

Decolonising the Mind: The Impact of the University on Culture and Identity in Papua New Guinea, 1971–1974, by Ulli Beier. Canberra: Pandanus Books and Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies, Australian National University, 2005. ISBN 74076-137-5; xvii + 173 pages, figures, photographs, glossary, bibliography. A\$40.91.

I often asked whether Ulli Beier would write a book that would tell us all about his role as a catalyst in the emergence of Papua New Guinean (PNG) literature in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The question is now answered with his recent book, *Decolonising the Mind*. This is an appropriate title that reveals all that Ulli and his wife, Georgina, worked so hard to see happen in Papua New Guinea—especially their tireless commitment to see that Papua New Guineans use literature and arts as weapons of resistance to colonialism. That the chosen title comes from the work of the renowned Kenyan writer and social critic, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o (*Decolonising the Mind*, 1986) is also apt, as it leads us to consider the strategies that Papua New Guineans employed to decolonize themselves, even before independence arrived. Under Ulli Beier’s guidance, young Papua New Guineans used writing, drama, poetry, and arts to capture national sentiments and to promote PNG cultures.

Decolonising the Mind is not just a memoir that recalls the Beiers’ time in Papua New Guinea; it also tells of the activities and people with whom they associated during the period leading up to independence. It covers the

vibrant period of literature, art, performance, writing, and publishing at the University of Papua New Guinea (UPNG). This was a time of quick planting and harvesting of the literary and artistic talents that the Beiers stumbled into, waiting as it were to be nurtured, given impetus, and made to bloom. From subtle nationalism to fiery anticolonial resistance; from imagining one’s own community to living in one that is about to be independent—those were the moods of the period. Those Papua New Guineans that the Beiers influenced—such as Albert Maori Kiki, Vincent Eri, Kumalau Tawali, Leo Hannet, Mathias Kawage, Akis, Taite Aihi, and Ruki Fame—have all shown that the arts and literary culture have a purpose to serve the people of Papua New Guinea.

The main thread of the book is about the impact of the university on culture and identity in Papua New Guinea between 1971 through 1974. Ulli wants to tell us his story about what happened in between those years. After spending many years working to promote the art and literature of the Yoruba people of Nigeria, the Beiers came to Papua New Guinea in September 1967. Here, Ulli took up a UPNG lectureship—excited with the possibilities of embracing, nurturing, and promoting a rich artistic and literary culture.

One of the first Papua New Guineans they met on their way to the country, late at night in the departure hall of the Brisbane Airport, was Sir Albert Maori Kiki. Ulli recounts that encounter: “On the plane we had a brief conversation. His name was Albert Maori Kiki, he said. He had

been a patrol officer to the Australian administration, but he had recently resigned from that position in order to become the secretary of a new political party. I asked him what part of the country he was from and he said: “Well, you wouldn’t have heard of it, it’s a very small place on the Papua Gulf called Orokolo” (22). Such openness on the part of Maori Kiki led Ulli Beier to help Kiki publish his autobiography, *Ten Thousand Years in a Lifetime* (1968), a book that would trigger a wave of excitement, not only in Papua New Guinea but internationally as well. The second autobiography that Ulli had a hand in was Sir Michael Somare’s *Sana* (1975). (Somare served as PNG prime minister from independence in 1975 until 1980, from 1982 until 1985, and from 2002 to the present [2006].)

Ulli Beier also passionately recounts his work with pioneer UPNG students, then referred to as the “boys’ university.” He discusses establishing a relationship with Allan Natachee, the Papua “Poet Laureate” (12–19), developing the UPNG creative writing course, and starting a publication series called the Papua Pocket Poet series (43–50). From the creative writing class, Ulli recalls: “One of my first and most fascinating students was Vincent Eri. He was a mature student, 31 years old, who had been an education officer. He had twice visited Australia and had been to a conference in Teheran. In 1966, he was sent to Malaysia to represent Papua New Guinea at a writer’s conference. This experience inspired Eri to write his first and only novel, *The Crocodile* (51–60), which was also

Papua New Guinea’s first novel, published in 1971. Then, in later years, Ulli was inspired to establish the Institute of Papua New Guinea Studies.

