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The Power of the Pen: Solomon Islands Women Uniting to Overcome Adversity through Writing

Indigenous writers of the Solomon Islands, as with the majority of indigenous Oceanic countries and states, exhibit common themes throughout their literary works relating to colonisation, decolonisation and independent rule, the retelling and recording of traditional myths and legends, and issues relating to trans-cultural confusion. In reading the works of indigenous Solomon Island women, similar themes are evident, however, there is also a striking digression from those themes. For the purposes of this study, the writing can be divided into two distinct periods — writers born in the pre- and post-independent eras.¹ In both of these categories, it is evident that the women offer an insight into their world often from within a very personal and emotional space. Their poetry and prose reflect their fears and concerns for the future for themselves, their families and their society. Although the pre-independence era is the primary focus of this paper, this is not to suggest that the post-independent period is less valuable or interesting. Both groups of women have a lot to offer Pacific literature as their works capture their thoughts and feelings of their society in its various transformations. Tongan writer, Konai Helu Thaman, states that:

While much has been written about the impact of colonialism on Pacific economies, environments, politics, and social structures, little attention has been focused on its impact on people's minds, particularly on their ways of knowing, their views of who and what they are, and what they consider worthwhile to teach and learn. (n.p.)

The writing of the Solomon Island women is both eloquent and emotive, thereby offering an insight into the mind set of the colonised woman. Their works reflect the personal rather than the impersonal impact that they have experienced through colonisation.

The pre-independence poetry and prose seem to exhibit more confusion associated with a traditional agricultural society's rapid progression into a modern society. This is hardly surprising as colonisation had a direct impact on this group of women. The women of this era were born in the 1950s and 1960s and were, therefore, of the generation to experience first hand the many changes independence wrought. After independence in 1978, the affects of colonisation on the new generation were less obvious as most of the colonial impetus had abated.² The women of these two groups, therefore, address different issues. Sina Va'ai suggests reasons for this shift:

In the early 1970s the major thrust of Pacific writing was regional and looked at the enemy without — the former colonisers and the impact colonisation on the islanders and their cultures. Increasingly in the late 1970s, 1980s and 1990s, Pacific writing has become nationalistic, looking inward at the enemy within — at the neo-colonial practices continued by island elites who have come to political power since independence. (219)

The pre-independence creative works include issues of subjugation, (not only by the coloniser but more specifically by the indigenous male), bride price, violence — especially domestic violence — education, and village/town relationships, all most often within a strong Christian ideological framework. These works highlight the plight of women in an altered society and while they still explore issues of cultural transformation, they focus mainly on the everyday issues of women and the depletion of their rights. Education gave them a glimpse of the modern world and of the opportunities that were available, however, traditional customs have followed them into that world ensuring they remained oppressed. The internal conflicts of being an educated woman in a modern society while retaining traditional values through a lifetime of connection and obligation are overwhelming. While these writers may not think of themselves as feminists, their subject matter falls into the confines of feminist theory. While the experiences and emotions drawn on by Solomon Island women writers mirror the experiences of the impact of their colonised societies' transition to national independence in general, they specifically highlight the paradox of the colonised women's experiences, as Robert Young suggests:

For all feminists, the transfer of power at independence and the achievement of national sovereignty, though desirable, was not the end. It was simply a stage along the way. Whereas from a masculine perspective, independence ushered in the defining new condition of postcoloniality, for women there was no such break: the struggle continued. (98-99)

In a country where very few women are in a position of authority,³ creative writing becomes the conduit that provides a voice for women and although they are few in number, their digression from the much explored theme of the period of the confusions of indigenous peoples associated with loss of identity and cultural traditions and values and the fact that their works have been published, are testament to their tenacity and desire to raise awareness of women's everyday living conditions. The interweaving of colonial history and the experiences of the women writers is evident within their poetry and prose. The reader is given an insight into the correlation of the impact of colonial and mission policies with the personal experiences of the writers and their communities and the resulting confusions and frustrations of the colonised.

