the woman's specific role to give life. The poem also says that the mother dies at childbirth. She sacrifices herself.

I wailed and I wailed
Till the sun set
I long for the rope to hang myself
I want to communicate the pain
but no one will listen.

... Bring all the children I have closer
Let them see me experience in an enclosure
I shall embrace them before my departure
For I will not curse life's pleasure.
(Childbirth Lament, p. 19)

The self-sacrificing mother we see in the poems above demonstrates the Martyr archetype Carol Pearson describes as one of the six
archetypes we live by.\(^{50}\) The martyr archetype always puts others first and gets out of his/her way to care for and be responsible for others.

There is a danger in constructing such a narrow stereotype, because it excludes women who haven’t yet mothered a child. The mother-centred gendering leaves other women feeling impotent and half a woman. This is the kind of exclusion a barren woman feels, likewise a woman who aborts her child. ‘The Circles’\(^{51}\) depicts a knowledgeable old woman who is denied motherhood through barrenness so she does not have children to pass this knowledge on to. ‘Shame’ is a tragic tale of a woman who drinks poison and dies out of shame for committing adultery.

She shamed herself
She shamed her family
She shamed her clan - by an act of adultery.
She blamed herself
-- out of shame of her act of adultery.
(Shame, p. 17).

The sad part here is the male party in the act gets off the hook while the woman takes all the blame. In \textit{Wanpis},\(^{52}\) the narrator protagonist talks about how his mother Enita is condemned for life for having two children out of wedlock. The male party in the act walks away a free man while the woman bears the scar, the ‘scarlet letter A.’ However, in Eri’s \textit{The Crocodile}, we see that modern justice


\(^{51}\) Waisi, Pascal ‘The Circles’ in Chakravarty, Prith and Hardy, Patricia (eds) \textit{Ondobondo}, No.5, Ondobondo Buk Haus, Port Moresby, 1984, p.17.

jails the male party and orders him to pay maintenance on the child (p. 70). This is the story of many women.

Mother is equated with nature, hence the terms ‘Mother Earth’ and ‘Mother Land.’ This means that the earth or land is seen as the provider of a home and therefore life. It sustains her children. In Regis Stella’s ‘Confused Conscience’,53 the rebel commander’s voice is heard over the radio,

"Do not surrender. We are fighting for our motherland. Our mothers and sisters have been raped by foreign dogs. Our people have been killed. Are you going to just stand and watch your motherland desecrated by outsiders"

This attitude to land is very patriotic but represents the female as the possession of the male to be protected and fought over as a passive object. According to eco-feminists, the Mother in this patriarchal culture is also left (as sustainer) to solve nature’s problems like pollution and overpopulation.54 The mother-nature relationship creates a false consciousness that men do nothing to solve all of nature’s problems: that such problems are ‘women’s’ fault. In a different context, Abba Bina’s poem about Port Moresby55 depicts the place as a mother who gave birth to the suburbs, crime and slums. She is the mother of both the good and the bad. Consequently, motherhood, the feminine aspect of women equated with place or environment, debases women especially when the environment is

unfriendly or insufficient and cannot be sustainable to the people and their livelihood.

Russell Soaba's *Maiba* offers a contrast between the good and the bad women. Veronica Wawaya represents the bad and 'weak' woman in that she is an opportunist allying herself to whoever appears strongest because as a stray character, it is the only way she as a woman can get power. Before she marries Mr Wawaya, she has an affair with the late chief Magura. Veronica takes sides with Doboro Thomas in overthrowing the old dynasty.

As the good woman, Maibina is depicted as a “voice against corruption and suppression by men and foreign setups on our soil.” Figuratively, Maibina is a symbol representing a place, a country as Ngwele asserts:

Normally a country is referred to as a feminine. Thus Maiba represents a country facing an outside dominant power symbolised by Doboro Thomas, who is closely assisted by Koboni and his companion.

A country as feminine, leads back to the motherland, the Earth mother who is the archetypal figure. As such, the woman does not exist per se; she is there to protect and save the people and the country. Thus, Soaba's purpose of a heroine in his novel does not only elevate the status of women in the society but also perpetuates the role of a caretaker of a place, be it a country, a society or a

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58. Ibid., p.27.
household. She is always there behind the scenes, hence occupies a secondary position in society.

The archetypal images of woman, wife or mother developed by the patriarchal society as expressed by texts from male writers are very much tainted by culture and geography. It is clearly indicated that Melanesian women belong in their local space and shouldn't lose this identity or the subordinate position that goes with it.

**Woman as the Sexual Other, the Sex Object**

The gender discourse faces us with male and female polarities, one, more dominating than the other. As this polarity ascribes power and subject agency to the male, so women are relegated to objects of male desire and control.

In the traditional society, popular myths tell that once long ago, women possessed power and magic. Then one day this power was stolen by men so that is how they came to have power. For example, my grandfather told us a legend that long ago, there were only women on Manam island. They had knowledge of everything under the sun. One day, a man a was swept in a flood out to sea. He went ashore on that island where he discovered the women. He married one, the others become jealous so they turned into flying foxes and flew away. The man remained there and started a new family and he eventually took control of the power from his wife.

In these texts, we see how women are portrayed as temptresses, objects of male desire and sexual harassment. In *Maiba*, the young
protagonist Maiba is verbally abused and almost raped by some young boys from her school. When she gets home, Mrs Wawaya (Maiba’s uncle Wawaya’s wife) blames her for causing the boys to harass her. Maiba came home each evening, her eyes swollen with silent weepings and carrying her skirt over her shoulders.

“There, there now,” Mrs. Wawaya had often comforted the child, “that’s the price little girls pay for not wearing clothes and looking tidy.”

This implies that girls have to dress up and look tidy in order to be spared from such sexual harassment and obtain more respect. Yet if we look at the amount of abuse women receive because they take more interest and care in their appearance, they still cannot win male respect.

A woman walks past a male observer very decently dressed (a blue dress, a little make-up) but he disapproves of her. She is called a ‘black European.’ When a woman is well dressed, people have the impression that she is out to attract men, like Lucy in ‘Shattered Dreams’; therefore it is her fault that she is deceived by a jobless trickster and marries him.

In the modern developing society of PNG, a woman’s sense of good dress is taken as sexually suggestive by men. She is seen as a temptress. Scenes two and five of John Kasaipwalova’s play ‘My Brother My Enemy’ presents the secretary of the Minister for National Security

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59. Maiba, p.3.  
- Thomas Sokaru. She dresses in a semi-transparent dress. Sokaru passes sexually motivated compliments,

Good morning my beautiful secretary... You are looking very ripe and very sexy... (Staring at her departing undulating bottoms)...yes, yes, very sexy bottom!61

The semi-transparent or the see-through dress poses a problem here because it does not represent 'decency' in dressing. The male writer uses this to blame the secretary for calling attention on herself, while the main issue of male gaze and satisfaction is trivialized. On the other hand, the secretary uses her female body to manipulate her boss for her own benefit. It seems that however women dress, they still become objects of male censure or desire. If women don’t ‘dress up’ they are scorned or ignored, if they do, they are still scorned or exploited - either way, it is the male gaze and satisfaction which is the central consideration.

In scene five, Sharon a female guest, arrives at a party hosted by the Minister. The author notes that she is wearing a see-through dress. The host gets turned on (pp. 26-27). The male writers here suggest that women provoke male desire and therefore also say that women who become victims of rape or any other form of sexual harassment bring it upon themselves. According to studies, Kaye Healey presents these as some popular myths and lies about sexual assault:

- women attract rape by the way they dress and behave;
- men who rape can’t help or control themselves;
- it is a woman’s responsibility to control a man’s sexual behaviour towards her;

61 Kasaipwalova, John ‘My Brother My Enemy’ in Chakravarti, P and Hardy, P (eds) Onobondo, No.5, Ondobondo Buk Haus, Port Moresby, 1984, pp.23 and
When a woman says no, she means yes. For example, in 1994, two women were physically assaulted and stripped at Gordons Market in Port Moresby because they were wearing shorts. These women were blamed for provoking men's gaze. They could have controlled men's sexual behaviour towards them had they worn skirts or dresses. These ideas are erroneous but victims often take the blame and accept it as their fault. Healey, however, asserts that "Rape is an act of violence which uses sex as a weapon." In Kasaipwalova's play as discussed above, the National Security Minister shows sexual desire for his secretary. In Nash Gegera's story, Albert rapes Linda, "I thought back a long time to when I raped her with insane ecstasy. It hadn't been an approach of love making. It was rape." In *Maiba*, the young boys at school attempt to rape the protagonist (Maiba). Then there is horrific and violent act of Christine's rape by Koboni and his companions. These are textual examples of men exerting power over women. This demonstration of power is to keep women as sex objects, vulnerable and easy victims. It is a form of mental terrorism in that men terrorize women by sexual assault to keep them where they belong - the home. Therefore they cannot be seen in clubs, pubs, on streets at night or even university campuses like UPNG. These are male institutions. Kanekane writes about this through the male character in 'Where is Mummy.' Charles survives by playing in a band that entertains drunkards. The band he belongs to plays every weekday at

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63 Ibid., p.17.
Boroko Hotel. Women hardly go to there because they fear they will be molested by men.\textsuperscript{65}

Forms of sexual harassment can be seen in some texts. Sexual harassment according to Healey, is "any unwelcome sexual attention that makes you feel embarrassed, scared or angry, such as comments made about your body, or demeaning sexual remarks."\textsuperscript{66} Gegera's story begins with a scene of vicious sexual harassment of women at a concert at Tabari Place, Boroko. Men call out "Holim arse!...Burukim trousers! Apim sket!"\textsuperscript{67} While this is openly violent, less physical threats by a university lecturer to a female student or a boss to his secretary are forms of assault. Nancy Kupson ("Who Killed Nancy Kupson?") marries a law lecturer because he threatens to fail her. Thomas Sokaru - the Minister for National Security Affairs makes passes at his secretary but when she refuses, he threatens to fire her ('My Brother My Enemy'). Such women are in a powerless position and men take advantage of them. They are made to believe that they are wrong while the male perpetrators conceal that they cannot control their sexual desires - the weapon of power. If these women only had enough courage or awareness of these forms of sexual harassment as crime, they could protect themselves through the law.

Sometimes women trivialize harassments by taking them as unimportant incidents (what Papua New Guineans call a "minor

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\textsuperscript{65} Kanekane, Joe "Where is Mummy" in Lahui, Jack (ed) \textit{Savannah Flames} Vol.1, No.2, Language and Literature Dept. UPNG and COP Publishing Pty Ltd., Port Moresby, 1996, p.28.
\textsuperscript{67} Kanekane, Joe, "Where is Mummy", Op. cit., p.27.
\end{flushright}
problem"). For example, a drunken man calls to a Morobe girl walking past him. Then he flashes a two kina ($2) at another young woman believed to be a secretary who works at the University. The same man goes to the canteen to buy a cigarette. He hands the young woman the money and touches her buttocks and says to her, "Beautiful thing." She giggles and goes back into the canteen. Firstly, a secretary is targeted because she is seen as someone at the bottom of the corporate ladder and can be abused. Secondly, two kina is a derogatory term. It is the minimum amount paid to a low class prostitute. Thirdly, the woman giggling does give an impression that she accepts being harassed. However, looking at these women, they all look like women who have had little education and are handicapped by not knowing what their rights are in the modern justice system.

The texts we have looked at do portray how the dominant gender exerts power and control over the subordinate gender. Melanesian men use their sexuality and the archetypal gender roles to keep women as second-class citizens. Changing attitudes of women pose a threat of dislocation of the centralized power structure of this patriarchal society.

CHAPTER THREE

THE FEMALE VOICE

The Papua New Guinean woman is first of all a woman, then a writer. As a woman in her geographical location, she has to perform duties of a daughter, sister, wife or mother. As such, her household chores come first. Then if she has time and space, she can be a writer, secretary or something else beyond her domestic chores.

Women writers whose work I discuss here are educated women. They are among the few women who have had a university or tertiary education. In 1961 the total primary school enrolment was 42,865 females compared to 66,567 males. That same year, the female secondary enrolment was only 43, compared to 411 males. Ten years later, the total female enrolment for primary schools was 76,190, while males recorded 133,047. Secondary school enrolment for females in 1971 was 5,508, compared to 13,101 males. No females were enrolled in technical institution in 1961, males recorded 662. In 1971, females were 295 and males 1,468. In 1973, only 113 females graduated from professional courses while the male output was 253.70

Recent statistics in PNG (1991) show that 87.3 per cent of women over 25 years have had no schooling; 7.2 per cent completed primary

school; 1.8 per cent completed secondary school and the figures for tertiary institution are not available. The rate of illiteracy among women as recorded by the UNESCO in 1991 is 62.2 per cent for those over 15 years of age. This shows that as the level of education increases, fewer females continue beyond primary school and consequently, the rate of illiteracy remains relatively high.

The few who have reached a tertiary level of education, are empowered to have a voice in the nation's literary history. They also have access to the means of modern decision making in society. If traditionally women could not discuss issues that affected them, writing has removed such barriers to a certain degree. Writing is an alternative way to voice the realities of the voiceless women suppressed by tradition and modern institutional inequities insofar as men are central. In the new media, women still have to conform, 'be sponsored' etc. to gain a public voice and in the kind of endemic patriarchy already described, it is hard to see how a woman's voice wouldn't somehow 'violate' entrenched attitudes. Now women, as writers, can write, can speak. In other words, PNG women writers are still writing in a restricted environment. By writing, even if they are not seen, they can be 'heard' when their work is read.

Do women really foreground their daily realities and concerns? If so, What are those issues they raise? What are the images women writers portray of themselves? Women do raise issues whether it be specifically about women or about the general national sentiments.

