

Looking Thru Those Eyeholes: Re-historicizing the OndoBondo Poster Poems

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CONTENTS

I. "PRE-HISTORY"	1
II. 50,000 YEARS IN THE LIFE	6
III. UPNG & THE AFRICAN CONNECTION	10
IV. THE QUEST FOR A NATIONAL IDENTITY (Part 1)	20
V. INDEPENDENCE, THE MELANESIAN WAY, ET AL	23
VI. THE SOUTH PACIFIC FESTIVAL OF THE ARTS	27
VII. READING THE POSTERS	31
VIII. CONCLUSION	56
IX. NOTES	59
X. BIBLIOGRAPHY	62

On first glance, there is not a great deal to indicate the provenance of these pieces: From the copyright information printed at the bottom of each poster, one learns that the series was produced in Papua New Guinea and co-edited by Prithvindra Chakravarti and Russell Soaba. The posters are numbered sequentially, indicating serial publication at the rate of roughly one per month between July 1979 (no. 1) and April 1980 (no. 10 and no. 12). Several list the National Arts School among their credits. There is no number 11 in the Pacific Collection holdings, but the dates and sequential numbering indicate that it should exist, and would have been printed circa April 1980. The poems are published in a variety of languages—Tok Pisin (a.k.a. Papua New Guinean Pidgin-English), English, French and various combinations of the three—by writers ranging from relative unknowns to some of Papua New Guinea’s most celebrated, including Soaba, Nora Vagi Brash, and Regis Stella. These writers are paired with a variety of artists, several of whom would also become well-known in Pacific art circles, particularly Joseph Nalo (figure 4) and Mathias Kauage (figure 5). The posters represent early works in the careers of most the poets and artists. At twenty-nine, Russell Soaba was the most established of the writers, having already published a novel and a collection of poetry. Of the visual artists, Nalo and Kauage were then the



Fig. 2: “National Anthem”
Text: Renagi Lohia
Illustration: Warrey Apporo



Fig. 3: “Ypela Meri I Senis Hariap Pinis”
Text: Baluwe Umetryrifo
Illustration: Titus Tilley

most prominent of the group: Kauage had his first exhibition in 1969 (Rosi 323); Nalo had been making art since the mid-1960s and in 1978, roughly a year before the first poster was made, he became head of the Painting Department of the National Arts School (Rosi 419).

Because they are silk-screened, many of the posters also have a tactile quality—the layering of inks necessary to print multiple colors, one at a time, creates an uneven surface. They are an altogether different kind of illuminated text, and one meant for an altogether different type of reading — that is, they are geared toward mass public display and consumption; they are not just to be read but to be *seen* ... and are such that, even if one *can't* read (or is unfamiliar with the particular language used),

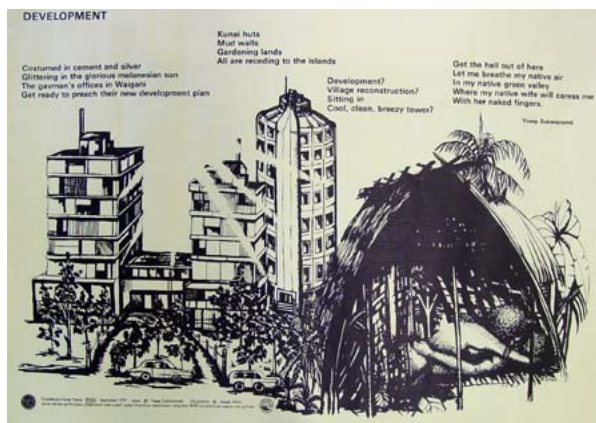


Fig. 4: “Development” Text: Yosep Sukwianomb
Illustration: Joseph Nalo

the message is generally clear. Still, though they are included in the library’s Online Public Access Catalog and available for anyone to examine in person, the posters remain largely invisible. I am a librarian in Hamilton Library’s Pacific Collection: In the last five years, the posters have not been requested once for viewing. Nor, for that matter, have they received much in the way of interest from Oceanic scholars beyond Hawai‘i’s shores. This is perhaps not surprising, as the posters have become a rare commodity: WorldCat, a database that lists the holdings of more than 9,000 libraries worldwide, shows them as existing in only one library in the world—that is, at UH-Mānoa.¹

Indeed, in terms of the official canon of Pacific literature, the poster poems are virtually non-existent. There has been no sustained critical exploration of these works. To my knowledge they are mentioned only once, in passing, in any of the several bibliographies that cover Papua

New Guinean or Oceanic literature (Goetzfriedt 27). In fact, I have found only three mentions of them in *any* academic context. A 1994 book chapter by Penelope Schoeffel (369) reprints Baluwe Umetryrifo’s poem “Ypela Meri I Senis Hariap Pinis” (figure 3) as one example of the ways in which Oceanic women are expected to be keepers of traditional culture. A 1995 article by Laura Zimmer-Tamakoshi (117) in the journal *Ethnology* briefly cites Mary To Liman’s “Bia Botol Longlong” (figure 6) as evincing a woman’s perspective on the effects of colonialism and modernity, though it doesn’t include the poem’s complete text. And, finally, Evelyn Ellerman’s (223) 1994 dissertation, *Literary Institutions in Papua New Guinea*, notes the existence of the series as a whole but doesn’t delve into the individual poems. The anthology *Nuanua*, which reprinted Soaba’s “Looking Thru Those Eye Holes,” vaguely cites the original source as “PNG poster series” (Wendt, *Nuanua* ix). James’ *PNG Women Writers: An Anthology*, which reprinted To Liman’s “Bia Botol Longlong” does not credit the original source at all. In all of the cases cited above, when the text of the poem is reprinted, it is done so without the accompanying illustration.

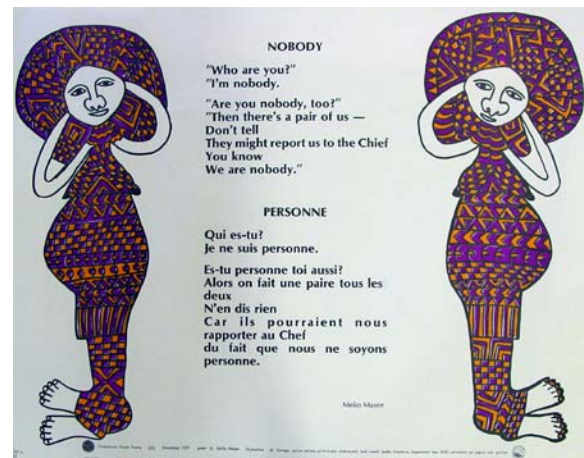


Fig. 5: “Nobody” Text: Melio Masen
Illustration: Mathias Kauage

And hence the rationale for this paper. I am a librarian who specializes in Pacific materials. I work in an institution of cultural memory, in which my colleagues and I attempt to simultaneously preserve and make widely available the accumulated knowledge of (and about) Oceania. These dual responsibilities—to preserve and make available—are occasionally at odds with each other. On the one hand, I fully support storing the posters under the conditions

described above: Left hanging on a wall and minus climate control, the inks used to print these pieces would have long since begun to fade. Even so, I acknowledge that archival storage utterly decontextualizes the posters; without that context, the posters, if not entirely stripped of their meaning, run the risk of being mis-read. It is also clear that their current existence—housed in a way that keeps them largely outside the public consciousness—was not their intended fate. These are public works of art; they have a story to tell, and that story remains relevant. This paper is thus meant to return these pieces to their historical context, and in the process to highlight their importance as sign-post(er)s marking a specific point in the development of Papua New Guinean literature. It is my contention that their existence signals a turning point in PNG literary production, at which writers were not only addressing a broader range of subjects in the wake of independence, but were also creating new means of distribution following a four-year period in which publication of books and journals had virtually ceased.

To accomplish these goals, I will first outline the circumstances that led to these posters—the how and why of them—and in the process use this historical context to illustrate how these works may be read as multiple texts. It is my further contention that, in their multiplicity, the posters not only illustrate a specific set of forces shaping early post-independence PNG literature, but also hint at the ways in which Oceanic writing can and does



Fig. 6: “Bia Botol Longlong”
Text: Mary To Liman
Illustration: Joseph Nalo

reach beyond the margins of the printed page and into “proto-literary” forms that extend back hundreds if not thousands of years.

In undertaking this project, I acknowledge that Pacific literary criticism is contested terrain: The debates over who can or should write about indigenous literature—as well as what (and how) “western” literary theory applies to Oceania—are ongoing. For example, in summarizing western critiques of Oceanic writing, Hereniko and Schwarz (56) assert that, “Again and again, we find this inability to empathize, to see history and writing through the eyes of the colonized. The result is a review that is often superficial and ethnocentric.” Meanwhile, in talking about the uneven application of critical theory in the Pacific, Steven Winduo (quoting Paul Sharrad) notes that, “It must be kept in mind that ‘the lack of sizable and home-grown’ critical tradition and criticism ‘has meant that the process of importation leaves much room for eclectic borrowings and academic abstractions’ to theorize Pacific literary culture” (*Unwriting Oceania*, 602).

These conversations are vital to the growth of Pacific scholarship and Pacific literature itself. At the same time, there are many longstanding schools of critical thought that could be used to deconstruct, categorize or otherwise analyze Papua New Guinean literature². Indeed, this paper clearly owes a debt to the work of Ferdinand de Saussure and his successors in the field of semiotics, dealing as they do with the ways in which meaning is determined by context. In the end, I feel it is most productive to place primary emphasis on commentary and critical theory generated from within Papua New Guinea, in particular via the writings of Regis N. Stella, Steven Winduo, and Russell Soaba. Stella and Winduo have themselves already synthesized a great deal of western theory into their own work, and along with Soaba are uniquely placed to comment on the posters: All three have lived the history of which they speak. In addition to the

works of these writers, I have attempted wherever possible to highlight the critical thinking of writers who engage directly with the Pacific, including Albert Wendt, Epeli Hauofa, and Paul Sharrad. When appropriate, I have also noted the work of those western theorists or schools of thought that have directly impacted the creators of these works of literary art.

II. 50,000 YEARS IN THE LIFE

To understand the social forces at play at the time the poster poems were created, it is helpful to have at least a thumbnail knowledge of Papua New Guinea's history, both in terms of its early settlement and, more importantly, its colonial era.

At 303,500 square miles, the island of New Guinea is the second largest in the world after Greenland. It is in fact so large that residents of New Guinea's highlands are among the only Pacific Islanders who can live their entire lives without ever seeing the ocean. Politically, the island is split roughly in half on a somewhat arbitrary north-south border, with the western half of the island, today known as Papua³, currently under the control of Indonesia and the eastern half, Papua New Guinea, being an independent nation and member of the British Commonwealth. The island's current population of roughly 7.35 million also makes it the largest population center in the Pacific, with 5,130,365 living in Papua New Guinea, and the remaining 2,220,934 in Papua (Europa Publications 861). It is also one of the most linguistically diverse places in the world. There are more than 1,000 different languages presently spoken throughout New Guinea, with Papua New Guinea accounting for 820 (Gordon 587). The three official languages of Papua New Guinea are English, Tok Pisin and Hiri Motu (the latter being another form of pidgin distinct from Tok Pisin).

It is generally agreed that New Guinea was settled in two waves, with the first arrivals being placed anywhere from 30,000 to 50,000 years ago, at a time when a land bridge still existed between Australia and New Guinea. The bridge would remain until roughly 8,000 years ago, when rising sea levels cut New Guinea off from Australia. Linguistic evidence points to a common link between Australian Aborigines and the first settlers of highland New Guinea (Howes 7), but it has also been noted that the earliest tools found in the highlands have more in common with Japan than they do either Australia or Southeast Asia (Howes 27). In any case, by around 25,000 years ago, hunter-gatherers were established in the highlands, and somewhere between 11,000 and 6,000 years ago, a second wave of settlement took place in the island's coastal regions. These later arrivals were Austronesian speakers, and are believed to be ancestors of those who later set out to explore and settle the rest of the Pacific (Howes 27). A variety of evidence points to at least some level of established trade between the hunter-gatherers of the highlands and the later-arriving agriculturalists of the coastal regions. Trade between various points in New Guinea and neighboring island groups has also been documented.