There is little doubt that the indigenous women of the Solomon Islands, as is the case in most colonial territories, have had to bear the burden of double colonisation. John Goldie, an early pioneer missionary stationed in the New Georgia group, notes his observances of women's lives:

The lot of women was a particularly hard one. They were the burden-bearers, doing almost all the work in the village and the food plantations. I have frequently seen families returning from the gardens, the man carrying his battle-axe and shield, the woman following with heavy loads of yams, taro, or firewood, with a child on her back or across her hips. (564)

For centuries traditional cultural practices ensured women played a secondary role within their society and with the arrival of the patriarchally-dominated West, they were further subjugated by the colonial administrations and to a certain extent by the missions as an agency of colonisation. These patriarchal ideologies were reinforced with the introduction of Christianity and in turn, mission education. Although the missions acted with religious zeal and what they believed to be benevolence, their influences and colonial agency had debilitating consequences for traditional societies as Roger Keesing suggests:

The cost for men, who have borne the brunt of incorporation into plantation or town economies, has been staggering. Proud people who controlled their destiny, in the centre of their universe, have become despised and semi-human 'natives' in the colonial situation. 'The native' becomes a scorned creature in his own country; his culture became an object of derision. Proud men were turned into 'boys', forced to demean themselves serving and slaving for white 'masters' with obeisance. Christian missionaries sought to save their souls by turning them into pious children. Humans were led to despise the colour of their skin and the way of their ancestors. (412)⁴

The Solomon Islands, as with all other Island states and countries of the Oceanic region, have a history intrinsically tied to evangelical missions and Christianity. Statistically, ninety-seven per cent of Solomon Islanders are Christian.⁵ In the Solomon Islands pre-World War II period, education was the domain of the mission school and until the end of World War II, education and schooling⁶ was the domain of the various missions of the Solomon Islands and was, as Hugh Laracy states, 'a secondary adjunct to evangelism' (144). The post-war administration's involvement in education was (spurred by the United Nations push for independence of colonised territories) accelerated as the need for indigenous professionals and leaders was vital. In the period after the War and impending Independence in the late 1970s, education in earnest became a key factor in decolonisation, and the introduction of Western concepts transformed traditional societies of Oceania, including the Solomon Islands, irrevocably. Mission literature up to the early 1960s particularly, speaks of education in terms of males being the primary focus.⁷ Mission schools reinforced traditional allocation of chores by categorising them as being 'women's work' and 'men's work'. As Sister Gwen Cross discussed in her *Aloha Solomons* (7), much of the girls' time was spent learning Western crafts and ways of domesticity with the intention that the girls would become suitable wives for the indigenous missionary or native teacher.⁸ Later, the focus shifted to ensuring the girls were proficient in a Western manner to look after their families' health and were acquiring the skills necessary to maintain a 'Christian' home.

Domesticity proved to be an added burden in the modern society as women entered the workforce, for as these women grew up in a simpler time, a less materialistically and economically generated era, they had not previously experienced the dilemma of juggling family and work commitments. They grew up in an era in which 'women had their roots and major commitment in the domestic realm: women's roles centre[d] around the hearth and home' (Keesing 305). Jully Sipolo's 'Working Mother' (1981 7) and Lemu Darcy's 'Women and Housework' (Billy 1983a 107) relate to the tiredness and frustration of mothers who are unable to be with their children. Celo Kulaghoe contributes a male Solomon Islander's perspective on this dilemma in his poem 'Women's Week' by concluding his poem with:

...This week
won't you spring
back to home to rock the cradle? (Crocombe 58)

