Gendered Violence in the Tropical Pacific: The Capacities and Limits of Narrative to Address Global Social Inequality

Submitted by

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This thesis is dedicated to all women who survived or are still being affected by gendered violence in any form. I hope that every female who wishes to share her trauma through storytelling finds the courage to express her thoughts, talk about her feelings, pass the message to future generations, and receive the healing and empowerment she deserves. The life testimonies and stories of women which I analysed in my research gave me personally much courage, inspiration, and faith. Many times I cried while reading their creative writing and truly felt for them. This experience helped me develop empathy and grow intellectually and spiritually. I would like to thank all these beautiful women for letting me into their personal, touching poetry and prose – it shaped me to become a better person.

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Statement of the Use of Generative AI

Generative AI technology was not used in the preparation of any part of this thesis.

Abstract

From the first voyages of exploration, European narratives have portrayed the tropical Pacific as an erotic and feminised space of conquest. These narratives can be considered a kind of violence, particularly against women. Postcolonial writers from the Pacific have actively attempted to overcome these kinds of narrative misrepresentations. Yet violence is not just discursive: gendered violence, especially against women, is a serious and pervasive problem throughout the Oceanic region. Focusing on gendered violence in poetry, prose, and some media in all three areas of the Pacific--Melanesia, Micronesia, and Polynesia, with an emphasis on Samoa, this thesis considers how narratives about gendered violence in the tropical Pacific seek to overcome both historical violence and contemporary silences to offer the possibility of empowerment. Inquiring into the capacities and limits of writing about gendered violence across this diverse region, this thesis highlights the significant role poetry has offered female writers in the tropical Pacific as a means to raise complex and often taboo[1] subjects and bring them into the public sphere. It also reflects upon the more limited role played by prose narratives, particularly by women writers who have some relationship to the Pacific diaspora. Finally, the thesis draws attention to some other contemporary forms of narrative in the region, such as online activism, noting the way these kinds of narratives are circumscribed by cultural dynamics. Ultimately, this thesis concludes that literature, and in particular poetry, is a powerful form of speaking out against gendered violence in a region where being open about such matters is a complex undertaking.

[1] The word 'taboo' has become commonly accepted in English and does not have the same connotation and denotation as it does in the Pacific. Since this thesis is English, written from the perspective of a European candidate in an Australian university, it is arguably acceptable to use word taboo in its English sense. Please do not confuse with the word *tapu*.

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Chapter One

Introduction: Western Representation of Women in Oceania as Gendered Violence

1.1 European Explorations and the First Romanticised Misrepresentations of Pacific Islanders

> [T]hanks Bougainville
>
> for desiring ‘em young
>
> so guys like Gauguin could dream
>
> and dream
>
> then take his syphilitic body
>
> downstream to the tropics
>
> to test his artistic hypothesis
>
> about how the uncivilised
>
> ripen like paw paw
>
> are best slightly raw
>
> delectably firm
>
> dangling like golden prepubescent buds
>
> seeding nymphomania
>
> (Excerpt from the poem “Guys like Gauguin” by Selina Tusitala Marsh, 2016, pp. 89–90)

As Selina Tusitala Marsh’s poem reflects upon in strident, deservedly angry tones, the age of European exploration and subsequent waves of colonisation produced visions of distant peoples and places that irreversibly altered both European and Pacific cultures. The perception of men as savage warriors and women as alluring and erotic has strongly suffused Western stereotypes of the region. In Oceania, the voyages of Louis Antoine de Bougainville and James Cook mark the beginning of a persistent practice of historical, artistic, ethnographic, and other imaginative representations that instituted and consolidated a connection between the Pacific region and notions of feminised, sexualised, and erotic otherness.

These stereotypes presenting European ways of seeing tropical Pacific Islanders have been widely discussed, including in Bernard Smith’s foundational study *Imagining the Pacific: In the Wake*

of the Cook Voyages (1992).[2] Stereotypical representations have perpetuated a form of violence that is not only racialised but also fundamentally gendered. Exoticism played a special role in European identity as it was defined based on its contrast to distant cultures. Consequently, *exotic* was presented as not romantic objects of desire. As a result, this very term was used by Europeans to describe non-Europeans in the era of neo-classical beauty (Smith, 1992, p. 10).

Finally, the title of the thesis refers to the difficult position of women within the society in the South Pacific Islands. The term "Global Social Inequality" refers to the effects of colonialism on these nations which directly affected the treatment of women in these areas as well as to the global issue of gendered violence. The thesis raises the problem of why it is difficult to address as a global issue, in the tropical Pacific context, which is both a limit of narrative and a limit on Western research.

1.2 Summary of the chapter

This chapter explores the historical and ongoing Western representation of Pacific Islanders, particularly women, through colonial and postcolonial lenses. Early European explorers, such as James Cook, created distorted stereotypes that portrayed Pacific Islanders as exotic, sexualised, and primitive, which were further popularized in literature, art, and anthropology. These representations led to a form of "discursive violence," where harmful stereotypes about race and gender were imposed on indigenous cultures, perpetuating epistemic violence as described by Gayatri Spivak. The chapter argues that these portrayals continue to shape perceptions of the Pacific and its people, particularly women, in harmful and degrading ways. Moreover, chapter explores the ongoing impact of colonialism and patriarchy in the Pacific Islands, particularly in how women experience "double colonisation." It examines how sexualised representations of the Pacific, used to boost tourism and military recruitment, continue to harm local women by perpetuating stereotypes and facilitating violence. The chapter then discusses the prevalence of domestic violence in the region, especially against women, and the cultural, social, and economic challenges they face in reporting and addressing abuse. It suggests that the colonial background of these societies, involving Western gender stereotypes present challenges for Western researchers approaching topics involving gender, sexuality, and violence. It also suggests that these stereotypes are part of the many challenges indigenous tropical Pacific writers face in speaking out about gendered violence on their own terms.

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[2] A note on the style used in this thesis: throughout I have used the conventions of APA because of the usefulness of documenting dates of publication for studies and writing. In a thesis like this one that charts the chronological emergence of narratives and scholarship, APA offers this useful capacity. However, as a literary scholar, I feel it is respectful to capitalise titles, which is not a convention of APA, but of MLA. I have therefore retained this feature of MLA throughout my title cases, but otherwise adhered to APA style.

It considers these some of the limits placed on women's narratives but then also considers the affordances of storytelling, particularly poetry, to find ways for women to speak despite these and other forms of silencing. It addresses narrative as a tool for women to reclaim agency, speak out against violence, and challenge the silencing taboos surrounding gendered violence in Pacific societies. This chapter serves as an introduction to the topic of this thesis: gendered violence in the Pacific, its colonial and postcolonial complexities, and the limits as well as affordances of narrative to give women ways to give voice to and address these issues of global social inequality.

1.3 Discursive, Epistemic, and Representational Violence

Figure 1

Tahitian Beauty

Note: Photography by Beatrice Grimshaw, from *In The Strange South Seas* (1907).

As Vanessa Smith and Rod Edmond (2003, pp. 1–18) point out in *Islands in History and Representation*, European illustrations of the Pacific from the time of early Western exploration into

the twentieth century externally imposed representations imposed by European colonisers on South Pacific nations—whether literary, artistic or otherwise— constituting a form of discursive violence. These scholars reinforce Bernard Smith's concepts of the damaging imaginary-like presentation of certain nations during the first explorations that occurred in literary narratives. In particular, Smith and Edmond (2003) emphasise how discursive depictions of Oceania's peoples have entrenched stereotypes of both the erotic female and the violent male.

The sexualised imaginary of the Oceanic region has been popularised and reinforced in countless adventuring narratives by European and American authors. *Treasure Island* (1883) by Robert Louis Stevenson, *Summer Cruising in the South Seas* (1874) by Charles Warren Stoddard, Jack London's *Adventure* (1911) and James A. Michener's *Tales of the South Pacific* (1947) are only a handful of examples of this kind of representation. While nineteenth-century stereotypes of savage male warriors and sexualised erotic females suffused fictional tales, they also persisted in the twentieth century, infiltrating even scientific and anthropological work on the Oceanic region. The sexualised imagery of the Tropical Pacific can be clearly traced in anthropological works such as Bronislaw Malinowski's *The Sexual Life of Savages in North-Western Melanesia* (1929) and Margaret Mead's *Coming of Age in Samoa* (1928), reifying and reinforcing the harmful stereotypes. It was not until the publication of works such as Derek Freeman's *Margaret Mead and Samoa: The Making and Unmaking of an Anthropological Myth* (1983) that scholars began openly challenging the idea of the promiscuous young tropical Pacific female that had been perpetuated in anthropological work, and which appeared to draw on longtime Western discourses of the imagination and desires.

The arrival of Europeans in the tropical Pacific[3] and their discursive representation of Oceania have culminated in a large-scale form of what Gayatri Spivak calls epistemic violence. The term *epistemic violence* (Spivak, 1988 as cited in Nayar, 2015, p. 65) describes the imposition of a collection of representations and understandings of native culture put together by a coloniser, imposed upon indigenous peoples by outsiders, in a manner that deprived them of their original cultural identity, and promulgated by the coloniser both within and beyond their local cultural context. These fabricated generalisations and imposed knowledges are often victimising in ways that cause harm and degradation to local communities. In Craig Santos Perez's (2016) words, Oceania's peoples have been stereotyped as "violent, primitive, hyper-sexual, exotic, childlike, cannibalistic, dependent, noble, athletic, hyper-masculine, uncivilized, and hospitable" (p. 376). And, as Spivak

[3] The arrival of Europeans inaugurated the convention of referring to this region as the 'South Pacific.' Because of the Eurocentric understanding inbuilt within this terminology (prioritising Europe as the 'top' of the world, and thus the North, and its colonies in the tropics as the 'bottom,' and thus the South), I have wherever possible avoided the term South Pacific and used the term tropical Pacific as a term of respect instead.

(1988) noted, epistemic violence is particularly harmful in colonial and neo-colonial discourses about racialised women in developing countries.

Whether discursive violence arises from real or imagined encounters or is imposed upon the colonial past or the neo-colonial present, harmful ideas about the Pacific and the diverse peoples and cultures of the region are intolerable in terms of their representations of women. Michael Hayes (1997, p. 26) suggests that in the representations of the Pacific, analysing discourse in the way Michel Foucault advocates is useful because it proposes a system whereby the rhetoric, categorisations, institutions, theories of colonialism, and Pacific History may be conceived as a related set of rules actively reproducing and dispersing particular ways of writing, thinking about, and representing the past in the Pacific. It revealsthat the process of stereotyping pioneered by Westerners during the era of the first explorations of the Pacific Islands has not ceased. It has continued in various forms up to and including the present. As a result, the patriarchy can be considered as a colonising force. Discourses about the Pacific did not only affect the past. They persist into the present and have a negative economic impact on a region being exploited by foreign powersin political and economic spheres. As Santos Perez (2016) writes, “Our islands have been seen as tropical paradises, stepping stones, unsinkable military bases, Hollywood sets, or scientific and agricultural laboratories” (p. 376).

In the neo-colonial contemporary period, in the aftermath of formal political independence in the region, eroticised stereotypes continue to impact representation. The practice of representing Oceania in a sexualised way in order to increase the income from tourism is still used by international corporations and, as many have observed: “Pacific Island nations were the destinations most likely to use sex as a means of tourism promotion” (Hanson, 1997, p. 125). Such advertising attracts the attention of millions of visitors each year. Furthermore, as concluded by Andrew Bickford (2003), many recruiting strategies in the American military rely on the romantic representation of regions such as the tropical Pacific to encourage more people to join their forces, at times even suggesting the possibility of sexual intercourse with local people. As a result, women are used as a form of advertising a product or concept where their personal and intimate needs might not be equally respected or fulfilled, in contrast to males’ standards and profits. As well as a vision of a sexualised paradise, the tropical Pacific has been portrayed in dystopian terms as full of violence and aggression.

1.4 Patriarchy and the Concept of Double Colonisation

Even in the twenty-first century, colonial stereotypes and international, commercialised images continue to represent the tropical Pacific as a feminised exotic paradise in ways that perpetuate harmful ideas about women in Oceania. This can be considered a form of representational violence.

However, violence is not just representational. In many postcolonial societies,[4] women have suffered what Kristen Holst Petersen and Anna Rutherford (1986; as cited in McLeod, 2000, p. 175) call *double colonisation* by both colonisation and patriarchy in forms that are complex to overcome. According to their research, this phenomenon illustrates "the ways in which women have *simultaneously* experienced the oppression of colonialism and patriarchy." As a result, where the whole society is victimised and colonised by the foreign government, women are situated in a worse positionwhere they are colonised not only by Western influences but also by the men in their society who control their rights and freedom to express themselves.

Studies on domestic violence in the last few decades have highlighted the way patriarchal structures in Pacific Island territories facilitate–or appear to normalise–acts of aggression and physical violence against women. These studies have also revealed the way patriarchal structures impose conditions of silence and shame on women who are subjected to violence. This is not to say that violence is natural or endemic to Pacific society, but that it has complex causes and origins that are not within the scope of this thesis to uncover. Nor is it to say that all Pacific societies are similar. Certainly, the position of women in the Pacific Islands differs between regions and nations, and this must be acknowledged. For instance, in traditionally matrilineal Palau, women had rights equal to men before "paternalistic colonisers during the first half of the 20th century undermined women's authority, revoking their property rights and relegating them to subordinate positions in modern institutions" (National Research Project on Violence against Women in Palau, 2014, p. 17). The struggle to regain respect and rights continues even in originally matriarchal societies.

1.5 Violence Against Women

While violence against men exists in many societies, and gendered violence is also a feature of homosexual and transgender relationships, this thesis focuses on violence against women and on domestic violence specifically. According to the *Encyclopedia of Domestic Violence,* "From a sociological feminist perspective, a battering relationship is one of captivity, and battered women are survivors of terror" (Jackson, 2007, p. 84). There are several difficulties victims of domestic violence must confront, including access to crisis accommodation, a limited response by authorities, the taboo nature of domestic violence, social ostracism, long-lasting traditions around or the normalisation of

[4] In this thesis, I use the term 'postcolonial' in the way used by founding theorists of postcolonial literary studies in Australia, the authors of *The Empire Writes Back.* Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin (1989) refer to 'postcolonial' as the era of its colonialism and its aftermath; the term is not hyphenated as post-colonial so as not to be confused with the political status of a country after official independence. Throughout this thesis I assume that colonialism continues into the present day, despite official political independence.

violence, and financial dependence. Complexities can be further compounded by forms of domestic violence that extend to psychological abuse, threats, or other forms of physical harm.

The consequences are analysed and described in studies of trauma, including in the work of literary trauma theorists like Cathy Caruth (2015) and Anne Whitehead (2004), who draw on the foundational work of Judith Herman. This field focuses on the effects of post-traumatic stress disorder of individuals, victim-survivor identities, and the impact of trauma on families and communities. In order to develop the idea of victimology, it remains crucial to present the life-lasting consequences of psychological and physical abuse on women, their family members, and society as a whole. A key and shared understanding germane to all of this research, as noted by Lorrai Woulhter et al. (2008), is the recognition that "[t]he effects of rape and sexual assault are long term and not solely confined to the immediate aftermath of the crime. Some of the greatest damage to victims is done at the psychological level" (p. 53). Additionally, according to studies by Stark and Flitcraft (1996, p. 101), victims of domestic violence suffer from multiple stress disorders, including battered woman's syndrome and post-traumatic stress disorder, and often undiagnosed long-term effects.

1.6 Violence Against Women in The Tropical Pacific

As the Pacific region has undergone dynamic change and attempted to deal with the aftermath of the colonial past, it has also begun to renegotiate the status and role of women in society. Nevertheless, the reality of gendered violence in these societies is stark. Violence against women ranges from the opportunistic exploitation of global socioeconomic inequalities by Western tourists who profit from the local sex industry to alarming rates of domestic violence happening locally. As postcolonial societies in the region attempt to overcome colonial and neo-colonial stereotypes, issues of gendered violence are not only discursive but material and locally specific. Moreover, as stated by the report *Ending Violence against Women and Children in Asia and The Pacific*, domestic abuse "can cause ill health and social harm, leading to enormous costs for individual victims/survivors as well as their families, communities and national economies, and placing considerable burdens on health, justice and social welfare systems" (2021, p. 4).

Nevertheless, one fact remains certain: violence against women in Pacific Island nations rates amongst the worst in the world as young girls are "often subjected to various forms of violence, ranging from violent punishment at home and school, to domestic violence and sexual abuse and exploitation" (Ali, 2006, p. 3). Without a doubt, one of the areas most severely affected by epidemic-level violence is Papua New Guinea, where the cruelty of domestic abuse can regularly lead to the abused victims' veritable imprisonment in the household, as well as severe bush knife injuries or even decapitation. Moreover, other forms of routinised sexual violence in Papua New Guinea include

rape, transactional sex, violence between co-wives, and other forms of humiliation. Research published by Amnesty International (2006, p. 6) shows that in some of its regions (Oro, West New Britain, for example), almost one hundred percent of women have been beaten by their partners.

As one of the constant challenges facing women across the Pacific, the NGO Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development sees "the need to address harmful social and cultural norms and the ongoing problem of widespread and systematic violence against women and girls" (2020, p. iii). Data presented by United Nations UNFPA Asia and the Pacific consulted in February 2024 reveals that the number of women experiencing intimate partner violence in the Pacific Islands often exceeds sixty percent of those surveyed. According to the *Vanuatu National Survey on Women's Lives and Family Relationships* (2011, p. 55), sixty per cent of women in Vanuatu experienced physical or sexual violence from their partners. Even though in the Marshall Islands, the *Ekakwikwi jinen emman* tribe obligates a man to protect his female relative from experiencing physical harm, the national survey estimates that forty-eight percent of women from that region experienced intimate partner violence (National Study on Family Health and Safety, 104, p. 16). Since the eruption of Hunga Tonga and the tsunami in January 2022, intimate partner violence has been documented as increasing. According to Ofa Guttenbeil-Likiliki, "[m]any women were already escaping violence which worsened during recent COVID-19 lockdowns" (Maykin, et al., 2021).

1.7 Power of Speaking Out About the Violence and Power of Narrative and Storytelling

Anne Brewster and Sue Kossew (2019) make the point that writing is one way to reclaim social power and overturn the paradigm of silence and shame associated with gendered violence, especially where speaking out about intimate domestic issues is taboo. They note the emergence of contemporary women's writing on gendered violence as "[v]iolence is of concern not only for the ways in which it results in physical injury, disability or death, however, but also for its widespread social, economic and political impact and effects" (Brewster & Kossew, 2019, p. 2).

Among other forms of narrative it explores, this thesis uncovers the way multiple forms of literary expression, and especially poetry, have offered women ways of reclaiming personal and social power, within and perhaps because of limits placed on their expression. Although poetry may seem at first glance an ineffectual means of addressing domestic violence, poetry has offered and continues to offer an important voice for the expression of sometimes unspeakable acts, and situations that are otherwise difficult to speak about and address. Female writers are beginning to develop their own voices in speaking out and writing about domestic violence, but they face several challenges in doing so, especially in complex postcolonial societies and milieus, like the Pacific. One such challenge is writing about domestic violence in ways that do not repeat the stereotypes of the

tropical Pacific's past. The thesis, therefore, is based on postcolonial theories of narratives and addresses the role and importance of storytelling as a form of representation, but it also acknowledges the limits of these forms of representation, including those of this thesis. It looks at gendered violence as a universal problem experienced by both Western and indigenous women around the world, with particular contours in the tropical Pacific, some of which are of course particularly challenging to research and address as an outsider to these cultures. Nonetheless, this thesis concludes that despite these limits, narratives that challenge gender stereotypes of Pacific cultures, while also exposing the realities of domestic violence in the region, have the potential to create new avenues for dialogue and possibilities for social change.

Storytelling has played a long role in Pacific cultures. However, the way storytelling can communicate difficult personal truths, such as gendered violence, is perhaps another issue. In the Pacific Islands, as Brewster and Kossew observe, "culturally and linguistically diverse women are less likely to report violence" [than Caucasians] even though they face violence from both internal community and exogenous factors (Third Action Plan, 2016; as cited in Brewster & Kossew, 2019, 8). Rates of gendered violence reporting, domestic abuse, and rape across the tropical Pacific suggest that the trend of under-reporting that Brewster and Kossew observe in Australia is much the same across the Oceanic world. Brewster and Kossew thus make the point that the prevalence of under-reporting of domestic violence in such cultures means that "[l]iterary texts in English by minoritised women which represent violence against women'' are important, because they can, "in effect, move these private discussions into the public sphere" (Brewster & Kossew, 2019, 8), and sometimes beyond the cultural limits of imposed taboos. Poetry is one key form of expression that has offered an important outlet to express these otherwise private issues in the public sphere.

1.8 Conclusion

This thesis analyses the use of narrative forms to illustrate the systematic shift in women's agency, addressing very often disturbing, political, and personal issues as these take the role of a symbolic orator, which is associated with a chiefly position. As women define themselves, their position, and their experiences confronting perpetrators of violence against them through their poems, voice agency is being built and maintained across the region of Oceania. This thesis will present the work of the female writers in chronological order of publication. Firstly, female-authored narrative expressions tackle the matters of gendered violence from the secure position of personal reflexivity in both narrative and poetic forms. These authors use personal reflexivity and the protective shelter of poetry to explore social and structural problems. Gradually, as I note across this thesis, these poetic responses to gendered violence become more bold, as well as more confronting. Combining

both literal and figurative images, they raise strong emotions of vexation for the reader as he or she unfolds the layers of the author's frustration. The emergence of narratives relating to domestic violence in the 1970s has thus led to massive social changes through making powerful statements and fighting against forms of degradation of women in society and in private spheres. For texts written in English, these themes first appeared in women's anthologies and poetry volumes. Later, longer forms of prose developed and grew in length and power. Women's poetry of the 1970s and 80s, along with theirnew confidence in the tropical Pacific novel, lays the groundwork for longer form prose narratives, including novels, from Pacific islands and across the Pacific diaspora, as I will go on to show.

Writing thus opens new channels of dialogue. Through breaking taboos and standing against ostracism, domestic violence, incest, rape, and abuse, women from the Pacific islands fight the double colonisation of their sex. They dare to express and confront this gendered violence through both indirect and direct descriptions and also call to attention the limits that have been placed on them within their society and throughout Western imagining. Their work is courageous and inspiring, and deserves to be better known, both within and outside their Pacific Island nations and the Pacific diaspora. As a Western researcher, I am aware at all times of my outsider status, and that the complexity of researching and writing from an outside and European perspective as a Polish international student in Australia not only comes with the regular limitations of the ordinary kind (such as the cultural, linguistic, and time-management challenges for a project like this), but also of an extraordinary kind in this case. This is because a thesis like this risks repeating, perhaps in some new way, the colonial violence of the past imposed by Europeans seeking to understand and write about Pacific cultures, as well as reproducing the kinds of ongoing discursive forms of violence that are imposed in recent representations.

Despite these many challenges, it is the boldness of these women's narratives that has carried me forward, as I am humbled by their courage. I also explore in later chapters the limits that are imposed on Pacific women writers and scholars which someone like myself, as an outsider, is free of. I am aware, at all times, of those limitsand know the cost of so many years of outsiders'-imposed representations and misunderstandings. Like the women writers and poets who have inspired me, I believe it is possible to find a way to talk about, write, negotiate, and bring further understanding to the affordances and limits which relate to Pacific women starting to address the issues of domestic violence, especially in the context of this complex history of representations, because of the urgency of the ongoing and present issues Pacific women face, and because their writing and advocacy deserves to be well known.

Thus, focusing on gendered violence in the mostly women-authored poetry, prose, and some media in all three areas of the tropical Pacific (Melanesia, Micronesia, and Polynesia), this thesis seeks to overcome both historical and ongoing discursive violence, as well as contemporary silences, inquiring into the capacities and limits of writing about gendered violence across this diverse region. In the early chapters, it highlights the role of poetry in bringing taboo topics into the public sphere. It also reflects on the more limited role played by prose narratives, particularly by female writers who have some relationships to the Pacific diaspora.

Largely a historical survey about the emergence of issues of representation in the writing of the Pacific islands, the dissertation makes an argument for the distinctive and important role this writing plays in the public sphere. The first few chapters look at the development of a voice about gendered violence in the poetry of female writers of the Pacific islands, surveying anthologies and performing close readings of individual poems. This section of the thesis identifies the particularly important role played by the poets Jully Makini and Grace Molisa. This section also draws attention to the important scholarship of Selina Tusitala Marsh. The later chapters of the thesis consider the emergence of these issues in prose and longer forms of narrative poetry. Centring on Sia Figiel's *Where We Once Belonged* (1996a), *Girl in the Moon Circle* (1996b), and *Those Who Do Not Grieve* (1999), it touches on the influence of Albert Wendt before focusing on works by writers of the Pacific diaspora. Finally, the thesis draws attention to some other forms of narrative in the region, such as online activism, noting the way these narratives are circumscribed by cultural dynamics.

The role of this introductory chapter has been to introduce the historical context of representational and epistemological violence in the tropical Pacific, to outline the background of the actual domestic violence in the tropical Pacific, to consider the challenges, limits, and power of writing about this violence—including this dissertation—and to outline its approach. The second chapter considers terminology and methodology, including postcolonial theory and the importance of tackling the issues presented by women in their storytelling as a testimony of trauma. The third and the fourth chapters focus on poetry—on its emergence and power for these women in and of the Pacific. The two following chapters tell the story of how poems evolved into longer forms of narratives such as prose. They mainly analyse the works of Sia Figiel but also tackle other modern narratives of diasporic authors. This thesis does not, however, address the large body of Pasifika writing in Aotearoa New Zealand, whose authors have made a significant contribution to work in this area—leaving this study, which could be a dissertation unto itself, to the expertise of New Zealand-based scholars. Ultimately, this thesis concludes that literature, and in particular poetry, is a powerful form of drawing attention to and speaking out against gendered violence in a region where being open about such matters is a complex undertaking.

1.9 The structure of this thesis

This thesis will proceed in the following manner. Chapter two of the thesis titled "Narrative and Storytelling as Methodology for Discussion of Gendered Violence in the Postcolonial Context of the Pacific" outlines the methodological framework of the study, focusing on postcolonial approaches to narrative and gendered violence, particularly in the South Pacific, while examining how storytelling serves as both a research tool and a means of resistance. The second chapter also explores the role of colonial discourse theory, trauma recovery through narrative, and the impact of cultural, political, and international frameworks on gendered justice, with a specific discussion of Samoa as a case study for examining postcolonial gendered violence.

Chapter three of this thesis, "The Emergence of Pacific Women's Voices—Speaking Out on Gendered Violence through Poetry," considers the evolving role of poetry in Pacific women's voices from the 1960s to the present, demonstrating how poetry has served as a medium for confronting gendered violence while navigating cultural taboos and colonial influences. Additionally, the chapter traces the shift from metaphorical and allusive expressions to more direct critiques of patriarchal and colonial oppression. In it, I highlight key poets, works, and movements—such as the *Ondobondo* series—that reflect the increasing political activism and empowerment of Pacific women.

Chapter four, "Poetry from 1970s Amplifying the 1980s and 1990s' Scene," explores the confident rise of Pacific Island women's literary voices from the 1970s, focusing on poets like Selina Tusitala Marsh, Momoe Malietoa Von Reiche, and Konai Helu Thaman, who use their work to confront gendered violence, colonial history, and cultural identity while asserting a distinct feminist perspective. Subsequently, it highlights the role of poetry as a tool for activism and empowerment, showcasing how writers such as Jully Makini, Grace Mera Molisa, and Haunani-Kay Trask confronts themes of domestic violence, societal expectations, and a problem of double colonization, inspiring future generations of women to challenge oppression and advocate for change.

The fifth chapter of this thesis, "Hybrid Narrative Forms: Finding Ways to Speak About Gendered Violence in Literary Prose of the Pacific," examines how Pacific women writers use prose to address gendered violence by blending oral storytelling traditions with colonial literary forms, highlighting how authors like Sia Figiel navigate societal barriers to give voice to trauma and advocate for women's rights. Through works such as *Where We Once Belonged* and *The Girl in the Moon Circle*, Figiel explores intergenerational trauma, patriarchal oppression, and the silencing of women in Samoa, demonstrating both the limits and affordances of narrative in confronting gendered violence and expanding the conversation within the Pacific diaspora.

Chapter six of the thesis, “Narratives from The Tropical Pacific: Further Female Perspectives in Literary Prose,” examines more recent Pacific literature following Sia Figiel’s groundbreaking work, focusing on the role of the Pacific diaspora and the ways in which authors like Lynn Pulou Alaimalo explore themes of family, love, and violence in Samoan culture. Through novels such as Lovefolds of Our Upbringing and Sourcing Siapo, the chapter highlights how contemporary writers navigate cultural storytelling traditions, the pressures against speaking out, and the consequences of breaking the silence surrounding gendered violence, while also addressing themes of trauma, identity, and healing.

Finally, in the conclusion, I examine the rise of the #MeToo movement as a contemporary narrative against gendered violence, analysing its cultural and societal barriers in the Pacific while also highlighting the role of digital activism in breaking silence and fostering change. Through the works of Jenny Bennett-Tuionetoa, Selina Tusitala Marsh, and other contemporary Pacific writers, the chapter reflects on the evolving role of women’s literature in resisting patriarchal systems, asserting cultural identity, and demonstrating how, despite ongoing limitations, Pacific women’s voices continue to gain strength in the fight against gendered violence.

Chapter Two

Narrative and Storytelling as Methodology for Discussion of Gendered Violence in the Postcolonial Context of the Pacific

2.1 Summary of the chapter

This chapter serves as a methodological chapter explaining the use of the postcolonial approach to narrative, the topic of gendered violence, and general ways that narrative has been examined as tool that addresses the global social inequality of gendered violence against women in general, across various global contexts, and especially the South Pacific. It examines the use of colonial discourse theory and storytelling as methodologies for understanding gendered violence in the postcolonial context of the Pacific. It outlines how postcolonial theory, particularly through Edward Said's work, focuses on how colonial powers shaped the representation of colonised peoples and how these representations persist in contemporary narratives. The chapter builds on the last emphasises the importance of storytelling, both oral and written, as a tool for research, particularly in the Pacific, where narratives serve as a vital means of cultural expression and identity formation. It also discusses the power of narrative in recovery from trauma, highlighting the therapeutic role storytelling can play in addressing the effects of gendered violence. This chapter explores the role of storytelling and truth commissions in healing and resistance, particularly for victims of violence. It examines the challenges of receiving and representing gendered violence narratives, especially in contexts like South Africa and the Pacific, where cultural, political, and social factors influence how stories are received and validated. Additionally, it delves into how media, discourse analysis, and frameworks like CEDAW can help or hinder the empowerment of women, shedding light on the importance of culturally sensitive approaches to gendered justice and the elimination of violence against women. This section explores the multifaceted nature of gendered violence across different cultural, political, and regional contexts, emphasising that the definition and experience of violence vary greatly depending on societal and historical factors. Specifically, it discusses the persistence of gendered violence in postcolonial societies like Samoa, which emerges as a minor case study in some of the chapters that follow, where the influence of local traditions and institutions, and the responses of international frameworks and local organizations working to address and combat these issues.