New Guinea became known to the European world in 1511, when the western part of the island was sighted by Portuguese navigator Antonio d'Abren. In 1828 the Dutch, having already laid claim to the East Indies (i.e., Indonesia), expanded that claim by annexing the western half of New Guinea. On November 3, 1884, Germany annexed the northeastern portion of the island; three days later, Great Britain declared a protectorate over the southeastern portion of the island. "British New Guinea" (i.e., the protectorate) became a fully annexed colony in 1888. In 1906, this colony was renamed Papua⁴ and transferred to Australian rule (Standish 23). During this period, the German colony was known as New Guinea.

There were both marked differences and commonalities in the colonial rule of Papua and New Guinea. Papua's main attraction for Australian colonists was gold, which was first discovered in the 1880s and 1890s in the D'Entrecasteaux Islands to the southeast. New Guinea, meanwhile, was exploited by the Germans largely for its agricultural resources (Standish 24). Owing to a variety of reasons (smaller population, poor soil for agriculture, minimal external funding), the infrastructure of Australian Papua was much less developed than that of German New Guinea. The main commonality was that both regions used race-based legislation to maintain a separation between colonizers and colonized, and in both regions education, which stopped at the primary level, was left largely to Christian missions of various denominations. As Standish points out, "The first generation of educated indigenous elite, who grew up in the 1950s and 1960s, are usually the children of indigenous clergy, or of colonial servants, such as policemen" (25).

Following World War I, New Guinea came under the control of Australia, but it did so as a United Nations Trust Territory, as opposed to an outright annexation, as was the case for Papua. The two regions were thus ruled as separate (and in some cases competing) administrations. During World War II, the two territories were jointly administered by Australia; this arrangement was formalized after the war, and continued until Papua and New Guinea were united at the time of independence on September 16, 1975 (Premdas 64).

In the early post-war era, governmental infrastructure was slow in rebuilding for a lack of resources, but by the late 1940s aid money was flowing and coastal areas began to experience growth, with an influx of Highlanders providing a good portion of the construction labor (Premdas & Stevens 26). This growth was largely seen in the Port Moresby area, on the island's southeastern coast. As late as 1935, Moresby was a small colonial enclave, with a total of 2,800

people (Premdas & Stevens 2). However, in 1949 it became the capital of the combined Australian territory of Papua and New Guinea. This meant that virtually all imported goods and Australian personnel entered the country through Moresby. As external aid increased to the country as a whole (from \$10 million in 1951 to more than \$200 million in 1969), so too did Moresby's population: From 15,688 in 1954 to more than 106,000 at the time that the poster poems began printing in 1979 (Premdas & Stevens 2). Up through the time of independence, the city was largely segregated along black/white lines. There was also a certain amount of tension between more recently arrived Highlanders and earlier waves of coastal settlers. In 1962, the same year that Indonesia took control of Western New Guinea from the Dutch, a United Nations Visiting Mission recommended the establishment of a national parliament and a university, as initial steps in preparation for independence (Standish 28).

III. UPNG & THE AFRICAN CONNECTION

Steven Winduo has previously broken down the history of Papua New Guinea's literary production into three periods: The first, extremely productive period, from 1968 (date of publication of Albert Maori Kiki's autobiography *Kiki: 10,000 Years in a Lifetime*), through the eve of independence in 1974. Then came a largely fallow period, from 1975 through roughly 1980; then a revival period from 1980 to the time of Winduo's writing, in 1990 ("Papua," 37).⁵ Gilian Gorle, in assessing the impact of social change on PNG literature, breaks things down more broadly into three decades: From 1969 (the founding year of the journal *Kovave* which was the first of its kind devoted to art and literature in Papua New Guinea⁶) through 1979; from 1979 through 1989; and from 1989 through the 1990s (Gorle, "The Theme" & "The Second Decade").

In any case, the rise of the first generation of PNG writers is always linked to the founding of the University of Papua New Guinea and its creative writing program. As already noted, as late as 1965, formal education in Papua New Guinea had been left largely to the Christian missions—a situation, as Paul Sharrad points out, that was mirrored throughout the colonial world, where literacy and Christian missionary impulses are intertwined, and run parallel to (if not hand-in-hand with) the Euro-American quest for global empire (Sharrad, “Out of Africa”). The missions certainly played their part in shaping the literary output in Papua New Guinea’s early modern period, as Sharrad notes elsewhere:

Vincent Eri contrasts the Catholic and LMS systems in *The Crocodile*. Leo Hannett invokes his experiences in Catholic seminary to mount an attack on colonialist Eurocentrism. Russell Soaba recreates his time at Martyrs’ Memorial, Popondetta in his novel *Wanpis*, which depicts the tension between missions wanting mostly to instill holiness and discipline in a protective environment and students wanting to acquire knowledge that would bring material advancement and a chance to ‘see the world.’ Overall, however, the pidgin term *skul*, which conflates the meanings of ‘mission’ and ‘place of instruction’ is a fair reflection of the role played by churches in Papua New Guinean education. (“Literary Legacies” 201)

The history of the complex relationship between Christian missions and literary production throughout the Pacific is beyond the scope of this paper. For the sake of compression, it’s worth noting that, in addition to the PNG writers named above, Sharrad also lists well-known anti-colonial African writers Ngugi wa Thiong’o, Chinua Achebe and Wole Soyinka as products of the mission education system. “And,” he writes of the specific situation in Papua New Guinea,

“as in both Africa and the Pacific, where colonies were moving toward political self-determination, there was a push to develop a state education infrastructure that had been left for financial convenience to the missions” (“Out of Africa” 720).

However, Papua New Guinean literature is linked to Africa in other significant ways. By the 1960s it was clear that the country was headed toward independence. “The question,” writes Evelyn Ellerman, “was how to go about creating an instant country. The answer seemed to lie in transferring to PNG the considerable expertise acquired during decolonization in other parts of the world” (1). As Ellerman goes on to document, the vast majority of this expertise was imported from Africa, and its transfer to Papua New Guinea would largely shape the curriculum at the University of Papua New Guinea, which was officially founded in 1965 and began instruction in 1966. “The history of Papua and New Guinean colonies is characterized by a continual backward glance at Africa,” she writes.

For nearly a century, secular and church authorities alike used their prior experience in or knowledge of African colonial history as the basis for policy and practice in PNG. Thus the sponge-like ability of UPNG to absorb decolonizing agents straight from Tanzania, Uganda, Nigeria and Ghana in the late 1960s follows a path already established by both the Administration and the missions. For the first flight of university students this exposure to the self-assertion and success of African writers and leaders was overwhelming. In their History, Economics, Literature, Linguistics, and Sociology classes they were bombarded with one African model after another—from Achebe to Fanon to Ujamae. (291)

This fact would in turn have a shaping influence on the literary output of the country through the time that the OndoBondo Poster Poems were created.

One of the major moments in the history of Papua New Guinea literature came in 1968, with the hiring of Horst Ulrich “Ulli” Beier, a German teacher, writer and literary critic. It was on Beier’s initiative that UPNG began creative writing instruction, in addition to its courses in literature. Prior to his arrival in Papua New Guinea, Ulli Beier had spent the previous sixteen years in Nigeria, where he and his second wife Georgina (an Australian painter, graphic artist and set designer) had, in the words of Pamela Rosi, “worked to promote contemporary artistic expression in order to encourage Nigeria’s search for national identity and to aid the integration of modern artists into society” (122). During this period, Ulli was teaching African literature at Nigeria’s University of Ibadan, making him what is believed to be the first to teach African literature in a university setting (Ellerman 177). Both Ulli and Georgina were also heavily involved in the creative community in Nigeria. In 1954, he founded *Odu*, a journal of Yoruban arts; in 1957, he began editing and publishing the journal *Black Orpheus*, the first English language magazine of African arts and literature (Beier, *Decolonizing* x). In 1961, along with Wole Soyinka, Chinua Achebe and others, he founded the Mbari Writers and Artists’ Club, for which he served at various times as chair, editor, and director of its art gallery (Beier, *Decolonizing* xiv). He also helped to form a theater company, which produced musical plays based on Yoruban history and mythology.

During this period, Georgina was also teaching artists’ workshops, which led to the international “discovery” of at least a half-dozen African artists. As Rosi recounts, both Ulli and Georgina had similar aims in their teaching. “Central to the Beiers’ philosophy of art,” she writes, “was their view that if contemporary art was to function as communication, imagery must be dynamic and engage the values and concerns of the times” (124). According to Rosi, Ulli and Georgina translated this philosophy nearly wholesale to Papua New Guinea, with Georgina

turning her attention “primarily to the artistic possibilities inherent in urban illiterate and semi-literate grassroots men and women” (124). One of Georgina’s early and ultimately best-known protégés was Mathias Kauage, a Highlander who had relocated to Port Moresby in 1968.

Kauage’s first art show was held in 1969. Ten years later, he would illustrate two of the posters in the OndoBondo series.

When the Beiers arrived in Port Moresby, there was no artistic or literary scene to speak of. The main instrument of artistic production was the Moresby Arts Council, which had been in existence since the 1920s. As Peter Trist recalls of this period: “I was asked to direct *HMS Pinafore* with the music lecturer of the Goroka Teachers College. We nominated to the council that Papua New Guinean students from the college be included in the cast. This suggestion staggered the all-expatriate council and caused several outraged resignations: ‘But where will THEY all get dressed?’ Despite this opposition, the *HMS Pinafore* season went ahead successfully. In 1966, this was the first integrated production in the country” (Beier, *Decolonizing* xv).

While Georgina was working at creating a modern artists’ movement in Port Moresby, Ulli took up his teaching post at UPNG. He created a course in New African literature, in which students were required to travel home during their Christmas break, record an oral tradition and create a rough translation of it. “When the students had gained some understanding of the role of oral literatures in their own cultures, they could then look at new literatures in English from Africa,” Beier recounts in *Decolonizing the Mind*, his 2005 memoir of this period.

African literature was particularly relevant for two reasons: African writers of the 1950s and 1960s were concerned with the same issues that preoccupied the minds of New Guineans at the time: the impact of

colonialism on their lives, the conflict of cultures; problems of identity, the struggle for independence. Secondly, African writers had demonstrated that it was possible to adapt a foreign language to one's own needs. They showed no 'respect' for the English language; they did not want to write like Englishmen. They took it for granted that the language now belonged to everybody and that they could inject their own speech rhythms, metaphors and images derived from their own languages and that, in a country where English had been the *lingua franca* for half a century, they were free to employ the whole scale of spoken English, ranging from West African Pidgin to formal English. I hoped that the course on New African writing would encourage the students to appropriate the English language and use it as a vehicle for their own creative expression. (3)

Beier also introduced his students to the *négritude* movement, and notes that they "responded enthusiastically" to translations of Senghor, Césaire, and Damas, "because they felt a similar nostalgia for their cultures, which were rapidly being lost, and because they went through a similar crisis of identity" (Beier, "Leopold Sedar" 5).