Ulli was supported by his wife, Georgina, on his mission to accomplish this dream—or perhaps it is better considered an awakening. Georgina provided mentorship and guidance to artists, sculptors, and textile designers in the studio behind their house. This was the beginning of what later would become the National Arts School, an icon of an era rich with artistic flowering. The Beiers also helped to foster the work of pioneer artists at the Center for New Guinea Creative Arts and formed a close relationship with the center’s Mathias Kawage, who became the most original and prolific of all PNG artists and brought contemporary PNG arts to the world. The book is dedicated to John Gunther, first UPNG vice chancellor, and to Kawage.

Ulli also devoted his attention to theater, and joined Peter Trist and Frank Johnson in the founding of the University Drama Society (which also included Professors Clunnies Ross, Leo Hannet, and Arthur Jawodimbari). The first plays were Bernard Shaw’s *Saint Joan*, Euripides’ *Alcetes*, and a sketch in Pidgin entitled, *Em rod bilong kago* (*Road of Cargo*) by Leo Hannet (staged in April 1968). Later plays, however, were written by peoples of Papua New Guinea—Rabbie Namaliu’s *The Good Woman of Konedobu*, *Cannibal Tours* (later turned into a brilliant film by Dennis O’Rourke), Arthur Jawodimbari’s *The Sun*, Kumalau Tawali’s *Manki Masta*, and of course Ulli Beier’s two plays *They Never Return* and *Alive*

(written under the pen name M Lovori).

As a second-generation PNG literary artist, I could ask for nothing better than to read a book that celebrates the artistic, literary, and performative arts of Papua New Guinea. Even more, this book is from the person who has had everything to do with the emergence and recognition of these art forms outside the country. The memoir, at least for me, serves as the link between the pre-independence era of literary and artistic culture and the present. I find the memoir written with passion and honesty; and, as expected, it is a book rich with vivid recollection and dedication to the arts, artists, writers, and people of Papua New Guinea. It gives these pioneer artists the place they deserve in PNG history. Most important of all is the generosity and good will of Ulli and Georgina Beier in promoting PNG arts and culture. We couldn't ask for more, could we, than such a splendid book, which is also clearly written and contains memorable photographs and other images—other signatures of the Beiers' influence.

Thank you, Ulli and Georgina Beier, for leaving us a legacy that has transformed us and continues to be the yardstick that we measure against and build on in our continued attempts to develop our own artistic and literary arts, from that time till now.

STEVEN EDMUND WINDUO
University of Papua New Guinea

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Savannah Flames: Papua New Guinean Journal of Literature, Language and Culture, Volume 5, edited by Steven Edmund Winduo. National Capital District, PNG: Melanesian and Pacific Studies (MAPS), University of Papua New Guinea, 2004. ISSN 1561-7807; ii + 137 pages. Annual subscription K25.00 (individual), K30.00 (institutional).

The beautiful cover of *Savannah Flames* anticipates the variety of offerings inside. The journal includes a range of prose and poetry, interviews and reviews, creative and critical work. For me, however, the distinctions between the genres blur; I see poetry in the prose and stories in the poetry. Regis Stella admits in the interview with Aundo Aitau that the major influence on his writing was “listening to myths, legends, stories, songs, and other traditional aspects of culture” (7). This ancient method of enculturation continues to inspire storytellers from our region, and much of the creative writing in this collection retains that oral flow and flavor.

Vincent Warakai's critical essay on Sia Figiel's work is a provocative foray into the deliberately outrageous sexual politics of the Samoan author, and refers to the Margaret Mead–Derek Freeman controversy, adding to a “story” started over a hundred years ago.

The short prose pieces in the collection reveal very different worlds for readers who reside outside of Papua New Guinea, reminding us that the home of *Savannah Flames* is a place of myriad communities: linguistic, social, cultural, geographical, artistic,