2.2 Colonial Discourse Theories

According to Edward Said in *Orientalism* (1979), a foundational text of postcolonial theory, "[t]he Orient was almost a European invention, and had been since antiquity a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, remarkable experiences" (p. 1). By pointing out the way

that the imagination and thus discourse (which proceeds from the imagination) organises knowledge about the world and the Other, and functions in the service of colonialism, Said's work set the foundations for several decades in postcolonial literary studies, from which this PhD thesis derives its methodology. As John McLeod succinctly sums up in his keystone textbook for students in the field, *Beginning Postcolonialism* (2000), postcolonial theory has long held that the operations of colonialism are fundamentally discursive and imaginative, albeit with profound material effects. Discourse analysis in postcolonial studies has extended from Franz Fanon's early work on psychology to reveal how empires colonise minds as "[e]mpires colonise imaginations" (as cited in McLeod, 2000, p. 22) to Stuart Hall's work on the semiotics of race and internalised oppression. The role of language and narrative has been a central way that theorists have approached issues of power and injustice using postcolonial methodologies. As McLeod (2000) explains, colonial discourse theory offers ways to "explore the ways that 'representation' and 'modes of perception' are used as fundamental weapons of colonial power to keep colonised peoples subservient to colonial rule" (p. 17). The binaries of self and 'other' that organise the Western understanding of the Orient in opposition to the Occident have since been extended to other regions such as the Pacific. Because postcolonial theory alerts us to the adverse effects of generalising discourses, the application of postcolonial theory to other areas of the world has required attention to their nuanced particularities. Despite differences across cultures, however, the work of postcolonial theory alerts us to a shared ethos of resistance, through the ways that different cultures that have been colonised have found unique ways to overcome and persist in the face of colonialism.

Colonial imaginaries of Oceania have almost invariably presented European imposed visions, even as they have varied in doing so, from the draughtsmen' first sketches (Sydney Parkinson, William Hodges, and John Webber) who accompanied James Cook in his explorations~~,~~ to the art of performance, musical compositions, sculpture, photography, jewellery, movies, and dance. Scholars have explored the multiple conceptualisations of indigenous societies that have been represented through the lenses of these arts. Max Quanchi (2004), in his studies of colonial photography for example, distinguishes several ways colonial discourses outlined various 'types' of Oceanic peoples, including but not limited to "savages," "labourers," "cannibals, primitive villagers and belles " (p. 10). Quanchi also notes how the West's understanding of tropical Pacific societies has with time acknowledged"Oceanic people managing their own cultural renaissance." (p.10).

Colonial forms of representation demonstrate that the European imaginary of "the Other" constitutes and derives from various discourses of everyday life (such as adventure stories, tourist mementos, or personal or ethnographic observations based on experience and memories), official documents (such as government papers, newspaper reports, or archival material), and academic

resources (such as anthropological research or scientific scholarship). Consequently, while postcolonial studies are often based within literary studies and on methods developed from literary scholarship, the forms of discourse postcolonial scholars analyse extend beyond fiction. They often include scientific studies and everyday narratives, since colonialism and its aftermath impact on all kinds of knowledge systems and forms of representation.

One example of colonial discourse theory being used by literary scholars to analyse representation and its effects in the Pacific can be found in Anna Johnston's (2003) work. *Missionary Writing and Empire, 1800–1860* describes how the evangelist writings and activities of the London Missionary Society shaped how the Oceanic Other was imagined in Great Britain and beyond. As Johnston (2003) observes, "[t]he nineteenth century saw the vast expansion of archives filled with information about the world outside Britain, an expansion which grew exponentially alongside Britain's 'second' empire. Missionary texts were a foundational and influential part of this 'imperial archive'" (p. 3). This work was used in ways that were regarded in its time as emancipatory, as part of a civilising project, but which has subsequently come to be understood as deeply implicated in colonial projects of governance and administration that have had profound cultural effects, including the way they failed to acknowledge the folkways and knowledge systems of Oceanic peoples. Aside from the deep and longstanding effects of missionary colonialism in the Pacific, "[c]olonial governments, school systems, and media outlets privileged and mandated colonial languages, literatures, and cultures while suppressing and devaluing indigenous knowledge (Perez, 2016, p. 373). It is worth underscoring this point, as it shows how postcolonial literary theory has also drawn attention to the both the oppressive effects of literature and language, and the power of discourse and narrative to express and come to terms with the grievances of the colonial past in empowering ways. In the aftermath of colonisation and political independence, Pacific peoples have been left with a complex pathway for coming to terms with the aftermath of colonialism, in and on their own terms, and using their own forms of knowledge and cultural exchange, which are now intermingled with adopted and adapted Western forms of representation and even governance.

2.3 The Case for Storytelling as a Multi-field Method

Even art form brings new insight and is crucial to understanding the particularities of culture, this thesis leans on the origins of postcolonial theory in literary studies and thus focuses on written forms of storytelling. This is in contrast to studies of other forms, such as photography, undertaken by scholars such as Max Quanchi and Anne Maxwell. Written compositions remain central to postcolonial methods of discourse analysis, as John McLeod (2000, p. 38) has explained. There are three main purposes for reading and analysing narratives through a postcolonial lens: firstly, to put

written work back into its historical frame; secondly, to reveal how the West shaped understandings of their colonies through representation; and finally, to analyse the way in which present narratives can still draw on past colonial stereotypes that continued to be perpetuated into the present day and to look at how contemporary postcolonial narratives may attempt to adapt, respond to, or overcome the representations of the past to explore and express culture on their own terms. Certain examples of narratives executed first or mainly in oral forms are also important to consider, particularly in Oceanic societies. Thus, drawing from a review of current literature, this study considers storytelling as a methodology well-suited to the particularities not only of the postcolonial Pacific but also of the situation of gendered violence in the Pacific. As represented in various forms of narrative relevant to contemporary Pacific, society and the issue of gendered emancipation is the prevalent topic in the South Pacific literatures.The case for a literature-centred form of analysis that extends into other forms, such as newspaper or media reportage and material published by NGOs, takes its cue from Graham Huggan's work *Interdisciplinary Measures: Literature and the Future of Postcolonial Studies* (2008, p. 2). Huggan demonstrates the usefulness of drawing on methods of discourse analysis that are based in literary studies but extend beyond analyses of literature alone. The approaches to Huggan offers suggest ways of comparative analysis by drawing on postcolonial literary studies extended into forms of "transdisciplinary cultural analysis," or through "multilingual dimensions" that take into account differences in modes and forms of representation that circulate in different cultures. Huggan's work thus provides the groundwork for a multi-field analysis that this PhD project will build on by beginning with literary studies and then touching on studies of media representation and challenges facing Pacific peoples and writers in gaining access to print and audio-visual media and media representationin the Pacific. This is because, while there is a literary heritage and present novel-writing industry in Oceania, it is is constrained by limited publishing opportunities. In addition, arguably more common and pervasive forms of knowledge circulation in Oceania are through everyday representations in the media. Of course, traditional cultural forms also include oral storytelling.

2.4 Multiple Forms of Storytelling in the Pacific

A case study in this thesis emerged in Samoa and the wider (tropical) Pacific, as the majority of prose, poetry, and journal articles I have drawn upon refer to that specific region.The narrative culture of Samoa extends beyond literary representation to media and other forms of cultural storytelling. Thus, this research engages with multiple kinds of narratives and storytelling as methodological, qualitative research. This research acknowledges and addresses the way Oceanic peoples share information and tell stories that pre-date and post-date Western notions of what counts as literature.

Tropical Pacific ways of expression are transforming in a significant manner as Pacific islanders are in the process of attempting to recover and adapt their regional identity in accordance with their *pre-palagi* culture, to embrace modern frameworks and achievements, as well as historical *kastom* (Wendt, 1976, pp. 53–54). Moreover, indigenous epistemologies play an essential role in defining these characteristics as they constitute the pre-colonial regional knowledge as well as unique recognition (Quanchi, 2004, p. 10). In their article "Have we been thinking upside-down?: The contemporary emergence of Pacific theoretical thought" (2004), Elise Huffer and Ropate Qalo emphasise the importance of implementing indigenous wisdom and strategies into Oceanic spheres of politics, economy, architecture, and education in order to avoid modelling and perpetuating Western patterns with different understandings of problems and solutions. Their work argues that contextualisation and internal philosophies are inseparable parts of a well-functioning modern community.

Geographical territories such as Samoa have multiple forms of narrative. *Fāgogo* is the traditional way of storytelling, mostly for children, that implements the elements of myths and legends (*talatupu'a)* (Long, 1999, p. 236). Appreciation for the way this narrative form dominates many aspects of Samoan society suggests that narratives occupy a particularly influential place in Samoa's storytelling culture. The story of *Metotagivale* and a*lo* s a particular Samoan narrative that tell the histories of love, life's challenges, and pain. This makes them some of the most recognised Samoan forms of transmitting knowledge about cultural heritage, emphasising connection with land and nature. Importantly, they strengthen the personal bonds with ancestors and distinguish the particular narratives of Samoa from other Pacific Island cultures (Lilomaiava, 2020, p. 122). This is not to say that Western forms of storytelling, including forms of media and novel writing, do not continue to exert influence in the region, as many of these forms are adopting hybrid or syncretic forms, as I discuss in Chapter Two. An alertness to cultural particularity means an alertness to postcolonial complexity in the Oceanic region, as well as to the preponderance of storytelling and narrative forms.

2.5 General Use of Storytelling as a Research Tool

While the history of discursive narrative analysis is particular to postcolonial literary studies, it bears pointing out that the use of storytelling as a form of research analysis and research method across multiple fields has precedents in other research fields as well. It is thus useful not only to a study like this one that considers the role of literature and narrative in addressing gendered violence, but also for any study oriented to understanding self and cultural identity, topics particularly germane to the aftermath of gendered violence. According to Deborah Potts in *Once Upon a Time… Storytelling As a*

Qualitative Tool (2004, pp. 16–17), storytelling is a basic human way of sharing knowledge, feelings, and expressing oneself; in addition, it is an irreplicable and indisputable reflection of an individual narrative's ambiguity and subjectivity. Since telling stories consists of multiple facets and components, including reflection, ordering of events, motives, and morals, it offers a great capacity to be a qualitative research instrument. Moreover, this tool presents personal experiences, the genesis of the process, and an understanding of the context.

Stories stimulate our fantasies, which in turn, shape personal beliefs and exercise the imagination (Booker, 2004, p. 3). The interpretive work of storytelling identifies and emphasises elements such as dominant or recurring themes, emotions, motives, responses, and messages conveyed. As such, storytelling has been used as a research methodology in various disciplines. For example, Rooney et al. (2016, p. 149) adopt this methodology to investigate customer relations in business. Additionally, researchers have suggested that storytelling is beneficial in the public health field and in contexts of medical examinations as it validates the patient's experience and history of injuries (McCall et al., 2019, p. 2). Autobiographical storytelling has been used as a feminist research tool because it provides access to the personal. It includes the self-reflexive narrative tools of reporting and reflecting. In such contexts, storytelling allows meaningful insights in terms of its "usefulness not just for addressing the experiences of those who are marginalised in society and the marginalisation of feminist researchers in academic settings [for instance], but also for foregrounding the experiences of those researchers [or their subjects] whose marginality is linked to race, sexuality, class, gender, age, and […] ability" (Kimpson, 2005, p. 75).

As noted by Vilsoni Hereniko (1994), "[t]he oral histories, imaginative literature, and the visual and performing arts of the Pacific Islands indicate significant moments in the evolution of cultural identities" (p. 406). The use of storytelling as a research tool looking at the evolution of awareness of gendered violence, and of forms of postcolonial feminist identity, validates this statement and honours Oceanic heritage. It also recognises the way narrative has been used as a management technique in colonial and various anti-colonial governmental regimes but also in postcolonial attempts to reclaim identity. This thesis takes a broad approach to storytelling in this context, recognising narratives as powerful explanatory documents revealing the perspectives and approaches of persons, organisations, cultures, and nationalities (Liu, et al., 2012, p. 144).

2.6 Storytelling and Narrative Used as Recovery from Trauma

In addition to its ethnographic and cultural uses as a documentary and research tool, narrative has a unique and special power in terms of recovery from trauma. Within the well-established field of trauma narrative theory and testimonial literature, many researchers have regarded narrative as an

essential recovery tool for victims of violence or atrocity. In many cases, violent acts fall outside the ambit of narratable language. Thus, the act of telling one's story can recognise personal or cultural violence, ease the act of forgiveness, and help the teller find a path beyond trauma and pain. In some cases, a type of relief can also be felt when a victim of a crime hears the confession from the abuser. These are just some of the conclusions Priscilla B. Hayner suggests in *Unspeakable Truths: Transitional Justice and the Challenge of Truth Commissions* (2001, p. 2). Hayner states: "[U]nhealed wounds of society and of individual victims may continue to fester long after the cessation of fighting or the end of a repressive regime" (p. 145). In this context, sharing personal testimony can become a means to initiate healing, not just personally but culturally as well. It can identify the need for any reparations or explore applications of necessary political, personal, or social changes. It is well-documented in trauma literature that refraining from speaking, as well as denial, impede recovery and intensify trauma (Hayner, 2001, pp. 145–146).

Moreover, where shame and stigma are involved, telling the story of trauma to others is seen as an act of courage" has been changed to "Women telling the story of their trauma to others is seen as an act of courage—secrecy is often considered a protection from social ostracism or victim shaming. In *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence- From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror* (2015), Judith Herman notices that admitting of being a victim of an abuse or assaultcan often elicit further shame and stigmatisation. On this point, she reinforces the role of narrative after receiving the letters from the readers of the first edition of her foundational book, first published in 1992—"Through them, we realized the power of speaking the unspeakable and witnessed first-hand the creative energy that is released when the barriers of denial and repression are lifted" (Herman, 2015, p. 2). One of the stages of recovery in combatting and overcoming post-traumatic stress disorder and regaining power is "a conscious choice to face the danger" (Herman, 2015, p. 197). Due to the difficult nature of trauma and the retelling of it, this can often influence patterns in which trauma is narrated: it may be fragmentary, circular, repetitive, concrete, or dream-like, for example. Yet this does not make it unreliable. As Christine Shearer-Cremean and Carol L. Winkelmann note in their Introduction to *Survivor Rhetoric: Negotiations and Narrativity in Abused Women's Language* (2004), "[t]rauma narratives epitomise in a painful way the fragmentary and uncertain status of all narrative in a post modern world" (p. 11).

Nora Strejilevich, in her article *Testimony: Beyond the Language of Truth* (2006, p. 702), raises the question of correlation between the need to tell the story and the recipient's reaction. In fear of not being heard, trauma survivors tend to adapt their internalised feelings to the psychological capacities of the listener. The process of adaptation has implications in a cross-cultural context. In regards to the tropical Pacific, the implications relate to the way in which gendered

violence is represented by Oceanic cultures in contrast to the way trauma may be narrated in the therapeutic and sometimes more open cultures that can be found in the West, in particular the USA. Moreover, they illustrate the manner in which female survivors put a cultural lens of acceptability (or not) on narrating acts of violence over their own experience, as we see to an extent in the film *Once Were Warriors* (1994). Consequently, while trauma everywhere tends to be narrated in fragmentary narrative forms, in some cultural contexts, the exposure of trauma in general and gendered violence in particular through trauma narrative tends to come through veiled references in contrast to sometimes more direct descriptions (Strejilevich, 2006, p. 704). This thesis is alert to these constraints and cultural contexts. Moreover, the cultural biases of the interpreter also need a degree of self-reflexivity in cross-cultural contexts, as this thesis has already acknowledged. Powerfully, Strejilevich (2006) emphasises that the role of the "post-narrator" is one of the most crucial and noble of possible roles, and a delicate one, as he or she must "keep the dignity of truth alive—not [necessarily] […] the truth of facts, but the truth of what has happened and is happening […] at the verge of being derailed" (p. 713).

2.7 Storytelling and the Truth Commissions

Research that explores the emancipatory potential and limitations of storytelling for victims of violence differs around the world, especially in different national contexts. One example of this is the use of various kinds of truth commissions that have drawn on narrative testimony. In their scholarship "The Burden of Memory: Victims, Storytelling and Resistance in Northern Ireland" (2009), Claire Hackett and Bill Rolston differentiate two attitudes in the engagement of stories told for the purpose of healing the wounds or seeking compensation. Some testimonial narratives are told for the healing of the narrator; honouring the subjective experience of the teller is important. This form of narrative requires a response that understands the difference between testimonial experience for restorative justice or healing the wounds and testimony based on juridical facticity, seeking compensation. The evaluation of purposes is therefore essential in order to receive stories on their own terms and understand how to respond with the necessary degrees of sympathy or objectivity (Hackett & Rolston, 2009, p. 356). Otherwise, tellers of trauma stories continue to have the truth of their experience rejected and risk becoming further marginalised. Moreover, in the context of testifying, storytelling is not limited to the individual story but extends to the attestationof collective experience (Hackett & Rolston, 2009, p. 357). Engaged by the non-government organisation Healing through Remembering, numerous public committees in Ireland revealed that storytelling is one of the most liberating possibilities to conquer the trauma of the last thirty years of political conflicts. Yet, the initiative received multiple comments on the hazards of individual stories and the discrepancies the citizens might want to hear or simply be prepared to acknowledge (Hackett &

Rolston, 2009, p. 358). Thus, Hackett and Rolston (20009, p. 355) conclude that in order for narratives to serve humanity, it is necessary to develop ways to receive or circulate them in order to prevent the same atrocities from happening. This observation is germane to my research on the need to develop ways to receive and share stories of gendered violence in the Pacific that focus on healing and avoid repeating the epistemic violence of the colonial past.

Based on the interviews with survivors of Holocaust, in “Shame, Guilt and Anguish in Holocaust Survivor Testimony” (2005), Michael Nutkiewicz analyses the nature of testimonial storytelling from varying perspectives. He notes that the position and perspective of the narrator as well as the receiver of testimony influences its reception and the understanding of traumatic abuse in starkly different ways. There is a great deal of difference between the position of a person witnessing such abuse, who becomes injured or indifferent (an individual violated privately) and a member of a psychologically humiliated group such as a narrator of “personal and corporate pain” speaking collectively in the plural (Nutkiewicz, 2005, pp. 1–5). According to Nutkiewicz, traumatic circumstances influence the comprehension of trauma for people in general and the degree to which individuals and societies can interpret the situation or react appropriately. Importantly, Nutkiewicz not only shows that cultural circumstances shape the way narrative testimony of trauma is received and validated as an issue of collective versus personal experience but also that different positions within a society (a victimiser, a witness, a complicit or inured spectator, or a victim) will also impact the way that such trauma or violence is understood. These positions will themselves may take various forms, or be enacted or embodied, in gendered and cultural ways.

In Cape Town, 1996, recognising these issues in the aftermath of apartheid, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission produced an important new process to involve women in hearings; nevertheless, the number of participants remained relatively low. In their research “Dealing with the Aftermath: Sexual Violence and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission” (1997), Beth Goldblatt and Sheila Meintjes note that the status of women in South Africa can be limited to the role of wife or daughter inside a family considered to be a private entity where outsiders do not interfere. On top of that, violence against women is tragically prevalent in this area to the extent that it is seen as a part of everyday reality. Thus, as December Green (1999) remarks, “Where these practices are deemed legitimate, their treatment as forms of gendered violence has stirred a huge debate. Often this debate boils down to arguments for cultural relativism versus universal human rights ” (p. 15). The similar issues of the narrativisation of gendered violence happen in South Pacific islands. Biersack and Macintyre (2016) insist on a human rights approach while acknowledging the challenges of doing so. They state that a common acceptance in the context of the Pacific by Pacific peoples themselves is that “women are considered inferior to men” and highlight the existence of a “promotional

regime" with "limited international implementation" and "no international enforcement," as well as tensions in human rights discourse between "universal and particular" ideas of human rights (p. 16).

These issues and more emerged in the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission as issues that limit women's voices and agency, including but not limited to fear of stigmatisation, normalisation of violence, hate speech as well as the shaming of those speaking out (involving both women and men), concerns about the violation of privacy, and limited access to counselling, as well as political allegiances and politically influenced frames of mind (Biersack and Macintyre, 2016, pp. 11–12). Taking into account these limitations, the only way of eliminating gendered violence and implementing necessary changes is by creating the space for women to talk because:

> Violence against women is rooted in cultures of inequity, injustice, and entitlement. In countries where there is greater equality between genders, there are fewer incidents of violence against women. (Trenoweth, 2015, p. 4)

2.8 Media Narratives and the Agentic Voice

In the context of victims of trauma and violence, Sharon Lamb, in *New Versions of Victims: Feminists Struggle with the Concept* (1999), explains how women themselves sometimes play a part in refusing to be considered "victims" because of pejorative connotations this word brings to mind to the recipients of their story who might not choose to identify as "victims" for reasons of their own self-image. She describes "the struggle of these victims to remain 'agents' of their acts, that is, to see themselves as planful actors, as they describe their victimization" as well as to participate in narrative which "recognises agency as well as passivity, strength as well as vulnerability, resistance as well as dissociation" (p. 109). Issues involving the "pornography of representation" occur when the description of sexual assault is overly repeated; conversely, the protection of a victim (such as dis-identifying a survivor's name and or speaking of the violent act in objective language suitable for the court) can risk re-objectifying the victim (Zorn, 2012, p. 171). Gregory Ernest Fry (1997) argues that "[s]uch images [of acts of violence] do not simply provide interesting insights"; he reminds us that "they affect the lives of the people they depict" (p. 306). The media can sometimes play a complicit role in re-victimising victims of violence. Ignacio Corona (2010) observes that the sales of a newspaper increase when it contains violent content, with preferably locally committed crime (p. 107).

Yet, the media representation of violence is not always negative. Bridey Heing (2017) underlines the additional function of news media in helping people who are not involved in acts of violence understand the broader context. She adds that "shared narratives", for example, "help us connect with and understand victims on a human level, rather than simply as statistics" (p. 166). This

research project includes an acknowledgement, in small part, of the media landscape in order to recognise that it may reobjectify victims, sensationalise violence, perpetuate silences, or conversely, provide social and cultural contextualisation. As such, it also seeks to identify issues and affordances in terms of reflecting on possible communication opportunities as well as identifying concerns and sensitive approaches in presenting individual stories.

2.9 Discourse Analysis as Research of Resistance

This thesis thus not only looks at storytelling as a research tool and a mode for analysis but also explores how both literary and non-literary narratives can serve as well as a form "research as resistance" (St. George, 2009). This term has been used by Sally St. George (2009), who outlines its role in "presenting [what she calls] *irresistible* stories [italics mine]—stories that describe pushback against the status quo, stories that revisit the ethics of 'the way things are,' and stories that forge new paths by telling the stories within the stories" (p. 3). Likewise, this thesis is interested in exploring the way that narratives are capable of taking up the challenge of speaking veiled or silenced truths. The poetic and veiled forms of speaking found in the first-person narrated literary work of Pacific authors, may turn out to provide ways to other media so they can address the issue of gendered violence. For example commonly circulated stories of print media, or even PR discourse of NGOs who work at the coalface of gendered violence in the Pacific, might open respectful ways of telling stories that pushback back "against the status quo" without reinscribing epistemic violence or perpetuating further forms of victimisation.

As illustrated in the examples above, storytelling plays multiple functions in contemporary research. It has a particular place in this project that investigates the narrative affordances and limits of representing gendered violence in the Pacific. Analysis and interpretation of the quoted literature will answer my thesis's questions, such as why and how women in the tropical Pacific tell their stories in forms or poetry and prose as survivors. I also consider how these narratives and the victims do or do not speak individually or collectively and what the power and limits of these stories are. All of these questions emphasise the critical importance of narratives in ways that can be framed by Shepherd's (2008) statement arguing that:

> Raising the profile of women's experiences of violence, and seeking to bring these experiences from the margins to the centre of the political agenda, the documentation of violence against women can be seen as an effort to overcome this 'silence', and also to go some way towards constructing a better, safer world. (p. 38)

2.10 Women's Liberation and the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)

In *Overcoming Violence Against Women and Girls: The International Campaign to Eradicate a Worldwide Problem* (2003) Michael L. Penn, Rahel Narods, and William S. Hatcher argue that the first movements of the women's liberation movement worldwide can be traced to particular initiatives believed to be initiated in the middle of the nineteenth century by two women: 1) Qurratu'l-'Ayn, who was executed in 1848 due to the non-compliance with the political regime, who said, before her death: "You can kill me as soon as you like, but you cannot stop the emancipation of women" (Effendi, 1974, as cited in Penn et al., 2003, p. 2); and 2) Cady Stanton, who that same year—1848—commenced her journey of fighting for women's rights. Over the course of two centuries, women have stood up for their rights, opinions, and beliefs. Gradually, institutions such as the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women have raised concerns regarding voting rights, equal salaries, customary law, and genital circumcision. In order to ascertain and consolidate the aim to achieve new gendered equality principles, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) was established. International engagement with women's rights, through CEDAW and beyond, enabled the 1993 UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women, the first official and internationally recognised tool adapted to eliminate gendered violence (Penn, et al., 2003, pp. 2–9).

In recent decades, scholars such as Sally Engle Merry have studied the establishment of CEDAW to assess how the sanctions of one institution apply to multiple culturally diverse geographical areas. In *Human Rights & Gender Violence: Translating International Law into Local Justice* (2006), Engle Merry stresses the way such a human rights approach to gendered violence "articulates principles of gender equality and state responsibility and demonstrates how they apply to the countries under scrutiny" (p. 72). On the other hand, she notices that the committee applies the same procedure to each of the countries to ensure its policy is equitable and just. The repercussions of such strategies are that:

> [c]ountries that ratify it assume the burden of conforming to its requirements, regardless of their specific cultural attributes. (…) Thus, the committee is not explicably promoting transnational modernity but is pressing governments to conform to the terms of a convention that embodies many of the ideals of that modernity. (p. 91)

Here, Engle Merry offers a version of a culturally sensitive prism through which one can distinguish transnational and international types of human rights. In her terms, the "international" approach

constitutes the universal comprehension of women's rights violations around the world and suggests some strategies and policies that would prevent discrimination from happening. On the other hand, "transnational" is the term used to describe the regional application of these recommendations to create a culturally appropriate version compliant with local characteristics and cultural approaches to promote women's empowerment and eliminate gendered violence (p. 1).

2.11 Intercultural Contexts for Gendered Violence

In another work, *Gender Violence: A Cultural Perspective* (2008), Sally Engle Merry identifies gendered violence as dependent on the recognition of the role of gender in acts of violence. At the same time, she underlines that "[t]he scope of gender violence is continually changing" (p. 13). Depending on social, cultural, and political contexts, gendered violence can be "both physical and sexual" (p. 14) as it differs and cannot be framed into one specific scheme for a particular geographical area, which often changes the perception of pain, consent, or the erotic. Other forms constitute humiliation, threats, or degradation (p. 14). Adding to this,

> [i]n postcolonial societies, such as Papua New Guinea, violence is embedded in systems of power such as colonialism, family institutions such as bride price, development projects and their large-scale environmental degradation, and the poverty and social exclusion experienced by poor rural migrants to the city who face unemployment and residence in squatter settlements without adequate drainage and sewage systems or clean water. (Dinnen & Ley, 2000, as cited in Merry, 2008, p. 15)

In the first section of the conference proceeding *Rethinking Violence Against Women* (1998), Rebecca Emerson Dobash and Russell P. Dobash reinforce the importance of cultural contexts in the interpretation of violence by differentiated levels of reference such as "the individual, interpersonal, institutional, and ideological" (p. 10). Attention to the different levels at which violence can occur is fundamental to analysing the causes of violence, addressing their motivating factors, and forming a significant and meaningful response to the offender or sufferer. Thus, the authors conclude that no exclusive terminology can be offered to specify what constitutes gendered violence because of the variance of regional and circumstantial factors (p. 56).

2.12 Gendered Violence Worldwide

In the preface to *Honour: Crimes, Paradigms, and Violence Against Women* (2005), Radhika Coomaraswamy notes that violence against women firmly relates to the dominant need of a male to control and restrict female sexuality. She underlines the importance of actions designed to empower

women and tackles the subject of transnational frameworks of understanding, arguing, contrary to a cultural relativist framework, for a human rights framework:

> These practices (and others) represent forms of domestic violence which until recently have escaped national and international scrutiny largely because they are frequently presented as 'traditional or cultural practices' requiring tolerance and respect. Thus, cultural relativism (or respect for multiculturalism) is often employed to excuse the violation of women's rights by inhumane and discriminatory practices in the community and family. (p. xii)

Coomaraswamy's points illustrate how the difference between perspectives frames the problem of gendered violence through global and local lenses in ways that can raise heated debates and sensitivities. While the matters discussed by Coomaraswamy refer mostly to crimes of honour and forced marriages in specific cultural areas related to the Middle East, such as Egypt, Palestine, and Iraq, December Green's *Gender Violence in Africa: African Women's Responses* (1999) emphasises the complexities within any given cultural complex. Green notes that gendered violence can be a multilevel form of violence that is operationalised as a political weapon, a tool of patriarchy, a form of institutional self-interest, an instrument of economic domination, and simple postcolonial reality; in all cases, however, Green notes that gendered violence remains "the preservation of male control over resources and power" (p. 2).

In *What Happened to the Women: Gender and Reparations for Human Rights Violations* (2006), Heidi Rombouts focuses on contemporary Rwanda, presenting the widespread gendered violence problems paralysing the society as she stresses the limited possibilities for women in public life and their submission to the authority of their husbands. The gap between men's and women's access to land ownership and education is striking. The statistics demonstrate that even after the genocide period, sexual assaults and rapes are still a prevalent issue. As a result of the genocide, many children there have been left with no guardian and have had to be taken care of by other families who have often sexually harassed them as orphans. This circle of violence reinforces domestic violence in all sectors of Rwandan society (p. 206).

Perhaps closer to home for the Pacific, in regards to the region of Southeast Asia, Lisa Law's *Sex Work in Southeast Asia: The Place of Desire in a Time of AIDS* (2000) centres on the economic mechanisms, including tourism development and limited professional opportunities, which lead females in areas of Philippines, Thailand, and Indonesia to seek labour as sex workers. Law's work demonstrates the complexities in regional contexts where women are forced to make difficult choices to make a living, often subjecting them to gendered violence, and begs the question of how much

agency these women have in making these choices. In *Sex at the Margins: Migration, Labour Markets and the Rescue Industry* (2007), Laura Marìa Augustìn quotes the perspective on prostitution by The Coalition Against Trafficking in Women which defines it as "a form of violence against women, eliminating any notion that women who sell sex can consent" (p. 39). Honouring regional contexts is important, as work like this demonstrates, but equally—a culturally relativistic framework has a responsibility not to ignore the universality of human rights.