As noted above, in addition to courses in literature, Beier also founded and taught the creative writing courses at UPNG. The creative writing program would quickly produce what Ellerman calls "the core of the early PNG canon": Leo Hannett⁷, John Waiko, Kumalau Tawali, Rabbie Namaliu, Arthur Jawodimbari, John Kasaipwalova, Russell Soaba, Apisai Enos, Dus Mapun, Vincent Eri, John Kadiba, John Saunana and Siuras Kavani (180). These writers were all among the first three classes to graduate from UPNG (University of Papua New Guinea 1984); their output largely forms the backbone of two major serial publications founded by Beier—the

journal *Kovave* and the Papua Pocket Poets series (Beier, *Decolonizing* xv). Works by many of these same writers also form the bulk of what are the two best-known anthologies of PNG literature, *Black Writing from New Guinea* (1973) and *Voices of Independence: New Black Writing from Papua New Guinea* (1980), both of which were edited by Beier and published by the University of Queensland Press. In addition to these publications, Beier also edited Albert Maori Kiki's autobiography and Michael Somare's *Sana: An Autobiography of Michael Somare*; arranged for the staging in Australia of Leo Hannett's early plays; and was instrumental in getting Vincent Eri's *The Crocodile* published by Australia's Jacaranda Press in 1970.

Eri's novel, which to this day is arguably the most famous single piece of Papua New Guinean writing, had been workshopped in Beier's creative writing class, and some have noted the similarity between the final chapter of the novel and Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*. Sharrad attributes this to the "general similarities between African and Pacific experiences" of colonialism, as well as to the fact that Achebe's book was being taught in Beier's literature course ("Out of Africa" 724). Papua New Guinean writer and literary theorist Steven Winduo claims a closer tie, saying that Beier had a hand in editing both books (personal interview, September 24, 2008).

The Beiers departed Papua New Guinea in 1971, when Ulli became director of the Institute of African Studies at Nigeria's University of Ife. They returned to PNG in 1974 to found the Institute of Papua New Guinea Studies, at the invitation of Albert Maori Kiki, who was then serving as the country's first foreign minister (Beier, "Leopold Sedar" 9).⁸ In 1978, they would depart the country for good.

In later years the majority of the writers featured in the poster poems would also pass through UPNG, though not all through the creative writing program. Most of these writers would

not have studied directly under Beier, but they were clearly influenced by his legacy. As one example, by 1977 the writer Kumalau Tawali, one of Beier's early students, was on the faculty of the English Department. A university research report for that year notes that Tawali had either produced or was in the process of writing a four-chapter work on the *négritude* movement and its relationship to Melanesian philosophy (UPNG, *Research* 35).⁹ Nora Vagi Brash, whose poem "C'mon Babe, Race with the Devil" was the first to be published in the OndoBondo poster series, received a B.A. from UPNG in 1982. She was no doubt familiar with Frantz Fanon's writings: Reading her best-known play, *Which Way Big Man?*, one can't help but note the similarities between the characters of Gou Haia, head of the newly created Department of National Identity, his wife Sinob and the corrupted national bourgeoisie that Fanon writes of in *The Wretched of the Earth*. That is, a middle-class that has been "backed into a corner" by the previous colonial system and which, rather than push its way out, "disappears with its soul set at peace into the shocking ways—shocking because anti-national—of a traditional bourgeoisie, of a bourgeoisie which is stupidly, contemptibly, cynically bourgeois" (150).¹⁰

Ulli and Georgina Beier are of interest to this project not only because of their heavy influence on Papua New Guinea's first phase of modern literary and artistic output, but also because Ulli in particular had such a shaping role in what is now generally regarded as the Papua New Guinea literary canon. Or at least, the canon as seen by foreign readers, who often only have access to publications that are printed or distributed by foreign entities. If not placed in the proper light this canon—which largely deals with colonialism, the push for independence and its immediate aftermath—could have a slight distorting effect when viewing post-independence literature, including the poster poems. Ellerman posits that Beier saw himself mainly as an editor, and didn't attempt to directly influence the subject matter of his students' writing; though

she also notes that he actively sought to introduce folk narratives and other subject matter in order to broaden the literary discourse. But at the same time, he was introducing literature—the négritude writers, Frantz Fanon, et al.—that steered that subject matter in another direction. “There were, then, two sides to creative writing during the Beier years at UPNG,” writes Ellerman.

PNG writing began when decolonization was in full roar around the world. As a result, many of Beier’s most committed writers were anti-colonial despite his own bias in favour of the rejuvenation of local cultures. Most prominent of these were Hannet, Kasaipwalova, Waiko, and Jawodimbari. Only a handful of PNG students such as Tawali and Enos were initially committed to that second, but most fundamental, aspect of Beier’s programme (189).

Later, she concludes:

What is quite clear is that Beier had a cultural agenda that at times meshed with the national imperative and that at times was inimical to it. His own ambivalence to nationalism is evident in his very political choice of textual models for PNG literature classes, as opposed to his oft-repeated comments about the transitional and essentially uninteresting nature of anti-colonial writing. As a teacher within the literary system just prior to Independence he must have felt annoyed when the nationalist agenda overwhelmed his own (190).

The reaction among PNG writers on the question of Ulli Beier’s influence has been mixed—most give him due credit, but there is often a subtext to that praise. Steven Winduo has referred to Beier as “the catalyst and patron of PNG writing” (“Papua” 37), and has praised both Ulli and Georgina for “their tireless commitment to see that Papua New Guineans use literature

and arts as weapons of resistance to colonialism” (“Decolonizing” 330). Regis Stella is a bit more reserved, noting that “...while Beier is viewed by many as the ‘midwife’ of contemporary Papua New Guinean literature, it must be emphasized that Papua New Guineans chose to engage in western textual practice as a preferred medium to articulate their concerns about their exploitation and subjugation and to affirm their cultural heritage. Beier’s influence was concomitant with the general stimulus provided by Taban lo Liyong, Elton Brash, and Prithvindra Chakravarti” (*Imagining* 168). The three instructors Stella cites are all expatriates: Liyong is Sudanese, raised in Uganda; Brash, who died in 1998, was Australian (and the husband of Nora Vagi Brash); and Chakravarti is South Asian. Elsewhere, Stella notes that Beier, “encouraged Papua New Guineans writers to utilize writing, ‘mainly as a political weapon,’ to fulfill their ‘duties toward themselves and the world’” (*Imagining* 167).¹¹

Russell Soaba, meanwhile, is more pointed. Writing of a period in 1974 when he and poet Jack Lahui were being paid to conduct traveling creative writing classes at PNG high schools, he notes: “Ulli Beier had succeeded in selling worldwide but only one aspect of PNG literature. This aspect falls more on the category of protest or anti-colonial literature than on what Jack Lahui and I had intended to promote through the Department of Information and Extension Services as PNG Literature overall” (“Justifying ... part 1” par. 3). Elsewhere Soaba lists four categories of PNG writing: “Firstly, protest or anti-colonial literature; secondly, works of self-appraisal or autobiographical writing; thirdly, social commentaries and criticism; and finally, oral literature and traditions. Protest or anti-colonial literature deals with PNG’s struggle to re-assert itself in the face of the world and subsequently prove its existence as a member of the overall global setting. This category of PNG Literature was the one publicized and distributed widely through Ulli Beier’s entrepreneurship” (“Justifying ... part 2” par. 7).

The point being that there is a danger in drawing a simple dichotomy between the nature of Papua New Guinean writing in the pre- and post-independence era: While the literary output prior to independence *was* heavily weighted toward anti-colonial themes, it was not as uni-dimensional as the Beier anthologies might lead us to believe.¹² Likewise, the post-independence material, though it does represent a visible change in focus—from a rejection of external colonial domination to a more internal, self-reflective mode—shouldn't been seen as a wholesale paradigm shift. All are part of the same continuum.

In any case, what *is* clear is that, by the early 1970s, the literary scene was flourishing in Papua New Guinea. Indeed, according to UPNG literature professor (and OndoBondo Poster Poems co-editor) Prithvindra Chakravarti, the 1975 edition of the *Bibliography of New Writing in Papua New Guinea* included more than 600 entries that appeared through November 1974 as “independent books and pamphlets and in important serials and periodicals.” However, as he is writing in 1980, he goes on to note, “Very little has ... appeared since then, except a few Poetry titles (Papua Pocket Poets by the Literature Department) and a few others by the Institute of PNG Studies and outside publishers. The only magazines worth mentioning in this period are the *Papua New Guinea Writing* and *Gigibori*, but unfortunately, both stopped appearing in 1978” (“Extracts” 22). Indeed, one of the main exceptions to the dearth in early post-independence publishing was the poster series’ other editor, Russell Soaba, whose two early works—the novel *Wanpis* and poetry collection *Naked Truth*—had been published in 1977 and 1978, respectively.

What, then, happened? The most commonly cited factor is political independence, to which we will return momentarily.

IV. THE QUEST FOR A NATIONAL IDENTITY

A political forum at the University of Papua-New Guinea recently heard black power philosophy expounded by the Trobriand Islands' most politically active student, John Kasaipwalova, although he didn't give it that name. But he made no bones about his intentions in the title he gave to his subject, "Why We Should Hate Whites." Before more than 200 students and staff of all races, Kasaipwalova fluently and rationally declared that whites in the territory should be hated in the sense that they should be rejected, and their dominating power structure with them, so the native people could stand up with pride as members of their own race. (Pacific Islands Monthly 45)

The day before John Kasaipwalova addressed the crowd at the gathering noted above, a visiting professor from Uganda, Ali Mazrui, addressed the Council on New Guinea Affairs.

Among other things, he raised the question of a national consciousness. According to the *Pacific Islands Monthly* magazine:

The professor was not kind to Australia as a colonial power. At least, he said, the British in Africa had contributed to national unity by their exploitative attitude to the colonies. But Australians took the only attitude that could be worse—they were indifferent, thus denying New Guineans even the shared anti-colonial feeling that had been such an important contribution to nationhood in Africa. There was practically nothing of this long tradition of exploitation to help P-NG combine its 700-odd separate cultures into a national feeling, there was no flag, no anthem or national song, no unifying cause. The Australian Administration had in fact perpetuated differences through the artificial line between Papua and New Guinea, and the 18 districts which brought about unequal progress, and you had to add to these the linguistic differentiation, and the geophysical break-up of the peoples between Highlanders and coastal peoples. (45)

Bernard Narokobi, a lawyer, politician and philosopher who had a hand in writing Papua New Guinea's constitution, has noted that the quest for a national identity was hampered by the fact that the independence movement was limited mainly to the educated indigenous elite, and largely to the Port Moresby region of the country: "Independence is a case of a few Papua New Guineans imposing their will, through legitimate and democratic institutions upon the majority of the people, who did not know what independence was and did not even want it at the time" (qtd. in Otto 56). I will return to Narokobi and his influence on the literary scene, but in the meantime this observation is important because the quest for a national identity can still be seen echoing through certain of the poster poems.

In an effort to foster national identity in the pre-independence years—and virtually simultaneous with the first era of major literary output—three noteworthy movements emerged in the Port Moresby area. Each had representation on the campus of UPNG: The Black Power Movement, which was essentially an umbrella PNG nationalist movement; Papua Besena, which was a separatist movement that sought to keep Papua from uniting with New Guinea (and instead to make Papua the seventh state of Australia); and the Bougainville separatist movement, which sought to have that island (which is geographically a part of the Solomon Islands) be independent from either Papua or New Guinea. Though these would seem to be mutually exclusive aims, there was a certain amount of interaction between the three as well as much involvement on the part of young writers. For instance, from the time of its founding in 1968, playwright Leo Hannett acted as a spokesman for the Bougainville separatist movement (Premdas 64). He was also a founding member and spokesman of the Nuigini Black Power Movement, which coalesced on the campus of UPNG on July 1, 1970 (Hannett 1), and which also included among its membership the playwrights John Kasaipwalova, Arthur Jawodimbari

and John Waiko among its membership (Ellerman 286). Papua Besena, founded in 1973, loosely aligned itself with the black power movement (May 72). This overview is far too brief to cover all of the intricacies of these movements and their place within the broader political context, but to give some inkling of the complexity, Papua Besena was also allied with the Social Workers' Party of Papua New Guinea, the Papua Group, the Papuan Republic Fighters' Army, and the Koiari Association (May 72).

