

Papua New Guinea Literature at the Crossroads: Islands, Languages, and Cultures

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MUCH THEORIZING AND discussion of contemporary literature of Papua New Guinea has eschewed or neglected the influence and role played by the orature. In many of the studies concerning PNG literature, critics and writers have concerned themselves more with political representation, meaning, and implications, that is, with how the literature deals with the issues of colonialism, decolonisation, and independence. While these issues are cardinal and inextricable, this rather restricted reading denies the exploitation of the full archives of this literature. The constricted theorizing of PNG literature demonstrates broadly the tendency to situate PNG literature in a restricted economy where a totalising process homogenizes and simplifies its complexity and genesis. In doing so, the dynamism and plurality of PNG literature are attenuated and reduced. This critical reception is often a consequence of vertiginous straits between western reading and conceptualities and non-western cultural specificities. Such narrow comprehension and analysis of PNG literature lead to the imposition of "control" over its meaning and definition as much as to an understanding of the literature. Perhaps the salient pitfall of such a hermeneutic hiatus is its covert power of homogenization and reductionism. In other words, PNG literature appears to abandon and lose many of its cultural sensitivities, ontological attributes, and other legacies when placed within the new architecture of variables and (postcolonial) configurations.

In this essay, I want to open up what has been a restricted economy, through the inscribing of orature as a cardinal and integral constituent of contemporary PNG literature. I begin by focusing on the impact and influence of orature on contemporary PNG literature. I deal with these issues through the exploration of

PNG literature at the crossroad: crossroads of island, of culture, of languages, of politics, of economics, of society, and indeed of the globalization of the world. PNG writing at the crossroads of islands, culture, and language is about negotiating a political and cultural space within the spectrum of disciplines, institutions, and new configurations of power. It is through the medium of writing that such a negotiation can best occur, because in writing, the "gulfs of silence" which exist between language, island, and cultures are traversed through the integration and reinscription of indigenous cultural experience. By analyzing local expressions against mainstream discursive practices, indigenous discourse is formed "in the teeth of the dominant."

The history of PNG literature, at least in the Western sense, is relatively short, compared, say, to the literature of other third world countries. The University of Papua New Guinea, which produced the first PNG writers, was established in 1966. These writers were also the first generation of Papua New Guineans to attend tertiary institutions. The belated provenance of PNG literature can be attributed to a number of factors, namely, the slow development of higher education in the country, the presence of a vibrant oral culture, and, most saliently, the power plays that result from the colonizing power's reluctance to relinquish hegemonic authority. In broad terms, the colonial agenda was predicated upon economic, cultural, and political "governmentality" for the benefit of the empire.

Contemporary PNG literature inhabits a space of Western textual practice. This is inevitable. By looking at this textual terrain Papua New Guineans were able to negotiate and interrogate the imperial enterprise. From this viewpoint, the germination of modern PNG literature must be read from a number of levels. First, writing was found to be a worthy medium to empower Papua New Guineans to reassert and validate their identity, selfhood, and unique heritage. Second, it was found to be a good weapon in resisting and exposing the biases of imperial discourse. Finally, writing allowed for a reinscription of an indigenous agenda.

A great deal of critical scholarship on PNG literature, and indeed much of the early literature itself, is concerned with a social and political agenda. These critical studies, however, have marginalised

the significance and status of orature as an integral component of contemporary PNG literature. The first group of PNG writers did more than simply write to denounce colonialism and agitate for reforms. They wrote to reflect the changing circumstances and reality around them and, most importantly, to reinscribe their history and cultural heritage. One of the major concerns in their writings was the reasserting and reinscribing of their cultural reality and worldview as opposed to that of the dominant colonial world. This reinscription was accomplished mainly through the adaptation and incorporation of orature. Through writing, the writers opened up new possibilities: experiments with new forms and styles, incorporation of oral traditions, utilization of new languages, and the broadening and “complexification” of their thematic horizons. Writing at the crossroads of island, cultures, and languages meant that Papua New Guineas could be read across the islands, across diverse cultures and languages. Their writing must not, then, be viewed simply as a response to colonialism.