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71. Chapman, Linley *Publishing and Development in Melanesia, with Solomon Islands Examples*, University of Hawai'i at Manoa, 1993, p.59. This is from a paper for the Master of Arts in Pacific Studies. (The sources for these statistics are from the UNESCO, *Statistical Year Book, 1991*, Moseley, 1992, 20.)
PNG’s prominent female writer, Nora Vagi Brash does that. Anne Turner notes, “Many of the themes of Nora’s plays concern the contradictions between traditional and Western cultures, and often conflicting systems of beliefs and values.”

Every female writer is different and therefore writes from her own perspective. The women writers’ silences about certain issues also indicate the social limits to expressions of dissent and their degree of commitment to a public program of social reform. The texts in this study so far, show very little concern for the subject of feminism. I believe this is so because ‘feminism’ is a Western concept and PNG women have a different perception and interpretation of it. Kirsten Holst Petersen writes about the African version of feminism versus the Western one as being different.

whereas Western feminists discuss the relative importance of feminist versus class emancipation, the African discussion is between feminist emancipation versus the fight against neo-colonialism, particularly in its cultural aspect.

If Western feminism is fighting for equality and African feminism is against Western cultural imperialism, what feminist position do Melanesian women take? From the Papua New Guinea women’s writings, the stance they take on the topic is still unclear; whether they are seeking cultural, imperial or class liberation or just simply contesting their material deprivation in society. As I see it, the

74. Ibid, p.252.
position of our women is more to do with having a voice or making our presence known in the society first, before negotiating equality or striving against neo-imperialism. PNG women have to first of all be healthy, be educated and be able to claim an identity apart from sex and servitude, then they can be concerned with more generalised feminist issues like that of equal participation in the labour market. Their concern is to be human first, to have the right to exist with dignity and comfort wherever people are located.

This thought is expressed in this stanza of Elaine Sari's poem 'Unemployed'\textsuperscript{75}. For her, employment entails a chance to live whereas unemployment in the face of modernity leads the death of persons and of the nation.

\begin{quote}
The right given in the Constitution
To have the opportunity
For every able bodied person
To actively participate in
The development of one's self
And that of the nation
Is not utilised.
(Unemployed, p. 44).
\end{quote}

Women's issues are seen differently by women of different backgrounds because, "Each woman writer is a product of different [society and] circumstance and therefore may have different conceptions, reasons, attitude etc. toward her role as a writer."\textsuperscript{76} This may mean that we can expect a range of issues that may not necessarily be seen as feminist by the outside reader or as purely

\textsuperscript{75} Sari, Elaine 'Unemployed' in Lahui, Jack (ed) Savannah Flames, Vol.1, No.2, UPNG Language and Literature Dept/COP Publishing Pty Ltd., 1996, p.44.
\textsuperscript{76} Stella, Regis 'Beyond Domestic Chores: Female Characterisation in Nora Vagi Brash's Plays' in Griffiths, Gareth (ed) New Literatures Review, no.19, New Literatures Research Centre, Wollongong, 1990. [....] the words in brackets are my own.
concerning women's affairs. Our women take not a specifically feminist stance but a humanist one. Perhaps it is similar to the kind of position Buchi Emecheta the Nigerian novelist works from; "Her prime concern is not so much with cultural liberation, not with social change. To her the object seems to be to give women access to power in the society as it exists, to beat men at their own game. She lays claim to no ideology, not even a feminist one." As we go through these texts, each writer's perception of her circumstances and realities will begin to surface in her own voice.

Nora Vagi Brash holds a Bachelor of Arts degree from UPNG and has a wealth of experience in drama and creative writing. Her first play was written for her local high school. She has studied in Hawaii and England. Brash has worked with the National Arts School and has been an assistant lecturer in Puppetry, Dance and Drama. She became one of the two artistic directors of the National Theatre Company. For the tenth Independence anniversary, Brash, together with Greg Katahanas, produced *Taurama*, a play she wrote in 1981. All these make Nora Vagi Brash the most experienced woman in PNG in the literary field

Brash has a distinct style of writing. She uses satire and puns to give humour yet cut through the conscience of society at the same time. The writer has a purpose for using this style. A satire "is a form of writing that holds up aspects of a person or society to ridicule. The aim of the satirist is not merely to amuse, but to make us see the

folly of our ways." Brash writes this way in order to expose and correct faults and injustices she sees in our society. She writes about issues she feels strongly about. "She observes life closely and reacts strongly against injustice, bigotry and the misuse of power. She uses satire as a weapon against hypocrites." This is clear in her treatment of the hypocritical attitudes of Gou and Sinob Haia in ‘Which Way big Man?’

The Injustices of Civilization

In ‘Which Way Big Man’, Brash ridicules Gou Haia (Go Higher) for being the Director of National Identity yet choosing to live and celebrate his promotion in a western way. He keeps a male domestic servant like the colonial expatriates did. Gou chooses to throw a cocktail party instead of a village feast and singsing. He drinks vodka, and eats Spanish olives. He ignores his traditional values of caring and sharing and is reluctant to help his cousin Hegame.

Gou Haia and his wife are in conflict with their ideals yet cannot be detached from their true Melanesian way. Although Gou and Sinob try to ignore their culture, they are still linked to it through relatives and wantoks like Hegame his cousin, his father and their wantoks who work in Gou’s office. Brash asserts that Westernization changes Gou and Sinob by detaching them from their traditional

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82. *Wantok* is a Pidgin word which literally means ‘one language’. Hence a wantok is one who speaks the same language as you. It has a wider connotation as it refers to a relative, friend, neighbour and a countryman/woman.
values of respect for family, elders; communal sharing and caring; and loyalty to village and customs. This modern couple wants to be identified with West and that is shown in Sinob’s desire for carpet on the floor and a swimming pool of their own. The West is determined by material ‘kago’ (cargo). Even Saga, the ‘Melanesian nationalist’ university student, is compromised by his taste for white man’s beer and smokes cigarettes.

Sinob is a pun for snob. She is an epitome of a modern woman who wants to fully embrace the western ideals and way of life and ignore her traditional identity. Sinob rejects the traditional dish of creamed fish and vegetables but prefers T-bone steak (171). She has a ‘western’ taste for fashion; French perfumes and dresses. Choosing French products is symbolically wanting to be part of the glamour of the international ‘jet set.’ This woman lives in a dream world where not even her husband’s salary can afford it: “Oh Gou, perhaps one day we’ll be in a position to get one! (Pause) If ever you get that promotion!” (p. 171). Her ‘posing’ is shown to be false when gossips suggest that Sinob bought her dress in a trade store instead of having it tailor made.

Marian: Hey Saga! Did you hear those two talking about dresses? I saw some dresses just the same as the one Sinob’s wearing in a Trade Store yesterday! I thought she was too high class now for the Trade Stores! (184).

Regarding her depiction of the position of women in society, Brash over-compensates for the oppressive subservient position women in Melanesian societies occupy. She gives Sinob Haia a prominent position which she abuses by bossing her husband around and even
taking control of his secretary as her personal aide. She even has a male domestic servant.

_Sinob:_ Can you get you Secretary to come here first thing in the morning, to help me with preparations? (176).

The secretary arrives.

_Sinob:_ Now get your pad and pencil. I want you to take this list down for your boss's celebration party (176).

Gou’s father tells him that his wife has too much control over him. “I luk olsem meri bilong yu i bosim yu. Yu no ken mekim olsem!” (186). Papa, the custodian of tradition, does not encourage his son to upset the patriarchal system that has already mapped out the proper space of women. For Sinob to exert such power and display that bold and arrogant attitude is a breach of custom. Women should be behind the scenes playing that supportive role, which Sinob tries to ennoble, ‘Behind every successful man, there is a woman’ (176). Ironically, Sinob is in a fragile position as she depends on her husband for ‘power.’ Behind that tough front, she is afraid of ‘falling’ back to the traditional subservience. She shows this by refusing to have Gou’s father in their house.

In ‘The High Cost of Living Differently’ Nora Vagi Brash delineates the attitude of the educated people like Mata, refuse to accept the simple truths and realities of the PNG society, represented by Iloko. The female representation in this play, is well

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portrayed by Vera, as a sympathetic citizen who tries to remain in touch with reality. Vera is accused by Mata to be too soft, hence asserts ‘softness’ as a female characteristic.

Vera: I don’t think he’s mad! He’s nice really, and very gentle. There’s nothing wrong with him. He’s just being himself. That’s the main thing anyway.

Mata: Now, that’s just the way a silly female WOULD react. Honestly, you’re just as mad as he is. Maybe you and he would make a nice pair at Laloki. Ha! Ha! Ha!84

A man like Mata pretends to be too educated and westernized to be identified with a villager like Iloko whom he brands as crazy just for singing at the market place. Although the ‘feminist’ aspect is not Brash’s main focus, this can be read from her play. Men like Mata want to be westernized, but they are not prepared to go as far as being ‘civilized’ enough to treat women with more respect and freedom. If men cannot do this, then their quest for education and modernity is just a cosmetic front. Mata’s macho attitude towards Vera still nurtures the oppressive aspects of the patriarchal society which he tries to change.

In another of Brash’s plays ‘Pick the Bone Dry’, the councillor of Munibi village silences his wife and Venda when they question where the rest of the money promised to them for their project has gone.

Kansol: Hey yu tupela meri natin. Yu go redim kai kai na noken daunim poin long gavman.85

84. Ibid., p.3. Laloki is the mental institution in the Port Moresby.
The implications to this statement are intimidating: they are mere women, therefore, they do not have the right to question the government and most of all, men who constitute this patriarchal structure. The councillor acts as if the women’s place in the kitchen has been pre-ordained.

Nora Vagi Brash’s ‘Pick the Bone Dry’, delineates such injustices. In the plot, we are told that the one person who is the link between the village and the government office, is Venda. She is the silent witness of the misappropriation and misuse of time, money and other resources in the government offices. Only she dares to question the system and the people who are part of that system.

For instance, Darekta comes into the office late, then he sits down to read the newspaper. He brushes aside a report he needs to give immediate attention to (p. 21). Venda enters the office to sell her fruits. The Director sends her away.

Darekta: You better go away. We have a lot of work to do here.

Another female character is Seketere. She is the direct contrast to Venda the village woman. Seketere is depicted as “young and vain, sexually and socially ambitious” (p. 20) secretary of this government office. Brash vests her with such confidence that she is even able to voice her opinion on a letter to the Editor complaining about girls wearing jeans and shaving their eyebrows (p. 21). Seketere also shows
an arrogant attitude towards Waitad (White Adviser). She says things like:

*Seketere:* That's your problem. I don't need a lecture from the white adviser, thank you. We're an Independent Country now, so leave us to make our own mistakes. Just keep your nose out of our affairs (p. 21).

This attitude, especially from an indigenous secretary to a white man, is unrealistic and makes her position incredible; secretaries are taught to be polite. Regis Stella asserts that Nora Vagi Brash is too idealistic when she elevates too much of her female characters Sinob Haia and Seketere.

This is a radical reversal of roles, which again is a fantasy. Most secretaries in PNG are taught to sell the image of whichever organisations they work for, to be “beautiful roses.” They are educated up to grade ten level or less and thus most would not have a taste for politics. In an office environment they can be sacked anytime if they become “hotheads” who oppose their superiors.⁸⁶

Stella posits that being bossy like Sinob, excessively arrogant towards her superiors like Seketere, or just simply questioning authority like Venda and Kansol’s wife, are trivial issues which do not delineate Brash’s commitment to the concerns of the womenfolk.⁸⁷ This is because the writer’s concern is for the whole population in the society and not just one sector or gender. Nora Vagi Brash’s portrayal of PNG women like this, does not display a realistic view and position of women in society as a wife, mother, secretary or whatever

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⁸⁷. Ibid., p.49.
role she plays. What is true in her plays is the corruption, hypocrisy, misappropriation, abuse of power and the injustices that go on in the government and in the society which Brash detests. Further, she shows 'big men' in conflict between the their Melanesian identity and Western ideals. Another valid point she makes about Venda and Kansol's wife is that they stand as the moral conscience of the society. They represent the women who are muted by the male hegemonic society. They cannot speak because they are silenced. While the Vendas are restricted by laws determining where they should or should not be, the educated or semi-educated like Seketere are silenced because they become allies with the government. Although Brash has no particular concern for women, one thing is clear; that she only provides negative models of women who break from traditional domesticity, and in so doing, she undercuts her subtle struggle for a voice in the society.

Though the village women in Brash's play are silenced from exposing Kansol and Minister, there is a wider interest in social improvement and anti-corruption. Joyce Kumbeli's poem 'The Ace'\(^{88}\), criticizes the politicians for their empty promises and lies. They show their faces in the villages only during campaigns and elections, an all too familiar trait. Another female writer echoes the same attitude of the so-called 'big men.' Elsie Mataio criticizes democracy and how it creates class.

They call it democracy
they call it the rule of the people,
the rule of the grassroots people,
they talk freely

\(^{88}\) Kumbeli, J 'The Ace' in Chakravarti and Hardy (eds) *Ondobondo* No.6, Ondobondo Buk Haus and Literature Dept. -UPNG, Port Moresby, 1985, p.22.
they decide freely
But the roots extend to the villages and islands
buried under beautiful soil
the grass spreads sharp blades to the sky
no body will fly in the special baluses
the Dash 7
the Kumul 1
the Kumul 2

Only the bigmen have wings
the small men have dead roots.
(Democracy, p. 23)  

Brash, Kumbeli and Mataio raise the issue of class; the grassroots, the villagers, uneducated as opposed to the modern, educated politicians or big men. The first class of people are the voiceless and the powerless while the second class have the power and the upper hand in society. Women constitute part of the former class. As women writers, these three not only take up the voice of the women, but also represent the disadvantaged population in society. Thus while speaking for the women, they speak for the whole population, and vice versa. In other words, women are not the only victims of injustice, but the whole society is affected.

