currently reflected in legal recovery of some rights over land, forests, and seas can also be found directly in a celebratory story like Marewa Glover’s “A Song for a Tattooed Man,” in the straightforward everyday of a poet’s encounters as in Brian Potiki’s poems, or in the complex self-mockery/self-assertion/satire of cultural politics in Patrick John Rata’s “My First Speech in the United Nations,” the energy of which is reflected in the “performance”-style experiment with text as voice. There’s also work from Briar Grace-Smith, Hinewirangi, Roma Potiki, Rangi Faith, a dramatic story mixing the tough and the comic from Linda Tuhiwai Te Rina Smith, and extracts from Patricia Grace, Mere Whaanga, and Alan Duff.

Those widespread readers of Mānoa who are not familiar with the field of Māori writing will get a good cross-section of its modern English expression that will whet their appetite for further reading; and that’s what such a collection is for.

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“When I was born my father had four wives. My mother was number three. She was young and this was her first marriage. Before I was weaned, she died giving birth to my brother. My father’s first wife, who recently lost her baby, was my wet nurse. She is the only one of my father’s wives I call ‘Mother’. I have always called his other wives by their first names” (3, 11). Thus begin both the Introduction and the first chapter of Anyan’s Story, the life story of a Tairora woman who was born sometime in the early 1920s, a few years before Westerners and their culture began to filter into the eastern New Guinea highlands. When she was weaned, Anyan moved to Abiera village where a maternal uncle and his five wives raised her and their other children. Anyan proved to be an adventurous and strong-willed individual, often roaming far from home in haunted, enemy-filled woods and tall-grass country, visiting the government station in Kainantu for the first time when she was about eleven years old, and successfully resisting consuming a first marriage to a man she barely knew and didn’t want for a husband when she had not yet menstruated. A young woman in 1943, Anyan distinguished herself from the majority of her peers—male and
female—by moving to wartime Kainantu, marrying a man from the coast who cooked for a white doctor, and learning Pidgin. Subsequently, Anyan acted as interpreter for the doctor, the local kiap (government official), her own people, and eventually Virginia Drew Watson. With the exception of her first child—born in 1946—all of Anyan’s children were born in Kainantu. Making infrequent and brief visits to Abiera village, Anyan raised her children on rice and tea and other store-bought foods (in addition to sweet potatoes and yams), made certain they went to school and did their studies, dressed them in western-style clothing, and took them to western doctors when they were sick. In 1952, Anyan made the first of several airplane trips to the coast. Visiting her husband’s relatives, she took her first canoe and car rides and walked the streets of much bigger towns than Kainantu. She did not, however, like the heat or the food and so was happy when each of these trips ended and she could return to the highlands. By the time she died in the mid-1970s, Anyan had voted in western-style elections, was at home in the Euro–Pan Papua New Guinean culture of Kainantu, and expected that her children—through their formal education and different experiences—would progress even farther than she or her husband in the soon to be independent, although at that time still western-dominated, Papua New Guinea society and culture.

Anyan told her life story to Watson in initially unsought after but copious bits and pieces during the two and a half years (1953–1955 and 1963–1964) Watson spent in New Guinea doing anthropological fieldwork alongside her husband, James B Watson. As Kainantu and Papua New Guinea are now very different places—socially, politically, and physically—Watson’s retelling in the “ethnographic present” is sometimes jarring to the informed reader. It is however, understandable, as neither the author nor her former husband returned to New Guinea after their 1963–1964 field trip. A more serious defect is Watson’s framing of Anyan’s story solely as an example of successful acculturation and adaptation to change. This is both anachronistic and disappointing. Anachronistic because of the absence of such contemporary perspectives as critical feminist theory and self-reflexive commentary that might further illuminate Tairora gender relations and Tairora women’s apparently strong position in traditional society as well as require an exposition of the nature of Watson’s relationship with Anyan. As it is, Watson begs the question of why she waited three decades to write Anyan’s Story, stating only that “There has been time to assess the flexibility and resilience of this one person during her passage from life in a culture in which metal tools were unknown to life in a society where advanced technology was a given” (vii). And she is unforthcoming about how she compensated Anyan for her work as Watson’s interpreter, telling us rather obscurely that “We arrived at a mutually satisfactory arrangement, attested to, I believe, by the fact that it endured for so long” (x). While it is probably unreasonable to expect otherwise, it is disappointing
that Watson does not place *Anyan’s Story* in the context of Papua New Guinea highlands ethnography in general or more particularly in the theoretically (and academically) rich fields of gender studies and women’s life histories. The absence of any bibliography other than a short list of supplementary readings (primarily James B Watson’s works), the fact that Watson never taught or worked with anthropology students, and the dust jacket blurb referring to Watson’s work as a prehistorian of the Eastern Highlands of New Guinea and curatorial affiliate at the University of Washington’s Burke Museum all suggest a possible unfamiliarity with and disinclination to tackle contemporary cultural anthropology and theory in either Papua New Guinea studies or more generally.

All carping aside, *Anyan’s Story* has much to recommend it. So, too, does the author. Virginia Drew Watson did her fieldwork and doctoral dissertation at a time when few professional anthropologists were advising their female (or, for that matter, their male) students to write books about the lives of individual women other than as examples of women’s supporting social roles as wives and mothers. As a wife and mother herself, Watson surely knew about “supporting roles,” having received her PhD from the University of Chicago seventeen years after her husband received his. The title of her 1965 dissertation, fittingly enough, was “Agarabi Female Roles and Family Structure: A Study in Sociocultural Change.” In giving us *Anyan’s Story*—a singular full-length portrait of a Papua New Guinea highlands woman from an earlier generation—Watson fills in a much-needed vantage point on traditional and changing Papua New Guinean societies. We learn, for example, that in the past there were female warriors in Tairora society, that women and girls bled their noses in order to strengthen themselves for life’s rigors, and that parents encouraged their daughters to make lifelong female friendships in addition to close relationships with their brothers, for protection against male depredation such as spousal abuse and gang rape, but also as bases for exchange and a degree of independence in their relations with husbands and in-laws. Such views on the self-conscious and active involvement of Papua New Guinea highlands women in their societies are only now being put forth. That a woman might come and go between village and town as freely and as much for her own ends as Anyan did, as early in the European contact period as the 1930s and 1940s, reflects a reality that is incompatible with stereotypical views of the “ submissive and oppressed” highlands woman. Finally, because it reads well and is not larded down with theory and comparisons, *Anyan’s Story* is ideal for use in undergraduate classes, so long, of course, as the instructor fills in the necessary context and notes the book’s unstated and undeveloped theoretical contributions.

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