Violence against women is now discussed extensively in national reports and during hearings. Human rights reports, since the turn of the millennium, increasingly report on violence against women, including issues of gender stereotypes, trafficking in women, prostitution, disruptions of employment through sexual harassment, women's health in rural areas as well as urban, and women's position in the family (Bernard, 1996, as cited in Merry, 2006, p. 76). Gendered violence thus takes many forms, and this project will seek at once to narrow these forms for its analysis whilst also respecting the pervasive and multi-level aspects of any discrete "kind" of violence involving dimensions of gender.

2.13 Violence Against Women and Gendered Violence in Samoa

In their introduction to *Gender Violence & Human Rights: Seeking Justice in Fiji, Papua New Guinea and Vanuatu* (2016), Aletta Biersack and Martha Macintyre prove that Oceania is no exception to the pervasiveness of this kind of gendered violence, suffering particularly from violence against women. As they note, "In the western Pacific, women and girls are overwhelmingly the victims of gendered violence, the perpetrators being overwhelmingly male" (p. 4). Even though Jean Zorn (2016) notices that CEDAW has had a beneficial influence on Melanesian culture through its promotion of gender equality, "despite those gains, however, women in Melanesian [and other Western Pacific] societies continue to occupy a subordinate status, and violence against women remains an intransigent problem" (pp. 230–231).

Ramona Boodoosingh, Melanie Beres, and David Tombs, in *Research Briefing: Violence against Women in Samoa* (2018), widely discuss the causes that make violence in Samoa a prevalent and serious social problem. The two main institutions that prevent female empowerment, according to their work, are the structures of regional authorities and the church (p. 33). Chiefly positions are held almost exclusively by men (p. 34), while Christianity promotes the image of a loyal submissive woman who "is considered the helpmate of her husband and is expected to be obedient to him" (p. 46). Even though Samoa became a signatory to the CEDAW agreement in 1992 and has subsequently introduced a Domestic Violence Unit as well as a Family Violence Court (p. 35), these cultural aspects of Samoan society make reporting it and therefore addressing it, particularly challenging. In Samoa,

women still avoid reporting abuse to the police as "Samoans do not involve the police in things that happen within the family unless the consequences are very serious" (MWCSD, 2017, p. 124).

The Duluth Abuse Intervention Project, described in Yvonne Crichton-Hill's article, "Challenging Ethnocentric Explanations of Domestic Violence: Let Us Decide, Then Value Our Decisions—A Samoan Response" (2001), distinguishes four cultural factors that promulgate the acceptance of male domination over woman in Samoa: "natural order" (p. 205), "objectification of women" (p. 206), "forced submission" (p. 207), and finally "overt coercion and physical force" (p. 208). Nevertheless, Crichton-Hill underlines that female objectification is hard to determine in a Samoan context as relationships in families are very complex; for instance, "[t]he status of sisters" in Samoa "is in direct contrast to the status of wives" (p. 206). The confirmation of this statement is reflected in the "It's All About Eve: Women's Attitudes to Gender-Based Violence in Samoa*"* (2018) written by Penelope Schoeffel, Ramona Boodoosingh, and Galumalemana Steven Percival. They emphasise "the traditional Samoan brother-sister covenant of mutual respect (*feagaiga*)", noting that while women are culturally respected as sisters, they tend to be subject to abuse as wives (p. 11). The same study quotes women's reactions to the public circulation of a promotional film raising awareness around domestic violence (Percival, 2015). Among these reactions was a common response of some women who claimed that, even in the context of violence, it remains women's responsibility to obey their husbands and meet their sexual expectations and demands (p. 11). "Intimate Partner Violence: Perceptions of Samoan Women" (2008) by Lois Magnussen, Jan Shoultz, Kay Hansen, Merina Sapolu, and Mili Samifua elaborates on the position of a woman in her own family by conducting the interviews with eight Samoan women who noticed that in Hawai'i women are deprived of the protection of their parents and close relatives as in the United States they do not live in "open housing, allowing intervention by others" (p. 391). The participants have also communicated that some spouses suffering from intimate partner aggression are not complaining to their brothers as there is a high probability that their brothers would attack their husbands and consequently have to face charges in court (p. 392). These issues are no doubt complex and must be taken into account in any studies of narratives about gendered violence or in seeking to define the terms and parameters of the term 'gendered violence' in the Pacific in general and Samoa in particular, which include but are not limited to intimate partner violence and prostitution.

2.14 Local Responses to Gendered Violence

Organisations offering women help in Samoa include the Samoa Victim Support Group, Nuanua O Le Alofa Inc. or Samoa Family Health Association (Boodoosingh, Beres, & Tombs, 2018, p. 42). Social initiatives such as Suiga/Change film projection use interactive drama to raise public awareness of

and discussion around intimate partner violence among young people. They show that the participants are eager to learn about gender equality and implement new strategies of interactions with peers (Heard, et al., 2019, p. 701). There are multiple surveys that have been conducted in Samoa to raise awareness of violence against women, for example, NGO Mapusaga O Aiga, Family Health and Safety Study, Samoa Demographic Health Survey, Mother and Daughter Study. These surveys are crucial for data gathering about issues of gendered violence in this context and the issues around discussing it, including their forms of promotion of female empowerment (Boodoosingh, 2015, pp. 101–103). In general, the responses this thesis will examine are, in line with its aims, narrative ones rather than governmental responses or the projects of non-governmental organisations. This is not to dismiss the importance of NGO and governmental projects which are in some cases extensive and sometimes significantly impactful. It is, however, to note that the scope of this thesis is limited in what it can examine.

The survey of the literature on gendered violence in the Pacific emphasises its pervasiveness, and its entrenched nature. The challenge of overcoming gendered violence in the Pacific faces many exogenous and internal challenges. The resistance to feminism, as a perceived Western import, is one such challenge that will be addressed in chapters to come, as is the 'double colonisation' of women as victims not just of imperialism but also of patriarchy inside and outside their cultures. Reporting and speaking out on gendered violence, in a culture of silence and shame, is also a significant challenge. It is for this reason that this thesis investigates how literary narratives can offer women strength, both as victims of trauma, and as agentic voices, gathering strength through solidarity and courage.

As it stands this chapter covers the general postcolonial approach, using colonial discourse theory, which offers an explanation of how postcolonial writing of all kinds, not just literature, can play a role to address colonial violence of the past, and raise issues in the present. In general, this chapter covers off on methods for how and why narrative matters for addressing gender violence against women in particular, and in the tropical Pacific even more specifically.

In the following chapters of the thesis, the study comes to use Samoan writing as a kind of mini-case study. As I began to uncover narratives, my sources seemed for whatever reason to often refer back to Samoa. Western and American Samoa are specific, and though instructive, the thesis findings about it cannot be generalisable across the Pacific. The research methods presented in the current section are needed to be presented before segueing into my own methods—scouring libraries for narratives of gender violence in the Pacific, and also considering and following the most recent forms of narrative about gender violence in the emerging #metoo movement."

Chapter Three

The Emergence of Pacific Women's Voices—Speaking Out on Gendered Violence through Poetry

3.1 Summary of the chapter

The chapter begins the section of the thesis that begins to analyse the limits and affordances of different forms of narrative to address gendered violence in the South Pacific, taking a chronological approach beginning in the 1960s, and extending to contemporary times. It reveals the role of poetry in Pacific women's voices, particularly in confronting gendered violence, highlighting how women have used this medium since the 1960s to raise awareness and protest against abuse. Despite historical patriarchal and colonial influences, poetry provided a platform for Pacific women to address issues of violence, often using metaphor and allusion to circumvent cultural taboos. The study traces the evolution of this poetic expression over decades, showing how women's increasing political activism and empowerment led to more explicit and pointed confrontations of gendered violence in their works. The poems "Love Song" and "Song," first published in 1909 and later adapted in 1982, are key examples of early Pacific poetry that use landscape and sexuality metaphors to explore themes of gendered violence and hidden desires. The translations by Nathaniel Bright Emerson and Marjorie Sinclair reflect a complex intersection of colonialism, nationalism, and gendered dynamics, with women depicted both as symbols of the land and as subjects of male control, often caught between the tension of traditional roles and modern liberation. The chapter explores the rise of feminist voices in Pacific poetry, particularly from the 1970s onward, highlighting a shift in literary expression where women began to address gendered violence, colonial oppression, and cultural identity. Women poets, such as Lynda Thomas and Mildred Sope, used their works to challenge patriarchal structures and to critique both colonial and nationalist frameworks that marginalized women. The emergence of poster poems in the late 1970s, such as the Ondobondo series, further demonstrates the growing confidence of female authors in using poetry to address social issues, combining indigenous and modern influences to advocate for women's rights and empowerment in the Pacific.

3.2 Introduction

I began this thesis in the tropical north of Australia, as an outsider—a student from Poland attempting to understand how and in what ways the women of the Pacific had used storytelling and narrative to draw attention to and protest issues of gendered violence. As I trawled through the holdings of the Eddie Koiki Mabo Library in Townsville, I was forced to confront the shortcomings of my knowledge about the vast Pacific and its diverse cultures. Of the many shortcomings was not having visited the Pacific until midway through my candidature. Consequently, my experiences of the

issues discussed in this thesis were almost entirely through written texts, at least until the second year of my research.

Despite these limitations, what I was most struck by, and what I did not expect in my trawling through published work, was how significant poetry had been for expressing the issues of gendered violence that are at the heart of this thesis. Venturing further into the field of Pacific literature, I discovered that poetry had long provided women with an important platform for discussing their struggles. However, earlier poetry could only raise issues of gendered violence in indirect ways. It was with time and social change that the women of the Pacific were able to use poetry to directly confront the violence perpetrated against them. I thus document the emergence and development of women's voices in Pacific poetry, from the establishment of the first universities in the tropical Pacific region in the 1960s through to contemporary developments in the 2020s. As Selina Tusitala Marsh points out in her PhD thesis, *"Ancient Banyans, Flying Foxes and White Ginger": Five Pacific Women Writers* (2004), poetry remains an important medium for Pacific women to articulate a woman-centred vision of their own lives and future, one which has not been imposed on them by imperialists, colonialists, nationalists, or even Western feminists.

A long history of oratory practice was crucial to the development of written poetry in the Pacific, but colonial and patriarchal dominance also influenced the development of the Pacific's literary traditions. For the women of the Pacific, poetry provided access to cultural freedoms usually afforded only to men:

> The genre of poetry is also the closest literary form to orature, whose many complex forms of expression already pervade island cultures […] It can be an aesthetically pleasing form of self-expression, while readily lending itself as a vehicle of public expression that remains relatively free from public, or cultural censorship. (Marsh, 2004, p. 17)

By addressing issues of gendered violence through metaphor and allusion, poetry provided a means of circumventing cultural prohibitions around discussing sexual violence. Fundamentally, as Marsh (2004) puts it, through metaphoric language, poetry in the Pacific has been crucial for women to make *the invisible visible* (p. 104) and to give voice to the otherwise unspeakable problems of violence against women.

In order to track the development of depictions of gendered violence in Pacific poetry from the 1960s to the 2020s, I assembled tables of published works collected as part of independent research. This table documents the research I uncovered from the Eddie Koiki Mabo library in Townsville, Australia. The tables are incorporated into the body of the chapters. While the tables

attempt to be as comprehensive as possible, it is inevitably limited in scope. Nonetheless, the tables indicate the prevalence of consistent themes that emerged in women's writing over the sixty years. I do not purport to provide an exhaustive list of Pacific poetry written by women, but the table does demonstrate how predominant themes in Pacific poetry shifted over time and how important poetry became in the postcolonial literary culture of the Pacific, in particular for expressing issues of, raising awareness of, and protesting against issues of gendered violence. Over this sixty-year period, the treatment of themes relating to violence against women becomes more frequent and, importantly, more explicit. By organising the poems in chronological order, starting with the examples of the emergence of poetry by women in the 1970s and 80s by women and finishing with contemporary Pacific verse, it can be clearly seen that the poetry of women in the Pacific in English evolved around developments in political activism. With time, successive generations of female poets refined their approaches to themes of political and personal empowerment. They began to tackle the violence they are subjected to in ways that were increasingly pointed.

3.3 The Historical Role of Poetry in Pacific Cultures

Poetry's long history in the Pacific can be traced back to oral traditions, where verse played a key role in many aspects of life. The use of poetry to pass on the art of navigation was of particular importance to the Pacific's ocean-going cultures. Navigation poems emphasise the historical importance of poetry in Polynesians' lives as they routinely travelled across the vast expanses of the ocean, with poetry providing Polynesian seafarers with direction across waters, especially in long ocean-going journeys (Sinclair, 1982, p. xv). Historically, not unlike Aboriginal songlines in Australia,[5] poetry in the Pacific served—among other spiritual, cultural and aesthetic functions—the very practical purpose of guiding travellers on dangerous journeys. With their poetry, Polynesians also, as Sinclair (1982) puts it, "recounted their history, delivered splendid orations, composed charms and riddles," and they "sang of universal things—warfare, love and hate, the melancholy of growing old, birth and death, the beauty of rain, wind and sea" (pp. xvii–xviii). Pacific cultures interlaced stories of heroes and gods with everyday reflections about life and the community, ancestry, and familial relations.

In the period archaeologists call (not unproblematically) "pre-history," tropical Pacific travellers proved themselves to be the best navigators in the world, sailing distances as long as from Tahiti to Hawai'i or Tahiti to New Zealand. The migrations across the ocean on the double canoes

[5] To read more on song lines refer to Atkinson, J. (2002). *Trauma Trails: Recreating Song Lines. The Transgenerational Effects of Trauma in Indigenous Australia*. Spinifex Press.

with whole families, which took place from the tenth to the fourteenth century, required extraordinary navigation and astronomy skills (Chadwick & Chadwick, 1940, pp. 229–231). Sailing the long distances between the islands of the Pacific Ocean required passing on generations of navigation and astronomy knowledge. Oral storytelling traditions, often through song, played a crucial function in maintaining such knowledge. In similar ways, Pacific poetry and song stored knowledges about wider cultural and moral practices, and information about aristocratic lineages and other genealogies.

Nonetheless, Pacific artistic practice did not merely serve as a practical reference, a set of instructions, or mere historical documentation. As Chadwick (1940, p. 234) observes, Pacific literary culture rather constituted a *living art*. Bards possessed very real cultural, legal, and political power. The knowledge of aristocratic ancestry provided bards with the power to confirm a person's lineage, which constituted a legal form of identification. Since connection to a family line could lead to privileges and entitlement, genealogical relationships were kept secret to prevent imposters from accessing the information on the bloodline (Chadwick & Chadwick, 1940, pp. 235–239). Here, too, bards became important keepers of knowledge.

Traditional Polynesian culture nurtured storytelling practices by selecting orators to remember spoken or sung histories.[6] The passing on of literary traditions was referred to as *apo*, which means "catching literature" (Chadwick & Chadwick, 1940, p. 234). As Edith J. K. Rice states in the Preface to *Hawaiian Legends* (1977, first published in 1923), *apo* relied on "trained men" who "received through their ears" stories of the past, just "as we receive through our eyes, and in that way the ancient Hawaiians had a spoken literature, much as we have a written one" and could recite a *mele*[7] or a song up to three hours long (pp. 4-5). In the tropical Pacific, the indigenous principles of *apo* continue in an altered sense, with established authors playing a significant role in passing on traditions, reflecting on developments, and steering culture for future generations.

More broadly, throughout the islands of the Pacific, there are varied and long traditions around the role of bards, singers, and poets. Well before the first European explorations in Polynesia,

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[6] The distinction between prose and poem in Polynesian writing is primarily concerned with the rhythm and length of the verse as the latter would be accompanied by melody and *hianga*, which stands for decreasing the volume of the voice at the end of the line and appears most usually in mythologies and elegies. *Hianga* allowed the chanter to catch a breath or leave some space for reflexivity (Chadwick & Chadwick, 1940, 240). Melodic voice intonations were applied in public speeches reflecting the singer's emotions. Songs and historic poems such as heroic and nonheroic sagas survive today (Chadwick & Chadwick, 1940, 235).

[7] According to Samuel H. Elbert and Noelani Mahoe (Eds.) word *mele* is a type of repeated verbatim, where *hula* stands for song, chant, dance, whereas *mele* for song, chant, poem. Some types of *mele* include *mele aupuni* (national anthem), *mele bo'oipoipo* (love song), *mele inoa* (name song), and *mele ma'i* (genital song) (1970, 6).

many Pacific cultures conferred a special status upon bards, such that "[t]hese men formed a distinct class, and lived only at the courts of the high chiefs. Accordingly, their stories were heard by none except those people attached to the service of the chiefs" (Rice, 1977, p. xiv). Bards were trained through special courses, which included instruction on narrative techniques, mythology, dance, and other skills. In Mangareva, for instance, trained bards, who were strictly male and called *rogorogo*, historically specialised in genealogies and recitation (Sinclair, 1982, p. xviii). Well before the emergence of the first written publications by tropical Pacific authors in English in the mid-twentieth century, Pacific cultures had long-established literary traditions. For example, "Melanesians had a strong and lively oral tradition, and early writers had their roots in these myths, legends and mime were all an integral part of life in traditional societies" (Powell, 1987, p. 1). Under such circumstances, women nonetheless found spaces to voice their experiences, first within the context of traditional roles but, in the twentieth century, increasingly by creating space for themselves within traditional literary spheres.

Women in various Pacific cultures were traditionally assigned roles associated more closely with the practical upkeep of the community than with the formalised cultural production of the bard, but this did not exclude them from participation in the literary life of the islands. The women of Samoa, for instance, traditionally worked with the *Komiti a Tinā*, a type of female committee, which supports and supervises sanitation and village inspections, and the *Tausi Fale*, which is responsible for looking after children, making mats, cooking, and performing household chores (Shore, 1981, as cited in Cassinat, et al., 2022, p. 2). Contrary to the formalised ceremonial settings in which men delivered oratory about aristocratic genealogy or navigation, women usually found themselves in the environment of domestic responsibilities where the primary form of creative outlet was as storytellers for other women and children. While no less important than the role of the formal bard, the literary practices of women were channelled into different directions due to the position of women in Pacific societies.

Another important role for women in many Pacific cultures was that of healer, which also contributed to the development of women's storytelling practices. In her article, "Having Vitiligo Strengthened My Identity as a Samoan Woman," Christine Afoa (2020) stresses the respect associated with the occupation of a healer in Samoan culture. She observes that "[i]n Western cultures, *Tinā* is dismissed as a 'witch doctor' or a 'shaman,'" while "[i]n Samoan culture, *Tinā* is a

taulasea[8] and her treatment is called *fofō*" (p. 2). Just as navigation poems passed knowledge from one generation of ocean-going travellers to the next, healers passed knowledge through the establishment of their own oral traditions. In Kiribati, for example, healers are mostly women with significant experience who have learnt much from life and remain the best tale tellers, passing their knowledge to little ones (Kanere Koru & Sullivan, 1986, pp. xii–xiii). As carers and healers, the women of many Pacific cultures continue to possess a wealth of experience that differs significantly from the formalised knowledge of male bards.

From the twentieth century, the Pacific became the site of significant cultural changes relating to the visibility of women's increased activity in roles and spheres previously assigned strictly to men in the community.[9] The shifting social status of women in recent decades has been explored in an interview conducted by Samoan writer and Professor Caroline Sinavaiana and J. Kēheulani Kauanui, a native Hawaiian, with Fijian scholar and author Theresa Koroivulaono (2007). In the interview, Theresa Koroivulaono discusses her observations of the recent contributions by women in informal oral recitations in *Kau Ni Matani Gone* ceremonies taking place in Fiji.[10] Even though women rarely take on the role of an orator, the occurrence of such episodes is increasingly becoming more visible and regular. The progress of women's participation in both formal and informal orations in Fiji has nonetheless been hampered by a local persistent conviction that "women do not play significant role in ceremonial presentations" and "gender roles fall distinctly into speaking and nonspeaking spheres" (Sinavaiana & Kauanui, 2007, p. 186), as well as the cult of *vu*[11] (p. 189). While women's roles typically require them to prepare food and accumulate household commodities, the discussion on challenging the boundaries between traditionally understood roles has already opened due to "altered sociological circumstances" (p. 188). One exception where women often partially contribute

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[8] In her magazine article, Gaugau Tavana (2001) describes her aunt in the society as a Samoan *taulasea* as "traditional healer and plant expert in her own right" who "would attend to her patients with great devotion, applying the knowledge she had once learned when she was young" (p. 29).

[9] Specifically, the role of orator has started to open to women, as depicted in the film *The Orator* (2011). When asking her mother Vaasiliifiti Moelagi, a Samoan Orator with 50 years' experience, what was her opinion on *The Orator* (2011), the journalist Lagipova Cherelle Jackson shared a telling response. The film depicts the struggles of executing such a role from the perspective of gender and physical strength, as the author says "it isn't an easy task being a female Orator […]" (2012, p. 243).

[10] This special occasion celebrates the first time a child is brought to a parental village.

[11] *Vu* is understood as ancestral gods who can condemn people for their actions, "[f]or example, should the family lodge a false claim to a chiefly title, the sudden loss of a child or other grave misfortune would typically be seen as a sign of disapproval by the *vu*" (Koroivulaono as cited in Sinavaiana & Kēheulani Kauanui, 2007, 189).

to ceremonies is if they are highly positioned female chiefs (p. 189).[12] These changes have had significant outcomes for the capacity of Pacific literature to engage with the subject of violence against women. However, in order to reach this point in the literary history of the region, we must first consider women's relationship with literature in the previous centuries.

3.4 Traditional Songs from Hawaii

In order to understand the ways in which contemporary Pacific literature confronts the issue of gendered violence, it is necessary to understand the historical context that produced Pacific poetry. The evolution of Pacific poetry from ancient to modern times can be observed—though admittedly through a colonial lens—in the assembly of the anthology *The Path of The Ocean* (1982). The editor of the collection, Marjorie Putnam Sinclair Edel (1913–2005), was born in California but moved to Hawaii as an exchange student and attended the University of Hawaii in 1935. In her biography of Sinclair, Patricia Houston wrote that Sinclair's "writings were influenced by aging and a calm acceptance of old and new conflicts. [...] She wrote extensively about what she observed of Hawaiians and Hawaii's other ethnic groups" (as cited in Lee, 2005). As an accomplished academic teacher, poet, novelist, and biographer, according to her friend Laurence Gay, "[h]er writings reflected her great love for Hawaii and the islands" (as cited in Lee, 2005). Nevertheless, it remains important to recognise that she engaged with the corpus of Pacific literature as an outsider and collector, with the shortcomings associated with such a background.

In *The Path of The Ocean: Traditional Poetry of Polynesia* (1982), Sinclair compiles "traditional Polynesian poetry […] selected from translations of missionaries, travellers, anthropologists, ethnologists, informed amateurs, and a few persons with literary interest" (p. xi). She suggests that the classical form of the Pacific chant "travelled in the canoes with coconuts, taro, children and dogs. As the language travelled, it acquired many variations and transliterations" (p. xvii). In her introduction to *The Path of the Ocean*, Sinclair (1982) accentuates the role of historical poetry in illustrating not only the stories of heroes and gods but also in documenting important events and occasionally conveying human sentiments and passions (pp. xvii–xviii). The anthology provides insights into historical forms of indigenous poetry that have been translated into English,

[12] Moreover, the significance of women is clearly visible in the documentary *Exploring Gender Equality Issues in Samoa*, which starts with a legend of the construction of *afolau* house told by Orator Chief Falealupo, Tulāfale Falealupo. The story describes a competition between the Falealupo girl, Sina, and her suitor, Leleisi'uao from Palauli, who fails to thatch his side of a house before Sini finishes hers and therefore fails a test that forces him to return home with no spouse.

and highlights both continuities and contrasts with the Pacific literature of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, which will be examined later in this thesis.

While reading the prefaces and introductions to the anthologies of poems and songs collected and translated by Western anthropologists such as Sinclair Edel, we must stay conscious of the fact that they are grounded in the context of a *colonialist* perspective. Their analysis must also be perceived, as from Edward Said's perspective, within the context of exotica, as influenced by a Pacific version of *orientalised* Western ideals. The tendency of Western culture to exoticise the tropical Pacific by cherry-picking from its cultural production is well described by Patty O'Brien in *The Pacific Muse: Exotic Femininity and the Colonial Pacific* (2006). O'Brien describes these tendencies in mocking terms of "[c]lichés tied loosely to fragmentary knowledge of the islands, their peoples, and the history of Western colonization in the region," resulting in an "immense emblem of exotic primitivism" (p. 3). While the work done by Sinclair has proven invaluable for preserving important information about the pre-colonial literature of the Pacific, it is important to remain sensitive to the inherent shortcomings of her perspective, particularly given that this thesis, too, represents the efforts of an interested and well-meaning cultural outsider.

Two poems in *The Path of The Ocean*, "Love Song" and "Song", describe the passionate love and dynamic relationship between men and women within the context of traditional Pacific social structures (see Table 1). In doing so, they provide insight into the way gender relations were depicted in pre-colonial Pacific cultures. Both poems depict the land and the women's bodies in ways that are conflated and blurred, and suggest that, even historically, verse provides an outlet to speak of violence and passion in ways which would not otherwise be permitted in public spheres. The poems provide good examples of the traditional literature of the Pacific and the ways in which Pacific cultures often used verse to engage with material that was not appropriate for public discussion.

Table 1

"Love Song" and "Song" publication details – earliest recorded written poetry featuring gendered violence themes

Poet	**Poem**	**Collection/Publication details (if known)**	**Year (in order)**	**Area of Provenance (if known)**	**Themes**
Unknown	"Love Song"	*Unwritten Literature of Hawaii: The Sacred Songs of the Hula* edited by Nathaniel B. Emerson	Volume publication: 1909, p. 76	Hawaii	Love, intimacy, passion, affair, abuse
		The Path of The Ocean: Traditional Poetry of Polynesia edited by Marjorie Sinclair	Volume publication: 1982, p. 42		

Unknown	"Song"	*Unwritten Literature of Hawaii: The Sacred Songs of the Hula* edited by Nathaniel B. Emerson	Volume publication: 1909, p. 211	Hawaii	Love, intimacy, intercourse
		The Path of The Ocean: Traditional Poetry of Polynesia edited by Marjorie Sinclair	Volume publication: 1982, p. 49		

The translations of "Love Song" and "Song" in Sinclair's anthology are adapted from older English translations undertaken by Nathaniel Bright Emerson for his book *Unwritten Literature of Hawaii: The Sacred Songs of the Hula* (1909). Born in Hawaii to missionary parents, Emerson worked as both a medical doctor and historian of Hawaiian mythology.[13] He has become a fraught figure in the history of the region, remembered for his work to preserve cultural and literary material from the Pacific, but also for his foundational role in the annexation of Hawaii by the United States of America. Emerson's book contributed to the text of many songs anthologised by Sinclair, and he, too, indicated the tendency of Pacific literature to deal with otherwise sensitive subject matter.

Very often, the poems collected by Emerson and Sinclair combine the imagery of picturesque island landscapes with eroticism. Metaphors around geography and sexuality are then imbued with additional meaning through allusions to local mythology typical to the *hula.*[14] As Emerson (1909) explains:

> The hula had songs proper to itself, but it found a mine of inexhaustible wealth in the epics and wonder-myths that celebrated the doings of the volcano goddess Pele and her compeers. […] This epic of Pele was chiefly a more or less detached series of poems forming a story addressed not to the closet-reader, but to the eye and ear and heart of the assembled chiefs and people; and it was sung. (p. 7)

As one might expect, Emerson does not provide the names of any authors of "Song" or "Love Song," and the exact origins of the poems remain unclear. He acknowledges that "[t]hanks, many thanks, are due, first, to those native Hawaiians who have so far broken with the old superstitious tradition of concealment as to unearth so much of the unwritten literary wealth stored in Hawaiian memories"

[13] The previously unwritten *Hawaiian legends* well known on these islands were later on gathered in the volume by Nathaniel B. Emerson who depicts the age, source, and long maintenance of the myth of Pele, "the volcanic fire-queen" and her sister goddess sister Hi'i-aka (1915 ix) which has been passed through centuries to next generations, "[t]he cycle of world myth already gathered from the rising to the setting of the sun, from the north pole to the south pole, is quite vast enough, and far in excess of the power of any one scholar to master and digest" (Emerson, 191,5 v).

[14] (hú -la) or lut. *húlahúla*- to dance, to make sport, to the accompaniment of music and song (Emerson, 1909, 267).

(Emerson, 1909, p. 9). Here, too, we can see the conflicted contributions of the Western anthropologist, engaged at once in the work of preservation and appropriation.

"Love Song" was first published in English in 1909 in Emerson's collection and then adapted by Marjorie Sinclair in 1982. The poem provides a good example of the subtle ways in which Pacific authors used layers of metaphor and mythology to engage with topics that could not be openly discussed. Emerson (1909) suggests that "Love Song" is an example of the *pa-ípu* or *kuólo,* which is a type of hula "of dignified character, in which all the performers maintained the kneeling position and accompanied their songs with the solemn tones of *ípu*" (p. 73). The song uses an extended landscape metaphor to depict "a love affair filled with anger and abuse" (Sinclair, 1982, p. 42). The intense red of the lehua flower—endemic to Hawaii—serves as a persistent motif throughout the poem. The poet's emphasis on red in the opening verses, while denoting the sea at sunset, illustrates not only the ubiquitous richness of lehua flowers but also evokes, at once, notions of blood, anger and romantic fervour. While Kona signifies "two seas" [15] and symbolises the point where two currents meet, it is also suggestive of the figurative and literal fusion—or coupling—of a man and a woman, and the material covering women's bodies is "on fire" with ambiguous passion:

Lehua flower that reddens the sea of Kona,

The sea dyed red with scarlet,

The red-glowing sea;

The uplands of Alea are red;

The kappa[16] of the women is dyed the red of fire

Stirred by gossip, tossed by love (lines 1–6, Sinclair 1982, p. 42)

The singer proceeds to insinuate that the central woman of the song—presumably the goddess Pele—has been overcome or seduced. Over the course of the poem, the emotional intensity increases, culminating in lines declaring: "Your tabu is gone! Your forbidden ridge has been climbed, / It has been stepped upon, conquered" (lines 15–17, p. 42). The comparison of the woman's covering with fire is used to suggest violent passion—the relationship being depicted is secretive

[15] Kona is the name of the district in Hawaii Island with its largest town Kailua-Kona. "The name of the city comes from two words that mean 'two seas.' This is because there are two lagoons separated by a peninsula" (Ollhoff, 2010, 31).

[16] "Kapa is the Hawaiian name for a type of fabric or cloth that is prepared by soaking and pounding the bark of certain trees. It was highly revered for its quality and prized for gifts or barter, and later as payment for taxes (Handy, Handy & Pukui, 1972, as cited in Francis, 1997, 51).

according to socially accepted norms. The last line of the poem refers to a "forbidden ridge" that has been "conquered," suggesting at once both violent conquest and sexual intercourse. Poetry allows the connection of these images and the purposeful blurring of discrete ideas, such as submission and abjection.