'Mass Media, Mass Mania' is another of Nora Vagi Brash's poems. Although she uses puns and alliteration to make the text interesting and humorous, it carries a powerful message that advertising makes people spend money. Those without money find other means of acquiring money so they can buy something. Advertising causes a disease of spending money in the society.

In stanza one, the media advertises sweets. While they are sweet, they cause problems to the teeth. The second stanza sells washing detergents; while they promise a brighter wash, they brainwash consumers into spending more money and some go bankrupt. In her puns, Nora uses ‘soft soap, dope soap’ to imply the addictive effects of dope - drug advertising. ‘Soap and dope’ wash or brainwash a consumer to be in a make-believe world, a world of escapism. Consumers are also treated like dopes - idiots. Consumers are allured to having more and more because those things are made to believe they give a ‘good life.’ Stanza three implies that people are addicted, they are broke, they run into debts. Serious consequences like prostitution, land and property mortgage and poverty are implied.

Buy now, buy new, buy big, buy bulk
Buy more, buy me, buy now, Dinau
Buy! Buy! Goodbye self-reliance
Sell! Sell! sell self, sell soil
Sell soul, sell out, sell bottles,
Sell empty promises,
SOLD OUT.
(Mass Media, Mass Mania, p. 96)

The writer is pessimistic about mass media advertising; that it creates unnecessary and unhealthy desires for things. It is creating a consumeristic and materialistic society and causing people to lose touch with self-reliance. This fools’ paradise is also echoed in Joyce Kumbeli’s ‘Caught Up’91. One spends money on raffle tickets to win a car but he or she loses both the dream car that promises ‘the good life’, and the money.

If we are looking for a text by Nora Vagi Brash that exposes the realities of a woman, and a mother as a writer, then it is better we take a look at her poem “I Ought to be Writing”92 Being a woman and a writer, her time has to be divided between household chores and writing. This poem carries a tone of exasperation that she ought to be writing but she has her household duties to perform first; like washing, cleaning, cooking and looking after children.

Today someone asked me
"How’s your writing going?"
"Fine, except it’s washing day."
I sit near the tub
Each piece of cloth I wring bears every word
that’s meant to be on paper
The multitudes of bubbles blow and scatter in the breeze.
Oops! There goes another sentence
Popped by a sudden burst of wind
Leaving my mind sterile
Like my washing on the line.
(I Ought to be Writing, p. 25)

The fact is that this female writer has no conveniences of a washing machine to help her while she writes. This shows the economic setbacks of a Melanesian woman writer.

Through Teenage Eyes

Loujaya Kouza is another well-known female writer whose poems are popular, especially among school children. This is perhaps because her poems talk about the world seen through the eyes of a teenager and children identify with them. Kouza started writing poems and

92, Brash, Nora Vagi ‘I Ought to be Writing’ in Chatterton, Alan and Powell, Ganga (eds) Ondobondo, Ondobondo Buk Haus and Literature Dept.-UPNG, Port Moresby, 1982, p.25.
published her first collection in high school when she was about fifteen years old. She has since gone into song writing. ‘Old Man’, ‘The First Day at School’ and ‘Teenage World’ are poems that have no particular interest in gender issues.

I sit and I sat in a classroom  
I thoughted and I thought  
I feeled and I felt  
Hot, tired, sticky, sweaty  
I tried, try, tries to tell, to told  
teacher that I, me want, wanted  
wants to go. To, to the TOILET!!!  
(The First Day of School, p. 26).

Though there is a lack of women’s presence, we can conclude that there was little interest in ‘heavy’ issues on a mind of a teenager. She writes about her experiences and how she perceived her world. There is not much depth and maturity in her opinions. Perhaps what Kirpal Singh observes about early PNG is also applicable to Kouza’s writings.

Much PNG writing in English tends to be unduly romantic. Most of the creative writing I am acquainted with is written by young people. That may be one reason why it does not reveal sufficient maturity of thought or expression. The generation-gap, boy-girl relationships, potted politics, are among the more common themes explored by PNG writers.  

Kouza’s poems in this first Ondobondo publication are pretty straight forward; they do not need a second or third reading. They

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are original, and in colloquial language, there is no need to read between the lines. 'She Just Left Home' (p. 26) tells of a woman who just walked out without a trace. There is no depth of creativity or emotional drama beyond the narrative events.

Motherhood and Parental Responsibilities

In Kouza's later works in the *Ondobondo* (no. 4), we see 'a little maturity' that is implicit in the symbolic dimension of the poem 'Am I a Child of my People?' It is about a child who is searching for family; for her roots and identity. She is looking for a sense of belonging which will give her a sense of security. The child has only ever known her mother. Now she has grown up, she wonders if there is an extended family and asks if she should be a part of them. Kouza implies also a search for her father.

The poem begins with a child born and abandoned. Kouza explores the dilemma of an unwanted child. He or she becomes a burden, "just another mouth to feed" (p. 11). She touches on the social problems of having a large family and being poor. If this is the position of the child, the mother has to be involved.

The role of the mother comes in the second and third stanzas.

Struggling woman with a beautiful child
temptation to leave
and let it run wild.

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The people turned their backs on them
and left them there alone
the child was all the woman had
so she gave to her, her all
in pain sorrow she loved the child
and nurtured her all the while
until at last it came of age and asked.
(Am I a Child of my People?, p. 11)

While this poem depicts a loving fondness towards a mother and
woman struggling alone to raise a child, a symbolic reading of the
poem brings us to more critical questions. Where has the father
gone? Why isn’t he around? Where is the extended family, a value
upheld by society? The writer is subtle about the irresponsible father
and the deteriorating bond and concern of the extended family in
her society. If we go further, we can note the changing values of a
traditional society that once had a strong sense of community.

A mother’s strength is prominent here; she makes sacrifices, all
alone, to bring up her child. She is the Martyr archetype Carol
Pearson identifies as self-sacrificing. In this situation, the words of
the Indonesian writer Pramoedya Toer comes to mind: “The heat of
the sun is borne by all, but the heat of the heart is borne alone.”
This woman stands alone like Soaba’s *Wanpis*, to raise her child. We
are confronted by a dilemma faced by women in our society today. A
woman is biologically prescribed to be an ‘incubator’, she is often the
one sentenced to struggle and sacrifice to raise the child alone when
the man who fathered the child abandons both. This is the only
work of Kouza with this symbolic dimension to the father’s

Francisco, 1986.

97. Toer, Pramoedya Ananta *This Earth of Mankind*, Lane,Max (transl.),Penguin
abandonment and the mother’s lone struggle in child rearing. It is also a thought not pursued explicitly and exclusively in women’s writings so far in this project. However, other works from other women writers bring out the sense of a mother’s workload.

Joyce Kumbeli’s similar sentiments to Kouza’s of the womenfolk in Melanesia in “Will I Ever Be”\(^\text{98}\), raises concerns that many women have as they enter into the labour market. A working woman goes to work, then comes home to do the household chores of cleaning, cooking, feeding the baby and more. The husband does not give a hand; he is just part of the household the woman must care for. A quarrel ensues when the husband is told to help. Hence the woman has a double load of work.

\begin{quote}
Coming home
I find my own home
uninviting
unswept
laundry basket full to the brim
dirty dishes all over the kitchen table
beds unmade
dinner waiting to be cooked
and endless chores staring at me.
(Will I Ever Be, p. 25)
\end{quote}

The next poem ‘Tied Up’\(^\text{99}\) discusses the stark responsibilities of parenthood. Joyce sounds regretful that she did not know that falling in love with a man would result in being tied up with responsibilities. She implies that young people do not know the full demand of parenthood until they become parents.


\(^{99}\) Ibid., p.25.
we were young then but
did we look to this day
when we slept the night out
in each other's arms
with all the best dreams
DID WE?
(Tied Up, p. 25)

Now she has to feed, clothe, educate and shelter her child. She
affirms a woman's motherhood role in "The Day I Was Born"\(^{100}\). If there is a birth, there is always a mother who makes that birth possible.

This sense of responsibility carries on in Kumbeli's play 'And What is to be Done'?\(^{101}\). Dinah, the mother in the story, is involved in something dirty. It is her brother who is involved with a dirty business that the plot does not reveal. Dinah introduces her brother to Raymond, her husband. Raymond gets involved in the business. Dinah knows about it, but does not tell her daughter May. She thinks it is best May doesn't know because Dinah wants to protect her. The police find out and they arrest Raymond and Dinah. May is devastated by this.

May is brought up in a strict home environment. She can only go to school, hockey training and Girl Guides. She is also pressured by her parents to do well in school and go to college and have a good job. But one afternoon she fights with another girl at school over a

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\(^{100}\) Kumbeli, J 'The Day I Was Born' in Chakravarti and Hardy (eds) *Ondobondo* No.6, Op. cit., p.22.

\(^{101}\) Kumbeli, J 'And What is to be Done', *Ondobondo*, No.4, Op. cit., pp.21-27.
boy Raymond, May’s father, talks to her. He is afraid she won’t grow up to be like her mother, she is different.

My daughter, May. My only daughter and my only child...She won’t be like her mother. No. No she won’t be like her. That’s the one thing I hate to think about.(p. 21)

Why does Raymond think like this? There is a ‘sting’ in this story. Raymond feels guilty of the things he is doing and is afraid he will be caught soon. He is afraid of letting his daughter down. Here the writer talks about the generation gap. The values and attitudes of the modern young people are changing. Many marriages happen when there is already a child in the relationship. It wasn’t like that in Raymond’s generation.

I married her mother when she was at the ripe age of twenty five. ...Today you see a wedding reception taking place; you see a baby in a woman’s arms; you see a little boy crying after his so-called father. And you tell me how old these parents are. Barely twenty! (p. 21)

The author is concerned about the social changes happening among the young generation. As the title of her play suggests, there is nothing we can do about change; it is inevitable. Raymond and Dinah represent parents who worry about their children’s future. Parents want their children to be exactly like themselves. However, the irony in this whole play is; are parents always right? May’s parents are arrested for doing something wrong. Whose example should we follow? This world is not perfect; each generation must find their own tune and dance to it.
Being a girl, May's freedom is restricted for the reason that she may fall pregnant or marry before she is old enough. If she does, other serious consequences could follow. There is a danger in not completing school. Without a good education (college or university), she cannot get a good job. There is also a subtle implication that in PNG, there is not much hope for a girl to continue education when she gets married or has a child that young. This is the situation of girls in PNG which the education system cannot accommodate.

Self-realization

Earlier, we saw Nora Vagi Brash's characters Sinob and Seketere unrealistically trying to reverse the position of women. Mary ToLiman's poem 'Bia Botol Longlong' takes us through the pub, mostly a male institution. She uses the metonym of 'beer bottle' as the crazy thing. She means that beer (the most common alcohol in PNG), causes drinkers to lose control of their senses and go crazy. Beer is a 'relic' of colonization, "Beer colonial work, Hey?" (ToLiman, p. 94). She implies that drinking is an extension of colonization and an act of modernization.

ToLiman's poem opens with the narrator's voice, "I strolled into the pub" (p. 94). As a woman, she could not do this. A pub is no place for a woman; it is rough. It is for men only. If a girl walks into the pub, she is likely to be harassed. She is seen as a 'tramp.' This is just the way society thinks. To make her point, the female poet must put on the mask of a man. There is an implied protest in this, but it is

102. ToLiman, Mary 'Bia Botol Longlong' in Powell, Ganga (ed) Through Melanesian Eyes, Op. cit., p.94. Longlong is a Pidgin word meaning "crazy".
predominantly an act of self-effacement. She has to be as strong as Margaret Thatcher (The Iron Woman), or go to extremes like George Eliot to assume a male pseudonym. Papua New Guinea female writers do not necessarily write 'feminist' poems, plays or stories as stated earlier. Paradoxically, they write about general events that keep them on a more neutral ground while effacing themselves and their 'feminist' position.

Lynda Thomas' 'Volcano'\textsuperscript{103} expresses strong nationalistic sentiments. She reckons the master (colonial rule) is exploiting us and our country. It is time we realized that they are using us like "play grounds; enjoying us like nightclubs; handling us like machines and stepping on us like dirt" (p. 150). She uses the metaphor of a volcano that one day soon we are going to erupt like one.

In a Freudian sense, the 'master' in this poem could represent men and how they control women. However, our kind of feminism as I stated earlier, is not radical. Therefore, the strong call to radical action by women is still absent in our women's literature. Our priorities lie in material development and how to cope with the conflicts inflicted by change. As the work cited above shows, there is a primary concern with getting used to the modern way of life before we can be occupied with more radical issues like feminism. For instance, English is an upwardly middle class language which predisposes its users to work in the broad, modern space before they can protest.

We sometimes get poems or stories about successes of women. The woman in Nora Vagi Brash's 'Taurama' is a strong figure. 'The Reunion' is another story that tells of a woman's strength. It is about how Karina, a young girl whose mother leaves her, is cared for by her father, but upon his death is adopted by her aunt. The aunt's husband is unkind to her so her friend's parents help her. She studies hard in school and goes to college in Mount Hagen. She gets a job there, and marries a successful businessman. One day, she gets a surprise phone call and the caller leads her to meet her mother. Karina's story represents women who, despite the financial or social difficulties, make use of opportunities to succeed in life. Modern prominent women like Josephine Abaijah, Rose Kekedo, Naomi Tulaha, Nora Vagi Brash and Meg Taylor are women who have succeeded in life. There are many more modern women from relatively disadvantaged backgrounds like Karina above, have struggled through life and are quite successful.