For PNG writers, literature is appreciated not only for its aesthetic value but as part of the broad task of dismantling unequal colonial social and political power structures which relegated them to positions of powerlessness and denied them their identity and selfhood. Literature contributes to the effort to empower and reassert their heritage in the midst of imperial enterprise. Through literature they can endeavour to articulate their problematic position as artists and intellectuals in a rapidly changing environment.

I. Orature and Tradition

The significance and influence of orature on the social existence and lifeways of Papua New Guinea are evident in the contemporary literature of PNG. Orature’s pervasiveness demonstrates to a large extent the profound impact it has had in the social formation, shaping, and constitution of the genealogy and lives of the writers. In addition, orature has immersed itself in the writer’s consciousness and can be seen in the aesthetics around what might be described as their “point of presences.” At the same time, PNG literature highlights how oral traditions have pervaded culturally specific articulations. Oral tradition therefore becomes an integral

component of the writers' authenticity of experiences, and of their collective identity as PNG writers. However, critical scholarship and discourse on PNG literature leaves much to be desired. Many critics are engaged in ethnocentric and biased readings and analyses. This bias is largely the result of reading from the "all knowing" perspective, which serves to homogenize all non-European literatures by stripping them of their cultural and idiosyncratic sensibilities and permutations. This bias undermines oppositional literature through its deployment of the full battery of colonialist readings which confound and commingle many cultural meanings. Colonialist misreading and cultural blindness denies PNG literature a plural cultural seedbed.

A salient omission in the critical examination of PNG literature is a lack of analysis of the impact and influence of orature. This lack is a critical one, because orature is a cardinal defining dimension in contemporary PNG literature. A closer reading of PNG literature will indicate the positive presence of orature. Many "white" critics overlook the significance of orature because they do not regard it as standing "among the fine arts as the most salient repository of 'genius,' the visible sign of reason itself," as Henry Louis Gates Jr. puts it in a different context (9). That is, white critics lack the cultural sensibility necessary to address this aspect of PNG literature.

This proposition aside, a prominent feature of contemporary PNG literature is its hybridized provenance. PNG literature germinated from a literary seedbed grounded in Western forms and oral tradition. This hybridized genesis provides a cross-cultural hermeneutic and a nexus composed of peculiar cultural variables and the inherited Western genre of writing.

Oral traditions have had (and continue to have) a colossal impact on contemporary PNG literature. The postcoloniality of PNG literature arises from a constellation of variables, one of which is oral tradition. In overlooking this dimension, to concentrate instead on social and political meanings, many critics may have missed the subtle cultural and native articulations and realities.

Orature is an integral part of indigenous societies. Oral traditions are at the epicentre of indigenous conceptualizations of social existence. Oral traditions define individual and communal

identity and selfhood, their sense of belonging and of place and their relationship with the environment. Oral traditions provide the mooring for indigenous constructions of histories and of personal and interpersonal experiences.

Simultaneously, oral traditions are engaged daily to regulate people's lives and social existence in general. Oral traditions elaborate their past, without which they would have no existence. One's past, embodied in oral tradition, gives one identity and control over place. Social existence is constructed through communal landscapes given in myths and common histories that provide a community with a source of identity. These "texts" are relied upon by oral cultures as pieces of evidence, as a sort of palimpsest of past lives which authorize their occupation of place. Orature is therefore a bearer of hegemonic authority at the same time as it performs the function of a people's map, guiding and giving meanings to their existence.

Orature is therefore an integral force in the social formation and identity of Papua New Guineans and its utilization in the "textualization" of PNG literature cannot be belittled or denied. But how have PNG writers translated it into a discursive practice and transformative politics?

A major function that PNG writing performs is to open up new possibilities and new agendas to expand its origins and give voice to the unspoken, unwritten "text," and in these ways to transform therefore both oral and the written culture into a meaningful discourse. This discourse becomes activated when it is elevated from its dormant marginal position into the colonial space.