"Song" employs a similar use of metaphor to discuss otherwise unspeakable subject matter. Like the poem discussed above, "Song" appeared in Sinclair's 1982 anthology in a form adapted from Emerson's 1903 translation from the collection of *hula kieléi*[17] gathered by the historian David Malo. The female singer of this *hula* describes the movements of her companion's body ascending the mountain, but the nature of this description is highly eroticised. "Song" seems to depict a sexual relationship that, for unnamed reasons, cannot be spoken about in more direct terms. What attracts attention is the speaker's unreserved willingness to express her desires freely:

> The buttocks of my companion swing over me,
>
> His loins are exhausted;
>
> Two beautiful forms!
>
> Sheltered from rain, I crouch under this bank (lines 5–8, p. 49)

As in "Love Song", the words in this traditional song express a sexual relationship conflated with geographical and topographical images. A lover's body becomes a "bank" where one might be "sheltered from rain." The entwinement of the geographical and sexual domination is explicit, and yet the way in which the female form is alternatively depicted as being "sheltered" by her lover's body is more ambiguous.

As stated by Ku'ualoha Ho'omanawaniu (2005), "Hawaiian literature, and more specifically, poetry, can be defined, categorised, and studied in many ways" (p. 30). As the following example shows, the interpretation varies depending on the scholar. Emerson (1909) suggests that the region described in the poem is Hanalei Kauai, which consists of "tangled woods, oozy steps, fathomless bogs, narrow ridges, and overhanging cliffs," and that it represents human struggle and desire stemming from jealousy and ambition (p. 211). He also ponders what kind of passionate love the verses might conceal but concedes that "[a]ll the Hawaiians whom the author has consulted on this question deny any hidden meaning to this mele" (p. 211). By comparison, Sinclair (1982) is more willing to offer a direct reading of the poem, suggesting that the "description of a hard climb up a

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[17] "*Hula kieléi* was a performance of Hawaii's classic times, and finds mention as such in the professedly imperfect list of *hulas* given by the historian David Malo" (Emerson, 1909, p. 210).

mountain" describes "a passionate love affair" (p. 49). Even though the idea of a tiresome climb up a mountain mirrors the challenging landscape of human existence, the sexual implications of the metaphors are quite clear. The power of poetry in this context, however, is to provide a suitable degree of ambiguity around sensitive subject matter. There are the first instances I have discovered in tropical Pacific poetry translated into English, where gender, sexuality, and violence are expressed, and expressed together. These poems thus offer a precedent, on two counts: of the use of poetry to overcome the difficulty and complexity of revealing what should be hidden or covered matters, and of the conflation of sexuality, passion, and violence in tropical Pacific poetry.

3.5 Chauvinism and the Liberated Woman

With the arrival of missionaries came the introduction of European notions of written literature in the Pacific, such as these recorded poems. As Albert Wendt (1995)[18] and others have repeatedly and pointedly observed, colonial literature positioned Pacific Islanders as characters "to be studied, erased, 'saved', domesticated, 'civilised', or 'developed'" by *Papalagi* or *Pakeha* (Western) visitors, perpetuating many harmful and romanticised stereotypes (p. 2). It was a trend that continued well into the twentieth century in the work of people like Emerson and Sinclair, as has already been observed. Furthermore, when missionaries first brought written language to the Pacific with them, it was in the service of imperialist motives—writing became principally associated with government records and ethnographic description rather than with novels or poetry. When indigenous poetry and songs were recorded, as in the work of Emerson and Sinclair, it is difficult to know if the exoticising and sexualising of land was an importation of Westerners or men within their own society. In any case, such poems do indicate that nationalism, as much as imperialism, drew on an association between women, sexuality, and the land. In the anti-colonial nationalist period, women soon found themselves facing new forms of domination and at once had to contend with the forces of a "civilising" Western culture and incipient forms of chauvinistic nationalism that sought to return women to traditional roles in society.

By the 1960s, tropical Pacific forms of literary expression were evolving and changing in pursuit of literatures that might at once reflect *pre-palagi* culture, modern achievements, and *kastom* (Wendt, 1976, p. 52). Inspired by human rights activism around the globe, Pacific Islanders embraced literature as an instrument of decolonisation (Wendt, 1995, p. 2). A new wave of creativity

[18] According to *The Oxford Companion to Modern Poetry* (2014), "Born in Apia, Samoa, Wendt's fiction, poetry, criticism, and editorial work has made him an important figure in New Zealand and Pacific literature. He studied history at Victoria University in Wellington, and subsequently taught in Samoa, Fiji, where he was pro-vice-chancellor at the University of the South Pacific, Hawaii, and Auckland, where he is emeritus professor. In 2001, Wendt was made a Companion of the Order of New Zealand."

emerged in the 1960s and 70s, culminating in the establishment of the first tropical Pacific universities. Poetry became an important rhetorical tool in campaigns for political independence in the 1960s (Santos Perez, 2016, p. 374). Craig Santos Perez (2016) associates the popularisation of written literary forms in the Pacific with governmental changes and the newfound political independence of many islands in the 1960s. This was a period marked by "demilitarization, decolonization, denuclearization, and sovereignty, as well as movements for native rights to land, water, housing, education, and cultural practices" (Santos Perez, 2016, p. 374). Further literary and political developments in the 1970s were crucial to the foundation of the first tertiary establishments, including the University of Papua New Guinea and the University of the South Pacific. In turn, these institutions enabled the further development of Pacific literature and provided new opportunities for publication.

As Steven Edmund Winduo (1990, p. 37) notes, the peak of the literary renaissance in Papua New Guinea took place between 1968 and 1973 and was embodied by the work of Kumalau Tawali, John Kasaipwalova, Leo Hannet, and Rabbie Namaliu. Then, between 1974 and 1980, the PNG independence movement took greater focus, and political activism and unrest overshadowed the publishing scene. The recently established universities took responsibility for educating and preparing a new bureaucratic elite to replace the colonial administrators leaving the country. In countries across the Pacific, the task of educating "elite classes of indigenous, mostly male, bureaucrats and professionals to replace departing colonial administrators and expatriate workers" produced a different kind of literary identity (Zimmer-Tamakoshi, 1995, p. 113). Cultural production became dominated by young men seeking to "explore their experiences of change and to develop their political awareness in poetry, short stories, plays, and other art forms" (Zimmer-Tamakoshi, 1995, p. 113). Political independence began to express itself in literary forms that threatened the emerging civil freedoms of women in the Pacific.

In the 1970s, a generation of young, nationalistic male poets frequently saw the status of women as emblematic of colonial interference in Pacific culture. The Creative Arts Center and Ulli Beier facilitated the publication of various volumes and journals with masculinist and chauvinistic elements. Women were often depicted either as living idealised, traditional lives with limited access to education or political power, or as educated, promiscuous, and decadent products of Western colonialism. Women living in the cities, like Jully Sipolo, were commonly branded as "being spoilt, self-indulgent, and inimical to their societies' wellbeing" (Zimmer-Tamakoshi, 1995, p. 113). The nationalism of male authors tended to glorify the hard-working, simple women of the village while criticising "allegedly self-seeking town women, beguiled by Western ideas and the possibility, given a certain level of education and prosperity, of ignoring traditional commitments and values" (Zimmer-

Tamakoshi, 1995, p. 114). Men, seeking to idealise their vision of the pre-colonialist era with poems (see Table 2) soaked in nostalgia and longing for traditional society, now posed a new threat to the literary aspirations of Pacific women.

Table 2

Male-Authored Poems with Chauvinistic *Themes, Authored in the Anti-Colonial Nationalist Era*

Poet	**Poem**	**Collection/Publication details (if known)**	**Year (in order)**	**Area of Provenance (if known)**	**Themes**
Siuras Kavani	"Black Woman"	*Bastard, Papua Pocket Poets,* (Vol. 34)	1973	Papua New Guinea	Prostitution; demonisation of town women; condemnation of modernity; greediness
Kama Kerpi	"Hohola in The Night"	*Call of The Midnight Bird, Papua Pocket Poets*, (Vol. 37)	1973	Papua New Guinea	Prostitution; demonisation of town women; condemnation of modernity; diseases
Kama Kerpi	"Kulpu's Daughter"	*Kovave, 5*(1)	1974, p. 12	Papua New Guinea	condemnation of modernity; criticism of town women; demonisation of town women;
Francis Nii	"Peaceful Village"	*The PNG Writer, 1*(1)	1985, p. 12	Papua New Guinea	Nostalgia; romanticisation; innocence
Dondoli	"Blame Yourself"	*The PNG Writer, 1*(1)	1985, p. 22	Papua New Guinea	condemnation of modernity; criticism of town women; mocking educated women
John Kilburn	"Meri University"	*The PNG Writer, 1*(1)	1985, p. 22	Papua New Guinea	condemnation of modernity; pregnancy
Justin Yatu	"Kaukau Graduate"	*The PNG Writer, 2*(1)	1986, p. 48	Papua New Guinea	condemnation of modernity and interracial couples; mocking educated women
Bernard Malle	"Grandfather Gelua"	*The PNG Writer, 2*(1)	1986, p. 70	Papua New Guinea	Eroticism; nostalgia; romanticisation
Data Pius	"Time Before"	*The PNG Writer, 2*(1)	1986, p. 73	Papua New Guinea	Idealisation of the past; nostalgia

In her article, “Passion, Poetry, and Cultural Politics in the South Pacific” (1995), Laura Zimmer-Tamakoshi provides multiple examples of the ways in which the nationalist poetry of men demonised town-dwelling women, including by presenting them as prostitutes. The cruelty and condescension of some of this poetry is remarkable, with Dondoli writing lines such as “Granma is entertained by your comedy. / You’ve got your rights. / You’ve got your piglet.” (Dondoli as cited in Zimmer-Tamakoshi, 1995, p. 115) and “Better hoe a kaukau mound / Than live in town, a whiteman’s clown” (Yatu as cited in Zimmer-Tamakoshi, 1995, p. 116). Even the very idea of educating women is condemned by Dondoli. He suggests that “an educated girl is very dangerous. They / want to feel the manhood of many secret lovers” (Kerpi as cited in Zimmer-Tamakoshi, 1995, p. 116). This was a vision of Pacific nationalism that condemned women to “frozen images of an ancient past” while granting men “firmer political, sexual, and social control over women” (Dickson-Waiko, 2013, p. 186). Under the tenets of this view of Pacific nationalism, women would be merely substituting one form of oppression for another.

Kama Kerpi’s poem, “Hohola in The Night” (1973), presents a shockingly misogynistic vision of modern progress as a form of a disease. In an inversion of traditional Pacific poetry’s tendency to connect the beauty of a woman’s body with the beauty of the Pacific landscape, Kerpi depicts Hohola—a district of Papua New Guinea’s capital city, Port Moresby—as a decaying body. In Hohola, a young man awaits a woman with impatience. Directly addressing his lover, the narrator of the poem likens her to Hellen of Troy, accusing that “you smile like a titled warrior, / Pride your mask. / You transfigure into Hellen, / to capture my admiration. / You have cast a spell over me.” (p. 32). Similarly, the men of Papua New Guinea have, Kerpi suggests, been seduced by the superficial beauty of a Western modernity relatively new to Papua New Guinea. The city’s true nature—like the nature of the woman in the poem—can be recognised beneath the façade:

> Yet;
>
> you;
>
> a camouflage:
>
> a deceiver:
>
> a pregnant woman with a deformed child.
>
> you whisper the devilish whisper of a harlot,
>
> of her virginity to an innocent teenage
>
> male virgin in bed. (lines 15–22, p. 32)

The liberated woman becomes a metaphor of choice for the rot associated with modern progress. The promises of modernity are akin to a sex worker selling an idealised image of young love. In this fashion, the district of Hohola is presented as a rotting creature, pregnant with a decomposing foetus. The metaphor operates in both directions, and the modern woman becomes emblematic of every corrupting aspect of Western influence. To be a liberated woman is to be a sex worker, to have unwanted pregnancies, and to be infected with sexually transmitted diseases. Hohola, too, is rife with such infections:

> Hohola infested with hook worms,
>
> Sick and diseased.
>
> I smell the dead corpse
>
> In the air.
>
> You breathe out unbearable smell. (lines 1–5, p. 33)

Modernity, Western influences, and women's liberation are all perceived and portrayed as sources of corruption that Kerpi suggests need to be purged from Pacific societies. He leaves little space for nationalism, which might lift the status of women into the bargain. The conclusion of "Hohola in The Night" demonstrates the extent of Kama Kerpi's disgust by comparing Hohola to Gomorrah. Hohola is a city where the police alarms do not stop and where women sell their bodies in dark alleys to young men. Kerpi suggests that the city and the women within it are irredeemably steeped in sin. The narrator appeals to God to smite the district as he did in biblical myth: "Hohola I wish you were a second / Gomorrah" (p. 33).

The tendency for nationalist poets to depict the liberated women as emblematic of the dangers colonisation posed to Pacific identity prevailed into the 1970s and 1980s. This can be seen in the poetry published in *The PNG Writer* and the *Papua Pocket Poets* series. Here, too, a correlation can be found between city nightlife, prostitution, cultural modernity, and the liberated woman. Consider, for example, "Blame Yourself" (1985) by B. M. Dondoli. A woman is condescendingly compared to a nocturnal insect attracted to the lights of the city's nightlife and denied human agency:

> Out of the Darkness, Unwanted,
>
> An insect attracted to bright lights,
>
> You enjoyed what came your way. (lines 1–3, p. 22)

The poem is an indictment of the cultural freedoms associated with Western modernity. On one level, this is a critique of the dehumanising power of colonisation, but in Dondoli's poem, it is a critique that comes at the expense of women's personal agency. The change being advocated for here—that women must return to customary life and another form of patriarchal subjugation—is no less dehumanising in its implications. As in the Western tradition, women become caught between idealised images of the Madonna and the whore, or rather, between the virginal subject living according to custom or the debauched sex worker indulging in Western freedoms. In such a portrayal, women become objects to be resented or pitied.

"Blame Yourself" describes a girl who was spoilt and refuses to follow the *custom* and traditional values and now suffers the consequences of her supposed liberation. She is described in deeply misogynistic terms and criticised for rejecting customary life:

> Now with a swollen bely,
>
> And a fatherless piglet,
>
> You twist the truth,
>
> But cannot blame the Stone Age. (p. 22)

The source of the young woman's troubles, we are told, is feminism. Second-wave feminism and the notion that national liberation should not come at the expense of women's rights are entirely at odds with the worldview Dondoli advances here. In places, the invective directed against women seeking personal autonomy verges on a kind of literary violence:

> Women's Lib., Women's Council, Women's Rights.
>
> Granma is entertained by your comedy.
>
> You've got your rights
>
> You've got your piglet (lines 12–15, p. 22)

Dondoli has particular contempt for women who receive graduate education rather than demonstrating complete dedication to the household and family. He effectively justifies the persecution of women raising children on their own as single mothers and the rejection of these women by their relatives.

As shown, the nationalist poetry that developed in the 1960s and pervaded Pacific literature into the 1970s and 1980s contained within it a thread of intense misogyny. A recurring theme was criticism of urban women who had been influenced by Western ideas, wealth, and opportunities,

contrasted against the model of an obedient, loyal, and self-sacrificing wife (Zimmer-Tamakoshi, 1995, pp. 116–117). Poems by men during this period demonised feminists and illustrated them as prostitutes, promiscuous, immoral, and greedy. Moreover, such poetry tended to assign all the problems faced by women as being due to the imposition of the West and the aftermath of colonisation. Other poets, such as John Kasaipwalova and John Lahui, also used their poetry to espouse the belief "that relations between Papua New Guinean men and women will remain estranged until black men oust white men with force, reject white ways, and regain their former dignity and power to run society fairly and to protect their womenfolk" (Zimmer-Tamakoshi, 1995, pp. 116–117). From within and from without, women in the Pacific faced the threat of patriarchal domination. Nonetheless, an increasing number of women poets were recognising that cycles of violence and gender inequality were as likely to be found in masculinist Pacific nationalism as in colonial oppression (Zimmer-Tamakoshi, 1995, pp. 116–117). The need for new kinds of feminist literary expression was becoming increasingly evident to a generation of women in the Pacific.

3.6 Women's Voices Emerge in Pacific Poetry—Women's Poetry from the 1970s

While the voices of men were dominant in twentieth-century Pacific poetry, a parallel movement was establishing itself with the aim to decolonise women's lives. New literary voices were emerging. Initiatives such as the United Nations' Decade for Women, the activities of the YWCA (Young Women's Christian Association), and the development of women's movements in universities and churches demonstrated that women's rights were a positive social force. Women in rural areas, too, began to protest against gender inequalities they observed in everyday life. In contrast to urbanised women who at this time tended to focus instead on issues of national identity, women from rural communities were focused on practical rights and greater personal freedom (Zimmer-Tamakoshi, 1995, p. 113).

Despite the fact that women did not play prominent historical roles in formal Pacific oratory, women's poetry emerged out of a long history of storytelling practices in the 1970s. Driven by a desire to have their voices heard, a generation of women entered the male-dominated spheres of Pacific literature with the beginning of the first wave of free poetry in Papua New Guinea by English-speaking authors with tertiary educations. With time, "such poems [have become] common enough to be recognised by most literate women as an appropriate way to express personal thoughts and political protest" (Hildson et al., 2000, p. 152).

The collection of poems edited by Ulli Beier published as *Black Writing from New Guinea* in 1973 contains some of the material previously included in journal *Kovave* and the series *Papua Pocket Poets*. In the introduction, Michael Wilding observes that the volume presents work written

originally in English as well as pieces translated from different languages, and describes them as being “some of the world’s most exciting and dynamic new literature” (p. xi). The poems gathered within the volume mark a breakthrough for Papua New Guinean literature, which Ulli Beier (1973) describes as “the last of the colonial countries in which the colonized peoples still accepted their fate without questioning and in which they did not assert their own rights and their own identity in writing” (p. xii).

Table 3

Female-Authored Poems with Themes of Trauma and Political Activism

Poet	**Poem**	**Collection/Publication details (if known)**	**Year (in order)**	**Area of Provenance (if known)**	**Themes**
Lynda Thomas	“Volcano”	*Black Writing from New Guinea* (Anthology edited by Ulli Beier)	Volume publication: 1973, p. 68	Papua New Guinea	Trauma; political activism
Mildred Sope	“Motherland”	*Pacific Islands Monthly*	1974, *45*(9), p. 64	Vanuatu	Trauma; political activism

Lynda Thomas’s “Volcano” (1973, p. 68) is a powerful demonstration of the extent to which the emergence of female poets marked a shift in the depiction of women in Pacific poetry. Thomas, too, draws upon the Pacific myth to connect women to the landscape, but, in this case, it is to characterise women’s latent power and creative energy. She contrasts the oppressed conditions under which women live with their capacity to erupt with violent and revolutionary energy. The first lines of the poem describe women as emaciated and frail:

> Our throats are dry and tasteless
>
> our hands are weak and feeble
>
> our bodies are boneless (lines 1–3, p. 68)

From this degraded state, however, Thomas commands women to rise, exclaiming, “Wake up sleepers!” (1973, p. 68). The words reverberate with biblical symbolism, recalling Ephesians 5:14–20: “Wake up, sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.” With this poem, Thomas seeks a spiritual, social, and political resurrection for women in the South Pacific. Men are indicted for their crimes against women:

> They use us like playgrounds
>
> enjoy us like night clubs

handle us like machines

they step on us like dirt

regard us like flowers of devil (lines 5–9, p. 68)

The final line here recalls Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du mal* (1857), at once identifying the way that men view the women of Papua New Guinea as prostitutes and drawing to attention the correspondences between apparently contrary symbols, which is so central to both poets' writing. Notions of the masculine and the feminine, of strength and weakness, and of beauty and degradation are brought into correspondence in Thomas's "Volcano" as much as they are in Baudelaire's poetry, but here for revolutionary effect. The downtrodden woman becomes the foundation upon which men stand, and power dynamics are subverted:

the higher it gets, the colder.

But master, we are the rocks beneath

on which you stand. Without us

You are no longer a mountain.

How long shall we carry your weight? (lines 10–15, p. 68)

Without women, men would not be able to hold on to their esteem or function in Pacific society. In an inversion of the relationship between master and slave, through correspondences, Thomas transforms the metaphor of woman as trodden-ground into woman as a mountain carrying the burden of men.

Thomas suggests that the power of men comes only at the expense of women's liberty and that such power is dependent on the acquiescence of the women who support them. The geographical metaphor shifts again, and the image of woman as mountain gives way as Thomas implores her female readership to turn their inherent power into real social change:

It is hot in your cell

we want to be free

if you don't give way

we'll force our way through you

like a volcano (lines 16–20, p. 68)

The vital work undertaken by feminist poets like Thomas created spaces for women to make their voices heard. Once a generation of women demanded a space in Pacific literature, it became possible to give voice to the horrific conditions that they experienced.

Mildred Sope (1974, p. 64) filled a similar role to Thomas in the poetry of Vanuatu. "Motherland" illustrates the despair of a generation of women asking why conditions are so poor:

My body is tired

My head aches

I weep for our people

Where are we going mother. (lines 1–4, p. 64)

The nature of the speaker's question ripples outwards from the literal mother being addressed, to a previous generation of oppressed women, to an indictment of a motherland that would tolerate its women being abused. As the circumstances facing women seem to have stagnated, the young, female speaker demands answers:

Do I mean anything to you mother

Won't you listen to me for once

I can't bear this burden any longer

Where are we going mother

What is our destination. (lines 18–22, p. 64)

The questions being asked here emphasise the role of women in the process of regaining independence and restoring cultural values. A vision of nationalism and culture that denies the importance of women, Sope observes, condemns generations of women to a future of continued oppression.

Sope's poem lacks the revolutionary energy of Thomas's writing but makes an emotive case that national liberation must not come at the expense of women's liberation. Like Thomas, however, she relies on correspondences to carry political weight. Here, the correspondence is between the nationalist political movement and women's own efforts to be heard:

Why can't I be visible and be heard

I'm too common to be regarded

Why did you create me at all

Where are we going mother

What is our destination (lines 9–13, p. 64)

Underneath the openly nationalistic tone of the poem, there remain lingering questions about the ways in which women's and girls' actual bodies and lives have been subsumed by the nationalist cause. These important works paved the way for a torrent of poetry that followed in the 1980s. Where some tropical Pacific women's poetry began to articulate exogenous factors involved in women's oppression in the region, other poems identified community complicity in gendered violence.

3.7 1979: Ondobondo Poster Poems

By the late 1970s, tropical Pacific poetry was flourishing. Two major approaches to poetry were emerging in Pacific literature. One approach involved poetry engaging with problems associated with modernisation. In this tradition, poets wrote about "social injustice, economic dispossession, militarization, nuclearism, plantationism, disease, tourism, urbanization, racism, homophobia, and environmental degradation" (Santos Perez, 2016, p. 376). The second stream of Pacific poetry developed into a melancholic strain of poetry re-embracing indigenous "cultures, nations, customs, languages, kinship networks, histories, politics, and identities" (Santos Perez, 2016, p. 376). Between these two approaches, poetry took shape in a wide variety of different forms, including "formalism, free verse, projectivism, ecopoetics, documentary, avant-garde, postmodernism, beat, confessionalism, surrealism, visual poetry, video poetry, protest poetics, spoken work, performance, conceptualism, queer poetics, multicultural poetics, multilingualism, and more" (Santos Perez, 2016, p. 376). Among this diversity of artistic expression was a developing confidence in the way female poets addressed the topic of gendered violence, as seen in a series of politically charged poster poems produced in Papua New Guinea in 1979. These posters reflect the coming of age for feminist expression in the nation's literature.

In a paper submitted as a partial fulfilment of a Master's thesis, "Looking Thru Those Eyeholes: Re-historicizing the OndoBondo Poster Poems" (2009), Stuart D. Dawrs describes the significance of these posters created between July 1979 and April 1980. The eleven posters created in Papua New Guinea are now stored where the author works as a librarian, University of Hawaii's Hamilton Library. They were edited by co-edited by Prithvindra Chakravarti and Russell Soaba; however, the direct influence of Ulli Beier is still visible, showing the combination of traditional and modern approaches and styles. These publications are rich in visual details, drawings, and

illustrations, which themselves could be perceived as a form of language. They present the diversity of language and experimental representations from many regions of Papua New Guinea, where pictures are an integral part of the poems as a whole.

Dawrs (2009, p. 28) remarks that the composition of the posters took place just before the Third South Pacific Festival of the Arts in June 1980, and they were displayed during the exhibition. While some of the works were composed by well-known writers and artists, other are by poets who have disappeared into obscurity. The exhibition of the poster poems was significant, as the *Kovave* literary journal had shut down in 1975. The posters reflect the establishment of *Ondobondo,* a short-lived literary magazine, running bi-annually from 1982 until 1987.

Teresia Teaiwa underscores the dominant role of visual arts in the tropical Pacific, as reflected in these poster poems, suggesting that "[t]he proliferation (and elaboration) of visual and material culture in precontact Pacific societies indicates a sophisticated understanding of the visual which has likely been overtaken and obfuscated by the introduction of writing" (Teaiwa, 2010, p. 734). Indeed, as Teaiwa notes, "Pacific literature is not just about writing but is more broadly about the visual, in addition to the oral," postulating that Oceania's writers combine poetry and prose with visual imagery (p.735). Teaiwa's observations suggest these poster poems signal the emergence of a renewed, postcolonial commitment to indigenous visual semiotics in a period that also saw the emergence of indigenous literary criticism (p. 735). In more ways than one, the *Ondobondo Poster Poems* reflect the confident incorporation of literary and visual elements to advance the cause of feminist values in a revolutionary way.

The collection of poster poems tackles a variety of themes, including the nationalist movement, but several engage powerfully with the status of women in a society facing rapid social change (see Table 4). Some of the works criticise foreign influence on men, who would drink alcohol excessively, forget about their families, and cease providing their relatives with necessary income. Others depict women becoming victims of consumerism, affecting their physical looks and behaviour.

Table 4

Ondobondo Poster Poems and Identified Themes

Poet	**Poem**	**Collection/Publication details (if known)**	**Year (in order)**	**Area of Provenance (if known)**	**Gender Themes**
Nora Vagi Brash	"Come On Babe, Race with the Devil"	*Ondobondo Poster Poem*	1979, poster number 1 (July)	Papua New Guinea	Gender inequality, women empowerment,

Mary To Liman	"Bia Botol Longlong"	*Ondobondo Poster Poem*	1979, poster number 3 (October)	Papua New Guinea	Effects of colonialism and modernity, alcoholism, consumerism
Melio Masen	"Nobody"	*Ondobondo Poster Poem*	1979, poster number 6 (December)	Papua New Guinea	Loneliness, social ostracism, danger

Describing the poster "Bia Botol Longlong" by Mary To Liman and illustrated by Joseph Nalo, Linda Zimmer-Tamakoshi (1995) reiterates that "[a]lcohol, consumerism, and gambling are modern ills in Papua New Guineans" (p. 117). This is the theme of many poems, with people falling into alcohol abuse. The poem "Sister's Lament" by Jully Sipolo (1981), for example, describes a girl who is astonished that her sister, smart and gifted, did not attend university or make something of herself:

> You threw it away,
>
> The dream of a lifetime;
>
> All this
>
> For a sip of beer… (lines 18–21, p. 3)

Similar fears are expressed in "Development" (1986, p. 13), also by Sipolo, where colonial influence disrupts society and leads people away from cultural practices. Ultimately, Sipolo condemns the outcomes of Western development:

> Urban drift
>
> Empty villages
>
> Customs forgotten
>
> Loose living
>
> Lost identity (lines 6–10, p. 13)

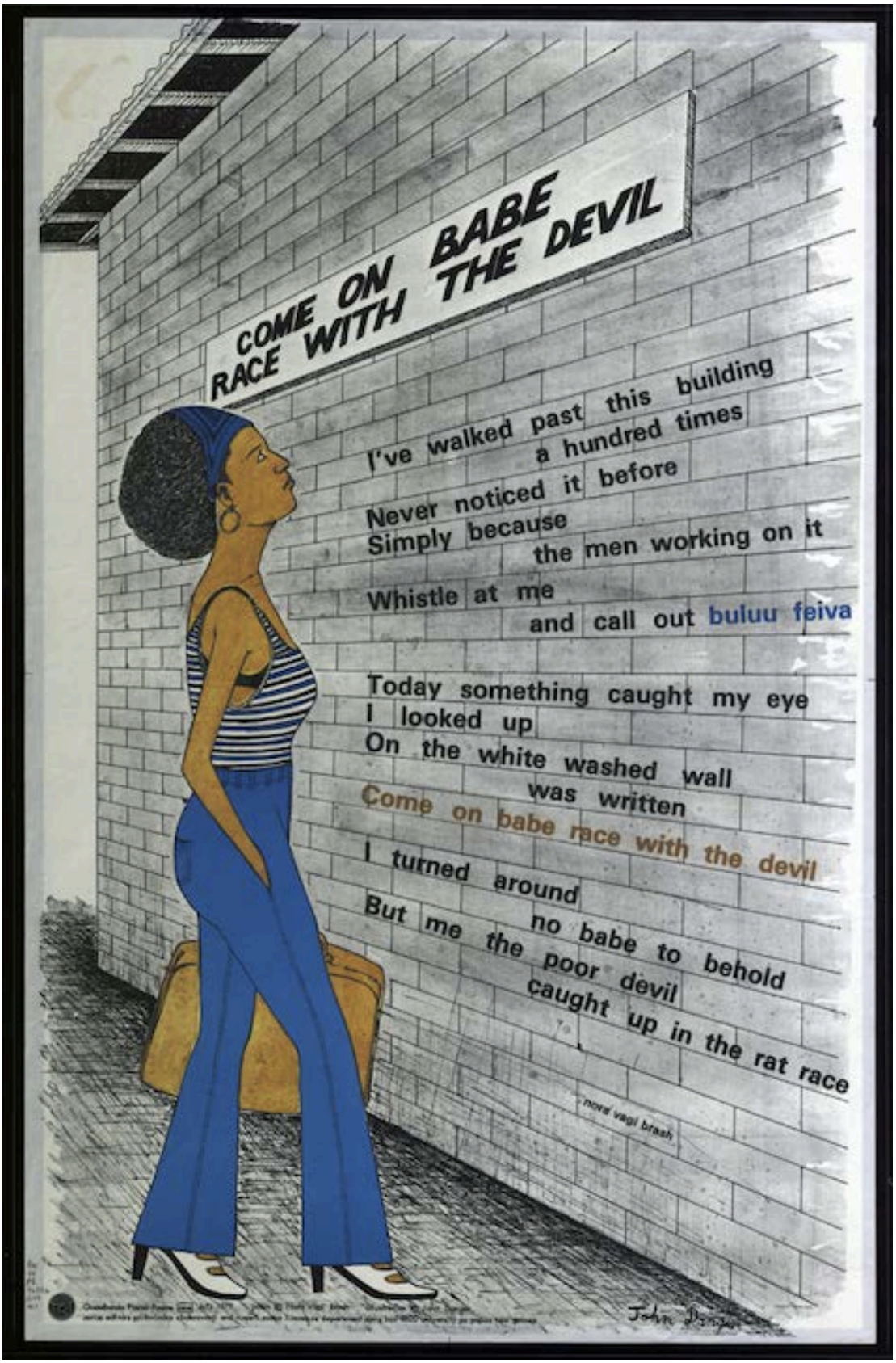
Yet, despite these negative changes, positive changes are expressed as well. Importantly, a consistent subject raised by female authors involved in the project is gender inequality and the hostile environment for women living in a modern society bringing many changes to Papua New Guinea and Port Moresby.