Sometimes dreams for success are shattered. In 'Broken Hope', Medi Reta explores how a woman's hopes and dreams of a good relationship with a man are shattered. Wilma walks out on Beno when she sees him with another woman. This is a situation many women in society find themselves in. In this story, the ending is quite happy because Wilma discovers that the man with the woman in Beno's flat was Beno's twin brother - Frank. It is Wilma's mistake.

but in other stories, women are betrayed without mistakes. Unlike Reta, Bessie Lovai’s untitled poem accepts the fact the macho male has the prerogative to change, just as the wind changes its course.

tomorrow the wind would change
its course - we know that well
each day had its ways
today it went south, maybe
it will remain or go north, east or west
tomorrow - i cannot tell
but...
one thing was clear
that he must part with
the changeable wind tomorrow
whether north south east or west
i cannot tell 107

Although such macho two-timing males exist in real life, not many women are writing about it. This is important to note because more women are writing on general issues and very few include issues like this where women are directly affected, and where women become the subject of male macho acts.

Homosexuality is another issue here. This is an issue that has not been mentioned in literature and Medi just touches the subject briefly. When Wilma breaks up with Beno, she befriends Randy. The woman discovers later that he (Randy) spends more time with a male friend than her. The relationship is a little abnormal as Wilma remarks, “Although Randy was a lovely person, charming and handsome, I found our relationship was more of a brother-sister relationship” (p. 59). The protagonist finds Randy and his male

107. Lovai, Bessie - untitled poem in Hey Now, No.1, Goroka Teachers College Literary Arts Department, 1973, p.9. The excerpt here has been copied exactly as it is in the book.
partner together one day and is devastated. Homosexuality poses a problem for young women and men seeking heterosexual relationships. The writer exposes homosexuality to the society; that it is not a clandestine activity anymore in PNG. The writer also touches on gay relationships which is an issue and even a movement in Australia, Europe and America. In a ‘macho’ society like PNG, gay men are looked down on. They are called by opprobrious terms like “gely, gely” or “gelix.” They are called “girls.” For them to be gay is equivalent to losing their maleness and they become as weak as women.

Wilma’s decision to leave Beno takes a lot of courage. She portrays a “headstrong” (p. 55), wise woman who is not ready to be abused and humiliated. She takes a stand; she is not ready to put up with a man who betrays her. Medi Reta affirms that her character never regretted taking that stand because this is typical of men to do what Beno did. “The day I made a stand to be myself - a day I never regretted. Men are men, and I only found out too late” (p. 55). By her decision to leave, Wilma does not allow herself to be fooled.

Child bearing is briefly discussed in this story yet is a very significant issue. This is a woman’s key role in PNG and perhaps Melanesian society. A childless woman feels only ‘half’ a woman. This is clearly expressed by Gumio.

You know, I feel so empty without children. We’ve been trying for the last three years to have a child but to no avail. I want to cuddle and see it grow. It breaks my heart to hear a child cry (p. 56).
A woman is pressured by society to have children. A barren woman is looked down upon. Musa and Gumio are in town. Childlessness there may not be a problem, but it will be if and when they return to the village. While Gumio is sad that she is childless, Wilma is happy she doesn’t have a child. Could she have left Beno or Randy so easily if she had had a child with either of them?

Medi Reta makes another point here. When a strong and steady friendship like Wilma and Beno’s is broken, it often leads to another relationship like that of Wilma and Randy just to find solace. For example,

Randy came into my life just at the right time, and at a time when I was just trying to put the pieces of my life back together. I needed someone then to lend me his shoulders to cry on. Randy was that person (p. 57).

If it is not for sympathy, it is for revenge. For instance, Wilma says why she has a new boyfriend, “I wanted to get even with Beno, my former boyfriend. We had just broken up our relationship” (pp. 56-57). Her hopes are shattered when she discovers that Randy is gay. Wilma’s rebellion against Beno’s faithlessness shows strength but not a completely autonomous feminism, since she seeks support in another male. This inability to be free of patriarchal society leaves women vulnerable and so become potential victims of unsuitable partners.
Betrayal: Vulnerability

In Medi Reta's story we read about a woman's disappointment and betrayal by men she thinks she trusted. At a time when experiences like the one above have led to distrust of men and their friendship, Luddy Salonda presents us with what a good and trusted friend should be. Salonda is a writer who keeps a lot of unpublished material because she cannot find a publishing outlet. One of her poems 'The Saxophone', won the first prize in the 'poetry section' of the PNG National Annual Literature Competition in 1987. Salonda takes a strong position on a woman's humiliation and defeat in friendship.

'Friendship'\textsuperscript{108} presents a meditation on what true friendship should be like. Friendship that is based on love requires good communication. It is knowing the truth about the other, breaks barriers of ignorance and should bring intimacy; it should bring forgiveness. When this happens, the persons involved grow into complete and whole persons.

\textbf{Friendship} (Luddy Salonda)

Such is a friend with whom
Every conversation is:
  A little more discovery of the common
  An unravelling of another coil
  An erasing of another mistake
  A destroying of one more barrier;
Like the dim speck of light
That slowly brightens
To dispel the darkness,

\textsuperscript{108} Salonda, Luddy 'Friendship' unpublished work in author's permission. A copy of the unpublished poems are with me.
Like a drop of dishwash
That sends the greasy film
To the edges,
A good conversation clears as it
Reveals a common whole.

Salonda uses the metaphor of ‘a drop of dishwash’ to make a point that conversation can clear doubts and barriers. In Medi Reta’s ‘Broken Hope’ cited above, depicts betrayal in friendship because of mistakes. Loujaya Kouza’s ‘Tell Me Brother to Brother’ shows one brother asking the other to tell him the truth about his female partner. The male (ostrich) and the female (guria) “cannot agree” (p. 16) because they are different and have different interests. Such relationships make an implicit wish for better (less sexist) male-female relations.

In this next poem Salonda demonstrates what good friendship is not. When the woman comes defeated, humiliated, and unforgiven, she remains oppressed by defeat while giving the man the power to release her.

Defeat (by Luddy Salonda)

I come to you
A dog in submission
The eyes a reflection
Of futile desertion.

Still I come to you
In great caution
Seeking permission
For a reconciliation.

110. Guria is a bird with a beautiful crest similar to that of a peacock.
111. Salonda, Luddy ‘Defeat’ unpublished work with permission from the author.
Tell me is it too late?
I beg in dejection
For your admission
Not your rejection.

Or have the pieces flown wide
For a collection
And a remission.

I come to you
A sinner’s destination
For a confession.

You are my priest
The root of my redemption
And absolution.

Hear will you not
Of my supplication
And pardon me
My transgression.

This woman is likened to a dog who must come in complete submission to the master to ask for forgiveness. She even blames herself. The man is the one whose absolution, approval and acceptance she seeks. He takes the centre position while the woman occupied the margin. The female poet’s use of religious language is significant. A priest is a man who is the holder of divine authority. This shows the woman’s acceptance of patriarchy. The woman’s happiness now relies on the man on the condition that he forgives her. In the same way, Regis Stella argues that Sinob Haia’s (‘Which Way Big Man?’) social and economic statues depends on her husband. “She is very much dependent on her husband. Her social status is in fact determined by the social position of her husband.”

The woman will still base their happiness and future on the man

even if he betrays her or is abusive, unless the woman comes to self-
realization and takes a stand like Wilma in Medi Reta’s ‘Broken
Hope.’ Women have to see a way out of this, which is the way
Salonda’s third poem ‘Journeys’ ends.

This is another powerful poem from the same unpublished
collection. Like the first two, it carries a sad tone of painful
experiences in life’s journeys, but in the end she sees hope for a new
and better beginning. In the first stanza, there are the dualities of
light and darkness which symbolize good and bad, happy and sad
times in the subject’s life journey. In stanza two the person tells of
the unkind roads she has travelled.

Many roads I’ve travelled on
Have been unkind.
Often I’ve
been cut deep
and left wounded,
received blows crunching
and lain fainting,
reached too high
and fallen crashing,
bent too low
and splintered,
stretched too far
and left reaching,
clung too tight
and left empty;

loved too much
and left with many
tears
memories
hurts
long dark hours
(Journeys: Salonda)

113. Salonda, Luddy, ‘Journeys’ unpublished work.
This woman has suffered violence, “received blows crunching and lain fainting.” In PNG, wives do suffer from forms of domestic violence. It is only recently (1987) that the PNG Law Reform Commission declared wife bashing as a punishable crime.

The poem goes on to say that the woman has had high hopes and dreams to be somebody; she has ambitions to be successful in life, but comes crashing. In this patriarchal society, there is little or no space for a woman to have equal opportunities for success as men. Women bend so low their spirit is broken. They have sacrificed themselves for their children, husbands, for their communities. Further, this woman is an example of one who loves a man so much that when he dumps her, she is devastated.

Stanza four expresses that these unpleasant experiences are impressioned in the mind; that she is a captive of those memories.

The mind’s been a stage to
cold darkness,
stone ignorance,
vain assumptions,
foolish pride.
Freedom imprisoned!
(Journeys)

Then the subject sees light at the end of this tunnel of depression and pessimism. She has new hope to break free from this state of physical and psychological oppression and soar to freedom.

fly
On the wings of the wind
On journeys to
Here is a wish to go somewhere where she can be with people who think like she does and who respect her dreams. There is longing to escape from male oppression and be free to be. The dualities like light/darkness; freedom imprisoned/freedom unchained; reaching too high/reaching too low; wisdom/ignorance; sunrises/sunsets; soaring/crashing and emptiness/fullness, demonstrate the issues this person is trying to grapple with in life.

Inadequacies

Freedom is an ideal PNG women are striving for. Here is Sally Ann Pipi Bagita’s story of the ‘Reluctant Bride’. It is about Ikena, a young village woman. Her marriage is arranged by her family to marry a man she does not love. She is given no choice and she cannot run away because her bride price has been paid.

Traditionally, marriages were arranged and bride price paid to seal the relationship between the couple and their family relations. Ikena must obey her parents and in so doing, she becomes a subject of the customs and stays subservient to them. The refusal to marry means that she is ready to defy a cultural system that suppresses her freedom of choice. Ikena is a village girl who is familiar with her

customs yet she refuses to conform to this arrangement. It seems to be an unrealistic protest from her position. However, the writer raises issues of a woman's helplessness: arranged marriages as opposed to freedom of choice and the significance of bride price in this modern society.

Sally Ann juxtaposes the irony of the traditional arrangement of marriage and bride price with full trimmings of a modern western-style wedding ceremony. For instance, the father giving away the bride; a soloist singing "The Wedding"; then the choir singing "Hail to the Bride." The minister begins the service with "In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit" and the congregation respond in Motu (p. 12). In a subtle way, the writer satirizes the authority for choosing marriage partners for young people today.

This story also carries a tone of protest against using women as economic assets for obtaining family wealth, while the woman's choice is not respected. Ikena says, "They have sold me like a prize pig" (p. 12). Her family cannot put up with her refusing the man because the bride price has already been paid. They are ashamed of her non-conforming behaviour. Her brothers beat her up again for that (p. 13). The bride price also makes a woman become the property of the man, she is totally subjected to him. She feels like she is trapped. During the wedding ceremony when the minister asks if anyone has anything against that marriage, no one responds, but she wishes someone would save her. "Idiot! Doesn't anyone want to save me? she thought bitterly" (p. 12). Ikena runs away but her husband finds her. In the end she agrees to accept him as her husband as well as gives in to her family's choice. This can be further
understood as the woman's life not owned by her, but by her family and in a wider sense, by her culture.

Ikena as the catalyst of change, wants to protest against the tradition of arranged marriages. She is muted because no one will listen to her. Instead, she runs away and cries about it. Ikena’s mother - the epitome of the old traditions, commiserates with her daughter’s plight, but she is also helpless. “It was her mother, who was silently sharing her daughter’s unhappiness” (p. 11). She cannot help her; she knows her customs too well to stand up for her daughter. “Her mother showed no reaction at the sight of Ikena’s tearstained face and puffy eyes” (p. 11). Ikena’s mother is torn between loyalty to custom and to her daughter.

“The Reluctant Bride” also presents the traditional and the modern position of women. Ikena represents the modern who puts to question a custom that affects women; their choices and bride price system. Mother represents the subservient, obedient and silent woman, wife and mother. Mother through her passivity may seem that she is colluding with male hegemony. However, she is silent because she feels powerless that her protests will be ignored or if she protests, she will most likely lose her position in society. She has no personal authority to choose; her choice is what her patriarchal community decides.

A woman can run away from problems like unhappy relationships or arranged marriages but she cannot run away from death. Luddy Salonda whose poems we looked at above, foregrounds another
reality that women succumb to; and that is death through terminal illness like breast cancer.

‘When Time Ran Out’\textsuperscript{115} is a story that brings out the tragic facts of civilization surrounding Lucy’s death. Firstly Lucy dies of breast cancer, an incurable disease many women fall victims to. It takes more than a month for results of a biopsy to be sent to her. When she returns to hospital for a surgery, her condition is already deteriorating, yet no urgent attention is given to her. Her eyes turn yellow. "It would take six weeks to determine the cause of the yellowness; fastest would be three weeks through a private surgery. Or she would have to be transferred to Port Moresby" (p. 3).

Secondly, there are not enough doctors let alone specialists and adequate facilities for tests, etc. at the Madang hospital where Lucy was diagnosed and where she later checked in. To train and employ specialist doctors would prove costly. Thirdly, there is lack of information and care given to the public about detecting early symptoms of cancer. Furthermore, there are no facilities adequate for check ups. Fourthly, Lucy is a school teacher for many years. She is still on her feet teaching till the weekend she leaves her school in Wewak to go to Madang with the hope of an operation, when she dies. This shows how little the education department or the country looks after its subjects like Lucy. Then, there is inadequacy in the legal system which should protect the victim or the family from negligence, or side effects of treatment like this one: “They had bag

\textsuperscript{115} Salonda, Luddy ‘When Time Ran Out’, Unpublished work with permission from he author.
after bag of liquid dripping into the patient...The stomach was bloated.” (p. 3).

This story highlights the inadequacies of the government and its system that is ironically set up to protect and care for its subjects. Of course the government cannot deprive death from a person, but it can surely try to prevent it. The irony of civilization is overwhelming. Here is the civilization the colonizers brought, yet left us inadequate to fend for ourselves. PNG is rich with natural and mineral resources, yet the health and education facilities are inadequate while the politicians have a better way of using the 51 million Kina on the International Sandline Mercenaries (1997).