Solomon Islander, John Saunana, touches briefly on the issue of girls and education in his novel *The Alternative*. A central motif of his observations relates specifically to presumptions made by villagers in relation to the morality of the girls who accepted positions in schools. Girls had to 'prove their worth' to achieve what was unconditionally offered to boys, and gaining a place in a school was fraught with negative connotations. Education was a part of the public realm as it was seen as the key to 'white man's authority and superiority' and as such was traditionally the domain of men.⁹ As the mission monopoly of schooling abated, government schools were keen to educate girls, but the education of girls was perceived by the villagers to take away opportunities that should have been allocated to males:

Some boys had mixed feelings about girls being at the same school. But there were others who loved being in the same class as girls. Maduru was one of the band who felt that it was reasonable for girls to have secondary education — provided that not too many places were given to them. Boys, he thought, would be more use to the government. (Saunana 53)

Additionally, villagers questioned the desirability of educating a girl when she would become a wife anyway. This consideration had to be weighed up against the enormous cost of fees and board and the presumption by many villagers, both men and women, that an educated girl would be unable to fit into village life. 'Still, the controversy raged. There were many who felt that it was all a waste of government money. When the girls returned, it was said, they would snub their traditional way of life and bring shame on their people' (Saunana 53).

Absence from the village for extended periods to attend school resulted in disconnection and the loss of informal village education. Traditional skills and knowledge that the indigenous student would normally have received was neglected. This in turn created animosity between the 'educated' and the 'uneducated'. Afu Billy's 'Loke' (Billy 1983a 82–92) exemplifies the derision

Toia, a city girl, experiences at the hands of the older village women when she visits the village of her intended future husband. To the village women, 'anything Toia did was either completely wrong or wasn't done in the proper way' (82). Toia has received a formal education often dismissed by indigenous villagers as being the 'white man's' education and it is often devalued in the village as Toia soon discovers when her knowledge of a woman's duties and role within the village are proven to be inadequate. On a similar theme, another question relates to whether an educated girl was a suitable wife for an educated male from the town or for a male who remained in the village. In, 'He is Mine', Lamour Gina (Billy 1983a 6–7) explores the relationship between an educated male and female. Tetu is an educated town girl who loves Randy but Randy's future has been determined by the village and he is to marry Seli, a village girl. His family believes that 'town girls make expensive wives' and do not know the village ways and are therefore undesirable as wives. Seli tells Tetu, 'you do not know how to motu or work in the garden' (6). Later, Seli elopes with a village boy, as she believes she 'would mean nothing to an educated boy' (6–7). A similar theme is explored in 'Vari Haba (Marriage)' (Billy 1983a 99–100).¹⁰ In this poem, the uneducated village girl is sent home by the educated male town dweller, as she is unable to satisfy his modern requirements.

Finally, it is made clear that a girl's acceptance of the opportunity to receive an education subjects her moral being to corruption. The fact that mission education generally meant boarding school with long periods of absence from family and village influence, ensured mission control and influence on its pupils. This was also problematic for parents of girls as they were concerned for their daughters' morality while they were away from the village environment. A common consequence of boarding schools was the disconnection from traditional cultures as the student was immersed in a Western environment for lengthy periods. Laracy comments on the destabilising effects of mission policies and the confusion of the indigene as s/he shifted between the modern and traditional worlds:

...the lengthy sojourns at station schools and the academic bias of schooling offered do not equip young people to settle into village life. The problem is made more difficult by the fact that academic education, while required for the creation of mission and government elites and desirable, perhaps, for a responsible electorate, tends to be held in exaggerated esteem by the islanders for the rewards and status it can confer — white-collar employment. But opportunities for such employment are likely to remain limited for many of those who aspire to it and carry the hopes of their village and relatives to school. For them, education is likely to lead to frustration as to fulfilment. (157)

Jully Makini (formerly Sipolo) was, and has been, the most prolific and substantial contributor of the women poets. Her *Civilized Girl: A Collection of Poetry by Jully Sipolo* (1981) was the first collection by a woman writer to be published. She followed this collection by contributing to, and co-editing with Billy Afu and Hazel Lulei *Mi Mere: Poetry and Prose by Solomon Islands Women*

Writers (1983), the first, and so far, the only collection to date written solely by Solomon Island women. This was followed by Jully's second collection of poetry, *Praying Parents: A Second Collection of Poems* (1986) and *Roviana: Custom Stories* (1991) which she also edited. Some other publications of the pre-independence period to include women's writing are journals such as *Mana* and *Moana*. Afu Billy, another of the co-editors of *Mi Mere* also edited *Poemes du Pacifique au Feminin*.