Significant parts of the poster poem series present women as modern, following the latest fashions brought by Western influences. The poster poem "Come on Babe, Race with the Devil" (see

Figure 2) by Nora Vagi Brash and John Danger illustrates a woman with no restraints on her mode of dress, freely sporting jeans and heels.

Figure 2

Poster "Come on Babe, Race with the Devil" by Nora Vagi Brash, illustrated by John Danger from the Ondobondo Poster Poem Series



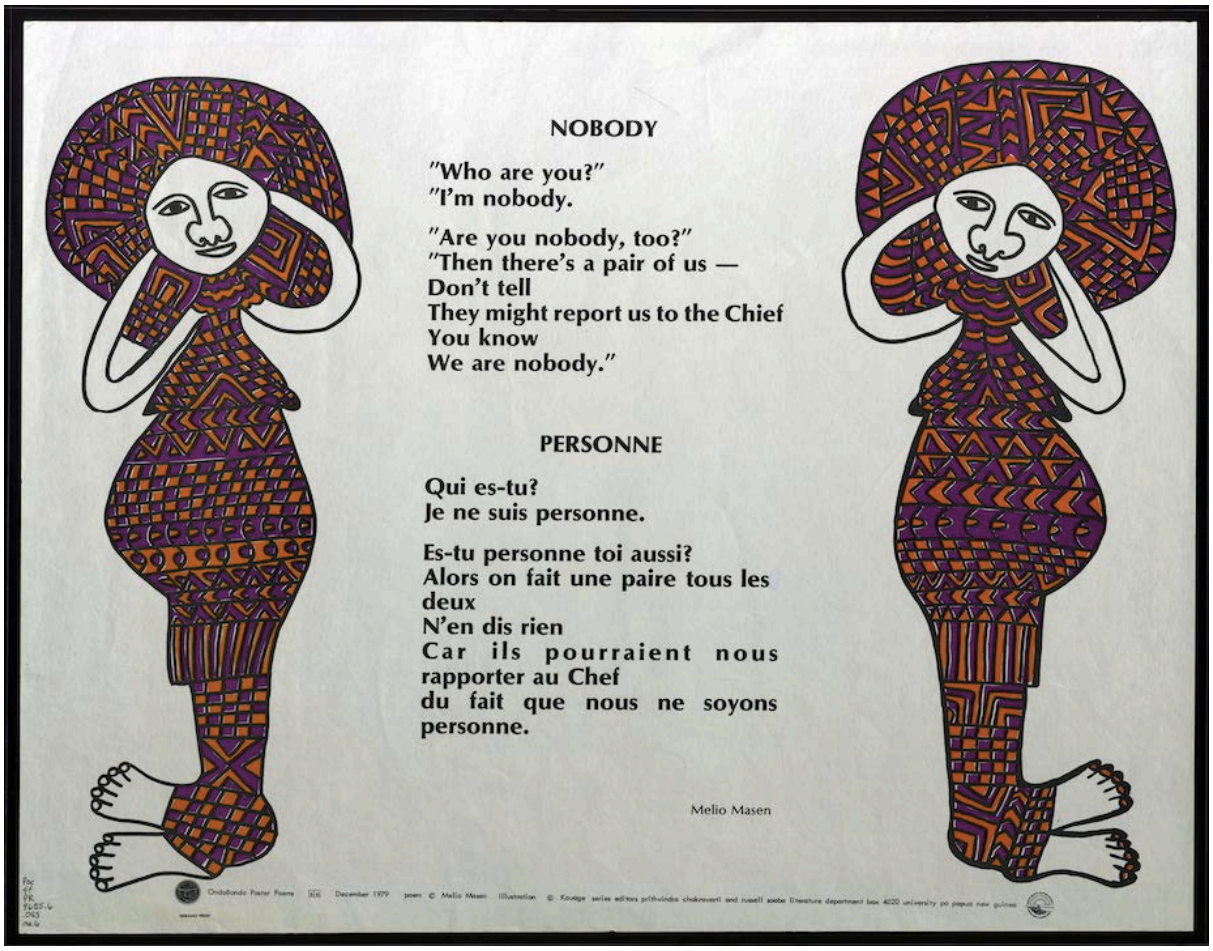
One could interpret the poster as a dynamic adjustment to these changes and the perils of imported culture accompanying these fashions, which not only provide women with more freedom but also bind them in new predicaments. Yet, the negative onslaughts the woman faces are not merely due to imported culture. The female narrator is so used to being catcalled by the construction workers that this harassment is clearly routine: it does not trigger any emotions for her and is routinised and old to the extent that she "never noticed it [the building] before." Through these suggestive lines, the reader can understand that men feel comfortable bothering women, making it a normal and longstanding phenomenon to which women passively adjust and do not protest directly. As Dawrs (2009, p. 40) observes, the use of the word *buluu feiva* is not coincidental and might aim to underline the linguistic differences between Papua New Guinea's various dialects.

The Tok Pisin words were probably meant by the workers to tease and mock the women appearing to stand in their independence, who in contrast receive an alternate understanding of the message. The woman perceives herself as a devil. Overwhelmed with responsibilities and work, she does not have time to engage or get involved in such an exchange as she is simply too busy with her life commitments. In any case, overall, the poster poem represents women's empowerment, portraying the way modern Pacific women dare to form their own independent thinking and stop seeing themselves as helpless victims. Even as these women may be critiqued by the male onlookers and catcallers for their Western influence, their own income and ability to engage in self-sufficiency allow them to develop a new sense of confident self-expression, just like these poems themselves, which mix indigenous forms of expression with more newly confident and bold forms of protest.

Vagi Brash is another writer of this era who takes on these mixed blessings of Westernisation. Brash is well-known for her play *Which Way, Big Man?* first performed on the 16th of September 1976. The play tackles postcolonial dynamics, the country's autonomy, and transitions in the government and social position in the upcoming changes. As Dawrs (2009, p. 17) suggests, Vagi Brash's writing was inspired by *The Wretched of the Earth* written by Franz Fanon in 1961, where he shows the social ascendance of the new bourgeois class and its cynical surface. This play explores the tension characterising modern Papua New Guinea, the clashes between traditional and modern culture, and the conflict between older and newer generations, as well as between women and men. In this play, wives of prominent figures in Papua New Guinea participate in the nation's independence by playing the role of hostess, "making cups of tea during party meetings" (Kumaina as cited in Dickson-Waiko, 2013, p. 182). Therefore, the author hoped that women would gradually take over local governments, but in the nationalist domain, women continued to be subordinated to roles as spouses and supporters of men (Dickson-Waiko, 2013, p. 188).

Figure 3

Poster "Nobody" by Melio Masen, illustrated by Mathias Kauage from the Ondobondo Poster Poem series



In "Nobody" (see Figure 3), Melio Masen conveys women's continued oppression in this culture. In the poem, she holds a conversation with and seeks identification from another woman, "a pair of us." Yet, sadly, the narrator sees both of them as isolated—as "nobody." She connects with her interlocutor as they both realise their lack. Even though they become close, the woman asks her companion not to reveal her secret to anyone else, especially the authorities. The reader might sense some sort of uneasiness or even threat of danger as the consequences of others knowing her circumstances are frightening. Based on the curvaceous silhouettes of the women presented in the poem, one might speculate that the secret might concern the extramarital or unwanted pregnancy. Whatever the direct cause of the women's distress, the poem shows the weak position of women in the hierarchical society of Papua New Guinea. It is worth noticing that the poem is written both in English and French. As Dawrs (2009) further suggests, the poem resembles "I'm Nobody, Who Are

You?" written by American poet Emily Dickinson and might have been an exercise assigned to a student in order "to imitate the style of another writer" (p. 47). As Dawrs (2009) notes, the original version does not transmit any sense of fear and might be read as ironic, whereas the poster illustrates the real reason one wants to keep to herself: fear of the male Chief.

The significant political changes bringing independence for the nation created challenging times, requiring much societal effort to fight not just the legal but also the cultural consequences of colonialism. The poems discussed in this chapter demonstrate that while "[m]en were incorporated [into the state] as individuals," "women were incorporated in relational terms as mothers and sisters" (Dickson-Waiko, 2013, p. 182), and that nationalism did not in every way serve their cause. Consequently, governments started to encourage different social programs and activities to enhance awareness of feminist aspects. Due to the state dependence on international funding, multiple conferences were supported by foreign financial aid and delivered through local government initiatives aimed at enhancing awareness of women's rights. It was in this environment that publications of booklets and materials encouraging these changes began to proliferate. Yet, they could not have done so without the pretext of women's poetry that came before: the generations of writers who had been able to write about women's issues and gendered violence even in concealed ways. The following decades brought stronger and bolder volumes of literature speaking out about violence against women and describing the processes of freeing from a colonialist mindset. The next chapter approaches these volumes and analyses the emergence of stronger forms of expressions, which gained power over the passing decades.

Chapter Four

Poetry from 1970s Amplifying the 1980s and 1990s' Scene

> About six years ago, when I first thought of compiling an anthology of poems and stories written in English by Pacific Islanders, I found that except in Papua New Guinea, little had been written by our people. Nearly all the literature about Oceania had been written by palagi [white people] and other outsiders. Much of this literature ranges from the hilariously romantic through the pseudo-scholarly to the infuriatingly racist... (Wendt, 1980, p. xiv)

The quoted lines above underscore the importance of the emergence of a tropical Pacific voice in the global arena. From the 1970s onwards, the publication of the first female poetry volumes openly tackling the issues of gendered violence emerged. As a result, tropical Pacific women established and controlled the representations of their image and life overseas. They spoke about their representation by the "other" women and men in Western popular fiction and anthropological research. By expressing this voice through published poems and narratives, Oceania became an open torrent of protest. It has validated and fortified its cultures in ways that have helped shape its emerging postcolonial identity on an intercontinental scale. As Wendt (1980) puts it, "[o]ver the centuries art styles changed slowly; and then the reefs broke open" (p. xiv).

4.1 Summary of the chapter

This passage explores the more confident and secure rise of Pacific Island women's voices in literature, from the 1970s, focusing on how poets like Selina Tusitala Marsh and Momoe Malietoa Von Reiche used their work to address gendered violence, colonial history, and identity, thus empowering women in the Pacific region. Their poetry, often deeply personal and autobiographical, challenges both traditional gendered roles and the internalization of Western ideals, while also asserting a distinct, culturally rooted feminist perspective, exemplified in the concept of "mana tama'ita'i" introduced by Marsh. Konai Helu Thaman, a Tongan poet and educator, uses her poetry to preserve and honour Tongan traditions while addressing the impact of Western colonialism, particularly the double colonization experienced by both men and women in the Pacific. In her works like "My Blood," she critiques the exploitation and identity crisis caused by colonial influences, while exploring gendered inequality and the personal struggles faced by women in her society.

Jully Makini (Sipolo), a poet from the Solomon Islands, expresses her dissatisfaction with gendered inequality and the patriarchal structures that shape women's lives, drawing from her own experiences to highlight the oppression and violence women face. Through her works such as "Civilized Girl" and "Praying Parents," she critiques the societal expectations placed on women and

calls for women's empowerment, while also contributing to the creation of *Mi Mere*, an anthology that provides a platform for women's voices in the Solomon Islands. The chapter explores the significant role of poetry in raising awareness about the oppression of women in the Solomon Islands and Vanuatu, highlighting the works of anonymous female poets and Grace Mera Molisa. These writings reveal the power and affordances of women's writing to address themes of domestic violence, societal expectations, and the double colonisation of women, within challenging contexts that threaten to diminish women's voices and agency. Grace Mera Molisa demonstrates a powerful use of poetry as a tool for political activism and social change, advocating for women's freedom and rights in postcolonial contexts.

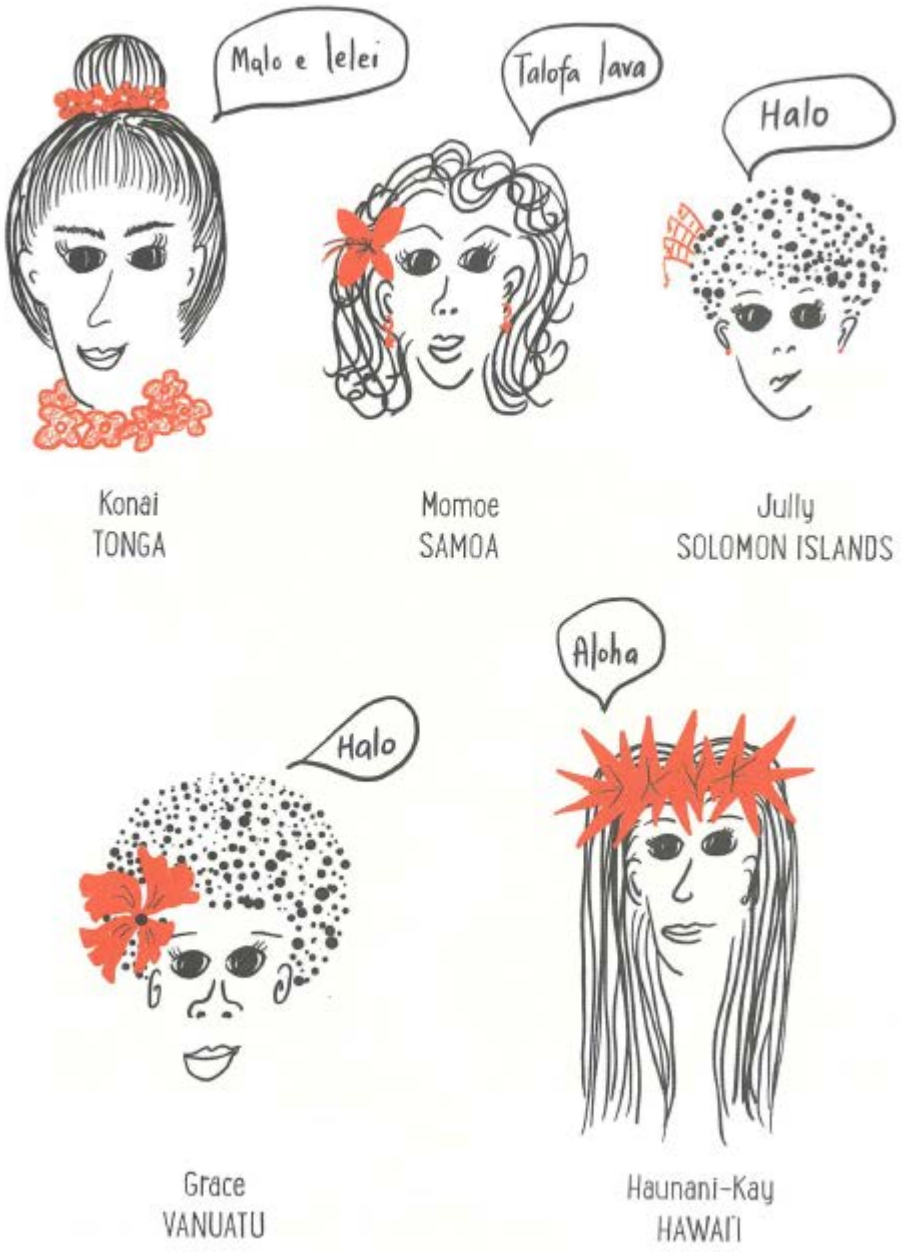
This chapter highlights the role of Pacific Island women poets in addressing gendered violence, with works like Sophia Jahan's *Silence* and Merilyn Tahi's *Violence* confronting the physical and psychological impacts of abuse. The legacy of influential poets like Grace Mera Molisa and Haunani-Kay Trask has inspired generations of women writers to challenge societal norms, amplify female voices, and advocate for change in the fight against violence and colonial oppression.

4.2 Selina Tusitala Marsh and Five Pacific Women Writers

In 2004, Selina Tusitala Marsh made a significant contribution to the field of Pacific literature and feminism by submitting her doctoral thesis at the University of Auckland. Her research, titled "*Ancient Banyans, Flying Foxes and White Ginger": Five Pacific Women Writers*, is a comprehensive study of a series of very influential women's poets. Marsh amplifies the work and legacy of the prominent pioneer tropical Pacific female authors whose work marks a watershed from the late 1980s onward: Jully Sipolo (also known as Jully Makini) from the Solomon Islands, Grace Mera Molisa of Vanuatu, Haunani-Kay Trask of Hawai'i, Konai Helu Thaman from Tonga, and Momoe Malietoa Von Reiche from Western Samoan. In her children's book and memoir published in 2019, Marsh, the former Poet Laureate of Aotearoa New Zealand, acknowledges the importance of these women writers and poets of the Pacific for laying the ground for her own bold work.

Figure 4

The illustration by Selina Tusitala Marsh from her first children's book and memoir Mophead published in 2019 by Auckland University Press



Note: The previous page says, "I discovered the WILD words of Pacific Island women poets."

Because of the ambivalence towards Western importations of culture, as documented above, and the allied postcolonial cause of recovering indigenous culture whilst exploring a postcolonial identity, the cause of Western feminism has always been difficult to incorporate and graft onto tropical Pacific culture, as Marsh (2019) explains. Thus, inspired by the formation of Maori

feminism termed *mana wahine*, Marsh introduces the term *mana tama'ita'i* in a chapter in *Inside Out: Literature, Cultural Politics, and Identity in the New Pacific* (1999) and expands on this idea in in her thesis (2004). As Marsh (1999) explains, *mana* represents "the issues of power and respect", and *tama'ita'i* "is the nonexclusive Samoan word used to refer to a woman" (p. 338). *Mana wahine* was a concept that overcame reservations within Maori culture with the generalising tendencies of Western feminism to specifically empower Maori women to take control of the representation of their lives and struggles in the international arena in ways that were culturally appropriate to Maori women. Similarly, *mana tama'ita'i* aims to speak to island and Oceania women in culturally specific and empowering ways. Marsh (1999) thus argues, alongside her conception of *mana tama'ita'i,* that even though the term 'feminism' is not relatable to Oceania in its Western application, the literary work of many prominent Pacific authors can be clearly connoted to "literary feminism" as the female tropical Pacific authors aim to empower other women and often "recognize that gender issues are a common scene of struggle in their poetry" (p. 339). Even though her chapter in *Inside Out: Literature, Cultural Politics, and Identity in the New Pacific* (1999) specifically focuses on applying the terms of *mana tama'ita'i* to the poets Konai Helu Thaman, Malietoa Momoa Von Reiche, and Jully Sipolo (Makini), this term can be applied to other women poets and authors. This is because by adapting the term *mana tama'ita'i*, Marsh (1999) hopes to explore how black feminism might become "Pacified" (p. 339). In analysing other Pacific poets, I argue that the term coined by Selina Tusitala Marsh, *mana tama'ita'i,* can be applied to all all the poets I discuss speaking out on gendered violence and refusing to be silenced. As such, this term empowers them and underlines their achievement for all women across the Pacific, fighting for their freedom.

4.3 Momoe Malietoa Von Reiche and *Solaua: A Secret Embryo* (1979)

In my discussions of these venerable writers, I analyse the works of women poets who tackle gendered violence in the Pacific, in chronological order of publication. Known as "[p]ainter, writer, illustrator, teacher, poet, artist, and publisher," Momoe Malietoa Von Reiche has established her status at the forefront of Samoan women authors. Selina Tusitala Marsh (2004) notes Von Reiche's significant family history, with her mother, Malietoa Tanumafili II's status as a former diplomat and politician, as well as the noble origin of her family with Malietoa's "paramount title," remaining "one of the four *tama a 'aiga*, or kingly ties to which all *aiga* (families) and Samoan titles are traced back" (Meleisea as cited in Marsh, 2004, p. 412). Perhaps it is because of her influential place in Samoan society that Von Reiche gained access to publication, but her works are stridently independent. Her first of four poetry collections was one of the earliest works of collected poetry by a woman to be published in Samoa. In truth, she is a polymath, recognised not only as a prominent writer and painter but also as an educator, introducing new curricula for Samoan primary schools and authoring

numerous academic resources. Von Reiche was also a community leader. A mother of nine and grandmother of seventeen, Von Reiche also opened the MADD Gallery in Apia, creating a welcoming space for local artists (Eteuati & Wendt Young, 2021, Va Anthology of Contributors).

In her article, "Islands Poets Sing of Grief, Love" (1981), Jo Rudd examines recent poetry by Pacific authors, with a particular focus on the impact of Von Reiche's first collection of poetry *Solaua: A Secret Embryo* (1979). Rudd (1981, p. 48) lauds this collection as the 'most accomplished' until that date and highlights the profound impact of Von Reiche's poetry on the Pacific literary landscape. As Marsh (2004) explains, the title of the poetry collection, "Solaua," means "place of rains" and most directly refers to the valley situated close to Apia. Even though the author is Samoan, she refers to other locations where she previously resided. Meaningly, she describes "Solaua" "an old colonial German-owned ranch," where the history is filled with "the sweat of exploited migrant [Chinese] labour" (Marsh, 2004, p. 424).Marsh (2004) thus explains that this piece of land is itself resonant of the postcolonial situation of the Pacific, as it is secured by surrounding waters, as in an embryo, as "a clever metaphor of mixed marriages, or loyalties crossing over difference" (p. 425). The rubber tree on this land, a foreign import, has a heart "suspended" on one of its branches. Therefore, the poemsuggests that there is an extent, to which, the non-native, who is rooted on Samoan land, is planted, too, "[i]n both romantic and historically-tensioned context" (Marsh, 2004, p. 425) in ways that suffuse Von Reiche's poetry.

Von Reiche's poems, often of an erotic nature, envision beauty, sensuality, and the natural world while also conveying a strong array of emotions, ranging from love to anger and jealousy. Rudd (1981) describes Von Reiche's style as "vibrant and strong, words deliberate, carefully chosen, hard-hitting" (p. 48). A significant portion of her work grapples with powerlessness in the face of her husband's infidelity, yearning, and resentment towards the emotional detachment of men. The autobiographical character of her writing focuses on the "quest for love, belongingness," and the "anguish of loss of love, and longing for Samoa when away from it, and returning home" (Subramani, 1985, p. 58). Marsh (2004) distinguishes Von Reiche as an author who stands apart from other female writers she analyses. Marsh (2004) sees Von Reiche's style as "indirect, perhaps subtler than that of her peers," allowing for greater "freedom of expression and defends the right of the artist to freely express herself" (p. 412). Nevertheless, her writing still has the hallmarks of the kind of feminism Marsh underscores, one which does not defy its deep loyalty to family, traditions, and land.

Perhaps, however, it is because of the strong autobiographical element that runs through much of Von Reiche's poetry that she is able to confidently reveal personal experiences that are

relatable for many Pacific women, and which thus seem in this context quite bold. The first of her poetry volumes includes many poems in which she permits personal experiences and charged emotions to linger at the surface of her writing (see Table 5). It is in this context in her poems "My Husband" (1979) and "My Guest" (1979) that the author portrays native women being compared to the image of the female standardised beauty promoted by the West.

Table 5

Selected Poems and Themes from Momoe Malietoa Von Reiche's Solaua: A Secret Embryo

Poet	Poem	Collection/Publication details (if known)	Year (in order)	Area of Provenance (if known)	Themes
Momoe Malietoa Von Reiche	"My Husband"	Solaua: A Secret Embryo	Volume publication: 1979, pp. 13-14	Western Samoa	Emotional and psychological abuse; impaired marriage
	"My Guest"		Volume publication: 1979, pp. 28		Jealousy; impaired marriage; internalised misogyny
	"The Last Wish"		Volume publication: 1979, p. 40-41		Intimate partner violence; emotional and psychological abuse; betrayal

In the first of these poems, "My Husband," one can notice the possible internalising of an indigenous woman's self-comparison to the standardised white physical appearance by despising her ethnic background "sentencing the self to irrelevancy" (Thiong'o as cited in Marsh, 1999, p. 344). There are instances throughout Von Reiche's (1979) poetry of women internalising notions of racialised and colonial standards of beauty, which are fundamentally at odds with their physical appearance. In this poem, the woman speaker's spouse bullies her on this topic:

My husband laughs

At me and says that

I'm black and ugly

Like the backside of

Aia's one-eyed dog

He says my hair

Is like the tail of

Ami's old mare in the paddock. (lines 11–18, p. 13)

The boldness extends beyond the revealing of these issues. For example, even though the poem portrays the Samoan wife as "a defeated woman trapped in domesticity" (Marsh, 2004, p. 422), as Marsh notes, despite informing the reader of her husband's judgement, the narrator in "My Husband" stands in defiance, and refuses to be "internalising this self-hatred by adopting pretensions to whiteness or actually feeling these things" (1999, p. 345). The husband's failed attempts to manipulate his wife prove her to be a more independent thinker than he gives her credit for.

Similarly, "My Guest" depicts a woman engaged in an internal monologue comparing herself to "a flirting, perfumed, false-lashed, red fingertipped, bottle beauty" (Marsh, 1999, p. 344). The scene reflects internalised misogyny and woman-on-woman symbolic violence. Denigrating herself in contrast to her guest's physical "bottle-beauty," the narrator reveals her own sense of insecurity and also a sense in which women stand in competition with one another. Observing the reaction of her husband, who stares at their "guest," the author says:

I feel like bloody Cinderella

In my tattered shorts

And torn shirt. My hair smells like

A garlic shop, and my nails

Are chipped to the core. (lines 17–21, p. 28)

The important Pacific critic Subramani (1985) also observes that Von Reiche's writing expresses a certain degree of feminism, highlighting relations between the two sexes, often in the forms of "an interesting mixture of feelings of love, resentment and tenderness" (p. 85). Once again, the bare frustration and sense of powerlessness are portrayed in the autobiographical aspects of the poem. Even though the narrator gradually reveals her denigrations at the hands of a husband who is unfaithful, it is the other woman who becomes a villain. The man gets away without being held accountable. As a result, the narrator feels depreciated and instead of directing her anger towards the real source of her distress—her husband, she points it to the "other" woman. Even the dinner in this poem starts to taste "off." Von Reiche's poetry consists of authentic confessions to the exhaustion of the vanity, egotism, and selfishness of men. The lines of "My Guest" reveal the contrasting and unachievable expectations placed on women, between the unattainable standards of magazine culture's pimped images imported from the global north and the dutiful island mother busy with errands to run and house chores. Moreover, it proves the persistence of colonialism in

Samoa, where, despite political independence, Western neo-colonial standards are continually imposed on people, their choices, and their lives.

The concluding poem in the collection *Solaua: A Secret Embryo,* aptly called "A Final Wish" (1979, pp. 40–41), exemplifies the depth of Von Reiche's expression of women's struggle to avenge gendered violence. Despite the autobiographical tenor of the preceding poems, "A Final Wish" has been read as a "a universal outpouring of female anger at the pain and restrictions placed on a wife by child-rearing and cruel mate" (Rudd, 1981, p. 48). The poem's first lines indicate that the wife is well aware of her husband's lover and knows the nature of their relationship as she calls her "nymphomaniac mistress / With the bad legs" (Von Reiche, 1979, p. 40). What is interesting is that the speaker is condemning other women based on their promiscuity. According to *fa'a samoa*, a woman should be traditionally subservient, and it is in part because of this that the woman speaker so boldly blames the other woman for defying this ideal and actively embracing a sexualised eroticism that lures her husband. Regardless of the fact that the narrator of the poem and indeed Von Reiche's own poetry speaks in openly eroticised terms, the speaker of this poem blames the mistress for conducting herself in a sexualised way. She is passing judgment on another woman, who, according to her, behaves in a liberated way even though, once again, the husband is at least partially to blame. Indeed, the speaker of the poem confirms her husband's flagrantly scandalous and disrespectful behaviour as he talks about his affair openly, comparing his lover's looks to the ones possessed by his spouse:

> My pride bent at last
>
> When you flaunted your slave – adoration
>
> For her bed habits openly
>
> Like a sickness,
>
> And as usual, I was the bloody
>
> Village idiot that stayed and suffered. (lines 6–11, p. 40)

Just as in the previous poems "My Husband," and "My Guest," the narrator is measured by the comparison to other women, and just like in these poems, here, the reader may observe the passivity of the spouse. The author proves her internal composure and collection by demonstrating her resilience to the harsh, sadistic treatment of her husband, who feeds on her suffering and humiliation. She internalises her anger and does not let it out:

> I devoured Freud, Jung, and Walt Disney,

> And tried not to cry
>
> When you taunted me cruelly
>
> About my simplicity which you called ugliness,
>
> And suffered gut deaths
>
> Every time you said you hated me. (lines 12–17, p. 40)

Through references to Freud, Jung, and Walt Disney, the reader of this poem may conclude that the narrator has received a Western education and is trapped between the West and the Pacific. Even with access to tertiary education and familiarity with concepts such as sexism and feminism, the liberation of women applied through Occidental standards is not applicable in a traditional Samoan society. Even though she has some knowledge of psychology and psychosexuality, she is not ignorant of her circumstances; her knowledge of Western culture still does not enable her to live a decent life.

It is worth noting the reference to Carl Gustav Jung's collective unconscious, which suggests the existence of archetypes unique to every human being and his or her personality regardless of cultural background. According to Jungian scholars, these archetypal elements are present in the fairy tales passed to generations of children, and thus are present in Disney films. As Sarah Lynne Bowman (2011) points out, "from a strictly ideological point of view, the phrase 'Disney film' promises characters and plots that feminists can easily read as overly simplistic, naïve, sexist, or even culturally offensive" (p. 80). The phrase might blame cultural imperialism for the fate of the woman in the poem. However, as Linda L. Linder (2001) explains in the example of "Cinderella," a Jungian reading might point out a more universal structure that oppresses women:

> From a Jungian perspective, one can take all the characters of the written story, fold them into the physic world, and relate them to the internal working of a female child. The dead-yet-ever-present mother may then represent the instinctive mother that exists in all females; she is a resource that is hopefully available… The ambivalent father may personify the male aspect of immature female which has not been allowed to grow… in ways that can protect and nurture the girl-child. (p. 36)

Such is the picture of the narrator's family and their situation in "A Final Wish," where she and her children become the powerless victims of a cruel father, ignorant of or apathetic to the scale of the harm he is causing on their psyche. The narrator needs to embody a virgin, mother, and wife simultaneously. Nevertheless, she plays the role of a loving and caring mother who makes every effort to make her marriage survive for the sake of her children. From the context of the poem, the

reader can deduce that the narrator's husband is perceived as exceptionally handsome. That might have been one of the reasons he could easily maintain the façade at the beginning to possibly lure her into marrying him. Even her father advises her to leave him as he sees the disproportion of their physical attractiveness, prophesying troublesome outcomes of the marriage. She cries:

> My father told me to leave you
>
> Because I was too ugly
>
> And my name wasn't Greta Garbo
>
> But I never listened. (lines 21–24, p. 40)

Again, Von Reiche interlaces universal issues with culturally loaded references like Greta Garbo, making it unclear and ambiguous the origin of this kind of violence and oppression faced by the female speaker in the poem. These lines of the poem generalise the emotional ill-treatment of women by men in their families. But with time, the emotional abuse evolves into physical violence, perhaps just as the symbolic violence shifts into actual physical oppression. Ultimately, the narrator reaches the point where she can no longer internalise her frustration and anger. She releases her pain:

> Although it finally dawned
>
> That after humiliations, black eyes,
>
> Broken ribs, and a million tears,
>
> Any good looking son of a bitch
>
> Was not worth it! (lines 26–30, p. 40)

By this time, not only does her mental state deteriorate, but as she cries out, she is also in physical agony. The previously used adjective "bloody" transforms from a metaphorical to a literal meaning. Battered, broken, and aching, the speaker realises that neither sacrifice nor silenced suffering will ever be a remedy to her marriage. Just as at the beginning of the poem, when the speaker wishes her husband could understand the true value of their marriage instead of abandoning his family and living with his mistress, she hopes that some woman in the future will break his heart so he learns how it feels. The tragic culmination of the end of marriage and years of endured pain, the woman thinks that she is no longer capable of loving. Her wounded heart, bruised body, and tortured psyche caused her lack of affection, hope, and love as these were feelings she spent on pointless attempts to save her marriage.