Among the women’s literary texts I have used, there is no novel as yet. There could be many reasons for this, but I believe that for the moment, plays, poems and short stories are easier to write because they are short and take up less time for women to be able to do their other demanding chores. Writing requires discipline and commitment and the discipline of writing novels is still ‘foreign.’

The issues these women raise are about realities closer to home. Even if Brash’s plays give less emphasis on women’s fear, hope’s and aspirations, they speak against injustices, bigotry, and the fear of the loss of our Melanesian way. These issues concern human problems in our society regardless of gender differences. Salonda has a strong theme running through her poems; women are vulnerable. In a simple story, she criticizes the inadequacies of our government. The theme of betrayal also comes out strongly. Then there is the subject
of parenthood and responsibilities. Whatever the subjects of these women's writings, they have made a break in writing.
CHAPTER FOUR

OTHER MELANESIAN WOMEN WRITERS’ WORK

The other Melanesian women’s works I wish to discuss in this chapter are from Fiji, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu. Since Melanesians share similar social conditions and ways of thinking, we might expect similarities to surface in the women’s writings of these countries. One of Papua New Guinea’s prominent statesmen, Bernard Narakobi, asserts there is a ‘Melanesian Way’ of life.\(^\text{116}\)

Having a common background, certain customs are different, but a lot of the sentiments about life and women’s position in the society arise out of largely shared experiences with women in Papua New Guinea.

As in PNG, women writers in the other Melanesian countries are very few, especially compared to Polynesia. From Vanuatu, the main female writer is Grace Molisa. It is useful to note that Molisa is the first female writer in her country who is a publisher (Black Stone Publishing) and has had three books of poetry published: *Black Stone* (1983), *Colonised People* (1987) and *Black Stone II* (1989). There are other writers like Mildred Sope and other up-and-coming ones whose works appear sporadically, and do not exclusively discuss women and their position in society. Young women whose poems and stories appear in *Gong: Young voices from Vanuatu*,\(^\text{117}\) are

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secondary school students who, like Loujaya Kouza when she started writing, have not yet formed an opinion on women's issues. In a school context, students like these are given topics to write about, and in a primary or high school it is not thought proper to question the status quo. Their focus is mainly on the beauty of their land and nature. The subject of the writings of these young students tells us of their limited personal experience of hardship and the social educational emphasis on conformity rather than criticism. This is not a foreign concept, because women in society are expected to conform to norms institutionalized by patriarchal dominance, and school dictates to students what the school sees as important.

Solomon Islands women's writings are from Jully Sipolo (Makini), who was the first female in her country with published books. Other women whose prose and verse appear in *Mi Mere*,118 were encouraged by Marjorie Tuainekore Crocombe to write. They are, Billy Afu, Eva Lingairi, Joy Comstock, Connie Selwy, Lemu Darcy, Nita Boso and Mary Raike. There are others whose work I will mention later. Fijian female writers are Vanessa Griffen (Sri Lankan and Pacific Island parentage), and Teresia Kieuea Teaiwa (Micronesian and African American, but grew up and went to school in Fiji so I treat her writing here as Fijian). The Melanesian Fijian women are Pamela Kacimaiwai, Barbara Verma, Julia Ung, Merelita Varo, Rejeili Racule and Akanisi Sobusobu. Arlene Griffen is known more for her critical work on literature than for poetry or prose.

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FROM VANUATU

Grace Mera Molisa is a role model for young writers in the Pacific. She is one woman who is the first in the fields of literature (although Mildred Sope’s poems already appeared in a collection put together by Albert Wendt in 1975), politics, publishing and university education from her country. Molisa claims that her talent in writing was discovered by chance. “I happened to get into poetry by accident.” She wrote in response to a document she saw on her desk one day concerning how tourists were treated by host countries. The piece got published in the Vanua’aku Party paper. Someone commented that it sounded poetic, so Molisa gave it a verse form and that became her first poem - Vatu Invocation.

Heavenly Father
omnipresent
in London
Paris
and Canberra

Look down
with mercy
upon us
your naive
and gullible servants
doomed to the colonial legacy of
watching
passively from the periphery
our prime resources
raped
for gratification of
corporate greed

121. Ibid., pp.74-75.
and
individual
pleasure seekers.
(Vatu Invocation, p. 66)\(^22\)

This is part of a long poem of prayer, of supplication with sarcastic implications for colonial powers of Britain, France and Australia exploiting the country. She pleads with the tourists and expatriates in general to respect Vanuatu. In her position as a politician, Molisa speaks as a custodian of the country's traditions and a curator of the country and people. 'Vatu Invocation' clearly takes on a political voice of protest against dominance by foreign powers. This sentiment recurs throughout her other poems such as 'Victim of Foreign Abuse', 'Newspaper Mania', 'Insurgent Rebellion.' Molisa writes from several positions - as an ordinary ni-Vanuatu person; as an educated person; and as a woman. Taking a political stance for example, Grace says that the poem 'Vatu Invocation' "was my way of giving Vanuatu's statement on tourism as it was to be after independence: our policy of controlled tourism, of hoping that the sort of tourist we would get into Vanuatu would be an intelligent tourist."\(^{123}\)

In a personal communication I had with her I mentioned to her that her poems carry a strong political tone. She responded, "I write about life as it is. If my poems are political it is because politics affect me directly by strongly impacting on my life."\(^{124}\) The way Molisa started writing tells us how issues that are important to individuals

\(^{124}\) Molisa, Grace, from her personal letter to me, 10.6/97.
propel them to write. The fact that she had the support of her male counterparts to write more, is worth taking note of. This means that although it is significant for Molisa as a woman to make a breakthrough in voicing her opinion in a male-dominated society, it is probably more important to get this backing up from the dominant sex. She not only has a voice, but also maps out her position as the first female MP and the first Vanuatu woman to complete a university degree.

Molisa’s writings emerged soon after Vanuatu’s independence in 1980. Strong nationalistic sentiments are evident in her poems which generally support independence and self-reliance often shown by criticising various kinds of dependency; for instance, in print media (‘Newspaper Mania’, pp. 14-17). Nationalism is sounded in ‘Vanuatu.’ This poem is a patriotic anthem of a new nation wanting to be recognised as autonomous.

Ageless Vatu
primeval source
creative forces
ad infinitum

Vanuatu
our land
in perpetuity
our people re-born
for eternity.
...

The birthpains
of Nationhood
reverberate
by year
to temper
with duress
active democracy
As a woman, Molisa takes the stand of an archetype mother (Mother Land) who beckons her offspring to struggle together for Statehood. However, assuming this role also puts her gender in a vulnerable position that can easily become a victim of plunder and rape as the colonials did to Vanuatu. In ‘Victims of Foreign Abuse’, we can see how the female poet engenders her country as ‘female’ and is open to exploitation:

Her natives
stateless
on their own land
while exploiter
Colonisers
milked her dry
of prime resources
and derived
benefits.
(Victims of Foreign Abuse, p. 12).

While still bidding for nationhood, ‘Black Stone’ is a poem that describes what Vanuatu is. It is the rock symbolizing the birth, strength, beauty, wealth, richness of the nation of Vanuatu. This is a totemic emblem of the new nation, solid as a rock, a fortress reliant on its own pre-contact resources (p. 8). The ‘black stone’ is a symbol of the geographical reality of Vanuatu; consisting of volcanic islands and the black basalt rock from the deep molten magma spewed by
volcanoes. In cultural terms, 'Traditional Leaders' (pp. 9-11), tells of the rich traditions; the wisdom of chiefs, 'big men' and leaders who know how to rule. The traditional leaders are philosophers, teachers, judges and well versed in customary laws; advocates, and great listeners. They know how to foster harmony, thus, Molisa despises the British and French white supremacy that causes cultural disintegration. She blames the colonialists for turning Vanuatu into a condominium, creating confused boundaries.

Vanuatu
suffered
the unique
horror
of a Condominium
Colonialism
for seventy years.
(Victims of Foreign Abuse, p. 12)

This female writer's strong dislike for colonialism poses a problem, that in celebrating tradition against white colonialism, she values the male-centred culture that she otherwise seeks to change.

Even after independence, there is still a strong presence of foreign control of Vanuatu through the newspapers (print media), and through some Ni-Vanuatu educated and politicians. Molisa calls this 'neo-colonialism.' For instance, 'Newspaper Mania' (pp. 14-17), implies that the modern forms of communication - the cultural heritage of the literate industrial societies - deprive the ni-Vanuatu of their own traditional oral forms of communication. The print media presents, dictates and imposes ideologies of the 'coloniser' while shaping public opinion.
“Metropolitan journalists” seem to misinterpret the life, environment and Vanuatu politics which could be better reported by local journalists. Molisa questions how many ni-Vanuatu reporters are employed by foreign newspapers (p. 16). By this she comments on how the foreigners think they possess knowledge and consider the colonized ‘other’ who is ignorant and therefore needs to be dictated to by the colonial Metropolis. Molisa ridicules ‘freedom of the press’, noting that although the people are free to express what they feel in newspapers, the expatriates still own the press and therefore decide what should or should not get published.

‘Insurgent Rebellion’ (pp. 18-22) is a poem of rebellion against the Colonial masters. They are portrayed as “Master exploiters” who are subjugating the people. The rebellion marks the renaissance, the moment of self-realization of Melanesian consciousness.

The renaissance
of melanesian consciousness is
the spiritual release
of a people oppressed
pre-empting the common
recognition and allegiance
to the sole and singular
goal of state sovereignty
succeeding self determination
and political autonomy
(Insurgent Rebellion, p. 20)
Molisa inserts a significant date in her country’s political history - May 1980, and alleges that the rebellion that year was instigated by self-interested foreigners exploiting the naivety and gullibility of minds closed to the treachery of intellectual domination and cultural colonialism.

(Insurgent Rebellion, p. 20)

The self-interested foreigners here are shown to be the French who wanted to sabotage independence and develop the New Hebrides into another France. Yet the natives can never be French; they are always second-class citizens and noble savages. This is the dilemma of the colonized people.

Champagne and quality never meant for second class citizen, demi, or franco-what once a Frenchman always a Frenchman but second class off-white half-caste, non-white never French never can whatever francophone or forte the franc and vino blind so totally. Black men never learn that serpentine stealth and venomous vituperations cannot shed for them their skins.

(Insurgent Rebellion, p. 22)

For the women who exist in a society that is already suppressed by patriarchal traditions and France and Britain, this poem entails multiple colonization.
Grace Molisa's poems so far fall into two categories: national political poems against colonialism and 'internal' critiques of the misuses of power in Vanuatu society. The first poem in which she takes on a female position in society is in 'Custom' (pp. 24-25). It tells how the word "custom" is manipulated, misappropriated and bastardised by the ni-Vanuatu men to keep oppressing women in society. Custom is:

> conveniently
> recalled
> to intimidate
> women
> the timid
> the ignorant
> the weak
> (Custom, p. 24)

'Marriage' (pp. 26-28) exhibits a strong pro-female position. Marriage is like "grafting of a male to a female." She implies that the male is a parasite that flourishes from the female. The 'parasite' analogy symbolizes the husband who eventually takes over the woman's life and completely controls the woman-wife. From a female's point of view, discouraging marriage, as suggested at the end of the poem, seems to be a way to avoid male hegemony. Marriage "should be the last thing in life... for women of good sense" (Marriage, p. 27-28). The binding in marriage imprisons the woman's spirit. Molisa makes an interesting point that women should:

> choose lovers
> and have children
> forfeiting
> the dictatorship
> of the Husband (Marriage, p. 28)
This writer uses the same political language here as she uses in the ‘state’ poems. She suggests that women can still procreate out of wedlock. This calls for a revolutionary action against male ‘dictatorship’, but it could have more detrimental social and moral consequences on the society. With the last stanza, the Melanesian writer assumes a Western feminist position. For instance, her female disposition at this point equates to the feminist position of Olive Schreiner seen through the female protagonist Lyndall. Lyndall refuses to marry because she does not want to be tied down. However, she does have a lover as Grace Molisa implies, and falls pregnant with his baby. Thus, she escapes ‘dictatorship’ of a husband, but bears his child.

By thinking like this, Molisa enters into the Western feminist discourse because it is not the Melanesian way to deliberately find a lover and get pregnant just for the sake of having a baby, then refuse to marry. For the Melanesian woman, this is a shameful thing to do. Yet the writer takes a brave step forward to suggest a way to overcome male oppression of women in the institution of marriage in this male hegemonic society. This is a call for the Ni-Vanuatu women as well as the Melanesian women to take a stand against their subordinate position. However, men still control the women insofar as they are sperm donors whom women depend on in order to exercise motherhood.

Molisa's pessimism about marriage carries on in 'Estrangement' (p. 29). Political language is again used here. Marriage entails power politics and it is the husband who controls.

Power
smothers
feeling
kindness
concern
appreciation

....

On the Altar
of popular
political will
lie
the ashes
of
Love.
(Estrangement, p. 29)

'Litany of the Righteous Wives' (pp. 30-31) depicts the submissive, timid and humble image and nature of Ni-Vanuatu wives who are always the supporting figure in the background yet never get acknowledged. This poem again tells how women's position is determined by the male figure in the family.

Submissive supporters
deriving their glory
from officious position
(Litany of the Righteous Wives, p. 30)

Molisa uses religious motifs in this poem to foreground the irony and hypocrisy of men going to church of Sunday yet ignoring Christian values of respect for and loyalty to their wives. The wives
sing a litany of things men do wrong against them, yet women forgive them.