This is exactly how PNG writers utilize oral literature. They incorporate elements of myths and legends in contemporary PNG literature as part of reinscribing and recuperating a collective identity and as a way to empower themselves. Engaging these elements, which are properties of oral cultures, further emphasizes the re-entering of peripheral discourse into a mainstream discourse. At the same time, this practice attests to a (symbolic) taking control of their destiny and validation of their existence.

Societies have always organized themselves in different ways, but traditionally, social organization was carried out through rites and observation of life phases, which were collective. In modern

society, individuals must create themselves with the aid of their individual ability to link their past to their future. Oral traditions, in accommodating forms of oral empowerment, authority, and worldviews bridge what Bill Ashcroft has termed "the gulf of silence" (58), the space which can not be traversed by both discourses except in a hybridized form.

One of the initial forms of writing that the first generation of PNG writers engaged with and utilized is (auto)biography. This genre has a special relevance to oral cultures because it is closer to some of their narrative styles and forms. In PNG societies, many stories concern the lives of ancestors and deities. Such stories deal with the protagonists' good deeds and attributes, for instance, their bravery, prowess, survival skills, and so on. The personal lives of the protagonists are very much attached to the broader well-being and history of their communities and have a direct impact on the people.

In many instances, autobiographies constitute the first writings of "new" literature. Autobiography is particularly concerned with the formation of national discourses and therefore of the nation itself. The life stories of authors serve as allegories of the national history. PNG writers have utilized this form to construct a sense of belonging and attachment to place/home and identity. This form of writing allegorizes a nation's history in the private lives of individuals. The private sphere becomes a microcosm of the public one. Autobiography is writing about the private self, knitted in recollection of significant aspects of one's life within a historical unity and time frame. For PNG writers, autobiographies are also national narratives and allegories that plot the political and cultural developments of the country. For example, Albert Maori Kiki's *Ten Thousand Years in a Lifetime* (1968), the first substantial work by a Papua New Guinean, is simultaneously an autobiography and an allegory about the political development and awakening of PNG as narrated through the writer's personal life story. Through this text we can also trace the development of indigenous (written) literature in the country.

A salient recurring motif in PNG autobiographical writing is that of initiation. In Kiki's work the author as a child undergoes at least four initiation rites. Initiation in this instance is a rite of

passage to power and manhood. In traditional societies, the uninitiated are considered effeminate, lacking in power and knowledge. In contrast, the initiated is vested with power, knowledge, and authority. The concept of initiation is metaphorically a symbol of empowerment for the indigene and indigenous culture. It underlies the point of entry of indigenous voice, culture, and selfhood into white textual practice and literary production. This is how Kiki describes his initiation:

The more secret things were learned during the boys' initiation ceremonies. I was barely seven when I was taken off to a place known as Kapa, in the bush, where I went through my first initiation. My mother's people believed that a very young boy can absorb power more easily. . . . At Kapa I learned about *Maruka Akore* and the origin of the clan. The second initiation took place at puberty. Its climax was the wearing of the mask. I can remember the large *Kova* mask, a painted can structure, being put over my head, and resting on my shoulders. . . . I rushed through the village; my relatives paid homage to the mask. My mother threw herself on the ground. (17-18)

The paramount importance that tradition carries in PNG cultures is underlined in its prevalence in PNG writing. Initiation ensures the recognition that one has reached manhood and maturity. Having undergone the initiation rites, a person has access to power and knowledge that is inaccessible to the uninitiated. As Kiki points out in the passage, things that are considered secret within a culture are only learnt about during initiation. The process of initiation, "becoming a man," unlocks many of the cultural secrets and beliefs of a group. The persons undergoing initiation rites are separated from the rest of the communities for fear of "contamination" or the revealing of cultural secrets to persons unauthorized, for instance, women. It is during such rites that those initiated absorb power.