If perhaps the themes here are both personal and universal, elsewhere, Von Reiche weaves into her poetry more obvious postcolonial themes, combining them with her lyrical expression of intimate and passionate feelings. “The Bible Class Teacher” (Von Reiche, 1979, p. 10) is another poem within the same volume that explicitly addresses the longstanding colonisation of Samoan peoples and neo-colonial circumstances. In this poignant poem, the harsh reality of colonisation and gender inequality presents a contrast with the more traditional poems, ‘Love Song’ and ‘Song’, discussed earlier. The metaphors of domination, once used to describe geography and women’s bodies, now depict the colonisation of the women’s mind and body, associated with the controlling mandates of imported Christianity. This poem evokes a deep sense of empathy for the young girl, impatiently waiting for Bible class to end to meet with her lover, under the watchful eye of the missionary Bible teacher, who

> Kept reading
>
> Paragraphs from the bible,
>
> About sin and adultery
>
> I knew he meant it
>
> For us – the young girls
>
> In the class (lines 1–6, p. 10)

The word “dying” in the verses that follow, suggests that the girls are held as prisoners in the classroom. It is specifically the girls who are targeted for this kind of education, while the boys enjoy their time outside, away from the classroom.

> I was shifting on the
>
> Hard form looking at
>
> The old clock on the
>
> Wall. Dying to stand
>
> Up and leave (lines 7–11, p. 10)

The teacher’s assumptions about the moral failings of Samoan girls foreground gender inequalities in Samoan society, but the young student is an audacious and independent individual who is aware of her desires and needs, as the religious sermons do not affect her choices:

> Before our teacher could say

Amen I was half

Way down the concrete

Stairs running

Fast to where

He was supposed to be

Only to find an

Empty hedge with

Other lovers in embrace. (lines 2–28, p. 10)

In this society, girls are supposed to be responsible, whereas young men are not held accountable for their actions. Girls can hear them laugh outside. There is a threatening and sexual figure in the darkness, which builds up the erotic notion, and the hibiscus flower is mentioned. This figure is the reason why they have the reading. The girl's expectation of a somewhat threatening lover is partially a product of the Western enculturation of young women being taken advantage of by men, which ironically drives her to actually go out and see the lover that she is warned about. He is not there, so the things she was warned about are not there. Instead, as Von Reiche makes clear in this poem, the real source of patriarchal dominance is the Bible teacher, a Western patriarchal figure who is forcing otherwise free Samoan women to be isolated from life and reading cautionary tales. Whatever the source of the oppression—internal or external—Von Reiche's strident poems laid the groundwork for other emerging female poets like Grace Mera Molisa in the mid to late 1980s, who even more openly confronted gendered oppression.

4.4 Konai Helu *Thaman, You, The Choice of My Parents* (1980), and *Langakali* (1981)

The names of the revered islands flowers Langakali, Hingano, and Kakala are used as titles for three of Helu Thaman's poetry volumes. Thaman "consciously uplifts ancient symbols, blossoming with meaning, from Tongan legends, songs, dance, and poetry to preserve oral traditions and forms of nonwritten narrative" (Marsh, 1999, p. 347). Moreover, as these flowers represent the degradation of ecological stability in the tropical Pacific, one could discern an allusion to the fading of inherited traditions (Marsh, 1999, p. 347).

Helu Thaman is a writer who is also known for her commitment to the education of young people. She has written an unparalleled number of articles and is known for her activism in the field of education. While presenting an essay at the conference, Decolonizing Pacific Studies: Indigenous

Perspectives, Knowledge, and Wisdom in Higher Education (2003) in Hawaii, , she introduced herself in a very modest way by saying:

> I am a Tongan woman of the commoner class, and although schooled in western ways, I continue to see myself as a part of an organic community, not as a chance result of natural selection at work in a world devoid of supernatural guidance. (Thaman, 2003, p. 1)

The words express deep respect for the listener and audience as well as for herself as a woman and a member of a close community. The author shows her belonging to the land, strong sense of national identity and closeness to her people. They also testify to her modesty and belief in the spiritual world and the symbolism of meanings that bring her closer to her land and people.

In the interview with Briar Wood, 'Tui Tu'u Heilala from 1997, Konai Helu Thaman talks about her connection to her children, ancestral ties, family, spirituality, creativity, and her views on gender equality:

> I did a lot of reading, and formed my own opinions about the whole feminist movement and decided that I was a feminist long before the movement came along, and my grandaunts were feminists before the word feminist became part of my vocabulary. So now when people ask, are you a feminist, if feminism is about equality, equal worth, then, yes, I am a feminist (Wood, 1997, p. 7)

Her poetry reflects this concept, especially in a couple of her poems where she clearly shows and analyses visible inequalities between the sexes in the Pacific communities (see Table 6).

Table 6

Selected poems by Konai Helu Thaman

Poet	Poem	Collection/Publication details (if known)	Year (in order)	Area of Provenance (if known)	Themes
Konai Helu Thaman	"Women's Lib"	You, The Choice of My Parents: Poems by Konai Helu Thaman	Volume publication: 1980, p. 1	Tonga	Women empowerment
Konai Helu Thaman	"I Tremble"	You, The Choice of My Parents: Poems by Konai Helu Thaman	Volume publication: 1980, p. 2	Tonga	Gender inequality; inferior position of women,
Konai Helu Thaman	"My Blood"	You, The Choice of My Parents: Poems by Konai Helu Thaman	Volume publication: 1980, p. 5	Tonga	Consumerism; post colonialism; modernity
Konai Helu Thaman	"My Neighbour"	Langakali: Poems by Konai Helu Thaman	Volume publication: 1981, p. 2	Tonga	Domestic violence; hypocrisy

Konai Helu Thaman	"Woman"	Hingano: Selected Poems 1966-1986	Volume publication: 1988, pp. 74-75	Tonga	Women's inferior position in the society; gender inequality

One of the author's most well-known and popular poems remains "My Blood" (1980). The viewpoint in the poem contrasts with those illustrated in Agnes Dewenis's "Tell Me Why, Man" (1995) or Jully Sipolo's "A Man's World" (1981), where the narrator seeks help and justice from an external agent as on her own territory, she remains powerless. The speaker in Helu Thaman's "My Blood" (1980) demonstrates her attitude in standing up against the indoctrination of internal domestic politics happening in her region. Her "brother" is attempting to muster her anger against politicians and white people:

> You tell me that I've been 'exploited'
>
> And that I must rebel NOW;
>
> You tell me that I must be their equal
>
> You tell me if I don't
>
> I am sick, apathetic and useless (lines 1–5, p. 5)

Nevertheless, Helu Thaman does not remain prone to the hypocrisy of the politicians and sees through how they aim to use her as a pawn in their political game. Even though the public campaign and government proclaim the postulates of independence, national pride, and autonomy, the prominent figures and administrative and bureaucratic representatives are the copies of the same silhouettes they detest and frown upon in their speeches. The theory seems to sound as empty words and shallow beliefs which are not put into practice in the everyday material existence:

> You ride a big car, just like them
>
> You booze, just like them
>
> You love, just like them
>
> You slaughter, cheat, and lie, just like them,
>
> Why should I hate them and not YOU? (lines 8–12, p. 5)

At this point, the author exposes the guilt of her brothers, who are aware that they are selling their land and traditions in the name of consumerism and private gain. In their efforts to imitate those who colonized their country, they have lost their mentality, balance, and sense of ease.

In their pursuit of education and money, they have given up their dignity and belonging. Imported goods have replaced archaic gods, mythology, and family ties. The author, frustrated and tired of her brother's behaviour, encourages them to confront the current state of affairs. However, she reminds them not to delude themselves that a foreigner who has too much to lose will help them. The pandemic of the identity crisis is too widely spread.

> Come, face your dilemma now, brother
>
> For your pompous friends won't help you
>
> They have too much to lose;
>
> Your statesmen friends can't help you
>
> They suffer from the same identity epidemic,
>
> Why don't you give up? (lines 24–29, p. 5)

Ultimately, what breaks the author's heart is not the exploitation of her people that she is forced to witness but the susceptibility of women and men to Western influence and manipulation. She feels betrayed. These policies have made her brother alien and distant. The poem clearly demonstrates the double colonisation from within. The poem opens the discussion on the unique position of women in Pacific society to critique this phenomenon as both sexes are the double victims of both kinds of colonisation.

Susan Y. Najita (2008) states that "though independence is a reality for many, true decolonisation has not occurred. Social, cultural, and political colonial hierarchies, values, and epistemologies find a continued existence within the new nation" (p. xiii). The aspect of postcolonial reality in terms of the global North and South dialogue in relation to women's emancipation is the subject of "My Blood" (1980, p. 5), which is the response of the tropical Pacific woman to Westerner's criticism of her nation. The author feels overwhelmed by the negative image that is being ascribed to her.

Even though her "brother" incites action for gender equality, the narrator notices the men of her nation are not better than the women's oppressors in her homeland. Later in the poem, she remarks on the urge of her people for Westerner intervention as a result of guilt for previous harms done to Oceania through colonisation:

> You are a fraud
>
> Squeezing the dry earth

For something to ease your guilt (lines 13–15, p. 5)

The foreign media and academic papers of that era seem to be preoccupied with the economic position of women, particularly issues of unequal pay, and unawareness. Nonetheless, Helu Thaman clarifies that these are not the worst of women's worries, but the problems that are the roots of gender inequality in her country:

My problem is that I

Have been betrayed and trampled on

By my own blood,

Don't forget YOU are their product

And YOU must sell (lines 33–37, p. 5)

According to Helu Thaman, the continuous aftermath of colonialism in provoking and establishing social and gender inequalities in the tropical Pacific is clear and ongoing. This is documented in poems like these wherein "My Blood" presents both exploitation and frustration of powerlessness as "the face of the oppressor is seen to be overwhelmingly both indigenous and male" (Marsh, 1999, p. 344). Even though constitutionally independent, many Oceanic nations still confront the consequences of the imperialism imposed on their islands, and for women these effects are personalised and gendered at the level of intimate relations. As Marsh (1999) notices, "' the brother' is 'other'" (p. 344). As a man in a stage of an identity crisis, the tyrant is "torn between the common people and the elite", which serves to depict the persisting post-colonialism.

Speaking of this author's further prominent pieces, Konai Helu Thaman's "My Neighbour," included in volume *Langakali* (1981), remains a sarcastic remark referring to some men's hypocritical behaviour. It is directed towards the appearance of the man the author knows in person and lives close enough to be familiar with. She is aware of the situation which takes place inside his house, behind the closed door. Among the members of his community:

My neighbor is

A very generous man

He pays school fees

Of needy children

Every year

Provides feasts

For his church (lines 1-7, p. 2)

Whereas the moment he comes back home, his family has to endure the horror as the last line of the poem indicates, he "frequently beats up his wife" (p. 2). This short twelve-line story of a man who deceives society informs the reader of the complexity of domestic abuse, which is not always recognisable at first sight. Only those with close access to those involved are aware of the real situation in the household. The neighbour might represent the society, which, thanks to deceiving, is praised by the outsider for its outward behaviour towards church and family. In contrast, privately, it is horrific towards its people.

The tables of poems designate those which relate to gendered violence. There is another one yet, which does not, though reflect a message relating to this thesis. A beautiful poem by Konai Helu Thaman, "Take-Off" from the collection of her poems called *Langakli* (1981, p. 4), shows that poetry and the freedom of expression is one of the most beautiful gifts enabling women to feel themselves when she says:

when was

the first time

birds learnt to fly?

i know it was when I began

to write (lines 7–11, p. 4)

Just as dignified and free birds, tropical Pacific women talk about their situation, inspiring future generations to aim for more and fight for equal gender rights and other causes meaningful to their hearts.

4.5 Jully Makini (Sipolo), *Civilised Girl* (1981), *Praying Parents* (1986), and *Mi Mere* (1983)

In the article, "Solomon's Bold Poet Jully Makini," Takiora Ingram Pryor emphasises the feminist spirit of the author, who has reclaimed her maiden name Makini as she "pursues her journalistic and political interests unfettered by the demands of husband and marriage" (Pryor, 1987, p. 55). Born in 1953 in the Solomon Islands, this prominent writer decided to include her dissatisfaction with marital life in her poetry, accepted a Fulbright scholarship, and escaped the "unhappy marriage that forced her to work with other women" (Pryor, 1987, p. 55) in order to build a strong female community. She

says, "'I ran away, and now I'm here. Now I'm free, but I still have nightmares" (Sipolo in Pryor, 1987, p. 55).

The topics present in her poetry reflect her discontent with gender inequality, her fight for women's rights, and their access to education and government positions (see Table 7). At the time of the emergence of the literature in the Solomon Islands, these were mostly public figures and people with higher education who produced written fiction, in contrast to the rest of the nation's population, while there was a high illiteracy rate among the more general population. This dissimilarity between her natal village and urbanised parts of the islands is a prevailing theme in Makini's first volume of poetry *Civilized Girl* (1981), "which describes a young woman alienated from traditional village life by her education and by 'town life'" (Miller as cited in Viking O'Brien, 1996, p. 70). It was the first collection by a female poet published in the Solomon Islands (Clarke, 1999, p. 196). In her poetry, Jully Sipolo tackles the emerging issues of concern in Oceania:

> neocolonialism, urban drift, cultural and economic poverty, the growth of individualism with its accompanying conflict between tradition and modernity, an increasing reliance upon a cash economy, political corruption, unsustainable development, nuclear testing, and the persistence of an alienating Eurocentric education. (Marsh, 1998, p. 669)

Marsh notes, "Makini's [as Sipolo returned to this name later in her life] poetic, gendered, postcolonial body as a site of contestation where conflicting forces of Westernization, tradition, and patriarchy battle for bodily dominance and ownership" (Marsh, 2015, p. 48).

Table 7

Selected Poems by Jully Makini (Sipolo) and Themes

Poet	Poem	Collection/Publication details (if known)	Year (in order)	Area of Provenance (if known)	Themes
Jully Sipolo (also known as Jully Makini)	"Spinning"	Civilized Girl: Poems by Jully Sipolo	Volume publication: 1981, p. 2	Salomon Islands	Modernity; consumerism; gendered violence; domestic violence
	"The Hypocrite"		Volume publication: 1981, p. 9		Domestic violence; religious hypocrisy
	"A Man's World"		Volume publication: 1981, p. 10		Position of women in the society; gender inequality
	"Civilised Girl"		Volume publication: 1981, p. 21		Position of women in the society; gender inequality

	"Mi Mere"	Praying Parents: A Second Collection of Poems	Volume publication: 1986, p. 8		Women's position in the society; gender inequality
	"Wife Bashing"		Volume publication: 1986, pp. 12-13		Domestic violence; physical violence; social ostracism
	"After Five Kids"		Volume publication: 1986, p. 20		Women's position in the society; gender inequality
	"Widow's Thoughts"		Volume publication: 1986, p. 28		Gender inequality; domestic violence
	"Anti-Climax"		Volume publication: 1986, p. 33		Gender inequality; domestic violence

In "A Man's World" (1981), Makini depicts the difference in the standard of life provided by society for men and women. Marsh (1999) suggests that Makini presents "the muffled frustration and horror… where the exploitation of a woman's role as sister is sanctioned by an unresponsive society" (p. 344). The striking examples of the difference in what boys and girls are allowed are visible from the beginning; "women's secondary work within a family" (Pryor, 1987, p. 55) is noticed even by a child as the young girl says:

> My brother can sit on the table
>
> I mustn't
>
> He can say what he likes whenever he likes
>
> I must keep quiet
>
> He can order me around like a slave
>
> I must not back-chat
>
> He gives me his dirty clothes to wash
>
> I wish he could wash mine! (Makini, 1981, lines 1–8, p. 10)

The lines of the poem prove instances of "girls and women exploited by male relatives who not only enjoy greater rights but also exert authority over sisters and wives" (Prentice, 2019, p. 148). The deep inequality between the two sexes leads to both physical and emotional aggression when the girl becomes a woman:

> If the house is full

I must crawl on my hands and knees

I must walk behind him not in front

Watch my speech when he is in the house

Don't say 'face' but say 'front'

Not 'teeth' but 'stone'

Carry out my love affairs behind his back

Custom allows him to thrash both of us if caught (lines 11–18, p. 10)

If the speaker breaks any of the customs and ceases acting inferior and servile, she risks being slapped and hit on her face, which becomes just a "stone front" and not a person. The assault is not only brutal and ruthless but impersonal and cold. It seems that the beatings have become a normalised ritual expected to happen if any of the rules are broken. A woman is not even allowed to be intimate with the partner of her choice. If she becomes pregnant with her lover, her brother "can make a living out of his sisters!" (p. 10).

The narrator strongly accentuates that women are not somebody's private property to be managed or controlled in isolation. The reality presented in the poem shows that mistreatment is not an uncommon but very trivial incident. With time, the seemingly unthreatening restrictions imposed by the husband, such as limited freedom of leaving the household or the abundance of house chores, evolve into the requirements of slavish submission. The injustice and disappointment continue even though many women try to meet the categorical expectations of their fathers, brothers, and spouses. The male domination and manipulation in certain households downplay women's attempts to please their husbands as pointless due to woman's actions being taken for granted.

Her first volume of poetry *Civilised Girl* (1981) simultaneously brings up the themes close to Makini, showing not only her political and economic involvement in the affairs of her region, but also the autobiographical side of her reflections. As Marsh (2015) underlines, "Makini's first two collections are filled with poems concerned with physical and mental violence against women, predominantly within the context of marriage" (p. 49). It streams the exhaustion, indirect and subtle criticism towards men, her failed expectations, disappointment, mistrust in the institution of marriage, and unfaithfulness and instability of men. *Civilised Girl* (1981) includes poems such as "The Hypocrite", where Makini states:

You showed your true self after the wedding –

Fangs bared, claws exposed,

A wolf in sheep's clothing. (lines 7–9, p. 9)

Other poems indicate dispiritedness, such as in "Marriage" (1981)—"What is marriage / But a piece of paper / That can be torn" (lines 1–3, p. 11)—or the empty significance of the marital oath in "The Promise" (1981, p. 16). As previously mentioned, the elements of her poetry include experiences from her personal life. Multiple pages of her books focus on the nature of this marriage. The next volume of her poetry, *Praying Parents* (1986), sustains the tone of bitter disappointment and lost hope. While "After Five Kids" (1986, p. 20) portrays a never-present father and uncaring husband spending his time and money in clubs on alcohol with his male companions, "Widow's Thoughts" (1986, p. 28) reveals the internal dilemma of a widow who, still mourning her late husband in confuse, thrills on the thought of becoming finally free:

Now that you're gone

I can breathe freely

The millstone around my neck

Like a leash around a dog's

Was cut when you left. (lines 11–15, p. 28)

As the speaker realises she can do what she pleases without having to submit to the male dominance and cruelty, she joyfully exclaims, "I'll never marry again / I've had it, I'm through!" (lines 31–32, p. 28). Moreover, the severity of the marriage's failure is accentuated as Makini decides to name the very last poem of the volume "Anti-Climax" (1986, p. 33).

When you married me,

You put a ring around my finger,

A ring through my nose,

A noose around my neck,

And a yoke on my shoulders. (lines 4–8, p. 33)

Among many allusions to frustration caused by factors such asmodernisation, consumerism, and lost traditional values, Makini slowly starts to talk about violence in a direct manner. In her second collection of poems, *Praying Parents* (1986), Makini includes one of her well-known pieces, "Wife Bashing" (1986, p. 12), which reflects the hypocrisy and indifference of the people from whom the

victim would supposedly expect shelter and rescue. The concept of powerlessness in the face of the community's indifference is slowly unveiled as the poem commences:

> "Sister, I've come to you with my black eye and bruises"
>
> "I'm afraid of your hubby, don't want to get involved,
>
> Go to big brother" (lines 2–3, p. 12)

The poem tells the story of a woman who, being a victim of abuse at the hands of her husband, seeks help and shelter. Covered in bruises, she contacts her sister. She refuses to help, and her brother does the same. Parents will not provide any support either, as they believe their daughter, at this moment, is somebody else's belonging. Neither a police officer nor a pastor is eager to help. While the first one excuses himself with the private character of the issue, the latter uses the Bible to humble the woman. Discouraged and defenceless, the narrator comes back to her husband:

> Hubby,
>
> I'm back,
>
> I've brought back this battered body
>
> battered face, plus battered case
>
> I am the ball that players pass around
>
> I've had enough of being tossed around
>
> like a hot sausage
>
> Now I'm back,
>
> Have a ball! (lines 1–9, p. 13)

The poem shows how both the Church and other relatives are complicit in silencing women. The Church tends to endorse male supremacy in the household and promulgate the notion of the loyal submissive woman. As a result, life in economic uncertainty and political instability often translates to abuse in a domestic environment where the perpetrator controls the victim, who has no other place to go and, thus, is financially bound to stay with her oppressor.

The sarcastic tone shows the perversity of the predicament. By seeking help, the female experiences more disappointment and rejection from her relatives than from the hands of her husband. The only way to keep the shreds of her pride is to remain in the abusive household. "Wife

Bashing" puts into question the oppressive traditional structures "and points to the need for change" (Marsh, 1999, p. 344).

Importantly, Jully Makini, along with Afu Billy and Hazel Lulei, contributed to the development of women's empowerment in the Solomon Islands by becoming an editor of *Mi Mere: Poetry and Prose by Solomon Islands Women Writers* (1983). The introduction to the anthology says, "[i]t is hoped that this book will give other women the courage to put down their ideas and experiences on paper, and share them with others in what is hoped to be the next collection on women's writing" (Billy et al., p. ix), and "[e]xcept for changes of characters' names in some cases, this work comes from the bared souls of women who have dared to speak the truth" (p. 23).

The collection resulted from two seminars for women that took place at the University of South Pacific Solomon Islands Centre in 1980. The booklet consists of six parts, and the themes of gendered and domestic violence interweave through each section. *Mi Mere* remains an essential and pioneering grassroots feminist collective experience that provides the groundwork for joint voices to gather strength (see Figure 5 and Table 8). The anthology combined the testimonies and stories of a variety of women from different backgrounds, material, and marital situations to energise the reader "to think about everyday experiences in a different, more critical way in order to stimulate thought about issues previously unaddressed" (Marsh, 2004, p. 20). Makini's writing as a whole has lifted the capacity of many tropical Pacific women to identify with it and speak more boldly.

Figure 5

The picture taken by Sue Fleming in 1982 in Nusa Roviana starting the 5th part of Mi Mere: Poetry and Prose by Solomon Islands Women Writers, "Woman," p. 95

Table 8

Selected Poems from Mi Mere

Poet	Poem	Collection/Publication details (if known)	Year (in order)	Area of Provenance (if known)	Themes
Anonymous	"My Husband"	Mi Mere: Poetry and Prose by Solomon Islands Women Writers, edited by Afu Billy, Hazel Lulei, Jully Sipolo	Volume publication: 1983, pp. 36-37	Solomon Islands	Domestic violence, gender inequality, hypocrisy

Anonymous	"Neighbour Joe"		Volume publication: 1983, p. 37		Domestic violence, consumerism, modernity
Iemu Darcy	"Beware"		Volume publication: 1983, p. 46		Domestic violence, intimate partner violence
	"Women and housework"		Volume publication: 1983, p. 107		Domestic violence, objectified treatment of a woman

It is essential to notice that the vast majority of women in the 1980s were still reluctant to publish their work using their true names due to the prevailing fear of societal consequences. As editors emphasise, "[t]he writers of several works in this book choose to remain anonymous because of the very real constraints of freedom of expression by women which still exist in Solomon Islands societies" (Billy et al., p. vi). Here, the poetry offers protection from possible hazards in terms of anonymity and exposure. Marsh (2004) underscores that "the very fact that women's writing is threatening to some fractions of society should alert us to the danger and subversive potential writing holds for a status quo that disempowers women" (p. 19). The two poems from the volume *Mi Mere* analysed in this chapter are authored by anonymous female writers.

One of the poems written by an anonymous author, "My Husband" (1983, pp. 36–37), intends to be ambiguous and provides alternative readings. The speaker's spouse is well-educated and graduated from a tertiary institution. Everyone considers him to be gentle and kind; however, the narrator notices that her life has gradually turned around. She is forced to quit her studies not long before graduation and moves to her newlywed husband's family region. Everything happens fast, and at this point, the woman breaks her silence as the façade falls:

> But wait
>
> You're not satisfied
>
> You beat me ill treat me
>
> There are days in our life
>
> When not a word is spoken
>
> Silence
>
> Silence
>
> How I dread it. (lines 14–21, p. 36)

Her spouse forbids her access to education, hence making any possible chances to become independent and self-reliant unreal. Her predicament is complex as she struggles to find an escape from a foreign land away from her relatives and friends. He imposes on her multiple rules as the psychological pressure and constant criticism towards the speaker cause her anxiety every time she comes back from work. This upsetting order of things drags for years, until the 1980s:

> You say wear this wear that
>
> Yes you may go
>
> You love me now
>
> But why? why?
>
> I don't know (lines 16–20, p. 37)

The speaker notices drastic changes in her spouse's comportment, which shocks her. Since the husband does not pay attention to his wife anymore, there is a suggestion of unfaithfulness. She is allowed to wear whatever she likes and leaves the house as she pleases. Perhaps the woman is now too old in the eyes of her spouse, and as a result, the man takes on a younger lover. On the other hand, the 1980s in the Solomon Islands brought the long-awaited era of national independence. It might be that along with the liberation and sense of independence for the nation, the freedom for Solomon women is an emblem of the domestic violence coming to an end, too. The husband does not perpetuate aggression, just as the government does not perpetuate violence on its people anymore.

Yet another poem by the anonymous author reflects the neo-colonial reality check for women, who suffer from the colonial aftermath the most. The speaker describes her "Neighbour Joe" (1983, p. 37) as a colonial, presumably white man who has access to money. In a long tradition going back to Paul Gauguin, who went back to the Pacific Islands to take advantage of the eroticised other, Joe buys his way into the Solomon Islands. He is a drunk, violent, and mean man:

> A drunken sot was Neighbour Joe.
>
> The ritual of wife beating –
>
> She couldn't take it,
>
> Ran away. (lines 4–7, p. 37)

Even though the neighbour has significantly more money than people from the Solomon Islands do, in the place where he originally comes from, he is probably an average, ordinary, and unimpressive

person. In that sense, he brings to mind the concept of the banality of evil introduced by Hannah Arendt (1963). In her report, she stated that Adolf Eichmann did not lack moral principles and was not a monstrous being. Contrarily, he carried out malevolent actions without malevolent intentions, a circumstance linked to his heedlessness and detachment from the actuality of his maleficent crimes.

Thus, “Joe” is not an exceptionally horrific man. He is an average individual who came to a place where average at home means fortune in the Solomon Islands. He is wielding this fact as a weapon towards his poor wife and children. Nevertheless, the woman liberates herself, and runs away. Consequently, he is deprived of all his power. He subsequently collapses and, as a result, falls further into drunkenness and sex workers. After all, the narrator hears the news:

> Heard on the radio, just last nite,
>
> Neighbour Joe, had met his match (lines 10–11, p. 37)

Since the information is broadcasted through the media, it becomes apparent that someone killed Joe. Although the author leaves the murderer’s identity ambiguous, the reader can speculate that the neighbour got into a fight with a local, had a disagreement with a pimp, was mugged or raised a dispute with the wrong crowd or sex workers. The sarcastic and enigmatic finale can imply a variety of the author’s feelings in relation to Joe’s tragic end. Makini has played therefore a significant role uniting women and collecting their stories into an anthology. Taking into consideration their fear of exposure and a strong taboo, her achievement could be seen as a breakthrough.

4.6 Grace Mera Molisa, *Black Stone* Poetry Volumes (1983 and 1989), *Colonised People* (1987), and *Beneath Paradise* (1995)—Vanuatu

In *"Ancient Banyans, Flying Foxes and White Ginger": Five Pacific Women Writers*, Selina Tusitala Marsh (2004) recalls that Grace Mera Molisa (better known to many of her readers by the sobriquet “Amazing Grace”) was a true “poet of the people” (p. 238). Marsh (2004) commemorates Mera Molisa for her intellectual might and resilience:

> She was viewed as “amazing” owing to her personal fearlessness at confronting oppression and political hypocrisy, her radical way of thinking about women’s initiatives, about sustainable development of the environment, and about how Vanuatu should realise its Independence, and for her uncompromising stand for women and the improvement of their quality of life. (p. 238)

Mera Molisa was at once a “poet and politician, erstwhile Personal Secretary to the Prime Minister and longterm advisor to the National Council of Women” (Jolly 1991, as cited in Jolly, 1997, p. 141), making her one of the most prolific figures in the tropical Pacific political landscape. As a poet, she established herself by conveying her messages about gender equality “in the terse, staccato, short lines of her poems” (Cammish, 1994, p. 139). As the daughter of a political activist, she continued to cultivate nationalist sentiment and pride in Ni-Vanuatu's origin with a strong sense of Christianity, writing both in English and Bislama. This was, however, a kind of nationalism distinct from the earlier generation of male nationalist poets who saw women’s liberation as emblematic of corrupting Western influence. Informed by a liberal, Western educational and cultural knowledge, she was able to envision a new form of Pacific activism in her writing.

Mera Molisa found new ways to express Pacific identity in relation to the landscape, and Margaret Jolly suggests that “[i]n the imagery of Grace Mera Molisa’s nationalist poetry Vanuatu was ‘black-stone’—solidified lava flow, immobile and eternal” (1983, as quoted in Jolly, 1997, p. 138). This idea that Vanuatu—physically and culturally—is as durable and permanent as obsidian finds its strongest outlet in Mera Molisa’s two most well-known volumes of poetry, *Black Stone* and *Black Stone II*, published in 1983 and 1989 respectively (see Table 9 for an outline of selected poems from these volumes). The first volume was printed only thanks to financial support from the South Pacific Creative Arts Society (Crowl, 2005, p. 94). Following the publication of *Black Stone*, Mera Molisa launched Blackstone Publications in order to provide publishing opportunities for the writers of Vanuatu and to further enable her own activist aspirations. As Linda Crowl (2005) observes, “[s]he displayed courage and determination in publishing about politics, in a very politicised environment, and she did it on a shoestring. She was a trailblazer, and because she showed it could be done, other Ni-Vanuatu may now follow” (p. 95).