Father forgive them
For they know not what they do!
(Litany of the Righteous Wives, p. 31)

By using Jesus' prayer on the cross, Grace Molisa is saying that like Jesus, women also suffer from the treatment they receive from their husbands. But the call to forgiveness on the grounds of ignorance seems to let the men off the hook too easily. In 'Pregnant Blues' (pp. 43-46), this suffering is compounded by the pains of pregnancy and child bearing which biology has bestowed on the female gender. Despite such physical, emotional and psychological setbacks for ni-Vanuatu women, Molisa pays tribute to three women who took precedence in equal participation in development and nation-building. 'Ladies of Precedence' (p. 47) is a poem about the courage and strength from Leitak and Mary, and Hilda Lini (pp. 26-27) who stand out as role models for women for generations to come. Praising these women is an important exception compared to Molisa's overall submissive image the Ni-Vanuatu women.

The ill-treatment of Ni-Vanuatu women greatly concerns Grace Molisa. She continues on this subject in Black Stone II and more exclusively in Colonised People. In Black Stone II modern men, educated, employed in politics, private or government sector, become alienated from their families and lose their sense of responsibility, hence further disadvantaging the wives, mothers and women. For example, 'Modern Political Status' (p. 14) tells of how demanding
an elevation in man’s political status is. It causes a chain of changes (mostly negative) to significant people and things in his life.

Elevation
is status
and self-esteem
change
the man
his family
home
preference
knowledge, outlook
practice and power
relationships
(Modern Political Status, p. 14)

’Hot Shot Lament’ (p. 15) highlights how a man loses interest in his wife; his responsibilities and loyalty to her as he gets promoted and gains status and power on the corporate ladder.

Elevation
to eminence

... The wife
a legally
and morally
contracted
partner
a burden
a hindrance
an embarrassment
(Hot Shot Lament, p. 15)

Similar sentiments surface in ‘Coming of Age’ (pp. 18-20). Men contradict their marriage vows; they do not keep to the good things they promised in marriage. The husband promises the wife a secure future and:
... Early in the proceedings
he laid the framework
nuptial security
and domestic contentment.
...
he promised loyalty
support, companionship
even his life
to lighten the yoke
of post-partum depressions.

Then as time goes by, his true colours surface.

His goal achieved
his solemn vows
like ghosts in antiquity
vanished his consciousness
(Coming of Age, p. 18)

He starts complaining that his wife is getting too fat during pregnancy. He has no time to look after her when she is sick, nor help with the children. He has social engagements to attend and she is spoiling life for him. For the man, it is convenient that the woman did not exist as lamented in 'Non-entity' (p. 23). The woman has no significant position in society; she has no rights, she is only a slave; “misis i nating” (p. 23). However if she exists, her discursive space is mapped out, her existence is controlled, limited, oppressed and enforced by the customs and norms of the society. This comes out strongly in the poem ‘Delightful Acquiescence’ (p. 24).

Everybody loves
a self-effacing
submissive woman
...
Vanuatu loves
Grace Molisa partly blames women for effacing themselves. She brings out the point that foreign women enjoy their freedom while the indigenous Ni-Vanuatu women are still oppressed. "Non-native Women citizens are often free from the forces oppressing Native Ni-Vanuatu Women. They are usually identified with the Coloniser. They can walk into any job of their choice as can be seen today."  

If modern educated Ni-Vanuatu women try to surpass the barriers of oppression and acquiescence, they are "clouted" (p. 24). It is a societal phenomenon to accept women who are "self-effacing, acquiescent and submissive"; to be otherwise is a breach of custom with embarrassing consequences. As a result, 

Half of Vanuatu
is still colonised
by her self
(Delightful Acquiescence, p. 24)

Being a female writer, Molisa voices the importance of the 'Village Women' (p. 29). They are often ignored and more oppressed because they are passive, but they equally contribute to the community as the modern educated women. Through her poem 'Village Women', Molisa gives voice to the 'voiceless' women in the village, handicapped by illiteracy and ignorance of the modern world and its ways.

Vanuatu village women work day by day year by year.

Vanuatu village women carry their country on their shoulders.
(Village Women, p. 29)

Black Stone and Black Stone II strongly voice the oppressive, submissive position of the Ni-Vanuatu women. Colonised People arouses and provokes responses from not only Ni-Vanuatu women, but also Ni-Vanuatu men, the society and the Melanesian race.

Like Trinh T. Minh-ha who claims that women writers are ‘triply bound’¹²⁷, Grace Molisa says women in Vanuatu and Melanesia are still colonized and “multiply oppressed” compared to men.¹²⁸ ‘Colonised People’ (pp. 9-13), the poems of this collection show a myriad of ways in which women are oppressed. The writer brings out sexist dualities. For example, women are represented as brainless and unintelligent, but men hold and keep knowledge. Men are free, women are not; men rule, women follow; men are masters, women are servants and so on. There are hypocrisies where:

Vanuatu supports Liberation Movements for the Liberation of Colonised people.

but

Vanuatu Womenfolk half the population remain colonised by the Free men of Vanuatu.

(Colonised People, p. 9)

'Integration of Women' (pp. 14-15) calls upon the nation, the society to recognise the existence of women and acknowledge their significant contributions to society. It calls for women to be integrated into the society. 'Women's Labour' (p. 16) is another powerful poem detailing the usual domestic chores and hardships women go through. This time, Grace Molisa pleads with the men to share responsibilities with women.

Other than the Biological processes all other life-sustaining chores burdens and processes ought to be equally shared by the male and female of the Species
'Democracy' (pp. 17-18) is really a call to the government and the policy makers to be true to the spirit and real meaning of democracy to bring freedom to the oppressed half of the population. It also debunks male hegemony and calls for men to be mindful of the womenfolk. 'Freedom' (p. 24) reverses the critique of reality to present the ideal that they yearn for. Vanuatu women are represented as lacking:

Freedom  
of the mind  
to think  
to express  
to live  
to exist  
(Freedom, p. 24)

Women are shown as their own worst enemies, as I pointed out in an earlier chapter. Grace Molisa discusses the same issue in ‘We of the Never Never’ (p. 25). Women are never ready to help themselves and each other. They do not help those women in politics, they oppose the others’ cause in the workforce. That is why women cannot overcome oppression unless they work together.

Not ready for this  
not ready for that  
we oppose  
for opposition sake  
we do  
what our men tell us  
we oppose other women  
through the high office
Grace Molisa’s voice is one of protest against white colonialism and ‘local’ colonialism. Ni-Vanuatu women are represented as a very suppressed group and need liberation. Despite her sometimes ambivalent position when she tends to support the traditional system, Molisa’s concern for women’s less valued position in society is forthright.

Mildred Sope, a Ni-Vanuatu woman had her poems published before independence, before Grace Molisa. Her poems do not lash out forthrightly as Grace’s, yet they carry this air of questioning the two divisions of the nation, thus indicating the condominium state colonized by Britain and France. Subramani comments that Sope was one of the pre-independence writers who “aimed at mediating between the oppressed reality and man’s capacity to change it. There is no doubt that Donald Kalpokas, Mildred Sope and Albert Leomala helped to communicate the predicament of the New Hebrides, before it became Vanuatu, to the rest of the South Pacific.”¹²⁹ The poem ‘Motherland’¹³⁰ invokes independence in this State of division and confusion because land is important to Mildred. For example,

Why are there two divisions
Why do you bear two different people
Can’t they all follow your footsteps

Where are they all leading us to?  
(Motherland, p. 3)

This writer’s other poem ‘Friend’ (p. 4) sounds the same urgency for revolution, for freedom for the New Hebrides people (the colonial name then for Vanuatu). Sope provokes the colonized people to question the status quo.

I read the book  
‘Revolution in a Revolution’  
And I wept silently for you  
You never question the status quo  
My friend your disease is apathy  
(Friend, p. 4)

Sope’s position as a writer before Vanuatu’s independence is significant. She writes more for the country in general than specifically for women. However, by being a female, she carries a female voice in the push for independence. Her concern is firstly for independence and freedom from foreign colonization. Her position is no different than the pre-independence writers of PNG. Only in ‘To My Daughter’ (p. 10) does Sope write from the position of a mother, a woman. As a mother who feels close to her daughter, she becomes an archetype mother homeland Vanuatu as portrayed in ‘Motherland.’

The differences in the themes of the different women writers are significant. While the young female students write about the beauty of their islands, Mildred Sope writes about divisions in New Hebrides then, and a call for revolution and independence. Grace Molisa, more exposed, and modern in her opinions, writes from the post-independence period and the political arena. She heavily
criticizes the influences of Colonialism and the other forms of colonization of women in Vanuatu. Molisa is the feminist 'voice' for freedom and equality for women, the issues that affect her most today.

FROM THE SOLOMON ISLANDS

Solomon Islands women's works have only recently started being published. In a book of poetry published in 1975 contributions were only from male writers.131 Jully Sipolo (Makini) is the first Solomon Island woman to have collections of her work published, Civilized Girl (1981) and Praying Parents (1986). She "broke new ground not only because it was the first published work of a woman, but also because, in content, it was the first attempt by any writer to comment seriously on the lot of women in Solomon Islands."132 Subramani affirms that in Civilized Girl, Jully's feminist anger is more astringent and uncontrolled.133 This is evident in the theme poem of this collection - 'Colonized Girl' (p. 21). Jully criticizes girls or women who mimic Europeans in their dressing, hair-style and wearing cosmetics.

Cheap perfume
Six inch heels
Skin-tight pants
(Civilized Girls, p. 21)

133. Subramani, Op., cit., p.58.
She asserts that in the course of imitating and mimicking, these Melanesian women are left with confused identity, because this is part of civilization.

Who Am I?
Melanesia Caucasian or
Half-caste?
...
What do I call myself -
Mrs Miss or Ms?
(Civilized Girl, p. 21)

The worth of the modern civilized world is put to question in ‘Spinning’ (p. 2) in which there are “Wars, disease, confusion.” Civilization ironically causes dystopia more than the utopia it promises. ‘Sister’s Lament’ (p. 3) is full of remorse over losing a chance of a university education, hence the prospect of a good job and a comfortable life. One silly mistake, “a sip of beer” and the dream of a lifetime is thrown away. Again, there is the sister, whose moral values and obligation to herself and her family are marred by elements that contribute to civilization. The irony surfaces again; by trying to be that civilized girl in taking a sip of beer, she loses her future in modern civility.

‘Okinawa Fishermen’ (pp. 5-6) really speaks for the women against sexual and economic exploitation by foreign workers. For example,

The Okinawa fishermen...
Expensive radios
To impress the local lasses
...
But there are half-castes now
Planted by
Okinawa fishermen
(Okinawa Fishermen, p. 5)
The presence of the Okinawa fishermen contaminates a pure race and language, thus creating confusion in identity and communication. Who is to blame? Sipolo thinks the government is to blame. She represents women as the 'land' where the men can come and plant their seeds. This leaves a woman vulnerable to exploitation.

‘Working Mother’ (p. 7) presents the dilemma of a modern working mother who does not have time for her children. This is another aspect of a civilized girl; the alienation of a mother and her children. Civilization causes the inevitable; change. Salome Palmer Karibule, another working mother, writes about the same concerns. ‘Forever Working’, ‘What is a Mother’, ‘Work is...’ and ‘Workaholic’134 (pp. 104-105) all centre on the modern working mother who is engaged in a ‘double’ workforce. She leaves home to go to work and when she returns home, there is more work waiting for her - her household chores. This is the reality of women in the workforce today.

The gates swung open as I entered,
Dogs barked excitedly signalling
a welcome home,
My child leapt for joy from the verandah,
School is over, mummy is home.

After a moment of hugs and kisses,
A quick sip of cool fresh water,
I began my endless hours of
playtime and household chores,

School is over yet I am continuously working.  
(Forever Working, p. 104)

As a woman, Sipolo advises other women to be careful of men who are hypocrites. They pretend to be so caring but after a while, their bad sides surface. This is the same sentiments Grace Molisa shares in ‘Coming of Age’ Sipolo warns women not to take a man at face value. This is a strong stand against being victims of men’s brutality on women. While she depicts men as wild beasts, women become prey.

You show your true self after the wedding  
Fangs bared, claws exposed,  
A wolf in sheep’s clothing.  
(The Hypocrite, p. 9)

In ‘A Man’s World’ (p. 10) Sipolo’s powerful poem depicts double standards in behaviour for men and women in her patriarchal society. A woman has no place in the man’s world. A woman’s position in the Solomon Islands society, like in a lot of Grace Molisa’s poems, is secondary. This is clarified here:

My brother can sit on the table  
I mustn’t  
He can say what he likes whenever he likes  
I must not back-chat  
....  
Carry out my love affairs behind his back  
Custom allows him to thrash both of us if caught  
But he can carry on in front of me  
That’s his privilege  
(A Man’s World, p. 10).

The woman gets second-class treatment because of what she is: a Woman. In Jully Sipolo’s second collection of insightful poems in
Praying Parents, she still shows concern for women’s issues. She owes her success to her parents who brought her up in a warm family environment. She pays a special tribute to her Mother in the poem ‘To My Mother’ (pp. 4-5). Here she shows the strength, wisdom, love hardworking and self-sacrificing nature of a mother, hence giving status to the roles of mothers and women in society.

Giving status to women is not enough, as Sipolo goes on to give them a voice in ‘Mi Mere’ (I am a Woman) p. 8. Women used to be only seen and not heard, but through a female radio announcer, a woman’s voice can be heard throughout the nation. Being an announcer, she has a privileged position to be heard, thus she has the power to stimulate, probe and influence the minds of the public, even if she is “Heard but not seen!” (p. 8). This is the kind of voice Melanesian women writers have - the “announcer” voice. Their ‘voice’ is read but they are not seen.

Poems like ‘Peace Train’ (p. 17) and ‘Peace’(p. 17) and ‘Nuclear Waste’ (p. 23) are significant in this book because they attest to the international discursive space Sipolo’s voice has begun to occupy. These poems were influenced by her involvement with the Peace meetings in Prague, Sydney and Manila, when speaking for Nuclear Free Pacific.¹³⁵ By doing this, Sipolo re-crosses into the political arena: women’s movements for quality of life entail both local and global matters.