In either case, the impact of the black power movement in particular is apparent in the literary output leading up to the publication of the poster poems. John Kasaipwalova's 1971 poem "Reluctant Flame" takes its themes directly from the movement (while at the same time borrowing stylistically from the American Beat poets, and particularly from Alan Ginsberg's "Howl"). The movement is also evident in Russell Soaba's 1977 novel *Wanpis*, which captures the black power dynamic as it played out in Port Moresby and on the UPNG campus. Reading "The Nuigini Black Power," Leo Hannett's 1971 position statement, it is again interesting to note the writers he draws inspiration from. Among others, he quotes Paulo Friere's *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (first translated from Brazilian to English in 1970, and often referred to as an extension of Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*), and Stokely Carmichael and Charles Hamilton's 1967 *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation in America*.¹³

V. INDEPENDENCE, THE MELANESIAN WAY, ET AL.

Papua New Guinea became an independent nation on September, 16, 1975. By then, the country was faced with three different secessionist movements: Papua Besena, the Bougainville Secessionist Movement and the Mataungan Movement, which was also based in Bougainville (Kabutaulaka 65). To combat these movements, the new government immediately embarked on a

policy of decentralization. Rather than further consolidate power in the National Capital District (of which Port Moresby is a part), it was effectively dispersed via the creation of an elected government for each of the nineteen colonial administrative districts. These local governments would control many essential day-to-day functions, including healthcare, primary and secondary education (Standish 34).

While the results of decentralization were mixed, one of the underlying effects was to exacerbate the lack of national unity¹⁴, which was already virtually non-existent given a host of other factors, among them: linguistic and cultural diversity; the lack of a country-wide movement for independence; and the fact that relatively small portions of the country were heavily effected by colonialism, while large swathes (particularly in the Highlands) were left virtually untouched. This is the point at which Bernard Narokobi's "Melanesian Way" appears, and not long after Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara, the first prime minister of Fiji following independence in 1970, coined the phrase "The Pacific Way" to call for a supra-national unity among Oceanic peoples. Narokobi proposed the philosophy of the Melanesian Way through a series of forty-five widely read editorials published between 1976 and 1978 in the *Papua New Guinea Post Courier*. These articles were later republished as *The Melanesian Way: Total Cosmic Vision of Life* in 1980 (and in two subsequent editions). The latter half of the book title comes from Narokobi's elegant if somewhat elusive definition of the Melanesian Way as, "a total cosmic vision of life in which every event within human consciousness has its personal, communal, spiritual, economic, political and social dimensions. It is, by its very nature, inherently open to change" (Narokobi 20). As Ton Otto points out, Narokobi was attempting to walk a fine line:

One of the main contradictions of the Melanesian Way appears to be that it constitutes a new identity whereas it is simultaneously assumed to be an old and

established practice. On the one hand there are many references in *The Melanesian Way* to the creation of a new society, a new vision and a new hope by the artist and writer. On the other hand this new way is rooted in the past; it is in fact ‘thousands of years’ old. (47)

Narokobi’s work has been analyzed on a variety of fronts, and many flaws pointed out.¹⁵ For the purposes of this paper, it is not necessary to go into a detailed accounting of the debates surrounding the validity of the Melanesian Way, only to note that the newspaper articles, which completed their publishing cycle only a few months prior to the production of the OndoBondo Poster Poems, were certainly known to the poets and artists featured on the posters. In fact, Narokobi, who considered writers and artists to be primary vehicles for spreading the Melanesian Way, was one of the featured speakers during a series of literary colloquia staged as part of the Third South Pacific Festival of Arts, for which the poster poems were created. The panel discussion on “Pacific Consciousness” was chaired by Albert Maori Kiki and included UPNG Associate professor Sione Latukefu (speaking on “Pacific Consciousness”), Faith Bandler (“Roots of Pacific Culture”), Gar McCormick (“Pacific Consciousness and Island Identities”), and Stephen Pokawin (“Melanesian Philosophy and the Intellectuals”). Narokobi’s presentation was titled, “Melanesian Way and the Writers” (Chakravarti, “Extracts” 25).

Themes that Narokobi addresses are readily apparent in the posters, particularly, “the centrality of the village in traditional and modern Melanesian life” (Thomas 153). In addition, Nicholas Thomas has noted that the Melanesian Way represents an attempt to break free of any influence of the colonial past. In particular, it is an effort to counter the kind of stereotyping (sorcery, extreme tribal insularity, violence, cannibalism, etc.) that the island of New Guinea has been saddled with since first contact, and which continued well into the 20th century. Narokobi

presented what was then a fairly radical re-formulation of Papua New Guinean identity, albeit one that once again draws on African ties: “Insofar as this is ‘derivative’ at all, the influences are from African négritude thought, which Narokobi knew of through a Nigerian philosophy lecturer at the University of Papua New Guinea” (Thomas 153). The sometimes conflicting desires to break away from the colonial past, create a modern nation-state and maintain a link to indigenous ways could explain why Narokobi generally shied away from a concrete definition of the Melanesian Way. At the same time, it is worth noting that these three goals appear (in various combinations) in the text and imagery of several of the poster poems.

In the period just prior to and immediately after independence, the government also either established or re-invented several institutions that were meant to help foster a sense of national identity. Notable among them for our purposes was the Institute of Papua New Guinea Studies (which was founded in 1974 by Ulli Beier and soon thereafter began publishing the journals *Papua New Guinea Writer* and *Gigibori*) and the re-invention of the Centre for Creative Arts (CCA) as the National Arts School (NAS), which included on its campus the National Theatre Company, founded in 1977 out of what had been formerly known as the Dance and Drama Programme at the National Arts School (Ellerman 144).

Pamela Rosi’s 1994 dissertation *Bung Wantaim...* provides a detailed accounting of how the NAS—which printed the OndoBondo posters—came into existence, as well as how its initial function was to promote a sense of national unity. But it is also worth mentioning the theater scene during this period, because its rise runs roughly parallel to the drop in other publishing that occurred in the early post-independence years. This decline is often attributed to the fact that the first wave of writers was also the first wave of locally educated, indigenous elite. They had been extremely active politically in the run-up to independence and thus were naturally absorbed into

the government they had worked to create. Others often cite the 1971 departure of Ulli Beier as a turning point, for the worse, in PNG's publishing history. But Beier himself refutes this notion in the introduction to *Voices of Independence*, writing:

Because the original emergence of writing was centred on the University of Papua New Guinea, many observers have erroneously concluded that because the university has produced very few writers in recent years, there has in fact been a decline in writing in Papua New Guinea. However, the scene has merely shifted from the university to other institutions—for example, the National Broadcasting Commission, the National Theatre Company, the Raun Raun Theatre, and the Institute of Papua New Guinea Studies. (xii).

It is not an accident that drama (whether performed live on stage or via radio broadcast) played a central role in the literary production during this period. As early as 1976, John Kasaipwalova had asserted that Papua New Guinea literature contained many unwritten elements, including mime, narration, song and dance (McCallum 20). What's more, in a country with low literacy rates¹⁶ and a multiplicity of languages, staged drama would naturally be more accessible than fiction or poetry. (As, for that matter, would be poster poems, given their visual nature.) Hence, the National Broadcasting Company became one of the major outlets for writers. Starting in 1973, NBC regularly broadcast countrywide radio adaptations of stories and plays by Arthur Jawodimbari, Rabbie Namaliu, Leo Hannett, Kumalau Tawali, John Kasaipwalova, Nora Vagi Brash and a host of others. Serialized versions of Vincent Eri's *The Crocodile* and Benjamin Umba's novel *While They Were Walking Through the Dawn* were also broadcast (Ellerman 351). Needless to say, writers continued to write in the post-independence period. They simply were not publishing in the usual venues.

Meanwhile, the situation at the university was somewhat bleaker. Beier notes that the university was in this period being “ruled with a heavy hand by the Ministry of Education,” with a much greater emphasis on degrees in education, economics and the sciences, while “literature, history, and political science are being regarded as both superfluous and potentially dangerous.” All of which ultimately lead to a situation where only one student was enrolled in the creative writing program at UPNG in 1978” (*Voices* xii). Again, this does not mean that there weren’t writers on campus, only that they were taking different degrees: Yosep Sukwianomb graduated in 1978 with a bachelor’s degree in education, as did Mary To Liman in 1979; Baluwe Umetyrifo graduated in 1982 with a degree in economics (UPNG, *Graduates* 1984).

VI. THE SOUTH PACIFIC FESTIVAL OF THE ARTS

As it turns out the name OndoBondo, with its simultaneously festive, creative, and collaborative meanings, is a fitting title for the poster series, which was produced in advance of the Third South Pacific Festival of the Arts (later known as the Festival of Pacific Arts), hosted by Papua New Guinea in June 1980 (Chakravarti, “Extracts” 23). By this time, as Ellerman recounts, there were virtually no publishing outlets for writers:

Kovave stopped publication in 1975 and [*Papua New Guinea Writer*] in 1978. By the early 1980s CCA (now NAS) had ceased to be a force in publication. The [Institute of Papua New Guinea Studies] had provided a narrow outlet for writing in its cultural journal, *Gigibori*. What this meant was that from 1978 to the establishment of *OndoBondo* in 1982, there were no local literary journals at all.

(224)

The *OndoBondo* to which Ellerman refers is a journal that was eventually founded by Prithvindra Chakravarti, as a direct result of the poster series.¹⁷

It was in this context that Chakravarti took on the role of Convener of the Literature Section for the Third South Pacific Festival of the Arts. “In fact,” he wrote at the time, “there were virtually no avenues through which our young writers could publish their materials. Considering this unfortunate situation, the Literature Department decided to raise a special fund to publish at least one part of the materials that were lying in the Departmental Creative Archive before the Festival. The Department made a special appeal at the same time to our young writers to write more. In direct response to the appeal, a good amount of new poetry, short stories, plays and two novels was completed by our Creative Writing students in 1979” (“Extracts” 22). In the end, three organizations agreed to put up 4,500 Papua New Guinea kina¹⁸: The National Cultural Council (K1400); the UPNG Publication Committee (K1950); and the Literature Trust Fund (K700). Using this money, it was decided to publish Russell Soaba’s second novel *Maiba*; sixteen poster poems; “some new poetry titles in Papua Pocket Poets”; “some new plays to be produced”; and “one collection of short stories to be published” (“Extracts” 23).