Kiki's autobiography is the first important book written by a Papua New Guinean "to tell the story of a man, who in his own life time spanned thousands of years of human development" (Beier 2). The arrival of the book interrogated dominant, long-held images and challenged the distorted knowledge of power and political parameters between whites and blacks, New Guineans and Papuans, highlanders and coastals, administrators and villagers, Christianity and paganism. At the same time, it helped to denounce the

sterile gestures and boundaries set up by Western discourses in Papua New Guinea.

In Michael Somare's autobiography *Sana*, the author, despite heavy commitments as chief minister, is determined to complete his initiation. For Somare, his political life would not be complete unless he underwent traditional initiation. It is important that he mediate between his traditional and the Western political leadership he is inheriting. Appropriating the European understanding and definition of leader, he also inserts the production of PNG cultures and selves. At the same time, by undergoing these traditional rites, he is symbolically reaffirming his attachment to identity and place within the context of traditional PNG cultures. This is how he comments about it:

I was now, more than ever, determined to go through with the ceremony. As chief minister, it was particularly important that I should not separate myself from my people. It was now essential that I establish my identity at home and that I receive the wisdom and strength that my elders were willing to pass on to me from my forefather. (33)

During that final initiation, his uncle Saub tells him:

Now you have left your mother's womb. You have come to this place to receive power. With this power, you must go out and lead — lead in initiation, lead in fight, lead in peacemaking. The strength now has been given to you. (35)

A major factor that prompted Michael Somare to undergo traditional initiation was his desire to establish a link between his European political role and his traditional upbringing and attachments. He did not want to be alienated from his people and cultural roots. At the same time, his undergoing the initiation was an affirmation and acknowledgment of his tradition and culture. An initiated person is someone who has received the power, blessings, and authority of the community to undertake important obligations and social roles. For Michael Somare, the traditional initiation was of fundamental importance in his dual role as leader of a modern nation and a traditional society.

Autobiographical works by Papua New Guineans, like those from other countries, allegorize the history of the country, however fragmented. As allegories of colonial history these works constantly revert to national and cultural beliefs at an individual and personal level (Hayes 40). These writers negotiate competing

issues of politics and self-representation in the act of writing. In this instance, “[p]ost-colonial ‘I’ represents itself through the interpolation of the imperial activity and their marginalization” (Hayes 41). Through writing, then, these writers enter the domain of power and therefore of knowledge. They reinsert indigenous alter/native knowledge into the main discourse. Writing means empowerment and the reconstruction of selfhood.

Through writing, Papua New Guineans define and forge a space for themselves within the broad matrix of colonial history. Aside from their desire to render a more accurate portrayal of the indigene, these writers recognize the possibilities of revising that history. PNG authors “write themselves” in order to rewrite history, to reinterpret certain cultural signs, to redefine tradition, and to move from the periphery to the centre of their own societies. By constructing narratives that explore the colonial vision, they allow their own dialectical perceptions to emerge.

Orature is an important fabric employed by indigenous writers to stitch the contemporary PNG literary tapestry. Having declared this, we must not lose sight of the broader concerns of PNG contemporary literature and the critical reasons behind its triumphant birth.

The theme of cross-culturality also figures in indigenous writing. This theme is realized through what has been described as appropriation or synthesis. A good example is to be found in the first novel by an indigenous writer, Vincent Eri’s *The Crocodile* (1970). As the title implies, the novel operates through the image and metaphor of a crocodile. On one level, the crocodile metaphorizes the forces of change, represented in the creature’s destructive power. These forces of change impact on the traditional society and are the basis for its disintegration. On another level, the symbolic crocodile alludes to the expressions and practices in traditional cultures which are stifling and considered evil, that is, magic and sorcery. It also represents the destructive power of the colonial force, represented by the *kiaf* (patrol officer) and missionary. The story is a reflection on observed reality. It chronicles the development of an individual consciousness while at the same time it records the development of Papua New Guinea. Moveave village, where the major part of the story is set, is a microcosm of

PNG traditional culture. A society operating through the internal dynamics of order and disorder, it represents aspects of tradition and culture. The writer reveals both the bad and good aspects of traditional culture as well as its changing and metamorphosing elements as tradition colludes with Westernisation:

There are some men well known in this village. It is they who carry out the groundwork. They collect the dirt of the people who is to die. Sometimes they cut off a piece from a person's dress. Fresh clean ginger is used. They make sure that their own dirt doesn't get on the ginger or else they are as liable to die. . . . When your mother died, her body was buried. Her spirit did not leave us. She has been visiting the place where she went fishing and gardening. Every evening, as the sun sets behind the treetops, she changes to her human form and weeps for us. It is at these times that we, the living can find out from the death the cause of their death. (10-11).