In the preface to the 'Edukasin an Sens' section of *Mi Mere* the editors acknowledge that change occurs but that it should be gradual — education was/ is not always to their benefit. 'Some changes result in false hopes' (Billy 3). Afu Billy's 'Anita' (Billy 1983a 11–14) offers an example of a woman who in longing for the white promise and materialism overlooks her own people in favour of the modern. The editors of *Mi Mere* suggest in the preface that 'Education doesn't change the colour of our skin — but it changes our thinking. We show this by our actions in imitation of the European' (Billy 1983a 3). In a similar light, Jully Sipolo's well-known 'Civilized Girl' (1981 21) confronts the dilemmas felt by society as an indigenous girl; she rejects her traditional past and adopts the modern coloniser's way (in this case the worst of the colonisers' habits).¹¹ It also epitomises the innate desire of the colonised to prove their transition into contemporary citizenship by disassociating themselves from traditional customs. Jully Makini (Sipolo)'s 'Friday Nite Dance at Gizo Club' (Maka'a 1996 4–7) is a satirical description of the altered lifestyle choices made by the modern Solomon Islander. Va'ai discusses the relegation of traditional customs and cultural practices in connection to education and evangelism thus:

The cord that tied the introduction of the written to the colonising impetus of the imperial nations from Europe resulted not only in translations of the Bible into island tongues but also in the transitions of the values of things homegrown which were then relegated to second place after things European. (213)

Jully Sipolo's 'Spinning' (1981 2) questions the uncertain future for a traditional girl as she leaves her past behind, gains an education and enters the modern world. She also describes the old world as an idealised space.¹² The dilemma for the colonised is that their new found knowledge ensures the old world can never be replicated. Eva Lingairi sums up the complexities of their position in 'Imagination' (Billy 1983 50) as she concludes:

Help me! I'm exhausted,
I'm on an island
Help!
I'm drowned.

For many newly educated indigenous people, the call of the city and townships was overwhelming. They often considered themselves too educated to return to the village but found that there were limited opportunities for employment. Employment had been the 'dangling carrot' that inspired the pursuit of education

for many indigenes; but they found the promise (after leaving their villages) was not valid. A tragic consequence of this movement of people to urban environments was the creation of 'ghettos'. Many indigenes refused to return to the village, either through embarrassment or because of the hope they would find employment if they remained. This theme is explored in 'The Compound' (Stella 2004 7–15).¹³ For many others, the hopes of families were pinned on their children's successful completion of education. Jully Sipolo's 'Sister's Lament' (1981 3) is an example of the confusion that resulted when the dream was not realised.

The division between the educated and the illiterate also grew within this era. Villagers often rejected the educated in favour of 'their own kind'. The short stories by Afu Billy, 'Loke' (Billy 1983a 82–92) and Lamour Gina's 'He is Mine' (Billy 1983a 6–7) exemplify this division. Villagers often thought of the educated as having an inflated ego or alternatively, they considered the educated to have 'sold-out' their traditional heritage by pursuing Western education and its accoutrements.