Owing to a variety of problems, not all of these projects came to fruition: At the time of the Festival, Chakravarti notes that *Maiba* was “still in the press and it looks as if K250 more will be spent on it.” Sixteen poster poems were originally to be published, but cost over-runs brought that number down to twelve (“Extracts” 23). In this same report, Chakravarti lists the one poster that is not held in UH-Manoa’s library collections: “You Fear?” by Kubura Basu, printed in April 1980. The remaining four posters, along with the four plays and other short stories were “kept at the ready in case some additional fund is available in the future” (“Extracts” 24). Be this as it may, Chakravarti notes that eleven of the new poster poems were done in time

to be displayed during the festival, as part of a larger exhibition held in the basement of the UPNG library (“Extracts” 26). Of interest, he also mentions “3

rare poster poems” that were exhibited along with the OndoBondo posters—he makes no further mention of these three posters, but it’s worth noting that the Pacific Collection holds two other poster poems that are not part of the OndoBondo series. One, featuring a poem titled “O Meri Wantok” (figure 7)

by poet Bede Dus Mapun and illustrator K.N. Lamang, was published in 1972 by the Centre for Creative Arts, with John Kasaipwalova listed as series editor. The other, “Friday Apinun,” by poet Jack Kell Emil and illustrator John Danger, is undated and unattributed to any publisher or editor. In the interest of

sticking to the post-independence OndoBondo posters, I will not address these posters, except to say that they set a precedent for the OndoBondo series. Rosi, in briefly discussing the CCA posters, notes that “O Meri Wantok,” which was the first in a series published by CCA, was notorious:

With its heavy chauvinistic message deriding the ‘western’ appearance of ‘modern’ PNG women and their desire to attract expatriate men, this poster caused a sensation on the UPNG campus and led to a series of handwritten opposition posters by female students, as well as numerous wall slogans and other exchanges of graffiti. (161)

To date, Chakravarti’s report on the events of the festival is the only mention I’ve found of the poster exhibition. This is not too surprising, as they generally fall outside the kind of



Fig. 7: “O Meri Wantok”
Text: Bede Dus Mapun
Illustration: K.N. Lamang
image source: Rosi, 1994, 159a

cultural production that the Festival of Pacific Arts is known for. As Adrienne Kaeppler notes, the original mandate of the Festivals was:

...that they would be instrumental in preserving old traditions as well as fostering new productions based on them but appropriate in the modern world. Old music/dance pieces, existing primarily in the memory of the aged music/dance-leaders have surfaced while new theatrical groups, such as the Raun Raun Theatre of Papua New Guinea, have condensed universal themes into presentations that can touch anyone, though filtered through the New Guinea experience. The first four Festivals, from 1972 to 1985, emphasized Pacific awareness and showing outsiders “our true cultural ways.” (6)

In this context, a series of silk-screened posters that grapple with issues that are at odds with “true cultural ways” would certainly exist on the fringe. Indeed, as Jacquelyn Lewis-Harris notes, in its early incarnations, the Festival made little space for contemporary arts:

Although the Festival has been held since 1972, the deliberate inclusion of contemporary paintings, sculptures and prints in a designated exhibition did not materialize until the Sixth Festival in the Cook Islands (1992). The Festival’s emphasis on traditional art forms left little room, physically or philosophically, for gallery-style contemporary arts. (91)

Lewis-Harris goes on to note that at the Fourth Festival, held in 1985, works by a number of contemporary PNG artists (including several featured on the poster poems), were sent to Tahiti but never in the end displayed for lack of a venue (91). That these posters, which are already ephemeral, would be relegated to a basement exhibition space (and thereafter largely forgotten) is thus not unexpected.

VII. READING THE POSTERS

There are two essays by Papua New Guinean scholars that are worth reviewing in relationship to the poster poems. They are Steven Winduo's "Unwriting Oceania: The Repositioning of the Pacific Writer Scholars within a Folk Narrative Space" (2000), and Regis Stella's "Reluctant Voyages into Otherness: Practice and Appraisal in Papua New Guinean Literature" (1999). I begin with Stella's essay, given that he is also one of the poets published as part of this poster series.

One of Stella's touchstones in "Reluctant Voyages" is the theory of hybridity, and in particular the influence of orature on the written word. For instance, he writes:

Papua New Guinea is by tradition an oral society; the intrusion of alien influences, however, inevitably meant that the germination and proliferation of its literature has had a hybridized provenance. Papua New Guinea literature has risen from the interface of orature with Western cultural practices. Although these orientations are seemingly antithetical, in fact they inform each other and form a literary seedbed from which writers produce their works and construct cultural and national identities. (222)

Stella goes on to discuss several examples in which PNG writers use a variety of tactics to set about "re-inscribing their cultures" (226):

Among the strategies we find in these examples are codeswitching, use of untranslated words and phrases, and glossing. In today's contemporary world, cultural forms are hybrid, mixed, synthesized. I

speak as a person from a Third World country, as a marginalized person, in contrast to the majority of critics, who come from a wealthy system of informational and academic resources. This traversing of established parameters demonstrates how marginal discourses have rewritten themselves into the dominant discourse and, in so doing, have traversed the gap between margin and center. Not only are we concerned about the adaptation of language; more significantly, through such appropriations, our writers have reinscribed our cultural baggage in a once sacrosanct center. This textual representation, then, negotiates a rite of passage through a no man's land, which becomes inhabited cross-cultural space. (227)

Though Stella doesn't cite him here, this notion of hybridity, this traversing/inhabiting of the empty space between colonial and indigenous cultures, is clearly influenced by Homi K. Bhabha's notion of the "Third Space of Enunciation" (Bhabha 37). And it is something that is visible in nearly every one of the poster poems. As only two examples, witness Russell Soaba's "Looking Thru Those Eye Holes" (figure 8) and Baluwe Umetryrifo's "Ypela Meri I Senis Hariap Pinis" (figure 3). In Soaba's case, the

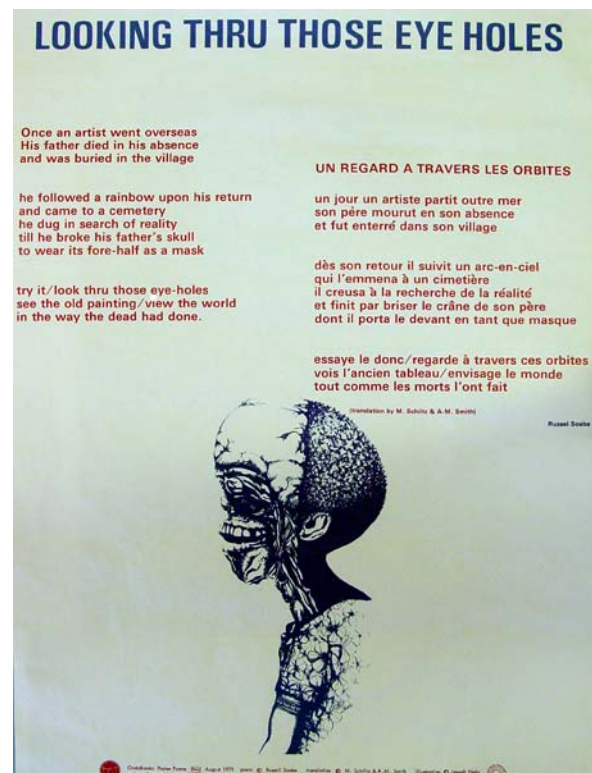


Fig. 8: "Looking Thru Those Eye Holes"
 Text: Russell Soaba
 Illustration: Joseph Nalo

hybridity is both explicit—how else to describe a poem that features a character wearing his father’s skull as a mask, let alone a poem that is written in the two dominant colonial languages of Melanesia, English and French?—and slightly more implicit: Though the poster’s artwork is on first glance shocking, and meant to be so, it speaks again of the melding of tradition and modernity: the figure in the illustration is not merely *wearing* the skull; he has literally found it fused onto his head, with his own sinews growing over his ancestral bones. In Umetryrifo’s case, the tension created by alternating between English and Tok Pisin in the poem is mirrored in the image, which itself represents a tug-of-war between two sets of conflicting values—again, tradition versus modernity, or more specifically, the role of women in a changing society. In both cases, the imagery serves to deepen the poem in ways that simple text on page cannot: When “Looking Thru Those Eye Holes” was republished in the anthology *Nuanua*, minus the French translation and Joseph Nalo’s artwork, the poem became something different. Smaller. The margins of the printed page feel as though they have closed in to lose not only the intense imagery, but also the more subtle markers: clothing, hairdo, even posture ... all of which lend a certain specificity of time and place to the piece. Meanwhile, the loss of the French translation takes away from the understanding that Soaba is reaching out to audiences beyond his own shores—by translating into French, he is using the *lingua franca* (pun intended) not only of neighboring Vanuatu and New Caledonia, but also of Tahiti and the rest of the francophone Pacific ... an act that again signifies the quest for a supra-national identity. Or, at least, an understanding of his situation by readers beyond his own borders: The choice of language is significant, in that English was (and still is) the language of the elite in Papua New Guinea—even today, it is estimated that only one to two percent of the total population regularly use it (Central Intelligence Agency, screen 2); except by expatriates, French is not used at all. I don’t

want to make too much of this point, as clearly one of the deciding factors in using English and French was the knowledge that the posters were going to be viewed by the South Pacific Festival of Arts' international audience, but it nonetheless bears keeping in mind who exactly that audience is.

Stella's point regarding reinscription of "cultural baggage" provides a fitting segue to Steven Winduo's "Unwriting Oceania," which puts forth a call for just this sort of re-writing, which is a movement that is also apparent in many of the posters. "Indeed," writes Winduo, "it is not so much the erasure of their cultures, but the overwriting of their cultures with European inscriptions. In other words, European explorer / 'discoverers' did not so much erase indigenous self-representations and cultural expressions, but in most instances overwrote them. Even where erasure as a process occurred, it was never complete and uncontested, and this tension has affected the process of representation in the Pacific to the present" (599). Many of the poster poems exhibit in one form or another the tension Winduo writes of (which tension can also be seen in Narokobi's *Melanesian Way*, as it too attempts an un-writing of colonial impacts). At the same time, Winduo also speaks to the question of hybridity—and like Stella, he sees it as a necessary evolution:

The influence of folk traditions in literary culture stands out in most Pacific writing. Pacific societies are essentially oral. The intrusion of outside influence inevitably meant that the germination and proliferation of their literatures have had a hybridized provenance: that of orature and Western cultural hegemony. Cross-cultural orientations developed between orature and Western cultural practice. These orientations are seemingly antithetical. Ironically, they inform each

other by forming a literary seedbed from which writers produce their works. ... Postcolonial cultures are no longer “insulated” from outside influences, especially that of modernization. Therefore, the only way to maintain cultural independence is to incorporate and adapt other cultural practices into their own to forge an independent identity. (601)

Given their position as early works of the post-independence era, the poster poems are particularly compelling in this context, in that they serve as early examples of the movement toward Winduo’s notion of forging a new Papua New Guinean literary identity. At the same time, they also speak more broadly of the struggle for a unifying *cultural* identity, which is again marked by the tug-of-war between tradition and modernity. Or as Winduo puts it, “Indeed, the founding conditions of the split consciousness remains deeply embedded in postcolonial conditions from which writers and intellectuals continually struggle to liberate themselves” (609).

In noting the tug-of-war between modernity and tradition, I should emphasize that the two should not be seen strictly in binary opposition. As mentioned above, both Winduo and Stella would seem to agree that the relationship is far more complicated, that there is give and take even as there is push and pull. Ruth Finnegan’s “The How of Literature” (2005) serves as a useful means of addressing this idea. In acknowledging the many aspects of literature that exist beyond “alphabetic writing”—or as she puts it, the multi-plexity of literature—Finnegan provides a means for discussing the posters as inhabiting a liminal space between orality and literacy. That is, whether it was the conscious intention of their creators or not, the posters can be seen as a mid-point between western literary forms and the non-alphabetic aspects of traditional Papua New Guinean poetry, as identified by John Kasaipwalova: mime, narration, song and

dance (McCallum 20). In other words, the combination of image and text form a type of non-verbal communication that mediates between the oral and the written—and, in the process, again attempts to cross Stella’s “no-man’s land” between (marginalized) indigenous and (dominant) colonial discourses.

Finally, in the context of both Stella and Winduo’s discussion of the need to re-inscribe, there is another aspect of Papua New Guinea’s history from which these writers are struggling to extricate themselves. Throughout much of the 20th century (and indeed up through the present), Papua New Guinea in particular and Melanesia in general have been among the most heavily anthropologized (to coin a verb) places on earth, with the resulting picture being far from complete. The late Epeli Hau‘ofa (who was himself raised in Papua New Guinea) was one of the first to bring this issue to light when, in a 1975 address to a gathering of his fellow anthropologists in Canberra, he asserted that:

...after decades of anthropological field research in Melanesia we have come up only with pictures of people who fight, compete, trade, pay bride-price, engage in rituals, invent cargo cults, copulate, and sorcerise each other. There is hardly anything in our [anthropological] literature to indicate whether these people have any such sentiments as love, kindness, consideration, altruism, and so on. (6)

These posters present an altogether different set of pictures.