The belief in sorcery and the spirits of the dead also demonstrates the inscription of cultural views and variables into the dominant discourse. The passage exemplifies two systems of belief. In the earlier stages of the narrative, the two beliefs are separated although coeval. It is only at the end of the novel that they collide. This passage describes one instance of an indigenous belief system inserted into the European system of belief that is also represented in the novel.

The paramount metaphor in the novel is the crocodile. The crocodile's capturing of Mitoro, wife of the protagonist Hoiri, symbolizes an important aspect of cultural belief and identity. Whilst it is culturally valid for Moveave people and indeed for Papua New Guineans to understand that it is no ordinary crocodile that has taken Mitoro, this interpretation may be culturally untenable for outsiders. Such cultural specificity demonstrates the complexity of indigenous cultures. I quote a long passage here to demonstrate the complexity of the image/metaphor of the crocodile:

A moving object, faintly visible, attracted Hoiri's attention. The object was moving upstream in a west-east direction. Gentle ripples rolled away from the ball-like object that formed the bow, a sure sign that a marine creature was a crocodile. . . . "This is no ordinary crocodile," Hoiri said to himself when he saw the crocodile make an about-turn and head towards him. He heard a whistle, presumably in reply to his, come from the direction of the crocodile. He did not reply, fearing he might give himself away the second time. Still the crocodile kept

coming straight towards him. The edge of the water was no more than a foot away from where Hoiri stood. Finding itself in shallow water, the reptile raised itself in on its legs and hands. The object that has seemed no more than a yard in length a few seconds ago had suddenly transformed itself into a huge dug-out canoe. With slow step, the horrifying creature advanced, then it stopped. The coconut palm, which he had leaned on for stability and comfort now, shielded him from the hideous beast. He knew that someone was alighting from the tail end of the crocodile: the splashes his feet made in the water were unmistakable. The head of the crocodile was on dry land, so Hoiri could not tell whether anyone was alighting from that end. His eyes were fixed on the splashing footsteps that were moving towards him. He placed his spear loosely against the trunk; ready to use when he needed it. When the footstep had come quite close, Hoiri lunged at the invisible being with all his might. There was a scream that almost drowned Hoiri's battle-cry. His axe had struck fast into some invisible object and before he could retrieve it for a second blow it had disappeared into the night. Hoiri jumped aside from the tail of the crocodile to avoid having all the bones in his body broken. He hurled his spear, and it struck deep behind the crocodile's right shoulder. One after another, his arrows penetrated the sinewy flesh. (112-13)

In this passage, the sorcerers have turned themselves into the reptile in order to become invincible and kill the victim. Such a metamorphosis is unintelligible to those who do not share the local worldview. And because it is unintelligible to European readers, they discard this belief. The only way to retain some aspects of this cultural belief — that the crocodile is no ordinary one — is to incorporate it into the dominant discourse. From another angle, the retention of this cultural belief without a taint of Western skepticism, especially in Hoiri's mind, exemplifies the function of an oral tradition in Moveave PNG cultures and cosmology. By intervening in the textual sphere which had appeared to be the exclusive domain of Europeans, Vincent Eri has appropriated some of the representational power of that discourse.

In such works, a whole worldview and cultural experience are shifted and moulded onto an alien culture. Oral stories are also important in another sense. Myths and legends in oral culture express folk worldviews. It is through such stories that people in a non-literate culture construct their sense of belonging, making permanent their social existence and identity. This textualization performs similar functions. Because orature is the tool for

empowerment and authority, its utilization and textualization accentuate and validate the notion of recovery: the recovery of selfhood, identity, and space within a postcolonial ambience. Through their lived experiences represented in autobiography, writers appropriate the history of their nations and of their landscape. In adopting traditional legends and myths into a Western literary form, they restore a sense of place for Papua New Guineans.