The village school remains a strong force in the formative years of children through primary education in particular, therefore, Christian ideals, ethics and morality are powerful influences on the indigenous people of the Solomon Islands and are a legacy of an agency of colonisation that remains evident throughout their literary works. Poems relating to marriage, divorce and infidelity by the husband, in particular reflect the entrenchment of Christian ideologies. In her role as President of the Solomon Islands National Council of Women, Afu Billy states that,

There are also worries about what the church and their families may say. Marriage, we are told, is for life. When those two little words 'I do' are uttered during the marriage ceremony, they are not meant to be broken 'for better or worse, until death do us part'. (2000 174–75)

The obligations of honour and duty felt by women are inherent in both traditional and modern societies. However, they differ in impact on the indigenous woman. Keesing notes that even in an arranged or traditional marriage, a woman has much more freedom in her relationships but remains bound to her husband in a legal sense (260). Contact with Christianity altered these obligations. The imposition of obligations and duties in the modern society were reinforced by the vows within the sacrament of marriage and the commandment of honouring one's parents. Evidence of the honour and duty felt by women through Christian marriage are evident in poems and short stories such as 'The MP's Wife' (Stella 2004 49–57) in which the wife's feelings are explored, as she becomes increasingly aware of her husband's indiscretions. She internalises the pain of his betrayal to the detriment of her health but, despite the urging of friends, will not leave him because of her Christian vows of loyalty and duty to him. The frustrations felt by women when a husband does not honour his vows are also evident in Sipolo's 'Marriage' (1981 11) and in her poem, 'The Promise' (1981 16).

For better or for worse
 For richer or for poorer
 In good health or sickness
 I do.
 You committed yourself
 Now going's rough
 You've broken your promise
 I don't

('The Promise', 16).

The traditional aspects of obligation towards one's relatives and kin have very strong roots within traditional society and these obligations remain intact in the modern society as Jully Sipolo suggests in her poem 'Obligation' (Maka'a 1985 14).

The final, and by content the most important, issue facing Solomon Island women is one of subjugation. Many of the poems and much of the prose deal with this issue and the debilitating consequences which result from it as well as the physical and mental abuse that is intrinsically linked to it. In his discussion of the indigenous woman in a traditional situation Keesing observes:

...we find over and over again in the tribal world that cultural ideologies that subordinate and exclude women, extract their labor and child-bearing and — rearing, and place them under legal control of fathers, brothers and husbands are supported as vehemently by women as by men. Accepting, as they have to, a celestialized system that consigns them to domestic roles and a regimen of labor that serves male prestige, women portray themselves in terms of virtue and duty. Within the constraints of subordination, women may themselves become important political actors who not only substantially influence the public political affairs of men from behind the scenes, but themselves pursue strategies of controlling labor and prestige within the constraints of the system. (302–303)

The formerly colonised women bears the burden of double colonisation within the contemporary society as the demands placed on her escalate. In the traditional society, the boundaries of roles and duties between men and women were clearly defined. Modernity alters this status quo as Robert Young suggests:

Women are often taken to represent the mainstay of the cultural identity of the nation, retrieved for the present from the society of the past. For macho-nationalists, home and the domestic sphere, relatively free from colonial control, was the best guardian of the traditional values, culture, and identity of the new phenomenon they were creating on the European model against their European masters, 'the nation'. Women and modernity came to be regarded as antithetical entities, with the result that the goal of national emancipation involved a betrayal of all prospect of progressive change for women. (97)

Traditionally, male authority was never challenged; but this power and authority in the traditional sense was usurped in many ways by Western governance and institutions. The Western coloniser asserted his authority over the colonial subjects ensuring his/her dominion and supremacy. The indigenous male, according to Albert Memmi, having lost his authority, suffers from feelings of emasculation

(79–118). The traditional successions to tribal leadership and rights associated with being an elder are negated through the colonising process. He becomes debilitated by his loss of power and respect inherent in traditional cultures within his own societies. No longer in control of his own life, the indigenous male asserts his authority over the only people he can — the women and children of his family — as this is the only way left to him. This is often portrayed in acts of violence against women and children and, therefore, categorised in modern times as domestic violence.