In any case, looking at the collection as a whole, some general themes emerge. In visual terms women are for the most part presented as modern, liberated figures. See for instance “Come On Babe, Race with the Devil,” in which the narrator is depicted in jeans and heels, in a confident (if slightly ambiguous) stance, carrying a purse rather than a more traditional *bilum* (a woven bag carried by both men and women). For Regis Stella’s “Oloman!,” Michael Ayula takes

this imagery even further, with a young woman who is defiant in her sexuality, looking down on viewers from a position of power, even as they are allowed a glimpse up her shorts. Even when they are portrayed in more traditional terms, women are generally seen as equal partners. For instance, in Joseph Nalo's illustration for Yosep (a.k.a. Joseph) Sukwianomb's poem "Development," a couple is depicted making love in a grass house with the woman on top, the net effect being one of soothing tenderness, in contrast to the harsh steel-and-glass sterility of the encroaching city¹⁹—which tenderness also serves to emphasize the overall theme of poem; one in which tradition itself nurtures, in opposition to the deadening effects of urban life.

The main exception to this generalization is Titus Tilley's illustration for Baluwe Umetryrifo's "Yupela Meri I Senis Hariap Pinis," which translates as "Woman, You've Changed So Fast" (Schoeffel 369). and which literally depicts a woman split between two worlds. On the one hand (also literally), is blood-red nail polish, a ring and a watch; the other hand, which holds a walking (or perhaps digging) stick, is unadorned, though the red nail-polish on her right hand is mirrored on the left side of her body, in the form of a traditional necklace. One breast is covered by a modern blouse; the other is bare. She wears jeans on one leg, and a *pulpul* (fiber skirt) on the other; sandals and nail-polish on one foot; nothing on the other.

Echoing the tension found in Tilley's young woman, in terms of visual imagery the men in these posters often appear to be conflicted, with their feet in two worlds. It's a situation that, at the risk of over-simplifying the set of complex forces that have already been described in this paper, can again be boiled down to the tension between tradition and modernity. This struggle is most graphically illustrated in "Looking Thru Those Eye Holes," in which Joseph Nalo's illustration takes the narrator's mask metaphor literally as a means to "see the old painting/ view the world/ in the way the dead had done."

For both male and female writers, however, on first reading there is also often a clear tension embedded in the fact that this is the first generation to be effectively educated away from their family and peers. For the writers in particular, there is an obvious conflict inherent in creating art in both a form—written—and language(s) that aren't accessible to their *wantoks*. This is something Nigel Krauth addresses in speaking of the first wave of writers, noting “Generally the writers in Papua New Guinea have seen themselves as outsiders from their communities—alienated by education, by experience and by language” (qtd. in Gorle, “The Theme” 95). Meanwhile, as evidenced by Gorle, the writers featured on the posters were on the cusp of a new literary direction, which can also be seen in several of the poems:

The 1980s were a time of poignant contrasts: political consolidation on the one hand, heightened social division on the other. This was a time in which the material circumstances of the small, well-educated, indigenous elite appeared, almost inevitably, to move further from the reach of ordinary people. In addition, the social, economic, and attitudinal gap between urban and rural districts grew wider. During this period many people questioned the basic justice of their changing society. A few courageous individuals suggested solutions. Perhaps more fundamental than this questioning, however, was a widespread commitment by writers to look at present and future directions for their country. (“Second Decade” 56)

Throughout the course of this paper I have discussed several themes as they are played out in various poems. To avoid repetition, I have chosen below to highlight a few points of

interest. In one particular case, Jerry Daniel’s “Kain Kar Ya,” I am not yet able to make a complete translation of the Tok Pisin, and so make only some general comments on it.

Poster Poem Number One: (Text: Nora Vagi Brash; illustration: John Danger).

Come on Babe Race with the Devil

I’ve walked past this building
 a hundred times
Never noticed it before
Simply because
 the men working on it
Whistle at me
 and call out buluu feiva

Today something caught my eye
I looked up
On the white washed wall
 was written
Come on babe race with the devil

I turned around
 no babe to behold
But me the poor devil
 caught up in the rate race

As mentioned earlier, the illustration for this poster depicts a modern woman, seemingly at ease with her life choices. But viewed alongside the text of the poem, there is an unresolved conflict between word and image, particularly in the final lines: the pun between the title and the “poor devil caught up in the rat race” takes on new meaning when seen in light of hybridization as discussed by both Stella and Winduo above.

On another note, it’s worth pointing out Brash’s use of the untranslated phrase *buluu feiva*. Stella sees this strategy as a way of “reinscribing” culture. Elsewhere, he has pointed out that, “In a country of over 800 languages, spoken by approximately four million people, the choice of which language to use in writing becomes politically

fraught” (Stella, *Imagining* 165). I point this out because neither *buluu feiva* nor any variant spellings appear in any of the several English-Tok Pisin-Hiri Motu dictionaries that currently exist. Whether it is a slang word or a specific dialect I honestly don’t know, but the choice clearly indicates something about the construction workers that is only available to speakers of the language—which is not inconsequential information in a city like Port Moresby, with its longstanding tensions between the various Papua New Guinean communities that have settled there.

Poster Poem Number Two. Text: Russell Soaba; translation; M. Schiltz & A.M. Smith; illustration: Joseph Nalo.

Looking Thru Those Eye Holes

Once an artist went overseas
His father died in his absence
and was buried in the village

he followed a rainbow upon his return
and came to a cemetery
he dug in search of reality
till he broke his father’s skull
to wear its fore-half as a mask

try it/look thru those eye-holes
see the old painting/ view the world
in the way the dead had done.

When recently asked about the general outlook toward independence among writers at the time the poster poems were created, Russell Soaba remarked:

Writers have sobered up a bit by this time. Albert Wendt on the other side of the Pacific that carries us was lamenting the lull of creativity in PNG.

What happened, he was asking, has PNG Literature died? Was

independence the only theme that kept the writer afloat? Is there going to be second novel from Vincent Eri? At least we have Russell Soaba who refuses to die. Etc. etc. Hence, the thematic content of the poster poem period; that of wondering, wandering. Overall, the general sentiment had been that writers were content, they'd achieved what they wanted. There was nothing more to write about. (Personal communication, 11/03/2008)

As for the writers' thematic concerns, he notes that they were:

More social, I would say; more of that need for self-criticism, as noted through works by Nora Vagi Brash (*Which Way, Big Man?*). The poster poems did not quite have an established theme in mind, and the editors felt that writing should continue despite the sound and fury experienced during the Independence period (1970-'75). Anti-colonial themes were long gone by this time, and PNG needed to reassert itself somehow through creative writing. Thus, the poem "Looking Thru..." (Personal communication, 11/03/2008)

It seems fitting that Soaba references Albert Wendt in his recent comments, as the poster appears not long after Wendt's hallmark 1976 essay "Towards a New Oceania." Both the poem and the illustration bring to mind Wendt's call for societies that are grounded in the past but not necessarily impeded by it. In particular these lines seem apt to reading this poster:

Our dead are woven into our souls like the hypnotic music of bone flutes: we can never escape them. If we let them they can help illuminate us to ourselves and to one another. They can be the source of new-found pride, self-respect, and

wisdom. Conversely, they can be the *aitu* that will continue to destroy us by blinding us to the beauty we are so capable of becoming as individuals, cultures, nations. (50)

Poster Poem Number Three. Text: Yosep Sukwianomb; Illustration: Joseph Nalo.

Development

Costumed in cement and silver
Glittering in the glorious Melanesian sun
The gavman's offices in Waigani
Get ready to preach their new development plan

Kunai huts
Mud walls
Gardening lands
All are receding to the islands

Development?
Village construction?
Sitting in
Cool, clean, breezy tower?

Get the hell out of here
Let me breathe my native air
In my native green valley
Where my native wife will caress me
With her naked fingers.

Read within the context of Russell Soaba's recent comments, this poem can be seen to represent the shift away from anti-colonial writings and toward self-criticism. This is not to say, however, that independence brought an immediate end to the effects of colonialism, nor that it didn't continue to be a concern for Sukwianomb and his peers: Though they are now in the hands of Papua New Guineans, clearly the "gavman's offices in Waigani" are a legacy of the colonial period (Waigani being the part of the National Capital District, and home to the PNG parliament and most other government agencies). As a more direct example of these concerns, one need

only read a letter written by Sukwianomb to the UPNG's National Academic Staff Association newsletter in 1980 while teaching in Kenya (note again the African connection). In it Sukwianomb cites Frantz Fanon while noting that "The so-called 'Dependency Complex of the Colonized peoples' must be broken, victory won and our children must live to enjoy the fruits of our freedom as a result of our struggle" (2).

Poster Poem Number Four. Text: Mary To Liman; Illustration: Joseph Nalo.

Bia Botol Longlong

I strolled into the pub
And sat on a chair against the wall
With my friends
Surrounding me

The place was packed
Mungkas's, Morobeans, Papuans
Tolais, Sepiks, Simbus
Talking in different tongues

Soon a poroman came up
Al Buddie!
Two ring? No Answer
Screw-driver? Shoulders shrugged
Spanner? Head bent low
Bakadi and Kok? Ah... struggling
Beer colonial work, Hey?
Ah... o... orange drink, please

KHA! KHA!
KOM ON, KID
BIA BOTOL MARASIN
He sipped the white crystals

Kom on! he repeated
Drink Bia
Because in Heaven
There is no Bia

My mind was troubled

For Papa's voice rang in my ears —
BIA BOTOL LONGLONG

As noted earlier, this poem has been described as being a woman's perspective on the effects of colonialism and modernity (Zimmer-Tamakoshi 117). For her part, To Liman is more direct, saying simply, "That was the one I wrote against drinking alcohol" (James 279). Clearly: The argument between the speaker and the bartender ("poromon") over whether what comes in a beer bottle ("bia botol") is medicine ("marasin") or something that makes drinkers alternately stupid, crazy, or simply drunk (all meanings of "longlong") is fairly straightforward. But read in light of the various strands discussed above, there are other subtexts: Note for instance that all of the patrons in the bar are grouped together by their regions, speaking their separate languages.

Poster Poem Number Five. Text: Jerry Daniels; Illustration: Mathias Kauage.

Kain Kar Ya

Mi sindaon long rot
Na mi lukim ol kar
Oloman! sampela kar
Mi no save ol I wokim long we
Man, ol I save fixim gut turu ya
Kain Kar ya

Sampela kar
Ol i gat planti mas
Ol i holim bilong redio

Sampela kar
Ol i gat planti mas
Ol i kolim dispela eriel

Dispela i bilong redio na

Felifon na televisen
Kain kar ya

Sampela i gat

Piksa bilong ol samting nabaut
Ol i save bilasim gut turu ya

Ol i dispela kar ya i save krai bikpela
Ol i save sipit nogut turu
Kain kar ya

Kain kar ya
Igat planti eriel
Igat kain kain stika na piksa
I save krai bikpela turu
Na i save sipit nogut turu
Kain kar ya

While I don't yet have enough of a grasp of Tok Pisin to make any meaningful comment on this poem's contents, there is one point that is worth bringing up in the context of national identity: The choice of language itself. Whereas other writers in this series are clearly aiming for an international readership, Daniels' work is strictly local: Tok Pisin is to some extent decipherable to speakers of other Melanesian pidgins, but even then only barely—there is not a great deal of crossover between it and Vanuatu's Bislama or even the Solomon Islands' Pijin. Tok Pisin is certainly not spoken by all Papua New Guineans, but of the three official languages in the country (and the 820 total languages), it is the most widely spoken. In other words, this is a poem written for Papua New Guineans, and in that sense can be read as an assertion of national pride. Readers are required to access this poem on PNG terms. Placing this poster side-by-side with a bi-lingual poem like Russell Soaba's, it is also possible to see the dichotomy present in Bernard Narokobi's philosophy of the Melanesian Way: On the one hand, the challenge is to create an internal unity based on values specific to Papua New Guinea; on the other, to reach across national borders to foster a region-wide identity.²⁰ As one final note on the subject, at the time the poster poems were created, there was ongoing debate about whether English, Tok Pisin

or Hiri Motu should be designated as the sole national language of Papua New Guinea (cf. McDonald).