More distressing circumstances of women are portrayed in ‘Roviana Girl’ (p. 26), ‘Husbands’ (p. 27), ‘Widow’s Thoughts’ (p. 28) and ‘After Five Kids” (p. 20). The girl from Roviana is a victim of cheap economic exploitation. Her ancestral land was bought by trinkets and tobacco; now, girls are bought with cheap commodities like coffee and rice. The inhumane thing about this is that the girls are used as a piece of property in an economic transaction. This is similar to the PNG bride price system as discussed earlier.

‘Husbands’ lists the different kinds of husbands a woman can have, ranging from an unemployed to a house husband to a politician. These are realities that many women are confronted with. ‘After Five Kids’ sees a husband slowly drifting away from family responsibilities and his wife. Perhaps the answer lies in the ‘Widow’s thoughts’; to lose a husband is to gain freedom, self esteem and be her own boss.

Now that you’re gone
I’m free as the wind
Blowing here, blowing there
I’ll let down my hair
And paint the town.

...Now that you’re gone
I can breathe freely
The millstone around my neck
Like a leash around a dog’s
Was cut when you left.
(Widow’s Thoughts, p. 28)
In the most recent anthology of poetry and prose from Solomon Islands *Raetemaut*\(^{136}\), young female students have their first appearances. Their focus covers the nostalgic affection for their homeland Vanuatu, the environment and its beauty, people and relationships. For example, Naomi Ata writes about ‘Nature’, ‘Beauty’ (p. 75) or Ellen Caramia’s ‘Sunset’ (p. 74); Natalie Tadiki’s ‘Moonlight’, ‘Our Trees’ (p. 73); ‘Parents’ and ‘Dad’ (pp. 102-103). These are sentiments for the simple, basic but important things in life. Being students, it is understood that their writing topics are chosen for them, incidents of which we see in students’ writings in Vanuatu and PNG.

Some female students write about more ‘serious’ issues like Jennifer Wate's “My Natural Hair” (p. 136). It talks about modern women changing their curly hair into straight European hairstyle. But all this is for a price,

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{My expectations turn backward} \\
\text{Headaches} \\
\text{Grey hair} \\
\text{Fallen locks} \\
\text{Alas, for my baldness} \\
\text{Oh, my natural hair.}
\end{align*}
\]

(My Natural Hair, p. 136)

Modernity and changes triggered by civilization does not stop with hairstyle, but permeate society and its lifestyle. One activity is the night-club culture which Jully Makini (Sipolo) brings out in ‘Friday Night Dance at Gizo Club.’ There is a lot of drinking and

\[^{136}\text{Maka'a, Julian; Kii, Hilda and Crowl, Linda (eds) Raetemaut: Creative Writing from Solomon Islands, SI Writers Association/ USP Centre, SI/ Institute of Pacific Studies, Honiara/Suva, 1996.}\]
merriment which eventually ends up in a fight over girls (p. 6). In this we find Jully’s recurring theme of civilization. Night clubs are part of civilization, but our Melanesian people seem to have their own version of being ‘civilized’ at a club; it means having no control or limits to drinking, men harassing women and ending with a fight.

Women writers in *Mi Mere* talk about issues that affect women in society ranging from education and change, men, remembering the past, mostly childhood and Women. This book has given a chance to the women to voice their views through poetry and prose on things that matter to them, as persons, women, mothers, wives, sisters and aunts. Part One: *Edukesin an Sans* (Education and Change) foregrounds the realities that as more women get educated their ways of thinking, behaving, dressing or even their ideals change. This creates a problem of ‘education gap’ among the old or uneducated and the young educated. The animosity between the educated and the uneducated is depicted in ‘He is Mine’ Randy’s parents choose a village girl (Seli) for him because she knows all the customs. They do not approve of his choice of marrying a university graduate, Tetu. These differences can be seen in Seli’s letter to Tetu.

“You bloody Westernised girls,” she read. “You do not know our custom. You would never make a good wife for Randy! You do not know our custom. You do not know how to motu (prepare stone oven for cooking) or work in the garden. You good-for-nothing; do not try to steal Randy away from me.” (p. 6)

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Ellen Fera’s story ‘Anita’ (pp. 11-14) brings out another aspect of education. It empowers women to have freedom of choice and dare to do things they would not otherwise do in the village. Anita the protagonist, promised her village boyfriend (also educated) that they would be friends forever and probably marry. However, she is introduced to an American man and he introduces her to another way of life, more western. They go to the movies, have picnics and she likes this new lifestyle. She falls in love with the foreigner and eventually tells her village boy that their relationship is over. This story shows that education also broadens one’s scope of knowledge and life outside of the rural village setting. For girls and women, it is significant. For some girls, change is ‘smooth’ but for others like Umataru,\textsuperscript{139} it is slower than she would have liked. She is still confined by customs and family norms that she cannot have the boy of her choice and go out the way she wishes to.

Some uneducated girls are looked down on if they begin to dress themselves up like educated or Western women. It seems that they have not made that ‘rite of passage’ to qualify to groom themselves, apply make-up and look good. When the ‘Local Girl’\textsuperscript{140} dresses up she is called a ‘Copy Cat’ just as Jully Sipolo’s ‘Civilized Girl’ calls her, a ‘mimic’ and some PNG male writers call her a “European.” These critical and negative attitudes towards women are more a case of anti-colonial support for traditional cultural identity or conservative village support for “morals” and family ties getting in the way of personal liberation for women.

Part Two of *Mi Mere* reveals how women portray men. “My Choice is...”\textsuperscript{141} and ‘I Can’t Wait any Longer’\textsuperscript{142} make a man unblemished in the eyes of the girls who love them. Men seem lovable yet others are unbearable. For instance, ‘Big Brother’ (pp. 25-27) depicts a brother - a man - who does not respect customs and his parents. He is too proud and pig-headed and violent because he is educated. ‘Dad’ (pp. 31-33) is a picture of violence, terror and abuse towards the children and the wife. ‘My Husband’ (pp. 36-37), a university graduate, is not changed by education at all to be civil and respectful to his wife. It seems education does not guarantee ‘civil’ attitudes and manners.

...  
My husband  
You took me out of school  
...  
You beat me, ill treat me  
...  
You boss my life  
You boss what I wear  
(My Husband, p. 36)

Some brutality towards a wife is fatal, as depicted in ‘Discouraged Mother.’

The broken bottles  
Destroy your pregnant mother  
With her broken balloon  
In the box  
(Discouraged Mother, p. 107)

Part five is the focus on issues affecting women. A lot of them have a common thread running through them: the subordinate oppressive place of a woman in society already sounded at length by Grace

\textsuperscript{141} Lingairi, Eva ‘My Choice is...’ in *Mi Mere*, Op., cit., p.24.  
Molisa, and the PNG women writers. Housework in itself is good, but the attitudes of male hegemony in confining the woman to domestic chores makes it burdensome as in ‘Women and Housework’

‘A Woman’s Lament’ (98-99) strongly portrays the woman as an economic asset to the family, but her life and happiness mean nothing. Her value is seen in the amount of money she will bring to the family when her bride price is paid.

Oh my father,
Oh my mother
When will you learn?
See what you’ve done to
my big sister.
You care more for the
shell money,
You ignore my feelings
(A Woman’s Lament, p. 98).

‘Vari Haba’ (married) is the first poem in this collection that mentions this aspect of life; that a married man actually asks a woman for an extra-marital affair. The answer from the woman is negative.

Sorry,
I am not the perfect substitute,
To pour water on you spells
of drought
(Vari Haba, p. 99)

In this case, the woman comes out strongly as someone with moral principles; to stand her ground and not give in to his flattery seen in

143. Darcy, Lemu ‘Women and Housework’ in Mi Mere, Op.,cit., p.107
the beginning of the poem. She changes the stereotype mentality many men have of women; that women are sex objects.

Despite the movement towards personal gender liberation, the general consciousness of these poems shows that the life of a woman in the Solomon Islands is as Grace Molisa puts it, still “colonised” by male patriarchal attitudes and by women down-playing themselves and accepting themselves as second to men. Eva Linairi’s poem ‘To My Family’ is a plea to forgive her and accept her back into the family. “She expresses the feelings of a despised daughter: feelings rarely felt by sons.”

FROM FIJI

Fiji is the cross-road of the Pacific; a melting pot of races - Melanesians, Polynesians, Asians and Caucasians. This accounts for the multi-racial society that accommodates writers like Seri, Raymond Pillai, Vilsoni Hereniko, Pio Manoa, Vanessa Griffen, Pamela Kacimaiwai, or Teresia Keieuea Teaiwa; just to name a few. The issues they write about, present some, if not all their complex cultural realities. Since my interest is on the works of women writers, I will discuss only some of them.

In Albert Wendt’s edition of Some Modern Poetry From Fiji published in 1974, there is an absence of women writers, although Vanessa Griffen already started writing fictions for Unispac between

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144. Editors in Mi Mere, Op, cit., p.97.
Griffen is part European, Pacific Islander and Sri Lankan and this reality already maps her as a voice in Melanesia with a lot of foreign influence. The evidence of this is seen by the names she gives her protagonist character in ‘The Visitors’ - Molly Peterson. Her stories are set in the modern, town setting and brings out the daily problems and realities of town-dwelling women.

Molly Peterson portrays a typical housewife whose constant worry is to clothe, feed and educate her children. Her story revolves around her washing. From where she is, money is the ‘most important’ element in raising a family. Molly sits listening to a women’s program on the radio advertising mandarins and advising women to buy at the local market.

Then Molly began to think of all the things that they needed and other household problems. They all boiled down to one thing--money. “Kids’ school fees coming up soon...and going up all the time too.”

Griffen brings out the point that it costs more to raise many children than to have two like her neighbour Annie. “Annie was better off than her. She didn’t have many children and her husband didn’t spend so much money on booze.” (p. 9) This mention of her husband’s drinking habit is a motif common to all the writing we have looked at.

In this story, we also learn that Molly’s husband is away working on a construction site in Sydney. Molly comments “Overseas, they pay a

148. Ibid., p.7
lot. Sometimes $100 a week. That’s a lot of money.” (p. 9). Then she thinks again. From her son’s experience, she has learnt that things are more expensive in Australia. By this simple analysis, the female writer opens up the discussion of the cost and standard of living in Australia as being higher than Fiji. This somehow justifies the cheque of only $20 Molly’s husband sends her, yet he could have spent most of it on alcohol.

Vanessa Griffen deftly brings out the character of Molly Peterson. She doesn’t complain that the $20 is too little, but immediately goes through the list of things she will spend it on; school fees first, something nice for the kids - Sunkist oranges, electricity bills and perhaps a lot more other things at the Sander’s grand 50th Anniversary sale. She takes it as a gift, a bonus. She tries to make a dollar stretch. She is not wasteful, as she eats leftover taro (dalo - common root vegetable in the Pacific), sacrificing her own comforts for the well-being of her children.

The writer brings out some more characteristics of women when she engages Molly and her neighbour Annie in local gossip. Vanessa uses these two women as a window to the neighbourhood, where we are exposed to the events, sights and sounds that make up the society. Gussie next door comes home drunk and hits his wife; they are always bickering; the brown dog almost bites Annie’s son; someone’s daughter is pregnant; kids and new-born babies abound in the neighbourhood.^[149

^[149 Ibid., pp.9-10.
The three visitors who come to visit Molly are there to bring 'good news' to her. The first two are European and members of a religious group who came to proselytize, and the second is the postboy who comes to deliver a registered mail with the $20. Molly Peterson does not welcome the 'good news' of the first visitors but she does the second. The former preaches "Love", "Peace on Earth", etc. which are too idealistic. However, the latter message of "Love" and "Peace" is manifested in the little bonus cheque. The religious visitors also show Molly's religious indifference; she doesn't go to church anymore, but she sends her children to Church school.

Just as Vanessa Griffen unfolds thoughts, emotions and events revolving around one person - Molly Peterson, in 'One Saturday Morning' she tells the story of how Teresa's life is centred on family obligations - Fijian way. Although her mother is part-European, she (mother) does not neglect the Fijian custom of an extended family, looking after the aged and the sick. Teresa's grandfather comes to live with them and he is sick. Mother attends to him while Teresa takes up the responsibility of minding her younger siblings. When grandfather asks for crab, mother sends her to the market in town. While in town, she meets her friend Ruci who is going to the movies and asks Teresa to come with her. Teresa refuses because she has to do her duty and return home. She gets home with the crabs but unfortunately her grandfather dies before she gets there. Griffen's stories are appreciated for their skill at bringing out shifts in personal mood, but they also are important for their depiction of the details of everyday realities in women's lives.
The author's voice in this next story 'A Double Life' is where she takes up the first-person narrator's position. Vanessa poses as a married man who goes back to university on an in-service program. She gets into the mask of a man to articulate emotions of Fiji men who are known not to bare their emotions. "Sometimes I have many worries, though no one would think so, to look at me, and I never let my friends know. We are not supposed to have these traits, us Fijians. Happy go lucky we are called, at least by tourists that pass through."150 Men should not feel this way because to show emotion is equivalent to weakness and this is a trait in women. "It is harder if you are a man, for we permit our women to be more voluble in their emotions."151

This female writer has to wear a man's mask in order to unmask the emotional side of men, thus she voices the weakness of men who are silenced by their macho patriarchal beliefs. Men under the cover of yet another 'mask' - alcohol, do unleash their emotions. This is similar to the 'painted and unpainted mask philosophy' Steven Winduo formulates. The happy-go-lucky face is the one that is the "painted mask" and the "unpainted" one is the one that shows when the man is drunk.152 Like her other stories, the thoughts, fears and worries of an older married and working man going back to university, finds himself having to work hard to prove to himself, to the younger students, to his friends and his lecturers, that he is still competent, sharp and sane. The narrator is terrified of the library

151 Ibid., p.11.  
(Griffen, p. 12); respects it (p. 12); admires the young students (p. 13); became bored and sleepy in class (p. 14). The narrator feels that what they learn and discuss in lectures and tutorials seems to be detached from the realities of living in the world outside of school.