Table 9

Selection of Poems from Black Stone and Black Stone II by Grace Mera Molisa

Poet	Poem	Collection/Publication details (if known)	Year (in order)	Area of Provenance (if known)	Themes
Grace Mera Molisa	“Custom”	Black Stone: Poems by Grace Mera Molisa	Volume publication: 1983, pp. 24–25	Vanuatu	Women’s political and economic inferiority; gender inequality
	“Marriage”		Volume publication: 1983, pp. 26–28		Women’s political and economic inferiority; gender inequality; trauma

	"Litany of The Righteous Wives"		Volume publication: 1983, p. 30–31		gender inequality; domestic abuse
	"Ladies of Precedence"		Volume publication: 1983, p. 47		Women empowerment
	"Nonentity"	Black Stone II: Poems	Volume publication: 1989, p. 23		Women's political and economic inferiority; gender inequality;
	"Delightful Acquiescence"	Black Stone II: Poems	Volume publication: 1989, p. 24		Women's political and economic inferiority; gender inequality; criticism of women's conformity
	"Village Women"	Black Stone II: Poems	Volume publication: 1989, p. 24		Women empowerment

Mera Molisa's literary approach to activism is expansive and reaches well beyond the merely political to address the experiences of women in Vanuatu at all levels of society and culture. Her second volume, *Black Stone II: Poems* (1989), includes "Delightful Acquiescence," which Chris Prentice (2019) calls "chillingly literal" in its reading of the conditions facing women in Vanuatu (p. 148). Mera Molisa's (1989) poem openly criticises the way in which government hypocrisy and social norms entrench the subservience of women in Vanuatu society:

> Vanuatu men and women
>
> Love self-effacing
>
> acquiescing women. (lines 1–6, p. 24)

As Prentice (2019) puts it, Mera Molisa "suggests, at the thematic level, little opportunity for women's social or political agency" (p. 148). In the poem, the woman's "discursive space is mapped out, her existence is controlled, limited, oppressed and enforced by the customs and norms of the society" (Sai, 1997, p. 96). Mera Molisa demonstrates how established systems of hierarchy oppress women and discourage more independent and talented ones from asserting themselves. Under the auspices of tradition, women are obliged to fill gender-appropriate roles, and "[f]or better or worse / we force / talented women / into acquiescence" (lines 7–10, p. 24). The narrator caustically observes that "Vanuatu supports / liberation movements / in other parts of the world" while continuing to oppress women at home (lines 22–31, p. 24) . As Samantha Rose (2006) suggests, Mera Molisa "[s]uccinctly described her country's own struggle to gain women's rights" (p. 5). Moreover, "she

condemns women for accepting men's definitions of things" (Zimmer-Tamakoshi, 1995, p. 120). Here, the threats of violence are both figurative and literal:

> Half of Vanuatu
>
> is still colonised
>
> by her self.
>
> Any women
>
> showing promise
>
> is clouted
>
> into acquiescence. (lines 22–31, p. 24)

With "Delightful Acquiescence," Mera Molisa thus turns her critical faculties upon her own society, engaging in a new kind of nationalism that is not afraid to call into question cultural values, regardless of their causes and origins, where they lead to forms of oppression.

Mera Molisa's notion of self-colonisation does not refer to victim blaming but evokes the double-natured quality of colonisation when it comes to the rights of women. In "Delightful Acquiescence," Mera Molisa confronts the crushing reality facing women in Vanuatu, where they must survive an effective "double colonisation" by Western culture and their own culture. This suggests that the source of oppression for women in the Pacific is both endogenous and exogenous, with its source being both from within and without, in a way that helps to explain the last and seemingly intractable nature of gendered violence in the Pacific region.

Prior to colonisation, perceived offences by women were controlled by *kastom* in Vanuatu. After colonisation, as stated by Anne Dickson-Waiko (2013), in Papua New Guinea, brutal methods were applied by colonisers to achieve the colonial state, "thus the use of violence was normalised, simply because it was part of colonial policy" (p. 185). As a result, "[i]ndigenous women were abused, brutalised and sexually violated by officers" (Kituai as cited in Dickson-Waiko, 2013, p. 185). The consequences were drastic, and new standards were set. Furthermore, as has been articulated by several observers, de-colonisation and the period of independence provoked new versions of gender inequality, which forced both sexes to "acquire new subjectivities as they forged national identities distinct from their ethnic selves" (Dickson-Waiko, 2013, p. 187). The poem "Delightful Acquiescence" makes for Vanuatu women what has been described as "a claim for space in the political and public arena, a self-affirmation of their social role within the family and in the public sphere" (Crosato & Haviland, 2021, p. 49). It announces women's entry into discussions about Vanuatu's future.

One of the most powerful and pioneering volumes of poetry in Pacific literature is *Colonised People* (1987) by Grace Mera Molisa. Unlike *Blackstone Poetry* (1983), which "balances the tension between the achievement of nationhood and the perils of neocolonial existence, with only a couple of poems making the reference to the situation of women" (Jolly, 2005, p. 147), *Colonised People* focuses entirely on the women's position. This self-published volume was designed to increase women's activism and chances of becoming candidates for Ni-Vanuatu's parliamentary elections (Crowl, 2005, p. 94). Therefore, the booklet constitutes a strong political and anti-colonial manifesto, tackling mainly the double colonization of women and social changes between the sexes. As Anastasia Sia (1997) adds, "Colonised People arouses and provokes responses from not only Ni-Vanuatu women, but also Ni-Vanuatu men, the society and the Melanesian race" (p. 98). The collection combines ten poems that analyse the position of women in Vanuatu in the 1980s (a section of which is outlined in Table 10). The lines of these poems describe both physical and political aspects of this violence. Marsh (2014) distinguishes this volume as it calls into question the "principles of 'Democracy,' 'Christianity,' and 'Melanesian Values'." Therefore, the poetry volume serves as a signpost for the continuing journey that lies ahead.

Table 10

Selected Poems from Colonised People by Grace Mera Molisa

Poet	Poem	Collection/Publication details (if known)	Year (in order)	Area of Provenance (if known)	Themes
Grace Mera Molisa	"Colonised People"	Colonised People	Volume publication: 1987, p. 9–13	Vanuatu	Women's empowerment; women's position in society; women's needs
	"Women's Labor"		Volume publication: 1987, p. 16		Ordinary women as a foundation of society
	"Hilda Lini"		Volume publication: 1987, p. 26–27		Gender inequality; Women's position in society

The first page of the booklet makes a touching dedication: "TO THE WOMEN OF VANUATU who toil and labour daily unaided, unrecognised, unrewarded, just to cope with life's chores and THE HOPE that Future Generations of Vanuatu Women will be able to enjoy a better life." In the preface to this collection of poems, Chief James Tambe, Chief Willie Bongmatur, and S. Ngwele continue this thought and claim that the current Ni-Vanuatu government makes a significant effort to support women in their battle towards access to better education, participation in politics, and any "national

affairs" (Mera Molisa, 1987, p. 5). Nevertheless, they still underline that regardless of these efforts, women face multiple challenges in proving their abilities and capacities to engage in such roles. They state that "official and unofficial reports indicate that women in Vanuatu are denied, discouraged and brutalised by men using unjustified violence" (p. 5). Moreover, they add that instead of changing the situation of women in society, men often perceive them as "servants, slaves or sexual objects" (p. 5). As Selina Tusitala Marsh (2014) observes, "[t]his symbolic public stamp of approval from male power brokers in Vanuatu society aimed to encourage receptivity of its radical message in the general community."

To develop and clarify the double colonisation, Mera Molisa (1987) states, "Seven years after Independence, Men are Free, women are still colonised" (p. 7), and offers a change from the "victim's" mentality; one needs to be refused to proceed thinking as a slave. Another important aspect needed to achieve the societal changes is to understand that every woman is essential, and females ought to support each other in order to succeed. Therefore, honest and genuine discussions on these topics are necessary to overcome womens' lack of mental freedom in making choices. Even though Mera Molisa notices the difference in the treatment of women depending on their skin colour, especially in a post-colonial context, she also states that, regardless of their ethnicity, it is imperative that women encourage one another.

The poem "Colonised People" (Mera Molina, 1987, p. 9–13) strongly presents the reality of the rough treatment women receive daily, and "unites women as the colonized half of Vanuatu" (Zimmer-Tamakoshi, 1995, p. 118). Even though the official policies introduced by the government which aim to protect women are in place, the actual practice of these laws does not take place:

Vanuatu

Womenfolk

half

the population

remain

colonised

by

the Free men

of Vanuatu (lines 18–26, p. 9)

Regardless of the nation's growth towards independence, women remain unrecognised as equal to men. Sia (1997) argues that "women are represented as brainless and unintelligent, but men hold and keep knowledge. Men are free, women are not; men rule, women follow; men are masters, women are servants and so on" (p. 98). The lines of the poem emphasise the disbelief in how society treats both genders differently:

> Women
>
> are treated
>
> as if
>
> having no brain
>
> as if
>
> having no thought
>
> as if
>
> having no feeling
>
> as if
>
> incompetent
>
> and incapable (lines 39–49, p. 9)

What is more, the author states directly that every day, women are suppressed and continue being victims of atrocities of domestic violence, being subjected to the anger of their oppressors. Through the frustration and vexation that emerges through the words, the reader interprets that "[h]er anger should be seen against the background of statistics which reveal a higher mortality rate for women than for men" (Cammish, 1994, p. 139). Mera Molisa underlines that even animals are treated better and receive more mercy and empathy than a severely beaten woman:

> At least
>
> ten women a month
>
> in Port Vila
>
> alone
>
> mostly

bashed

on the head

and kicked

in the abdomen

and thorax

while pregnant

are admitted

because

their battered bodies

require suturing

re-structuring

re-construction (lines 178–194, p. 11)

The true consequences of people's colonisation illustrate the domination of minds of both men and women who do not care enough to support each other. While women are obliged to take care of men who take it for granted, they are left alone to carry the burden of overwhelming responsibilities in loneliness. The fact that they rarely find support from other women is devastating. Therefore, it requires restructuring, just as the broken bodies and wounds caused by the physical aspect in the circle of postcolonial violence.

Similar to Makini, Mera Molisa identifies women's subjugation within the institution of marriage and in cultural practices that relegate women to a subordinate position within the family. Contributing to the strain in high-status sexual and marital connections is the juxtaposition of idealisation of males who seem to be frightened by swift political and economic transformations and seek unwavering support from their spouses (Zimmer-Tamakoshi, 1995, p. 120). The last verses of "Colonised People" remain a strong statement proclaimed by Mera Molisa in her life's work:

Women too

have a right

to be Free.

Free to think

> Free to express
>
> Free to choose
>
> Free to love
>
> and be loved
>
> as Woman Vanuatu (lines 62–70, p. 13)

The complaint reminds the reader that all people should have the same full access to self-expression, privacy, and a sense of security. The lack of respectful relationships puts females in a dangerous predicament, as their homeland becomes the source of traumatic experiences. While both women and men share the same motherland, their position in society is far from equal. The system, which favours men, leaves women behind with limited access to freedom of choice and education, burdening them with overwhelming chores and labour. The poem "Colonised People" proves that Mera Molisa

> is also a strong critic of male domination, indigenous and introduced. She espouses feminist values even if she prefers not to identify herself in this way. She deplores the masculinism she perceives in the independent state of Vanuatu, which she helped to establish. (Jolly, 2005, pp. 146–147).

Consequently, Grace Mera Molisa stands as a model for each Ni-Vanuatu woman striving for respect, dignity and acceptance from her very own community. She remains a source of inspiration and emancipation for many women around the world.

As a part of her political engagement, Grace Mera Molisa was involved in the foundation of the aforementioned Blackstone Publications house and felt responsible for facilitating women's access to publishing their poetry on matters close to their hearts. In 1995, she edited and released the collection of poems by various authors, *Beneath Paradise*, which constituted the reprint of the Pacific Women's Documentation Project. This three-year initiative started in 1992 with the support of the Australian aid program (Crowl, 2005, p. 94). The document organised in 1995 by Pacific Grassroots Women's Organisations and Grassroots Women's Leaders for the NGO Forum remains a source of many intimate and personal stories of women across the Western South Pacific Ocean, as "[t]hrough photography, soundscapes and testimonials Beneath Paradise ensured stories of Pacific women were brought to the world's attention" (International Women's Development Agency, 2015, p. 18).

The volume explores the poetry that emerged in the 1990s and elaborates on the idea that Pasifika women are internally colonised, boldly calling out male hypocritical behaviour. *Beneath Paradise* (1995) includes poems composed by Betty Arthur, Agnes Dewenis, Linda Passingan, E. K., Tina S. Takashy, Sophia Jahan, Merilyn Tahi, and others. These authors began to use poetry to voice the ongoing exploitation of women in the Pacific region, contributing to this growing field that emerged in print in the last decades of the twentieth century.The manner of this expression later paved the way for other kinds of longer-form narratives and other forms of storytelling, drawing attention to matters of gendered violence and the subjugation of women in the region. The collection of poems consists of five sub-categories. The ones presented in the table below (Table 11) come mostly from the sections "Violence against Women" (pp. 7–38) and "The Status of Women" (pp. 49–67).

Table 11

Selection of Poems from Beneath Paradise (1995)

Poet	Poem	Collection/Publication details (if known)	Year (in order)	Area of Provenance (if known)	Themes
Tina Takashy	"A Piece of Me"	Beneath Paradise: A Collection of Poems from the Women in The Pacific NGOs Documentation Project edited by Grace Mera Molisa	Volume publication: 1995, p. 7	Federated States of Micronesia	Intimate partner violence; violence against women; trauma; depression; emotional abuse
Yishu Lai	"Ain't a Woman"	Beneath Paradise: A Collection of Poems from the Women in The Pacific NGOs Documentation Project edited by Grace Mera Molisa	Volume publication: 1995, p. 8; poem written 1995	Unknown	Women taken advantage of economically and politically; women empowerment; sacrifice of a beauty to meet up the good wife standards; patriarchy; gender inequality;
Koila Costello	"As A Child"	Beneath Paradise: A Collection of Poems from the Women in The Pacific NGOs Documentation Project edited by Grace Mera Molisa	Volume publication: 1995, p. 9; poem written 1994	Fiji	Child abuse; child negligence; violence against children;
Jilly J.	"Family Love"	Beneath Paradise: A Collection of Poems from the Women in The Pacific NGOs Documentation Project edited by Grace Mera Molisa	Volume publication: 1995, p. 10	Unknown	Father shouting at a spouse and children; lack of love within the family; children's fear

Anna Luvu	"Family Unity"	Beneath Paradise: A Collection of Poems from the Women in The Pacific NGOs Documentation Project edited by Grace Mera Molisa	Volume publication: 1995, p. 11	Solomon Islands	Father's anger towards a spouse and children; domestic violence; divorce;
Linda Passingen	"Hear Us, The Women of PNG"	Beneath Paradise: A Collection of Poems from the Women in The Pacific NGOs Documentation Project edited by Grace Mera Molisa	Volume publication: 1995, p. 12; poem written 1993	Rabaul, Papua New Guinea	Women taken advantage of economically and politically; violence against women; gender inequality;
Sophia Jahan	"Hopeful"	Beneath Paradise: A Collection of Poems from the Women in The Pacific NGOs Documentation Project edited by Grace Mera Molisa	Volume publication: 1995, p. 13	Suva, Fiji	Intimate partner violence; domestic violence
Mosmi S. D. Bhim	"I Admit"	Beneath Paradise: A Collection of Poems from the Women in The Pacific NGOs Documentation Project edited by Grace Mera Molisa	Volume publication: 1995, p. 14–17; poem written 1994	Fiji	Depression; gender inequality; violence against women; sexual abuse; victimisation;
Koila Costello	"Listen to A Human Plea"	Beneath Paradise: A Collection of Poems from the Women in The Pacific NGOs Documentation Project edited by Grace Mera Molisa	Volume publication: 1995, p. 20; poem written 1995	Fiji	Women's rights; women empowerment
Saras Singh	"Lost"	Beneath Paradise: A Collection of Poems from the Women in The Pacific NGOs Documentation Project edited by Grace Mera Molisa	Volume publication: 1995, p. 21	NA	Abandoned woman, intimate partner violence, domestic violence; emotional abuse
E. K.	"My Life"	Beneath Paradise: A Collection of Poems from the Women in The Pacific NGOs Documentation Project edited by Grace Mera Molisa	Volume publication: 1999, p. 23	NA	Emotional abuse; intimate partner violence; trauma
Grace Mera Molisa	"Petty personal Jalousies"	Beneath Paradise: A Collection of Poems from the Women in The Pacific NGOs Documentation Project edited by Grace Mera Molisa	Volume publication: 1995, p. 24–27	Vanuatu	Women empowerment; women solidarity; women's rights; gender inequality; women taken advantage of economically and politically
Aciri R Ratulevu	"Saqamua"	Beneath Paradise: A Collection of Poems from the Women in The Pacific NGOs Documentation Project edited by Grace Mera Molisa	Volume publication: 1995, p. 24–28; poem written 1995	Fiji	Prostitution; sex work; gender inequality; patriarchy; victim blaming;

Kaitip Anniely	"Stop Violence for A Better Life"	Beneath Paradise: A Collection of Poems from the Women in The Pacific NGOs Documentation Project edited by Grace Mera Molisa	Volume publication: 1995, p. 29; poem written 1995	Wewak, Papua New Guinea	Domestic violence; gender inequality;
Sophia Jahan	"Silence"	Beneath Paradise: A Collection of Poems from the Women in The Pacific NGOs Documentation Project edited by Grace Mera Molisa	Volume publication: 1995, p. 30–31	Suva, Fiji	Child sexual abuse; rape; incest; domestic violence
Rebecca Alman	"Two Kina"	Beneath Paradise: A Collection of Poems from the Women in The Pacific NGOs Documentation Project edited by Grace Mera Molisa	Volume publication: 1995, p. 33; poem written 1995	Wewak, Papua New Guinea	Prostitution; sex work; women objectification
Merilyn Tahi	"Violence"	Beneath Paradise: A Collection of Poems from the Women in The Pacific NGOs Documentation Project edited by Grace Mera Molisa	Volume publication: 1995, p. 34; poem written 1994	Vanuatu	Intimate partner violence; physical violence; trauma; domestic violence
Jenny J.	"Violence against Women"	Beneath Paradise: A Collection of Poems from the Women in The Pacific NGOs Documentation Project edited by Grace Mera Molisa	Volume publication: 1995, p. 35	Vanuatu	Alcoholic parent; domestic violence;
Vineeta Nand	"With nothing to Cherish"	Beneath Paradise: A Collection of Poems from the Women in The Pacific NGOs Documentation Project edited by Grace Mera Molisa	Volume publication: 1995, p. 36–37	Fiji	Alcoholic partner; domestic violence; trauma; depression
Betty Arthur	"Violence against Women"	Beneath Paradise: A Collection of Poems from the Women in The Pacific NGOs Documentation Project edited by Grace Mera Molisa	Volume publication: 1995, p. 38	Vanuatu	Violence against women; domestic violence; gender inequality
Grace Mera Molisa	"Invisibility"	Beneath Paradise: A Collection of Poems from the Women in The Pacific NGOs Documentation Project edited by Grace Mera Molisa	Volume publication: 1995, p. 55; poem written 1994	Vanuatu	Women status; gender inequality
Grace Mera Molisa	"Ni Vanuatu Women"	Beneath Paradise: A Collection of Poems from the Women in The Pacific NGOs Documentation Project edited by Grace Mera Molisa	Volume publication: 1995, p. 55; poem written 1994	Vanuatu	Women status; gender inequality

Lusey Goro	"Sepik Daughter"	Beneath Paradise: A Collection of Poems from the Women in The Pacific NGOs Documentation Project edited by Grace Mera Molisa	Volume publication: 1995, p. 58; poem written 1994	East Sepik, Papua New Guinea	Gender inequality; women status
Agnes Dewenis	"Tell Me Why, Man"	Beneath Paradise: A Collection of Poems from the Women in The Pacific NGOs Documentation Project edited by Grace Mera Molisa	Volume publication: 1995, p. 60; poem written 1995	Bougainville, Papua New Guinea	Gender inequality; women status; women's political and economic inferiority
Tina Takashy	"Woman Faces"	Beneath Paradise: A Collection of Poems from the Women in The Pacific NGOs Documentation Project edited by Grace Mera Molisa	Volume publication: 1995, p. 66–67; poem written 1994	Federated States of Micronesia	Women's political and economic inferiority; domestic violence; women empowerment
Grace Mera Molisa	"Invisible Barriers"	Beneath Paradise: A Collection of Poems from the Women in The Pacific NGOs Documentation Project edited by Grace Mera Molisa	Volume publication: 1995, p. 72–73; poem written 1994	Vanuatu	Women empowerment; patriarchy; women taken advantage of economically and politically

The call for change is clearly visible as the poems accentuate the crucial role of gender equality in providing future female generations with a dignified standard of life. The system, which overlooks women and favours men, gives silent permission to degrade and exploit females. The themes of the poems vary from women's political engagement to very intimate domestic violence incidents and psychological effects resulting in anxiety.

In her poem "Silence", Sophia Jahan (1995, pp. 30–31) illustrates the memory of domestic violence from the perspective of an adult woman who survived incestuous abuse. Frightened and isolated, the narrator remembers the father apologising to her and her siblings:

> said it would never happen again
>
> I am sorry for the bruises
>
> gentle caress,
>
> promise never to harass (lines 5–8, p. 30)

The closed doors and windows in the house represent the lack of exit from the tragic environment where even the screams of pain turn into whispers that the outside world is not able to hear. On the other hand, the "windows and doors banged shut" paints the image of a speaker re-visiting the old

house where the incidents took place, in person or in her memory, as the space that is already part of her past. Neglected, not being able to attend school and starving, children needed to be:

> Tiptoeing around,
>
> ‘cause he was asleep
>
> hope to God he doesn’t wake up and start again (lines 11–13, p. 30)

The vicious cycle of violence continues as beatings are intertwined with apologies and empty promises of change for the better. The perpetrator finds effective ways to silence the children so they never tell what is happening inside of the household to outsiders. The horrors endured by the family stay within its members, assumedly, for years. The intimate promises cause physical symptoms of gastrointestinal distress and suggest that the young girl is being assaulted by her father.

> That day never dawned
>
> yet many more little secrets
>
> threatened never to tell
>
> gnaw at my insides (lines 18–21, p. 30)

The secrecy and taboo around their living conditions indicate that the siblings are victims of sexual abuse. The molestation happens at night, and the darkness seemsto be endless for children waiting for the daytime. Even though, as an adult, the narrator suffers from the consequences of the traumatic and emotional damage, doubting the liveable future, she realises:

> I am the one who can make it
>
> Try is all I can do
>
> And I most certainly will
>
> For he may have taken my childhood, my past
>
> he most certainly doesn’t have
>
> my Will, Determination and Dreams. (lines 1–6, p. 31)

The narrator believes in the strength of survival, where the predator who stole happiness and innocence from her at a young age would not be able to control her future. Symbolically, as an adult, she becomes a protector of a hurt child who did not have anyone at the time of the rape. Since no one could defend and rescue her from what was happening, she becomes the child's voice and

promises to take good care of her, leading her to success and happiness, regardless of the wounds and harm.

In a more general context, where gendered violence is a global problem, the damage to economic, societal, and individual worth is striking. The ubiquitous tragedy caused by violence and seeking reparation is shown as a prevalent problem in "Violence" by a campaigner against domestic violence from Vanuatu, Merilyn Tahi (1995, p. 34). The long list of changes in people's bodies, health, mentality, social relationships, consciousness, and ambition is painful. Through the enumeration of the areas where the author's life has been affected, the narrator proves how many aspects of one's existence can be destroyed by violence:

> You give me a distorted face
>
> You give me crooked hands
>
> You give me black eyes
>
> You give me a broken skull
>
> You damage my health (lines 1–5, p. 34)

The narrator accuses "violence" not only of physical injury and disfigurement but of the trauma and overall relationship deterioration together with her wellness and mental health. The evident marks of abuse on the body are comparable to the anxiety and poisoned mindset of a victim who learns harmful patterns and exposes her internal universe to aggression and toxicity that damage her perception of the world that surrounds her. The lack of ability to control her own life and make any decisions by herself ruins her self-confidence and makes her feel detached from being responsible for her own life and choices.

The silent and powerless consent to the abuse undermines her self-worth and any education she received. She questions her intelligence and logic of thinking, as the world she involuntarily agrees to exist in constitutes a living hell. Through the last concluding verses of the poem, the narrator proves that violence has multiple faces and affects one's personal life on various levels, starting from physical damage threatening to one's life and health, through anxiety and post-traumatic disorder, to the long-lasting consequences of humiliation and lack of self-esteem which project into the destruction of self-image. The concluding paragraph of the poem accuses violence directly:

> Violence
>
> You are violent

You are oppressive

You are careless

You are irrespectable

You are Violence. (lines 24–29, p. 34)

At this moment, the recipient remarks that violence impersonates every human being who might be characterised by the mentioned adjectives, which means that violence itself could not exist without people involved in destructing behaviours and patterns. Through the list of damages caused by violence, Tahi wishes to raise social awareness of how catastrophic and poisonous the aftermath of cruelty is.

The female authors who opened up their hearts by telling their stories of suffering in the collection of poems *Beneath Paradise* are some of the first who stood up against gendered violence in their region. They shaped the activism, writing, and courage of future generations of women, aiming to change their motherlands into safe and respectful places where they could grow and be valued. Undoubtedly, Grace Mera Molisa is one of the most prominent tropical Pacific authors and serves as a great model and example in women's activism. Her poetry and activism thus opened up many ways for females in tropical Pacific islands to be published and recognised for their work. To this day, she remains an inspiration for many.

4.7 Haunani-Kay Trask and *Light in the Crevice Never Seen* (1994)

In her poem "Hawai'i: Prelude to a Journey: for Haunani-Kay" Selina Tusiatala Marsh (2009) describes Haunani-Kay Trask's devotion to her writing, mythology and spirituality:

you go then

and meet

Pele's pen

her black lava

ever pricking the night (lines 21–25, p. 53)

and:

you go then

smell embered Lincolns

wrapped in kalo leaves

wedged in creases

of Pele-ʻai-honua

eater of the land (lines 5–10, p. 54)

Haunani-Kay Trask (Figure 6) passed away in July 2021. She was a controversial political activist fighting for Hawaii's independence. Being first a student and subsequently becoming a lecturer, she boldly championed many debates on political, economic, environmental, and feminist issues. The New York Times, called this scholar, academic, and poet the "Champion of Native Rights in Hawaii" and described her political activism visible throughout her work as her "poetry employed imagery suggestive of a sentient island bleeding from the violence of colonialism" (Williams, 2021).

Figure 6

Haunani-Kay Trask

Note: The undated picture published on the 9th of July, 2021 by the New York Times in the article "Haunani-Kay Trask, Champion of Native Rights in Hawaii, Dies at 71", accessed on the 10th of June, 2024.

Besides her main interest, which fully invested her in politics, she wrote about the movements and ideas that would enable men and women to live in harmony. The double standards that have been discussed by multiple other poets were also expressed by Haunani-Kay Trask in *Fighting the Battle of Double Colonization: The View of a Hawaiian Feminist* (1983). She noted that Hawaiian women's fight against colonialism was often hampered by local men who insisted on

determining women's roles and status in her homeland. Calling herself a "practising feminist," after receiving education in the United States and in Eastern Europe, Haunani-Kay Trask (1983, p. 5) came back to Hawaii to engage in the grassroots movement 'Ohana. Disgusted by the American influence, commercialisation, over-sexualisation, and exploitation of her native lands, the scholar noticed "patterns of male domination and conscious exclusion of women from policy-making" in her group (Trask, 1983, p. 12). She provides an example of basic tasks women of 'Ohana were given to perform, while distinguishing two groups of women who had a chance of a wider spectrum of contribution: firstly, elderly women (kupuna), who, thanks to their wisdom and age, were able to supervise and mentor other members; and secondly, educated, single women who "negated the prevalent characterization of women as merely erotic-reproductive objects (lover/mother roles)" (Trask, 1983, p. 15).

Nevertheless, as Hawaiian women, they were discouraged from aiming for leadership positions, even if they possessed some special skills or knowledge on given subjects. Consequently, "[t]hey would always be limited in the development of their talents and the power to use them" (Trask, 1983, p. 16). Moreover, similarly to the pattern in Papua New Guinea, women would be teased for their Western education or marital status, whereas that was not the case for men with similar backgrounds. The women could rarely count on their partners' emotional support. Bruddahs (brothers) shared a male code that incorporated "an undisguised, occasionally brutal macho ethic which includes violence toward women and children" as "it was not uncommon for men in the 'Ohana to defend violence against women as a man's prerogative or none of anyone's business" (Trask, 1983, p. 19). In short, women not only suffered from the colonial abuse as Hawaiians but "experienced all the oppressions typical of patriarchy: structural barriers to achievement; lack of accepted leadership roles; particularly spiritual roles; consciously-directed harassment from men; especially sexual baiting; and the constant refusal by men to convey recognition and authority" (Trask, 1989, p. 22).

Trask wrote two poetry volumes, *Light in the Crevice Never Seen* (1994) and *Night Is a Sharkskin Drum* (2002), and one academic book, *Eros and Power: The Promise of Feminist Theory* (1986). In the introduction to *Light in the Crevice Never Seen* (1994) , Eleanor Wilner remarks on the force of Trask's political activism and the influence she has on other Hawaiian women:

> [t]hus the movement for Hawaiian sovereignty—legal, spiritual, and cultural—draws much of its energy from the mana of women. And these women make it clear that whatever their affinities, their difference from haole feminists is precisely that for

> native women the concerns of the collective are the guiding impulse for the uses of power, and their collective is the Hawaiian people. (in Trask, 1986, p. xix)

As the word “haole” signifies in Hawaiian a white foreign person, this sentence clearly indicates the separateness and pride of Hawaiian people speaking of their values representing family and closeness with nature. Some of the poems where Trask states this mental separation in values are “Christianity” (1994, pp. 43–46), or in reference to colonisation and white Americans in a metaphor of a Western woman in “Na Wahine Noa” (1994, p. 53).

Hence, the term *mana tama’ita’i* offered by Selina Tusitala Marsh (2004) fits perfectly to present all women analysed in this chapter. Moreover, in her article on Haunani-Kay Trask’s poetry, Ha’åni Lucia Falo San Nicolas (2003) uses the specific word *mana wahine* to underscore “the embodiment of female mana (supernatural or divine power, energy or authority) made evident through her dynamic roles as a scholar, activist, kumu (teacher), film director, author, creative writer, sister, friend, and more” (p. 39) which aptly describes brave women activists and poets such as Trask.