II. Language and Appropriation

PNG writers inhabit a profoundly ambiguous position in terms of the politics of language choice. Writing in English means writing for the small educated minority and it therefore is in danger of becoming an elitist preoccupation and privilege. Writing in a language other than English however is difficult to publish because the publishing industry is controlled by market demands and "white" institutions. Even if such works are published, they find an extremely small readership. The issue of language is both highly contentious and politically sensitive.

Language plays a central function in constructing subjectivity. At the same time it becomes an important point of entry, offering a contestatory space in postcolonial writing (Ashcroft 39). One of the ways in which Papua New Guineans were silenced and marginalized was through the denial of their powers of articulation. Such silencing was effectively imposed and maintained through the control of language. The delay of formal education to Papua New Guineans resulted in paradoxical repercussions. From one perspective, because they were considered inferior and incapable of higher civilization, the "denial" meant inevitably the denial of access to the power of articulation and therefore to self-definition and control of their destiny. From another perspective, Papua New Guineans were still denied the act of self-definition in that colonial discourse is associated with power. In participating in a colonial discourse, PNG writers were seen to be perpetuating a hierarchical power/knowledge structure. For colonial resistance to succeed, the primary site of empowerment must be the affirmation of language (and the arts in general). The affirmation of language, whether through the utilization of the local languages or through

the adaptation of the empire's language, serves as the entry point for the colonial subjects' intervention in the dominant discourse.

For PNG writers, the issue of language is inevitably political and problematic. In Papua New Guinea, there are over 800 languages spoken by approximately four million people. Given the high illiteracy rate, the choice of which language to use in writing becomes a political issue. Coupled with the high illiteracy rate and the absence of a strong reading culture among the educated elite, writing in a language other than English means a very small readership. Some languages are spoken by 1000 speakers and about two-thirds or even three-thirds of these speakers are illiterate. For the educated elite, reading means reading in English, although *Tok Pisin* and *Motu* have been employed by some writers as a medium of writing. These two languages have been privileged by the government's language policy as official languages of Parliament. Steven Winduo explains his reasons for writing, not in his own language, but in English:

Writing in English is a political issue in the sense that I'm using that language to bring the other languages to that level also. . . . When you see one of my texts, you'll see that it's all constructed in English, but within that construction there are other languages. They play a very significant role in that these are parts that make up the whole discourse, the whole text. It's not as if English is playing a dominant role; it plays an accommodating role, perhaps diffusing other languages. I'm using it more as a channel for these other languages.

(qtd. in Gorle 130)

Winduo argues that language choice for PNG writers must be based on the premise that choice comes out of choicelessness. At the same time, he is more flexible and open about language appropriation. Winduo notes the insertion and reinscription of indigenous cultural experiences into mainstream discourse. When this happens, English is toppled from its privileged position to become "english" with a small "e." According to Maryanne Dever, because language "frequently becomes a site for the expression of epistemological and ontological difference," it loses "its claim for absolute representation." She continues, "[i]ndeed, for any new literature the relationship between language and meaning represents an on-going problematic, part of a new society's search for identity and self-definition" (32). Because "difference" is always

at the centre of any dialectical processes, Dever contends that cross-culturality is the only alternative in forging a postcolonial identity.