Clearly, domestic violence is not isolated to indigenous peoples or the Solomon Islands specifically as this tragedy is perpetrated in all societies. It has however in recent times become a central issue of many Women's focus groups, United Nations and government departments such as Police and Law Reform Commissions.¹⁴ Although domestic violence is a growing concern among Oceanic writers including, for example, Grace Meara Molisa of Vanuatu, the writing with which this essay is concerned predates intervention and affirmative action by government departments to criminalise and advocate for the eradication of domestic violence. Jully Sipolo's 'Wife Bashing' (1986 12) highlights the tragedy of violence as a woman finds she has no escape from her abuser.

...Impossible to go back to Dad
 Sis doesn't want to get involved
 Can't stand sister-in-laws tongue
 The police don't want to pry
 I don't like this cruel treatment from hubby
 But where can I go?

Hubby,
 I'm back
 I've brought back this battered body,
 Battered face plus battered case
 I am the ball players pass around
 I've had enough of being tossed around
 Like a hot sausage
 Now I'm back
 Have a Ball.

('Wife Bashing')

Jully's poem typifies the traditional response of relatives and authorities on domestic violence: that no one wants to get involved. For instance, society in general does not allocate the same credence to domestic violence as it does to violence between strangers. In earlier stanzas of the poem, the woman turns to her father, her brother, her sister, her priest and the authorities, all to no avail. She, therefore, accepts her fate and returns to her husband knowing the abuse will continue. Other tragic examples include 'Temperamental Man' (1981 8) and 'The Hypocrite' (1981 9) both by Jully Sipolo, and 'Dad' Anon (Billy 1983a 31–33), 'My Husband' Anon (Billy 1983a 36), and 'Neighbour Joe' Anon (Billy 1983a 37).¹⁵ Afu Billy states that domestic violence was not identified until the

early 1980s, 'when the Solomon Islands National Council of Women was established and began to raise awareness of the problem' (173). She comments further that, '[a]lthough there were little or no statistics at all on the scale of the problem, other evidence suggested it was a widespread one' (173). Chief Inspector Yawa's statistics confirm the enormity of the abuse (note xii).

Sadly, domestic violence is not confined to husband and wife as many of the writers observe. The poetry and prose explore other examples such as sisters beaten by their brothers in 'Against My Will' Afu Billy (Billy 1983a 17-19) and 'Big Brother' (Billy 1983a 25-27). Afu Billy discusses further examples such as sons beating up their mothers, boyfriends beating up their girlfriends — a Guadalcanal grandmother was even beaten to death by her grandson (174). The equally debilitating mental abuse by a husband toward his wife as she becomes his 'beast of burden' is also discussed in Jolly Sipolo's 'Anti-Climax' (Sipolo 1986 33).

The issue of male subjugation of women through traditional practices such as bride price and arranged marriages attracts a response by several of the poets. Afu Billy's 'A Woman's Lament' (Billy 1983 98) sums up the fatal acceptance by women in honouring their traditional obligations and their unwillingness to bring shame upon their families':

...Come my little sister,
Come my little brother,
Cry with me,
For tomorrow I go,
To marry the man of
Someone else's choice
I'm a woman.

('A Women's Lament')

Other examples include Eva Lingairi's 'To Relatives and Friends' (Crocombe 1979 76) and 'Expensive Smile' (Billy 1983a 103) in which the author equates her value to Ten Tafuliaes or \$1500. Her 'To My Family' (Billy 1983a 100) relates the despair of a young girl as she tries to escape her inevitable future only to find she wants desperately to return to her family. The anguish of the modern educated woman realising that her life equates to the bride price she will attract for her family is inconceivable to a Western reader.

The writers also voice their concerns over the general acceptance of male superiority. Jolly Sipolo's 'A Man's World' (1981 10) is a well-known poem juxtaposing a brother's rights and his sister's lack of rights. Other poems on this issue include Afu Billy's short story 'Against my Will' (Billy 1983a 17-19) and the factual account of male oppression of a wife by her husband in 'Liu in Town' (Billy 1983a 132-34).