In these works of Vanessa Griffen, we find the unusual adoption, not of an ‘outside’ accusing voice, but of a sympathetic ‘inside’ analysis of private concerns. In the female characters, we see the worries of a mother trying to raise, clothe, educated her children. “Some 50,000 school-aged children are not educated every year because their parents cannot afford school fees. Over 70 per cent of the labour force earn less than $5000 per annum or $96 per week.”

If these statistics have any significance on poverty in Fiji, the characters in the story have every reason to worry and Vanessa Griffen brings these worries out in her writings through her characters. Unemployed women, housewives who depend totally on their lowly paid and perhaps drinking husbands, will identify with Molly Peterson (‘The Visitors’).

Among the Fijian women writers, Teresia Kieuea Teaiwa of Banaban and African American parentage gives a wider flavour to the issues raised by her poetry. This collection Searching for Nei Nim’anoa is a search for her roots as Teresia puts so appropriately,

This collection of writing chronicles my search for emotional and intellectual roots. But given the mixed nature of my identity, it has been a project marked by

frequent displacements and replacements, detours and retours.\textsuperscript{154}

Every poem in this book has been dated and a location given: Suva, Seattle, Santa Cruz, Honolulu, Oxford, Paris and Suva. This signifies that this female writer is highly educated and has travelled widely. She is not confined to a single national frame in her quest for identity, taking on an international voice.

Culturally, however, Teaiwa grounds her work on the Gilbertese female mythical figure - Nei Nim’anoa, who navigated using the stars and charted the course for her seafaring ancestors from Samoa to the Gilbert Islands. Nei Nim’anoa is the great archetypal mother who stands as a symbol for Teaiwa’s search (p. 67).

She takes a strong stand against men for their abusive and violent nature towards women. In ‘To men who have been my brothers and friends’ (p. 28) Teresia’s narrative voice speaks for women who have been violated.

In my pain and righteous anger at
Men who have been my (so-called) lovers
I shut you out.
...

Locked in a
room full of men
who were batterers, molester, fuckers
...

Facing my pain and my righteous anger...
The pain of your mothers, sisters, daughters
and Lovers...

their righteous anger  
whether expressed, repressed or suppressed.  
(To Men Who Have Been my Brothers and Friends, p. 28)

‘Leaving Lovers: they said I was cold’ (p. 24), depicts a woman who is strong and able to make a free choice of her male lovers even if they misunderstand her. When she leaves her last lover, he says she is cold because she is gay. She replies, “I’d rather be cold than ambivalent” (p. 28). This woman is in an international discursive space to be able to exercise free will, unlike in a traditional society such as PNG. The ‘Unwed Mother’ displays issues more close to home. Since these poems are inspired by personal life events, they are more realistic than just abstract opinions about treatment of women. Teaiwa talks about her being pregnant from a Fijian, who already has a child with another woman and is soon to marry her. Teaiwa cannot tell her family that, and especially when they are strong practising Catholics. The Fijian man tells her, “No one will marry you, Terry...You’re too educated” (p. 70). This shows that Melanesian men do feel inadequate and threatened in relation to highly educated women. This poem also shows that education can empower women to change the stereotype expectations and attitudes towards women. Teaiwa ‘transgresses’ her customs, religion and her family by being a single mother. She writes,

I wrote to the father of my child to tell him that I liked being single and would probably never settle down. He wrote back to tell me that I wouldn’t be “single” with a baby, and would HAVE to “settle down” one way or another....

A counsellor told me once that she didn’t think I would make a good mother because I don’t like being clung to
in a relationship. She didn’t get that it’s clinging adults that I can’t stand.
(Unwed Mother, pp. 71-72)

Perhaps this is the kind of response Grace Molisa wants when she says that women should find lovers, have children but not marry.155

‘For Salome, Because Your Name Means Peace’ (pp. 12-13) is a symbolic and mythical poem which depicts the Mother earth and Father sky. Men fly while women have feet and they belong to the land. Therefore every girl child born belongs to the land. She becomes the solid figure that lives through wind, rain and storm. She is the symbol of peace. This is a strong feminist position.

Barbara Verma, an indigenous Fijian’s poem ‘Dear Wrinkled Old Man’ urges an aging man to pass on his knowledge to the younger generation.156 This implies that traditional knowledge is important to her and she does not want to see it lost. Pamela Kacimaiwai is another indigenous Fijian. Her short story ‘The Marginal Man’ talks about Asikinasa who is ostracized by his community because he is independent and promotes individualism. He builds his house on his piece of land away from the main village. He runs a successful trade store and grows vegetables to sell. Meanwhile, the village corporate trade store breaks down. They accuse Asikinasa of sorcery. One day the chief’s son dies and the villagers hold him as the prime suspect. However, after police investigation, he was found to be not guilty. The next day found Asikinasa’s store burnt down. Kacimaiwai sees that the man is despised because he wants to be

different and free from customs that control his freedom to exercise his own mind. The writer implies that this brings conflict upon a society which is community oriented.

Julia Ung’s short story ‘Will Ever the Palms Beckon to Me?’¹⁵⁷, shows personal conflicts of a girl (Muriam Taka) who is accepted to do high school in New Zealand. She is attached to her homeland and she is going to miss the sea, the breeze, crabs and her family. But Muriam also thinks of the possibilities of a good job if she goes to New Zealand. It entails learning a new way of life. Muriam sees her leaving home as a test of whether she loves Fiji enough to be lured back once she has completed her studies. As an indigenous writer, Ung offers the Fijian girls an opening to leave the tradition that subjugates women, but she also poses a test for loyalty to that tradition. While Ung paints a rich picture of Fiji, Merelita Varo depicts the opposite in ‘A Poor Christmas Day’¹⁵⁸ An old poor woman does not have food for herself and her granddaughter on Christmas day. She earns little money by selling fish and crabs.

Rejieli Racule tells of how the popular Fijian mats are made. Nita, the character in the story ‘The Gift’,¹⁵⁹ helps her grandmother make the tapa-cloth. Grandma is the custodian of the traditional knowledge and by working with her, Nita learns. It is the women who make the cloths and mats. In this story, we see the importance of non-formal education conducted by an older woman. This gives

¹⁵⁷ Ung, Julia ‘Will Ever the Palms Beckon to Me?’ in Third Mana Annual of Creative Writing, Mana Publications, Suva, 1977, pp.34-35.
¹⁵⁹ Racule, Rejieli ‘The Gift’ in Third Mana Annual of Creative Writing, p.66.
some status to women. Racule’s other short story, ‘A Marriage’\textsuperscript{160} depicts a drinking husband who is violent and abusive towards his wife and children. He expects his children to do well in school, but he cannot feed, clothe or care for them. At such a time, the wife stands alone to care for the family, yet her well-being depends on the husband.

Akanisi Sobusobu’s ‘The Taboo’\textsuperscript{161} is a depiction of the traditional male hegemony and control over the society through taboos. The central character in the story is a boy (Manasa) who seeks to avenge his mother’s death upon the village warrior, Setareki. This female writer chooses a male character to avenge the unjust murder of the female character. As a woman, she will be breaking a taboo if she questions why the mother is accused of bringing death upon her family. For a woman in a strong male hegemonic society in Melanesia to question male authority, is anathema. Therefore, the avenger has to wear the mask of a male, as shown in some of the female writers’ works earlier. Akanisi Sobusobu is seeking for liberation from the taboos that oppress women and use them as scapegoats for male weaknesses. This is shown by the witch doctor (the male custodian of hidden knowledge) blaming the woman for breaking a taboo and upsetting the ancestors. When Manasa’s father is killed in a tribal war, his mother is blamed, therefore it is just that she too is executed.

We see that the Melanesian writers - Kacimaiwai, Verma, Ung, Racule, Varo and Sobusobu, focus on the village and the traditions

\textsuperscript{160} Racule, Rejieli ‘A Marriage’ in Third Mana Annual of Creative Writing, p.66
and therefore carry the voice of the traditional society threatened by change and possible loss of traditions. The writers with mixed racial background obviously move away from the traditional space into an inter-racial society, even operating from an international framework. For these women, Vanessa Griffen and Teresia Kieua Teaiwa, have multiple voices: Fijian, Polynesian, Micronesian, East Asian, European, Educated or whatever they choose to be. The women they represent are those in the modern urban setting. The 'international' women tend to be more liberated from the traditions. However, the more alienated women get, the more they search for personal identity like Teresia Kieuea Teaiwa.
CONCLUSION

It has been discovered in the previous chapters that the women writers of Melanesia not only voice their oppressive positions in society, but also criticize political affairs, corruption and other things that affect their lives and their communities. Although some themes such as women's subjugation, power and control over women are similar throughout, slight differences can also be seen among the women writers in PNG, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu and Fiji. While PNG, Solomon Islands writers bring out the aspect of bride price as a form of exploitation of women, Ni-Vanuatu and Fijian women make no mention. In the institution of marriage, a lot of other forms of male control are exercised and women become dependent on male status. Some even mention domestic violence and lesser rights of women.

The Papua New Guinean male writers define a woman's role as wife and mother, consequently reflecting the society's image of women. They also resent change and modernity because it allows women to be liberated like European women. This shows in the heavy criticisms women get for dressing and behaving like European women or even for associating with expatriate men. Gender is swallowed up by race in the name of postcolonial patriotism. PNG men would prefer to maintain the patriarchal traditions and customs because they give men power. Once this status quo is questioned by women, men feel threatened. Texts also represent women as sex objects who therefore easily become targets of male desire and of physical and verbal harassment.
While PNG men have these negative images of women, the women in their writings, do not seem to subvert them. PNG women’s attention is not drawn consistently by every writer towards how they are treated in society. Instead, writers are more concerned with issues that affect the general population. Injustice, corruption and misappropriation of public resources by male leaders (big men) in power, rate as main concerns. By not subverting the male representations of women, the women are effacing themselves, thus further subjugating themselves to male dominance.

Male dominance and the treatment of women as second-class citizens is a tragic reality in PNG, but a struggle for equality in the workplace is a cause ‘big women’ (those in public offices) like Josephine Abaijah\(^\text{162}\), Margaret Loko\(^\text{163}\) and Dorothy Tekwi\(^\text{164}\) are vocal about. But the issue is not strongly taken up in PNG women’s literature as it is in Grace Molisa’s Vanuatu poems. Betrayal of women by two-timing male macho figures is a recurring motif, but a little ‘under-reported’ when compared to what happens to women in reality. While Melanesian women acknowledge that this happens to villagers and secretaries, Teresia Teaiwa also asserts that being educated does not make women immune to exploitation by men. Hence Melanesian women have a long struggle before they can be liberated from male oppression.

\(^{162}\) Abaijah, Josephine was the leader of the Papua Besena Movement in the early 1970s. She was also the recent president of the National Council of Women and elected to parliament 1997. She was fighting for equality.

\(^{163}\) Loko, Margaret holds an executive position with Steamships Co. She is an activist with women’s affairs. She also struggles for equality and wants to run for MP and “give the male MPs a run for their money”.

\(^{164}\) Tekwi, Dorothy, a Social Welfare Officer and very much interested in the welfare and development of women. She ran for parliament in the 1997 elections in PNG, but was unsuccessful.
From Vanuatu, Grace Molisa sees the oppression of women in her society in the same terms as the oppression and colonization of her country by expatriates. She shows this by using the same political language in her poems for women’s subjugation. She therefore asserts that Ni-Vanuatu women are multiply colonized. The direct way Molisa speaks affirms her strong involvement in politics. She no longer occupies the relegated subservient domestic position most women in Melanesia find themselves in, but holds a public position. Unlike many women who speak but are not seen, she is in a position to speak and at the same time be seen.

The Melanesian women writers’ works studied here show that the women in their traditional space do not see male oppression as a problem. They accept it as part of custom, thus they are self-effacing. As more women get educated and are exposed to ‘liberated’ positions of women from the Western world, they see the traditional patriarchal society as oppressive. Yet these women are caught between the quest for personal liberation in modernity and a national identity defined in terms of traditional culture. Not all educated women write about gender issue. Nora Vagi Brash does not particularly write about the womenfolk, but as a woman, she exposes the follies and moral deficiencies of the patriarchal society. Jully Sipolo highlights how the more women embrace freedom, the more they lose their Melanesian identity, yet this is the tradition that continues to marginalize them. Thus, their positive quest becomes a dilemma.
Vanuatu women writers, Grace Molisa and Mildred Sope strongly support their country’s independence. Josephine Abaijah (first woman representative in the first House of Assembly in 1973)\textsuperscript{165} and Nora Vagi Brash are the only ones who seem be the pro-independence voices. PNG women’s concerns are more on their existence and development. They need to be first of all liberated from ‘ignorance’ to attain a better quality of life, before they pursue general feminist issues like the quest for equal participation in the labour market.

While few women writers are able to voice the concerns of the majority of voiceless women in society, it is hoped that more Melanesian, especially Papua New Guinean women be liberated to voice their realities through creative writing hence, subvert the stereotype images the patriarchal society has of them. It is also hoped that all Melanesian women will be able to have more voice in the day-to-day events of their families and societies. However, in order to build confidence to speak, Melanesian women first of all need to be liberated from illiteracy. They need to be exposed to an alternative way of life so they can know the ideals they are struggling for. If they do not know what freedom from oppression is, they will not be able to aspire after it. While the silent majority of women live their lives, it is important for the minority who write, be able to observe and voice the experiences of all Melanesian women.

\textsuperscript{165} Abaijah, Josephine \textit{A Thousand Coloured Dreams}, Dellasta Pacific, Mount Waverly, 1991.
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