Poster Poem Number Six. Text: Melio Masen; Illustration: Mathias Kauage.

Nobody

“Who are you?”

“I’m nobody.

“Are you nobody, too?”

“Then there’s a pair of us —

Don’t tell

They might report us to the Chief

You know

We are nobody.”

On the one hand, this poem might be read as the type of simple exercise that is often assigned to early creative writing students, in which they’re required to imitate the style of another writer. In this case, though the poster doesn’t credit it, “Nobody” goes beyond imitation to borrow directly from Emily Dickinson’s “I’m Nobody, Who Are You?”:

I’m nobody! Who are you?

Are you nobody, too?

Then there’s a pair of us—don’t tell!

They’d banish us, you know.

How dreary to be somebody!

How public, like a frog

To tell your name the livelong day

To an admiring bog!

But there’s an interesting inversion that occurs in Masen’s poem, which makes it more ominous than the original. After pointing out that society doesn’t take kindly to outsiders, Dickinson’s child-speaker goes on to assert that being “somebody” would only be tedious. Whether or not she is being ironic, in the end there is not a great deal at stake for this speaker: at worst, she appears to be contemplating a choice between two lonely existences. But Masen’s

“Nobody” appears to have much more at stake, and appears to be intent on staying below the radar: By shifting the ostracizing judgment from a nebulous “they” to a specific persona (the Chief), the speaker in Masen’s poem creates what is itself a more specific and consequential situation. Whether the Chief is representative of Melanesian *kastom* or an agent of the modern-nation state, the speaker appears to have something more to worry about.

Still, there is a great deal of ambiguity here, which is heightened by Kauage’s illustration: It is typical of his highly stylized work, but nonetheless hard to read as an outsider—are the women pregnant? Why are they dressed from head-to-toe? On first glance, the clothing looks distinctly Nigerian, and it’s tempting to attribute this to Georgina Beier’s influence on Kauage’s artistic development. But, like the Tok Pisin poems in this series, Kauage’s art often has elements that are only intelligible to those with a deep understanding of specific visual cues.

Poster Poem Number Seven.

Text: Regis N. Stella; Illustration: Michael Ayula

Oloman!
Kain Sanap bilong em
Kain danis bilong em
Kain bilas bilong em
Kain wokabaut bilong em
Brokim lewa stret

Oloman!
Bel bilong mangki Buka sikirap
Mangki Sepik daunim spet nating
Boi Tolai singaut maiiau
Boi Simbu Pasim ai long em
Boi Papua singaut kekeni Favour
Boi Kerema I kus giaman
Boi Samarai wuisil
em i no laik lukluk bek

Oloman!
Marmari long mipela liklik
Meri wantok

Mipela bagarap pinis
Mipela pundaun pinis
Mipela drai pinis
Mipela drai pinis
Mipela sikirap pinis
Oloman! Yu olsem wanem

At the bottom of this poster is printed a note from the author: “Dedicated to the gangs who roam around Tabari place on Saturdays in search of the Hibiscus flowers.” Tabari place is the central square in Boroko, one of two areas of commerce in Port Moresby—and the grittier of the two, the other being the waterside Central Banking District. Attached to the poster is a type-written sheet that shows the original Tok Pisin in one column and a parallel English translation. The original poster does not include a title, but the typescript is headed “Wantok Meri”—*wantok* being one who speaks the same language, and therefore considered a relative; “meri” being a woman (literally “Mary”).

Wantok Meri

Oh my ... (God)!
The way she stands
The way she dances
The way she dresses
The way she walks
Breaks the heart

Oh my ... (God)!
Excites the emotions of the Buka boy
Sepik boy swallows his feelings
Tolai boy yells out: Do I have a chance?
Simbu boy winks at her
Papuan boy yells out: Favorite woman
Kerema boy pretends to cough
Samarai boy whistles
She does not look back

Oh my ... (God)!
Pity on us just a little
Woman-kin

We're crazy about you
We've fallen in love
We're "dried up"
We're "dried up"
We're aroused
Oh my ... (God)!
What kind of woman are you?

It is interesting to note the similarity between the title of this poem and the previously mentioned poster poem "O Meri Wantok," which raised such an up-roar on the campus of UNPG in 1972. It could be that the translator has conflated the two poems, or it could be that one is commenting on the other: In this case, there doesn't appear to be quite the same level of criticism aimed at the *meri* in question, and she is clearly in control of the situation. At the same time, it is interesting to note that Stella dedicates the poem not to her but to the young men who lust (in vain) after her. Finally, though the different young men are all seen to act in ways specific to their regions, it is also perhaps of significance that the woman is indentified as a *wantok* to all of them—and, as with Jerry Daniels, by writing in Tok Pisin Stella is using the only language that is guaranteed to be understood more by "the gangs that roam Tabari place" than by outsiders.

Poster Poem Number Eight. Text: Johnny Saulo; Illustration: Henao Gau.

A Night Mare Dream

Asleep on my bed like a non living rock,
My mind began to come alive, for now,
its dreaming time. Political dreams,
Good dreams of past happenings, Bad
dreams of searing acts. Sweet dreams of
love, Brave dreams of future achievement,
Began to past [sic] by like a movie being
screened.

Suddenly, without knowing
I stretched my hands out
to grab hold of Good dreams
of the past, to grab hold of

Sweet dreams of love But
when I tried to grab the brave
dreams of the future and Political
dreams, I began to struggle, struggle and
to struggle Untill [sic] my whole body
became alive again, Only to find
myself struggling against my own
red bed sheet, Entangled around
my own neck.

Owing to the uneven capitalization and line breaks, it is uncertain if the designer might have changed the poem to fit his layout. In any case, reading this poem, one is again reminded of Gilain Gorle's assertion that "The 1980s were a time of poignant contrasts: political consolidation on the one hand, heightened social division on the other" (Gorle, 1996, 56). One might read the first stanza as a metaphor for Papua New Guinea itself, in a pre-independence slumber, asleep like a "non living rock." If this metaphor is carried through the second stanza, the past is seen as being still largely available to the speaker, as a well to draw from. But the present and future are fraught with both uncertainty and perhaps even outright danger. To continue the metaphor of a young nation struggling with itself, trying to wake from a long slumber and into a new reality, the poem might in the end be seen as a parable for the times: Of a country that is strangling itself even as it reaches for the future.

Poster Poem Number Nine. Text: Elsie Mokis. Illustration: Pauline David Torome

Mopalau

Mopalau
You heal us when we are wounded
You pour rain
When the earth runs dry

When we trespass your grounds
Your eyes glow with anger
You make our heads reel
Make our backs ache

We catch fever
Our pigs go wild

Your laughter breaks like thunder
Your trampling fell our thickest trees
You enter our flesh
To blind our minds and visions
We stop recognizing our own people

We fear you, O Mopalau
The giver of our senses
The spirit of our ancestors [sic]

When the festival aroma blows in the air
Everyone talks about you
The best pigs and crops are gathered
To celebrate your coming

And on the big day
The bamboo fence around the burial ground
Is broken open
We make our presence jubilantly
Exchange our hard earned shell money
Under your watching eyes
Shooting out from the carved image
On the malangan board

Mopalau we wish you were here with us
Forever

On the most obvious level, this poem can be seen as an outcome of the University of Papua New Guinea's emphasis on the collection of folklore: In addition to Ulli Beier's previously discussed use of PNG folklore as a foundation for his early literature classes, series co-editor Prithvindra Chakravarti was himself chiefly interested in folkloric traditions and served as the University's main teaching faculty on the subject. Within the context of the South Pacific Festival of Arts, this poem is also the one that most closely adheres to the festival's emphasis on "Pacific awareness and showing outsiders 'our true cultural ways'" (Kaepler 6). In its broad outlines, the story told here is one that would be familiar to all Pacific cultures. At the same time,

there is specificity: *Malangan* is a type of art that comes from New Ireland, an island in the Bismarck Archipelago to the northeast of New Guinea. According to Susanne Küchler: “It is a collective term for sculptures and dances as well as for the mortuary ceremony and ceremonial exchange. *Malangan*-art is ephemeral, left to rot, burned or sold to European visitors after the sculptures have been displayed on the grave and have been transacted as primary items of value in the exchanges” (Küchler 238).

Poster Poem Number 10. Text: Baluwe Umetryrifo; Illustration: Titus Tilley

Ypela Meri I Senis Hariap Pinis

Not long ago I used to go up the Heklaka hill.
When I looked below over the green valley
I could see smoke popping up here and there —
From amongst the jar trees and kunai grass,
And I could see you young girls
Working very hard in your gardens.
In your traditional pulpuls
With pig grease reflecting in the sun
From your beautiful skin.

But now
When I go up the Heklaka hill
And look below over the beautiful valley
I can see grey smoke popping out of mills and factories
From amongst the huge ugly lumps of metals
And I can see you young girls
In blue jeans and jackets
With high heel shoes and stinky perfumes
Purses in one hand and newspapers in the other.
As you walk from shop to shop gardening
With your breasts sweating in the breast bags.

Oh yupela i senis hariap pinis!
Not long ago your names used to be Urakume, Mohoe and Ilaie
You never looked at boys nor talked to them
Always eyes were on the ground
With bilums on your heads

But now

All your names have changed
To Marys, Bettys, Jennys, and Roses
And you go around hand in hand

With your mangi poroman without bilums
Oh yupela ol meri i winim
Pinis misis Queen!
Na yu Goroka, yu laik winim Tokyo and New York!

The imagery and main themes of this poem have already been discussed above. But while it can certainly be read as indicative of the unfair expectations placed on women as repositories of traditional culture (Schoeffel 369), taken in the context of all that has been discussed in this paper, another more charitable reading would be that it indicates a society that is still in the process of establishing a working relationship between its pre-contact past and post-colonial present. Or, as Albert Wendt has put it: “Much of our early literature saw the colonial and the indigenous as in irreconcilable opposition, the colonial as the evil destroyer; no benefits at all were seen in colonialism or the emergence of blends and mixtures and fusions of the indigenous and the foreign, even though our literature itself is living proof of that” (*Nuanua* 4).

As with other poems in this series, the use of un-translated Tok Pisin aims this poem at a more specific audience. Translations for the Tok Pisin read as follows: *Yupela Meri I Senis Hariap Pinis*: Woman, you’ve changed so fast; *pulpuls*: fiber skirts; *o yupela i senis hariap pinis!*: Oh, you’ve changed so fast!; *bilums*: string carrying bags; *mangi poroman*: young friends. The final lines—*O yupela ol meri i winim / pinis misis Queen! / Na yu Goroka yu laik winim Tokyo and New York!*—read in English as: “Oh you women / beat the Queen! / and you, Goroka, want to beat Tokyo and New York!” (Schoeffel 370). Goroka is the capital of the Eastern Highlands District.

Poster Poem Number Twelve. Text: Renagi Lohia; Illustration: Warrey Apporo.