The themes and issues discussed above clearly indicate the obligation these Solomon Island women writers feel toward their community. Indigenous writers, both male and female, have become the social conscience of their new societies in many ways. Albert Memmi suggests that they hold a vicarious position within

their society and that they 'live more in cultural anguish' than his/her illiterate/village counterpart. [S/]he is more aware of the transformations [s/]he observes and records these changes through writing. Those who understand their fate become more impatient and no longer tolerate colonisation (Memmi 120). The writers discussed in this essay are aware of their vicarious position within their society and a sign of that is the number of poems and recollections signed 'Anon'.

Although there is a distinct absence of novels by woman writers and their publications have been limited in quantity and are spasmodic, their contributions are a valuable source of Solomon Island history. Continuity of publication in the Solomon Islands, as with many other Pacific islands and states, has been handicapped due to the need of the writers to fulfil work commitments and family obligations, as Albert Wendt, one of the most prolific literary and critical writers, suggests (Sharrad 2003 42). Va'ai confirms Wendt's observations:

Creative writing in the Pacific is often thought to have gone through a 'boom-full stop or comma' cycle from the initial flowering in the early 1970s to a very slow growth in the 1980s and 1990s, and in terms of production, this may well be true. The 'golden', optimistic time of independence produced a fruitful response in the writing of many Pacific Islanders throughout the 1970s. Many of these writers are approaching their 40s or middle age and hold responsible and influential positions in governments, private enterprise and academia in the Pacific in the 1990s. (220)

Publication, however, in no way assures that their message will be heard. In fact it is fair to say that their writing will have little impact on the general Solomon Island indigenous population as literacy levels remain relatively low. In the introduction to *Solomons: A Portrait of Traditional and Contemporary Culture in Solomon Islands*, Sam Alasia comments that 'while English became the language of the educated, the reality is that as little as ten to fifteen per cent of the population speaks English adequately' (Maka'a 1985 3). Linda Crowl's statistics that 'one quarter to one third of Solomon Islands children are not in school' would indicate that this aspect of modern Solomon Islands is unlikely to change in the near future (online).

However depressing these statistics may be, this particular group of writers has not relied solely on publication as a means of being heard. A common fallacy of the West is to presume that if literature is not in print it does not exist. Va'ai comments on the nuances of publishing in the Pacific:

In fact, when one considers the concept of centre and margin/periphery (used in relation to colonial and post-colonial situations), it could be said that much of the creative writing of west Polynesia and even throughout most of the Pacific, is not even in the margin, it is literally off the page, either unpublished or left in its oral form. (219)

The editors of *Mi Mere* have been very proactive in supporting their concerns for the community by taking their work into the Pacific throughout the many workshops and forums conducted to support the advancement of women's issues

in the region. They have become advocates for women's health, crisis centres and women's participation in political affairs. They are aware that they are a privileged few within their country and have taken on the obligations to ensure the betterment of the 'underprivileged women of their communities'.

Saunana in *The Alternative* wrote: 'When you educate a man, you are educating an individual. But when you educate a woman you are educating a family and ultimately the nation' (54). Not all education is academic and the poems and prose offered by the Solomon Islands' women writers prove that this is the case; the women are very keen to pass on their knowledge thereby ensuring the future of their people. They ultimately retain a strong sense of tradition, respecting the decisions made for them by their male figureheads, and after their education entered positions that would help them achieve advancement for the rights of other women.