An example of how PNG writers deal with problematic issues of language is demonstrated aptly in the work of John Kasaipwalova. This writer bridges the language hiatus through the blending of languages. That is, he moulds his cultural expressions into mainstream English to make the language bear his unique cultural experience and expressions. An instance of this practice is found in his play *The Naked Jazz*:

Chief: Ladies and gentlemen, tonight we meet to begin the celebrations for the independence of Papua New Guinea. Already you know from the radio that big, big, big somethings are going on in Port Moresby. Our leaders in Port Moresby are fighting very, very hard to stay on their feet so that Papua New Guinea will become independent from Australia. We here in the Trobriand Islands are very, very far away, but *maski!* We can make independence here too. Now we will start the picture, but before we start I want to remind all of you young boys and girls to keep your hands to yourselves. Hey Valu Gabena! . . . Here, give these tobacco sticks to the people and tell them to behave themselves while picture is going on. This is not the proper time and place for boys and girls to *kabisawali!*

Valu: Yes sir! (and calling in very loud voice) You already hear what our chief said. No *kabisawali!* Please when the light go out. And that means you married men too. Think of your family first. Also I'm sick of hearing your court cases with your wives and no time for my garden! (Scene One; 191).

The language here is mediated by appropriation through the use of untranslated words and vernacular transcription. It captures the rhythm of the vernacular languages at the same time as local words are inserted into the text. Kasaipwalova uses two words in particular in this example, *kabisawali* and *maski*. *Kabisawali* is a Trobriand Island term which possesses a number of connotations; among other things, it can mean intercourse, communal engagement, or love. *Maski* is a Tok Pisin term which literally means "forget it." These two terms are instances of the use of untranslated words whose insertion demonstrates and alludes to cultural difference.

For local writers, language is an important site for intervention. The point of entry for PNG writers into the colonial circuits of power and culture is through appropriation. In the process of reinscribing

and writing back to the imperial centre, the colonized people insert their cultural experiences and practices into mainstream practices. In order for this process of appropriation to occur, the privilege of English and the "metropolitan power over the means of communication" must be rejected (Ashcroft 37). Appropriation therefore is an important strategy that indigenous people utilize to adapt Western cultural practices and expressions and to make them expressive of their own cultures. Another example can be seen in this passage from Eri's *The Crocodile*:

The victim was an old man . . . he had been married once but his liquid brought forth no sons and daughters. His wife had died some years ago. . . . "You see how important it is to get married and have children," Suaea warned. "When one is young one has many friends. But when the skin shrivels up and the mind becomes forgetful, it is one's children, children from one's own liquid, who will bore to wipe away the mucus or do menial task such as making fire or carrying water. See what has happened to old Ivurisa. He had no children upon whom he could rely to boil his drink and washing water or to cook food for him. (24)

The word "liquid," which is a culturally sanctioned term, refers to sperm. Generally, in traditional PNG cultures, words that deal with genitalia are considered taboo. To refer to such parts, alternate words or terms are employed as metonyms. At the same time, this passage conveys the cultural belief about the need to procreate and have children. This cultural argument is not European but Papua New Guinean. The overall point about the utilization of the strategy of appropriation is that it portrays the indigenous people as politically conscious concerning oppression and subjection. They are no longer the passive recipients of white culture.

III. Conclusion

Orature is a central component of contemporary Papua New Guinea literature. PNG writers have employed orature to underline and to evoke their sense of belonging, their attachment to place, and their identity and selfhood, at the same time as they have used orature to accentuate cultural variances. Oral tradition is an inextricable component of and a link to the writer's relationship to their cultures. PNG writers have continuously engaged orature as part of the broader strategy of reinscribing and reinserting their cultures and their avowals of a new political agenda.

Contemporary PNG literature has come a long way in a short span of time. It has crossed islands, languages, cultures, and political agendas through ways I have discussed in this paper. Writing becomes an important bridge that traverses these boundaries. Writing provided for PNG writers the vehicle that accomplishes the many symbolic and metaphoric crossings within a spectrum of disciplines, institutions, cultures, and islands. Through writing, PNG writers restored their history and identity in mainstream discourse while at the same time interrogating Western representations of themselves. In brief, writing provides PNG writers with an important medium in which to represent themselves.

The postcolonial world is always a contestatory ground for oppositional discourses. This argument is not a new one to indigenous cultures and societies. Indigenous people know that they are situated in a site for resistance and contest between colonial discourses and those that it suppressed. It is at this site, interface, and juncture that marginalized discourses emerge to articulate contestatory perspectives.

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