National Anthem

We value our true ways
Our true norms
Our true traditions
That's our way — the Papua New Guinea way
The true way
Laid down by you, O wise elders, O noble ancestors

We value our true art
Our true culture
Our true heritage
That's our way — the Papua New Guinea way
The true way
Handed down by you, O wise elders, O noble ancestors

Your mighty spirits accompany our journeys
All our journeys
Your penetrating eyes watch our acts
All our acts
Your lofty ideas boost our thoughts
All our thoughts
You guard us, you instruct us, you encourage us
O wise elders, O noble ancestors

It's your direction that we follow
It's your plan that we execute
It's your dream that we dream
That's our way — the Papua New Guinea way
The true way
Prized by you, O wise elders, O noble ancestors
It's in your vision
That we all seek our true identity.

This poem is fitting both as the final publication in the poster series and as a summation of everything that has been discussed thus far in this paper. Coming as it does at a time when writers have, to again quote Russell Soaba, “sobered up a bit” following the early, heady days of independence—and during a period in which, as Gorle has noted, there is increasing social division—Renagi Lohia nonetheless strikes an optimistic note. In his eyes the question of unity has already been resolved: Papua New Guinea, officially in existence for little more than five

years and struggling to define itself as a nation-state, has a shared, 25,000-plus year history to draw upon. In reality, the work of finding “Unity In Diversity” (Papua New Guinea’s official national motto) is an ongoing challenge.

VIII. CONCLUSION

In August 2008, Russell Soaba published an article titled “Waigani Campus: Birthplace of PNG Literature” in the online edition of the *The National*, a daily PNG newspaper. It begins:

Writing started at the Waigani Campus in the sixties. And just as I type this I receive an email from a post grad librarian/student at Manoa (University of Hawaii) wanting to know more about a certain aspect of PNG Literature, known as the “OndoBondo poster poem series” of the eighties.

That should further confirm that the Waigani campus is indeed the birth place of PNG Literature; and it was from this place that a certain Rarotongan student and graduate, namely Marjorie (now Marjorie Crocombe), went away to the Laucala campus of Fiji to join forces with the Samoan, Albert Wendt, and further spread the word that literature was being born and bred in the Pacific but that it had its firmer foundations at the Waigani campus. (“Waigani” par. 1-2)

He followed up on this theme a few months later with a two-part article titled “Justifying PNG Literature,” in which, after outlining a course in PNG literature to an imaginary student at Harvard, he writes:

Indeed, our literature cannot be seen merely as a particle in greater arenas of global discourse, and should no longer be dubbed in with the rest of the world's intellectual preoccupations such as literature of new nations, emergent literatures, whatever that is, indigenous writings, post-colonial literatures, new writings from the Pacific, and so on. You must believe sincerely that your country has come of age and is now ready to offer meaningful courses in the global arena of intellectualism in other universities as well. ("Justifying ... part 2" par. 12)

I am the librarian/student that Soaba speaks of, and while I find it flattering to be mentioned in his article, I also find it unspeakably sad: That a writer of his caliber should feel any need to justify the collective output of his literary compatriots—and to an audience that is for the most part fellow Papua New Guineans, who should already know that output well—speaks volumes about the current state of affairs in Papua New Guinea, which Regis Stella characterizes thus:

Papua New Guinean writers have mostly represented the postindependence PNG landscape as brutalized, trapped in a cocoon of postcolonial tribulations, much of which is the work of Papua New Guinean leaders and elite. As Soaba and the others have darkly and somberly reflected in their works, the PNG predicament is largely the consequence of corrupt political leadership and greed for power. This is one of the salient faces of neocolonialism. As many writers have shown, PNG independence so far has been a sham, since a sense of dependency is

still firmly entrenched in the country's sociopolitical and economic life.

(Imagining 204)

Stella is speaking about a period of writing that extends back from the present to not long after the OndoBondo Poster Poems were produced. One of the consequences of Papua New Guinea's "post-colonial tribulations" is that the work of many good writers is not finding its way out of the country. Meanwhile, when attention is paid to Papua New Guinea at all these days, it tends to be in the context either of the country's ongoing crime problem (which is largely limited to the Port Moresby area) or its precarious position as a nation-state. This in turn leads to a situation where the essential role of Russell Soaba et al in defining the literary canon of Oceania is receding from view.

This paper is in part an attempt to correct that situation. Though it takes as its focal point a very small, seemingly inconsequential slice of PNG writing, my hope is that it also to some extent illuminates the broader framework of literary history within which these posters exist. Poster art is by its very nature ephemeral, and the fact that the OndoBondo Poster Poems exist at all is a testament to my predecessors at Hamilton Library, who were prescient enough to recognize their value and the need to preserve them for future researchers. It's my hope that this paper will also in some measure aid researchers who come upon these posters in the future. Because, though many of these poems and their illustrations can stand on their own, context makes a world of difference. Earlier on, I briefly discussed the ways in which, stripped of their history, these poems run the risk of being hollowed out and filled with myth, along the lines that Roland Barthes describes. It takes no great stretch of the imagination to see someone who has been raised on the myths that Epeli Hau'ofa writes of—"people who fight, compete, trade, pay bride-price, engage in rituals, invent cargo cults, copulate, and sorcerise each other"—to come

upon these posters at some point in the future and create a new set of myths for them. What, for instance, could someone make of Joseph Nalo's illustration for "Looking Thru Those Eyeholes"? What sort of cannibal is this? Context is everything.

All of this said, in closing I would like to give the last, redefining word to novelist, poet, essayist, teacher and OndoBondo editor Russell Soaba:

Finally what new idea is there for the world to know? PNG's world view overall through literature is divided into two: the philosophies of lusman and wanpis. A PNG individual is one or the other, and that is how the whole world is seeing Papua New Guinea at present. The lusman is one who believes that he is by nature free to exist and do whatever he wants. He is free enough to take his own life and those of others. The wanpis is basically the same, but with one difference. He has a conscience, and that's the worrying part. He is not just free as a human being. He is, as the appropriate philosopher puts it, condemned to be free. All these instances of philosophical enquiry boil down to that one focal point of what PNG Literature is: the wanpis phenomenon.

Whereas the lusman possesses all the vulnerabilities that can lead a country to total corruption and downfall, the wanpis does not. And that is the greatest phenomenon that we have about ourselves and which we would like to share with the world, even at the campuses that exist as the centres of their respective countries and their civilizations. ("Justifying" last par.)

IX. NOTES

¹ WorldCat membership is by subscription—its cost is beyond the means of many Pacific institutions, and hence can't always be considered a complete record of Pacific materials housed in libraries. Other libraries, particularly in Australia, simply choose not to participate—in all likelihood, there should be at least one Australian library that holds some of these posters, given the country's relationship with Papua New Guinea. That said, WorldCat does include some of the most important repositories of Papua New Guinean material (among them Australia's Alexander Turnbull Library).

² To see how these multiple theories might apply, I highly recommend the work of Regis N. Stella, whose *Imagining the Other: The Representation of the Papua New Guinean Subject* (2007) brings a vast spectrum of western theory to bear on the literature of his own country.

³ The region is also known by some as West Papua. As with its political status in general, there has been much dispute over the naming of the western half of New Guinea. Prior to the name-switch to Papua, the region was known as Irian Jaya, and before that Dutch New Guinea.

⁴ From this point forward, "Papua" refers to the Australian colony (i.e., the south-eastern portion of the island of New Guinea) as it existed from 1906 through 1975, and *not* the current Papua (the Western half of New Guinea, which remains under Indonesian rule as of this writing).

⁵ "Extremely active," "fallow" and "revival" are my terms, not Winduo's.

⁶ Gorle also cites 1969 as the year of publication for Vincent Eri's *The Crocodile*; however, the book was first published by Jacaranda Press in 1970.

⁷ Hannett's last name is often alternately spelled Hannet — it varies even on pieces authored by him but anthologized by others. While many of his contemporaries are listed in the Library of Congress Authority Headings (which codify name spellings for libraries), his name does not. At any rate, I am using the spelling which is applied by my own library's catalogers; in places where I quote others who mention his name using the alternate spelling, I have preserved that spelling.

⁸ Although Papua New Guinea gained full independence in 1975, provisional independence came in 1973.

⁹ To date I have been unable to track down a copy of this paper.

¹⁰ Regarding Ulli and Georgina Beier's shaping role in Oceanic arts, it's also worth noting that when the University of the South Pacific was in the planning stages for what would become the Oceania Centre for Arts and Culture, center founder Epeli Hau'ofa called upon the Beiers "to visit us, look into our situation, and write a report that would help us. A most valuable report was eventually presented to the university—one pregnant with ideas and suggestions but with no concrete recommendations for a systematic course of action" (Hau'ofa, 2008, p. 83). Knowing Hau'ofa's subtle sense of irony, it's unclear whether he is being completely transparent in his praise, or if he was hoping for structural advice on the founding of a new institution rather than "pregnant ideas" on the nature of Oceanic arts.

¹¹ As an aside, an interesting difference of opinion between Taban Lo Liyong and Ulli Beier arises at the first PNG Writers Seminar, organized by Liyong in 1976. At the outset of the conference—which Ellerman describes as "one of several attempts by Liyong to revive what seemed to be a moribund literary scene" (1994, p. 219)—Liyong published an editorial in the *Papua New Guinea Post-Courier*, in which Ellerman quotes him as calling for writers to "chart a way forward from protest literature, the retelling of folktales, and emasculated stories for school readers"

(Ibid, p. 221). Beier, who was also in attendance at the conference, countered that writers should still be willing to take on contemporary politics, posing the question, as quoted by Ellerman, “Are there already ... sacred cows that we are afraid to slaughter?” (Ibid, p. 222).

¹² In fairness, I should note that both Beier anthologies include material that falls outside the category of anti-colonial writing.

¹³ In 1977, this paper was published in volume 3 of Stevens and Wolfers’ *Racism: the Australian experience: a Study of Race Prejudice in Australia*. See bibliography under Hannett, 1971, for complete citation.

¹⁴ Tarcisius Kabutaulaka (1994) provides a very useful discussion of the terms “nation” and “state” as they relate to Papua New Guinea at the time of independence, as well as to Melanesia more generally.

¹⁵ Each of the three compiled editions of *The Melanesian Way* include letters to the *Post-Courier* from both supporters and detractors; see also Kabutaulaka, 1994 and Otto, 1997.

¹⁶ As of 2005, literacy in Papua New Guinea was estimated as being between 32 and 43 percent (Gordon, 2005, 587).

¹⁷ Following the close of the Third South Pacific Festival of the Arts, Chakravarti wrote that “The spirit of the festival will be kept alive in the name *OndoBondo* ... chosen by the Literature Department for its publication wing—*Books OndoBondo*. It is hoped that *Books OndoBondo* will produce in the near future a series of new publications to which our young writers and eager readers are looking forward” (Chakravarti, 27).

¹⁸ At present conversion rates, this equals just under \$1,500 US, though I’ve been unable to determine the conversion rate for the day, nor the equivalence between 2009 and 1980 US dollars.

¹⁹ I should note that these positions of strength and equality within the poems were first pointed out to me by Professor Caroline Sinavaiana, in casual conversation.

²⁰ That a region-wide identity necessitates the use of the language(s) of the colonizer also signals one of the broad criticisms of Narokobi’s philosophy: “Melanesia” is itself a construction of the West. It has been noted by many scholars that, of the three widely used geographic descriptors—Melanesia, Micronesia (“the small islands”), Polynesia (“the many islands”)—only Melanesia (“the black islands”) has specifically racist overtones, and by trying to create a “Melanesian” identity, one walks a line between creating a sense of legitimate regional cohesion (based on pre-contact trade that existed between the various island groups) and unquestioning adoption of colonial categorization.

X. BIBLIOGRAPHY

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