In the 1970s, this small group of women began to address the many injustices prevalent in their society in an inspirational and novel way by forming a women's writing group. *Mi Mere* was the result of their efforts, the women passionately and eloquently reflect on their relationships with males, and their outpouring of emotion is inspirational. In a society in which the male authority is entrenched, this group of writers have offered examples of the consequence of challenging traditional roles which have been ingrained and enforced by familial as well as governmental authority. They write of the suspicion, discrimination and violence that result from such challenges. In unity they exhibit the bravery necessary to gain a united voice on the tragic issue of domestic violence experienced by so many Melanesian women. Their work continues in the twenty-first century.

NOTES

- ¹ Independence was granted by the British protectorate on July 7, 1978.
- ² I do not mean to imply that colonialism did not have an impact on the later generations. I am basing this comment on a study of indigenous Oceanic literature from the emergent writers to the present. A comparison of *faa Samoa* Samoan, Albert Wendt's earlier works, for example, were highly critical of colonialism while his later works exhibit a mellowing of his former views. E. Krause Va'ai, also Samoan and of the younger generation, does not exhibit the severity of criticism as Wendt.
- ³ See, Keesing for a discussion of traditional roles and stature. Also Afu Billy 'Fighting for a Fair Deal in National Politics' for a modern perspective of authority and the difficulties still confronting women.
- ⁴ Discussion of the denigration of the colonised indigenous, both anthropologically and psychoanalytically, tends to offer an analysis of the colonised person in terms of being male. For a discussion on the male bias in anthropology, see Keesing 307-308. Also, renowned, formerly colonised psychoanalysts, Albert Memmi and Frantz Fanon, both discuss the impact of colonisation in masculine terms. Perhaps this is a generic rather than gender specific reference, however, it accentuates the double-colonisation of women and the oversight of the impact colonisation had on them, ensuring their relegation to a secondary status within their own societies.

- ⁵ Statistics taken from *The World Factbook — Solomon Islands*. Also, Swain and Trompf support these figures in 1992 when a survey conducted on 25,000 Pacific Islands resulted in ninety-five per cent of the population acknowledging 'their involvement with some Christian tradition or another' (192).
- ⁶ For a discussion on the central trope of schooling as 'negation of identity, colonisation, status enhancement, national formation and transition to modernity' see Paul Sharrad's 'Literacy Legacies: Faltering Feet; Dancing a Pen to a National Beat'.
- ⁷ See G.H. Cranswick and I.W.A. Shevill. Also, John Goldie, 569 and David Hilliard, 142, 149, 150.
- ⁸ See also Diane Langmore's 'The Object Lesson of a Civilised Christian Home'.
- ⁹ See Keesing 305. Many of the missionary writers found this perception to be the common appeal of education to indigenous societies.
- ¹⁰ Anon, but attributed to Afu Billy in *Mana* 80.
- ¹¹ See Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* and *Black Skin, White Masks* as well as Albert Memmi's *The Colonizer and the Colonized* for their thorough psychoanalysis of colonised peoples.
- ¹² This is a common trope of essentialist theorists and writers such as Kenyan Ngugi wa Thiong'o.
- ¹³ Regis Stella and Lynda Aniburi Macaniani's collaborative *Melanesian Passages* explores themes which cross over the two periods of pre- and post-independence. It is not possible to determine whether they wrote all of the stories together or individually.
- ¹⁴ Chief Inspector Miriam Yawa of the Royal Papua New Guinea Constabulary has published an article, 'Gender and Violence', in which she discusses the horrific extent of this crime in PNG. 'The Gender Analysis in Papua New Guinea commissioned by the World Bank states that 70% of women in PNG experience domestic violence. Other studies put the figure higher. The Papua New Guinea Law Reform Commission Report 1992 stated in some areas 100% of women were beaten and that one out of six wives living in town had to seek medical treatment for injuries inflicted on them by their husbands. 'These are statistics we are concerned with' (online <http://www.aic.gov.au/conferences/policewomen3/yawa.html>). Solomon Islands connection to Papua New Guinea makes these figures as equally concerning.
- ¹⁵ Attributed to Jolly Sipolo in *Mana* 1979.

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