One of Trask’s prominent and powerful poems directly engaging with the theme of gendered violence is called “Long-Term Strategies” (1994, p. 57). The first lines of the poem emphasise the many things men do to women against their will, physically forcing themselves on them, hurting them, and raping them. These first stanzas are ironic inversions. Men do all these things women do not have the capacity to do, and nor should they. This is a condemnation that cleverly amounts to a litany of men’s sins:

> We can’t rape men
>
> put anything in them
>
> against their will
>
> pull down their secrets
>
> chilled by fear, or force
>
> tight apertures
>
> fresh and wide.
>
> We can’t stalk and take
>
> bleed the night
>
> squeeze hysteria

from burning stars (lines 1–11, p. 57)

Up until this point, the poem enumerates the accusations. They constitute physical harm, cruelty, and sadistic tendencies. The narrator describes the drastic abuse of a woman's body, which is humiliated, insulted and sacrificed to cruel motives. She describes psychological abuse, where through manipulation and entitlement, a man gradually gains an emotional advantage over a woman. The way he abuses her body is inhuman and devoid of morality. He destroys her body not only through the way he talks to her but also in a spiritual way. A woman does not sneak up to attack, bleed her victim and squeeze out the last scream. A woman does not give a man life trauma by insulting his body to a degree that he will never forget.

After a break, the narrator completely changes and shifts her tone. Trask (1994) explains to men that what women are capable of doing is to strip men of their manhood and power figuratively, but it is also a literal threat. There are "young women dancers" who "learn castration / as an art" (p. 57). Pacific identity resides in the historical female, the Jungian archetype of the goddess warrior. When a man falls asleep, he remains at the mercy of the woman who can proceed with her righteous anger and revenge. The poem ends on a powerful note. Women will take back the power, Pele's Hills—a society with a long tradition of vengeful women. There are implications of the shift in the poem towards ways that women can strip men of their power.

4.8 Conclusion: The Legacy of the Foremothers of Tropical Pacific Poetry

In 2008, the Faculty of Arts at The University of Auckland offered a single semester course titled "Pacific Poetry in English 720" taught by Selina Tusitala Marsh (2008). The program analysed the work of the three poets Marsh identified as the "foremothers" of Pacific poetry. These writers were Konai Helu Thaman, Grace Mera Molisa, and Haunani-Kay Trask. In this chapter, I discussed their work in the context of other prominent authors of their era. Marsh subsequently shows how the legacy of these foremothers inspired contemporary diasporic writers Teresia Teaiwa, Tusiata Avia, and Karlo Mila in New Zealand. Like their predecessors, this later generation of authors served as a counterpoint to what Marsh (1999) portrayed as "prescribed roles for us [by a coloniser] as the sexual servant, the dusky maiden, the exotic native, the innocent savage, the 'happy-go-lucky fuzzy-haired' girl" (p. 343). Nonetheless, in their poetry, Helu Thaman, Mera Molisa, Jully Sipolo, Trask, and others speak of the very real plights of physical abuse suffered by women in the Pacific.

The intense subject matter engaged with by women poets in the Pacific in the twentieth century shaped the content of multiple publications within the Pacific but also affected the writing of the broader diasporic communities of Australia, New Zealand, and the United States. The female prose writers of the Pacific often received Western educations and had mixed ethnic backgrounds,

which provided yet another perspective on Pacific identity. Nonetheless, their writing always included the traditional values of their ancestors while conveying newfound feminist ideas that sought to empower women. This was literature designed to help Pacific women stand up for what is right and not to enable perpetrators to harm them. These very real and troublesome oppressions against women and culture have left deep and lasting marks on the collective psyche of the Pacific.

The poetry written by these prominent authors often conveys a sense of betrayal, shock, and disappointment. For all women from the Pacific who unite in the common work of the shared fight against violence, who write about the struggle against colonialism and its aftermath, who join battles for the protection of their environment, cultivate cultural values, argue for access to education, stand for independent politics, and advocate for the presence of women in parliament, the bold poetry of these Pacific writers is a model. It also offers personally therapeutic qualities: moving beyond the first poems found in anthologies that took shelter in anonymity, these signature poems demonstrate how together and iteratively over time, women's voices in the Pacific gained strength, not only to speak out against social and political issues, but also about personal issues—all of which are embodied in the poetry of gendered violence.

Chapter Five

Hybrid Narrative Forms: Finding Ways to Speak About Gendered Violence in Literary Prose of the Pacific

The emergence of poetry in the 1970s and 80s provided a platform for a generation of women to articulate personal and cultural narratives of gendered violence across the Pacific. The next part of this thesis extends the genealogy I traced in previous chapters of female poets expressing issues of gendered violence in poetry to understand how the articulation of gendered violence in women's prose—short fiction, novels, and longer narrative poems—is both indebted to the generations of female poets discussed in the last chapter and to the communities of women inside and outside the Pacific diaspora. The Samoan concepts of *aiga* (extended family) and *talanoa* (talking), and practices of storytelling such as *fāgogo* and *su'ifefiloi,* which are not just narrative forms but also community practices and cultural treasures, become key modes by which narratives in English, for writers based in the South Pacific—and beyond, in the wider tropical Pacific diaspora—reclaim local traditions. They also draw on oral storytelling traditions to find culturally safe ways to articulate the problems of gendered violence in prose. The hybridity of oral and other forms reflects the diversity as well as commonalities of Pacific identities across the diaspora and within the Pacific islands, mixing old and new forms as well as indigenous and exogenous ways of finding a voice for gendered violence.

5.1 Summary of the chapter

The chapter examines the role of women writers in the Pacific in using prose to address gendered violence, drawing on both oral storytelling traditions and colonial literary forms to confront issues that are often taboo to discuss. By blending indigenous cultural practices with modern literary techniques, these writers, like Sia Figiel, creatively navigate societal barriers, giving voice to the trauma of gendered violence and opening space for future generations to continue the fight for women's rights and recognition. In Albert Wendt's work, male and female writers in the Pacific address issues like gendered violence and trauma, with Wendt himself exploring these topics through male perspectives, though his contributions opened the door for more women writers like Sia Figiel to tackle these issues directly. Figiel's *Where We Once Belonged* confronts the pervasive gendered violence in Samoa, depicting its societal impact while resisting colonial stereotypes by highlighting the complexity and diversity of Samoan life and the internal constraints that prevent women from speaking out. Figiel's *Where We Once Belonged* explores the painful intersection of colonial and patriarchal violence, highlighting the generational trauma faced by Samoan women, especially through the stories of Siniva and Alofa, as they navigate societal rejection, gendered violence, and the suppression of female voices, all while finding solidarity in their own private, girl-only spaces.

Sia Figiel's novels, including *The Girl in the Moon Circle* and *They Who Do Not Grieve*, explore the cycles of gendered violence, intergenerational trauma, and the complexities of Samoan womanhood, where young girls experience sexual exploitation, physical abuse, and societal repression, while seeking empowerment and reconciliation with the painful legacies of their ancestors. Figiel's work emerges as a case study of the limits and affordances of narrative to speak out and address gendered violence in the Pacific Island nation of Samoa, and begins to consider the role of the Pacific diaspora in contributing to the capacity for Pacific narratives to defy cultural taboos.

5.2 Storytelling: Oral Traditions

> It is said that they have no literature; they have a splendid one, but it has hitherto and through the ages been circulated only by word of mouth, retained, as all civilized literature was originally, in the memory. (Andersen, 1928, p. 3)

In all the histories of narrative in the Pacific, narrative's roots in oral traditions are emphasised (in Duckworth 1995, p. xii and Kanere & Sullivan, 1986, p. xii). Besides limited publishing outlets, the strong oral tradition in the Pacific offers an explanation for the relatively fewer numbers of novels and long prose narratives in the Pacific, in general, in contrast to the flowering of poetry which is still in the process of emerging. It may be tempting to conclude that long prose forms are considered *palagi*[19] and associated with foreign influences. Sina Va'ai (1999) argues that "the marginalisation of the oral traditions and literature of the Pacific Islands led to the misconception that these indigenous peoples had no sense of the elements of literature at all and that the only literature of value was that written by Europeans" (p. 209).

Moreover, in colonial accounts of oral traditions of Oceanic literature, the prediction was that the oral histories and art forms of the Pacific would 'die out.' In 1957, J. Frank Stimson wrote:

> In this language, soft with its many vowel-sounds, the Polynesians created their greatest art-form, literature. Unwritten, preserved only by the unbroken line of human memory, it was a living, vocal force, passing from one generation to the next, sonorous and grand— until today, when, worn by the rub of an alien civilization, the line has frayed and broken. The oral literature of Polynesia dies with the last of the remembering sages. (pp. viii–ix)

[19] In Samoan, a white or non-Samoan person.

Yet, rather than 'dying out,' as colonialists once predicted oral forms would, in their necrophiliac 'dying race' theories, oral traditions have been reinvented by contemporary writers—in powerful ways by female authors, as this chapter will show. This may, in part, be because, contrary to the formal ceremonial setting in which men are the major representatives in oratory, the home environment of a domestic household is where mostly women perform the role of a storyteller. According to D. S. Long (1998, p. 232), the relatively large number of female-authored children's books in the tropical Pacific is another instance of this.[20] This strong association between women and the domestic sphere in the tropical Pacific has, on the one hand, restricted the publication of longer prose forms but has also favoured the home environment for the relaying of oral tales (Kanere Koru & Sullivan, 1986, pp. xii–xiii). In the written literature of the Pacific, oral tales find new forms of expression in postcolonial narrative prose that has flowered since the work of writers such as Robert Louis Stevenson and Albert Wendt.

Yet, the deployment of prose forms for raising issues around gendered violence in the tropical Pacific is a matter fraught with challenges. It is a matter that is compounded by issues around access to publishing longer forms, the marginalisation of Pacific literature, its non-conformity with European standards, and its closer ties with the poetic spoken utterance. But, it is also faced with other challenges in the use of *palagi* forms and in terms of the barriers to speaking out in the direct and plain-speaking modes required by prose narrative forms. This chapter considers these barriers and looks at ways that prose writers, inspired by and building on the poetic tradition and poetic advances that came before, find ways to innovatively express urgent matters of gendered violence in prose forms. What emerges is insight into the way that the oral character of communication associated with family closeness and ties (*aiga*) has become both a stumbling block and a means for women to find ways to speak out. This can be done safely in prose communication by mimicking the characteristics of oratory in ways that build intimacy with the reader and stimulate the safety of a relational utterance.

It is often noted that the significant literary figure behind the popularisation of the written form of storytelling in Samoa was Robert Louis Stevenson (1850–1895), author of the colonial adventure novels *Treasure Island* (1881)*, Kidnapped* (1886)*,* and *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886)*,* among other titles. After his arrival in Samoa in 1889 on a yacht holiday, Stevenson

[20] The significance of women in the household and in oratory is also highlighted in the documentary *Exploring Gender Equality Issues in Samoa*, which starts with a legend of the construction of the "afolau" house told by Orator Chief Falealupo, Tulāfale Falealupo. The story describes a competition between the Falealupo girl, Sina, and her suitor, Leleisi'uao from Palauli, who fails to thatch his side of a house before Sini finishes hers and therefore fails a test that forces him to return home with no spouse.

built a house in Apia—where he lived out the last four years of his life. This house, in Vailima, is now preserved as the Robert Louis Stevenson Museum, a tribute that shows how much Stevenson was and continues to be a popular and well-respected member of the Samoan community. As Gavin Bell (1995) states about the Scottish author and the venerated role he was given, which "the Samoans who knew him affectionately" named him "as Tusitala (writer of tales)" (p. 8). The fact that this is the name of a former Aotearoa New Zealand poet laureate Selina Tusitala Marsh has adopted for herself strongly signifies not only the enduring importance of this title but also of the hybrid postcolonial nature of Pacific writing, which has often drawn on both native traditions and colonial influences. Stevenson made a significant impact on the literary heritage of Samoa. However, the imprint of European forms of written narrative did not extinguish powerful and important precolonial forms and protocols, as I will further explore. Moreover, even though Stevenson's writing may have been a foreign import to Oceania, he was accepted there in part because he respected the local protocol of *fa'a Sāmoa,* which is important for any storyteller of oral or written prose in the islands to acknowledge.

5.3 Oceanic Epistemologies: The Pacific Way

As Jan Knappert (1995) indicates, "The Pacific Ocean has almost as many cultures as there are islands, so that its spiritual world is as multi-coloured as its coral reefs or the flora of its coasts, where over a thousand different languages are spoken" (p. 11). This thesis pays deep respect to the diversity of Pacific cultures and their complexities, the subtleties of which are beyond the scope of an outsider such as myself to aspire to comprehend. As early as 1928, in the Preface to his volume *Myths & Legends of The Polynesians*, Johannes C. Andersen stresses the importance of understanding the originality of the Oceanic way of being, in contrast to the Western one, and also the limits of Western understanding:

> We have for some time realised that even those who have collected some of the ancient lore had done so with only half understanding; the acquisition of the language is but the first step. (…) We cannot think as they think; they cannot think as we think; and the result has been much misunderstanding, much misinterpretation. (p. 3–4)

Yet, it is crucial to note that all the literature and cultures of the Pacific are linked by a way of life called "Pacific Way" (Subramani, 1985, p. xiii). Certainly, this way of life differs for each of the islands. For instance, *Vaka i Taukei: The Fijian Way of Life* (1983) describes the customs respected in Fiji, while the Western Samoan one is referred to as *fa'a Sāmoa*, which means the 'Samoan way.' Yet, commonalities also draw each island's culture together. In *fa'a Sāmoa* and indeed throughout much

of the Pacific, narrative storytelling has coded rules and expectations. In Samoa, "[a]s family heads, the chiefs administer family lands, uphold their group's prestige and honour, and supervise familial work and ceremonial activities" (Holmes, 1969, p. 342); they have a role to play in overseeing, therefore, the circumstances of oratory, and thus a role in authorising and indeed in some ways limiting what can be said.

These rules exist in part because, throughout the tropical Pacific, the craft of telling a story stands for much more than expressing oneself, as Steubel (1989) observes: "[t]he art of oratory demands great esteem and responsibility. There is a continuation of ancient traditions meaning that *tulafale* (orator) must uphold the social status of a family or village" (p. 7). Throughout the Pacific, storytellers are revered and accorded high social status:

> The storyteller is a special person. It takes a particular talent to tell a story in a way that captivates an audience. To know how to build up emotions so that listeners are eager with anticipation, to know when to pause, to know when to repeat things for proper effect, to be able to gradually weave plot so that the audience becomes more and more involved: this is the art of the storyteller. (Kanere Koru & Sullivan, 1986, p. xii).

Storytelling has always occupied a pivotal role in tropical Pacific cultures as a means of conveying core values, morals, and historical knowledge through the generations (Kanere Koru & Sullivan, 1986, p. xi). Indeed, each specific culture of the islands upholds its own set of codes and values around storytelling. In Hawai'i, for instance, storytelling provides the taleteller with a privileged status in transmitting non-material values entwined in one's existence, such as "ancestry, history, religion, human relations, crafts, and the natural world" (Duckworth, 1995, p. xii). Regardless of their specificities in some islands, Oceanic epistemologies share many similarities, including rules governing the choosing of orators, who have traditionally been male except in certain circumstances, such as the *fāgogo* with their links to the domestic sphere.

5.4 *Fāgogo:* Myths and Legends in Storytelling

Not unlike the Western fairytale, the traditional storytelling practice, *fāgogo*, "teach(es) each new generation of readers what makes a good story and perhaps, at some unconscious level, even what a story is" (Long, 1998, p. 232). As one commentator on the practice notes:

> In Samoan folklore, a *fāgogo* is a story told mostly at night, privately inside individual homes. It transports the audience into the folklore world of heroes and heroines, of supernatural forces acting for good and for evil, but is set against a background of a

> typical local society, making it immediately comprehensible to Samoans of all ages. (Moyle, 1981, cited in Fairbairn-Dunlop, 1993, p. 136)

Because the private sphere of the house is, to a large degree, seen as typically the female domain, *fāgogo* is a practice in which female storytellers excel instead of public male orators (Sullivan, 1986, pp. xii–xiii). Historically, within Samoa and across the Pacific, heroes and heroines would be presented in these kinds of stories, and similar figures recur across them. Certain stories, such as the one about Tafai,[21] are known across the Pacific under different names (e.g. Kahai in Hawaii or Tawhaki to the Maori people), and sometimes the parts of a plot or circumstances are changed. Nevertheless, the same hero or heroine often recurs across many cultural inflections of a particular tale (Stone, 1970, p. ix). One such recurring figure in these stories, as A. W. Reed (1974) observes, is the example of "[t]he great god of the ocean known to the Maori of New Zealand as Tangaroa" who is "Tagaloa in Samoa and Tonga, Ta'aroa in Tahiti, Tanaoa in the Marquesas, and Kanaloa in Hawaii" (p. 1). The presence of supernatural power and spirits remains a prevalent theme in most of the tropical Pacific narratives, and especially in the fairytale-like night-time domain of the *fāgogo*. As Stimson, back in 1957, notes of the presence of supernatural figures in tropical Pacific folkways:

> The spirits of the gods were everywhere— in storm and winds, in the flash of a meteor or the glow of the moon, in the valleys and the mountains. The sea itself was a great, moving marae whose waters were sacred, and there were shark-gods who dwelt in it. (Stimson, 1957, p. xliii)

The closeness with nature and belonging to the Ocean is also a fundamental part of tropical Pacific literature—both written and oral. Nature remains a strong component of one's identity as much as prayers to the spirits of gods at the altars of their temples. As Stimson (1957) further outlines, stories were used for navigating not only the past and the present but also quite literally for finding one's way. Polynesians, in particular, demonstrate in their stories an "astonishing working knowledge of astronomy, which guided the ships by the stars, by the sun, and by their close and studied observation of the waves, the winds, clouds, currents and birds" (Stimson, 1957, p. xlii).

In the most contemporary practices (which are further commented upon in the conclusion of this thesis), it has been observed that *fāgogo* is frequently used in the digital media of New Zealand by the Samoan diaspora, enhancing the traditional culture and strengthening connections between

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[21] The name of the mythical hero appearing in multiple legends and folklore across the Pacific under various forms of names according to the regional language and pronunciation.

people (Tielu, 2016, p. viii). Tielu (2016) also foreshadows this connecting role of digitalised traditional storytelling in the diaspora and its connection to fostering a sense of belonging by including the following dedication in her own digitalised *fāgogo*. Tielu (2016) states, "This is for my Samoans still trying to find a way home. And by 'home' I mean stay right where you are and know you belong" (p. x). This moving dedication implies that many contemporary Pasifika storytellers continue to use *fāgogo* to 'find their way' and navigate through difficult terrain and rough seas—and not just of the literal kind; it also implies that the story form has adapted and changed over time, and according to the needs of the teller, as we will see in this chapter.

Tielu (2016) characterises historical, also called "formational," *fāgogo* as storytelling in the forms of *lagi* (songs), *solo* (poems), and *tagi* (chant), which convey genealogical, religious, and societal norms. Tielu (2016) further notes that while contemporary *fāgogo* retains many characteristics of the original oratory, it "does not function as an explanatory point of origin for an aspect of Samoan culture, but as reflections, commentary or speculation on life" (p. x). Moreover, the latter is told both in Samoa and by the Samoan diaspora worldwide (Tielu, 2016, p. 20). This part of the thesis takes a closer look at how these practices have been adapted in stories that raise the issue of gendered violence and serve to navigate through it. In the selection of work I discuss here, the continuity of *fāgogo* and a specific way of "telling the stories in the natural mixture of colloquial and formal language" (Fairbairn-Dunlop, 1998, p. 140) are not the only ways that the present needs of female writers have called up and called upon the past. The narratives chosen for discussion include short stories, hybrid verse novels, novels, and other forms. The selected narratives present women facing gender-based violence either as individuals conquering their predators with fierce bravery or as vulnerable women struggling with internal conflicts and dilemmas where decision-making and resilience are often based on family (*āiga*) bonds and reliant on compliance with societal norms.

Telling a story of gendered violence in the tropical Pacific is no straightforward undertaking, as this thesis has already shown in its analysis of poetry. Yet, poetry, as Emily Dickinson (2020) famously observed, allows a way to "Tell all the truth but tell it slant." In this chapter, I consider in more depth the limits and affordances of storytelling in prose to reveal violence against women in the tropical Pacific. The number of factors influencing the broadly understood limitations in expressing gendered violence through literature are many. In general terms, gendered violence is a form of trauma, often taking a long time to process and existing outside the bonds of narratable language. However, in the tropical Pacific context, in addition to these issues, one of the main factors that stand in the way of novelistic expression is the form of writing, which has its roots in colonial European traditions. Moreover, in the case of literature written by women, the task is arduous

because they are the first authors to talk about this problem openly and refer to domestic violence directly in a culture of denial and reprisal. These topics often remain taboo, and confronting the sad reality can be a burdensome experience, especially if it conflicts with the generally accepted, conformist understandings and social mores. Talking about such topics in Pacific Island cultures often leads to social ostracism. To address and overcome these limitations through prose, a number of female authors have developed particular techniques, often drawing on poetic utterance and Pacific modes.

Pacific women writers who write about gendered violence through prose demonstrate poetic resourcefulness and resilience to all the above-mentioned challenges. They overcome the limits in expressing what is destroying their society, forcing the reader to process, digest, and analyse the content of their books in the belief that it will have a practical impact on the fight against violence. Like the poets who came before them, the first Pacific writers in prose who addressed these topics of gendered violence—most often in the context of domestic violence— raised the issue in a peripheral way, giving it only marginal space in the pages of their books.

One of the first tropical Pacific writers who touched on this topic in his novels is Albert Wendt—a male writer who also showed the power of the diaspora in addressing topics so taboo to address for 'those who remain' in the Pacific islands of origin. Building on Wendt's work and the female poets who came before her, Sia Figiel is the first female Samoan writer to address these topics in a sustained and direct way in literary prose. Her 1996 breakthrough novel *Where We Once Belonged* highlights not only the scale of violence that destroys and traumatises society from the inside but also shows what problems and limitations the author faces when she attempts to raise these issues to readers or interlocutors inside the local community and readers from outside its cultural circle. Figiel's work itself proves how complex the fight against harmful prejudices, fears, and stereotypes is in this historical and social context. At the same time, Figiel proves how important it is to understand this domestic and internal problem from both an insider's and an outsider's perspective. Through their work and overcoming the boundaries that prevent discussing issues of violence, Figiel and the other authors whose works I analyse in the following chapters show courage and creativity in discovering, analysing, and unceasingly striving to address their problems. This courage and boldness build a platform for subsequent generations of women who are increasingly bold in addressing the source of these problems in prose literature, and who are determined to improve the treatment of women not only in their own region but globally as well.

5.5 Albert Wendt: "A Mighty Giant"

The rich heritage of bold poetry tackling the issues of gendered violence, forming a path for future generations of women to fight for equal rights, enables authors such as Sia Figiel to continue their mission. Poets such as Von Reiche, Mera Molisa, Helu Thaman, Makini (Sipolo), Trask, and many others created the environment and circumstances in which contemporary women writers stimulate change for the better across Oceania and the Pacific diaspora through their poetic work. A generation of female poets created a way for not only women but also Pacific men to speak about the problem of violence. Consequently, some of the first long forms of narratives in the tropical Pacific, which would tackle the matters of gendered violence and generational trauma of perpetuating harmful patterns, were presented in the 1970s. Given the circumstances in the Pacific that favour men's public utterance and oratory over women's, it is unsurprising that one of the first authors to tackle these issues in his novels was the male author, the highly celebrated Albert Tuaopepe Wendt.

In *Albert Wendt and Pacific Literature: Circling the Void* (2003), Paul Sharrad calls Wendt the "most prolific and influential contemporary writer of the Pacific Islands" (p. vii). Besides the enormous success in the reception of his novels, Wendt's significant contribution to the development of tropical Pacific literature globally as an editor, scholar, and academic is prolific. As a part of the Samoan diaspora, he gathered the creative works of various authors in Oceania, spearheading landmark anthologies such as *Lali: A Pacific Anthology* (1980), *Nuanua: Pacific Writing in English since 1980* (1995), *Whetu Moana: Contemporary Polynesian Poetry in English* (2002), and *Mauri Ola: Contemporary Polynesian Poems in English* (2010). As a nationalist, Wendt also made a significant impact on overturning the longtime claim made by outsiders on the Pacific by raising the issue that this was cultural appropriation. Regardless of the genuine motivations (or not) behind such endeavours, Wendt powerfully argued that non-native writers could never understand or obtain the perspective of native insiders in the Pacific. That said, outside influences also impacted Wendt's upbringing and education. Wendt belongs to the generation of Pacific scholars educated in Aotearoa New Zealand, guided by progressive nonconformists, who "thus face the difficulty of defending themselves as a distinct voice within a discourse that is already critical of Western colonialism and colonial historiography" (Linnekin, 1997, p. 203).

This insider/outsider position extends to Wendt's portrayal of women's issues, as a male writer. In an interview with Christe Michel in 2004, Albert Wendt admits, "[w]hen I was very young, I thought that a lot of my most important portrayals were of women" (p. 151). However, even the title of Wendt's first semi-autobiographical novel, *Sons for the Return Home*, published in 1973, suggests

his emphasis on the male perspective. *Sons for the Return Home* delves into the complex dynamics of cultural identity in the Tropical Pacific, particularly for those, like himself, who leave for further education and return to navigate restrictive cultural mores. These include complex dynamics between generations and between men and women. Wendt's subsequent novel, *Pouliuli* (1977), delves further into these complexes, though perhaps in ways that attempt to account for male violence rather than express the female point of view. It presents the complexity of "the sadomasochistic relation of the man and the woman" (Lacabanne, 2007, p. xx) mixed with guilt, shame, and terror. Through the Jungian references, the author investigates the primordial instincts of the main male protagonist, Faleasa, who "eventually analyses clearly his sexual relationship with his wife which consisted in raping her or submitting to her" (Lacabanne, 2007, p. xx). Admittedly, many of Wendt's works emphasise men's business and perspectives over women's. For instance, *Leaves of The Banyan Tree* (1979) focuses on the men's world. In it, women's positions are confined to functional domestic roles in the service of being a mother, spouse, and sister (Brewster & Prentice, 2020, p. 195). Over a decade later, Wendt's novel *Ola* (1991) shifted to create a female protagonist, telling the story from her perspective and shaping the plot into a father-daughter novel. The author admitted that before its publication, he was met with some criticism towards the representation of women in his fiction, which he sought to address. With the publication of *Ola*, reportedly, "Samoan women, who were Ola's age and had been through the same experience of being educated abroad and who were widely travelled and had survived broken marriages, loved the book" (Ellis, 1997, p. 81).

Wendt is generally known as an author who focused on racial themes and postcolonial topics (Sharrad, 2003, p. 47) rather than the plight of women. Nevertheless, his work did help pave the way for Pacific authors to discuss the mentioned matters in prose narratives. As the prominent female novelist of the Pacific, Sia Figiel (2016), has said of Albert Wendt, these struggles fought by Pacific Islanders and tropical Pacific writers are "[b]attles already fought and paths already cleared singularly by a mighty giant without whose shoulders we wouldn't be here, today." Figiel pays tribute to Wendt as a path-clearing battler in her portrayal of Alofa, the young female protagonist of her first published novel, *Where We Once Belonged* (1996a)—a figure who speaks out, makes a way for others, and who also comes to occupy this in-between position as both insider and outsider. The novel concludes with the main character, Alofa, leaving Samoa as she needs to confront the patriarchal system and find a way to thrive, though the implication is that a real fight is yet to come. Indeed, as her three novels form a kind of interconnected trilogy, this fight has its prequel in *The Girl in the Moon Circle* (1996b) and its sequel in *They Who Do Not Grieve* (2000).

5.6 The Nature of Gendered Violence and Speaking Out in Sia Figiel's *Where We Once Belonged*

In *Where We Once Belonged,* Sia Figiel's 1996 breakthrough novel, the protagonist Alofa is a thirteen-year-old girl coming of age in rural Samoa, living in a traditional village in the close community of the fictional village of Malaefou, growing up alongside her friends Lili and Moa. The novel won the prestigious Commonwealth Prize, was a bestseller in New Zealand, and has been described in one online review aptly as "Samoan Puberty Blues, in which Gauguin is dead but Elvis lives on." A story set amongst the influence on Samoan young girls of Charlie's Angels and the allure of Western products associated with prosperity, luxury, and desired modernity (Fresno-Calleja, 2017, p. 1041), the allure of this neo-colonial lifestyle is a mirage concealing a very different reality. As the plot unfolds, it can be observed that a focus on foreign Western products enables girls to fantasise about a better life with no violence, and serves as an "escapism" from a brutal reality (Lacabanne, 1999, p. 68). Alofa's story proves how hard life is for women in rural Samoa, characterised by a "patriarchal society with strict rules and exemplary punishment" (Pes, 2010, p. 206). As the novel develops, Alofa Filiga learns to navigate the complex codes of behaviour expected of her as she matures. At the same time, she comes to terms with sexual double standards in which girls are punished for so-called sexual transgressions while men are not held accountable.

Alofa learns of family secrets and how to navigate close relationships within a circle of trust while gradually venturing out. The novel can be divided into three sections: Alofa talking judgmentally with her 'girl circle' about Afi, the local 'bad girl,' until she is witness to her own friend Lili's testimony of abuse and pregnancy; Alofa's family life when she was a teenager, with reference to legends (the "cure of being a woman"); and Alofa's own story and the two big events of her youth and their aftermath—her "first sexual experience" and "her father's love affair" (Lacabanne, 1999, p. 66). Thus, throughout the novel, the circle of Alofa's world expands, first from her circle of girlhood friends to her extended *aiga*, to her life with her ostracised aunt Siniva, and beyond where she finally detaches herself from the collective (Lacabanne, 1999, pp. 66–67). As a "a composite novel" (Dunn & Morris 1995), the novel is a series of interconnected vignettes drawing on a Samoan traditional storytelling tool called *su'ifefiloi*. It resembles the making of *ula* (the garland) (Pes, 2010, p. 205). But its composite character also involves the interweaving of Western references and modes with Samoan ones. With her broad education and having travelled the world, it has been observed that Figiel "bring[s] to the surface the cultural substratum of her ethnic group by absorbing Western narrative strategies" (Pes, 2010, p. 199).

In *Where We Once Belonged,* gendered violence is prolific. As Cheryl Nunes (2007) points out, "incest, child abuse, suicide, rape, and alcoholism" are just some of the many forms of violence

represented in this novel (p. 44). As a novel about Samoan life, it implies that the nature of the gendered violence in Samoa ranges from relatively subtle forms, such as expressed through instances of voyeurism and pornography, higher level, acts of physical assault, molestation, rape, and incest. .While male writers such as Albert Wendt, in his novel *Sons for the Return Home,* had already begun to suggest issues of gendered violence in the Pacific, few women novelists before Figiel had spoken about the violent themes that had previously begun to emerge in women's poetry. Sia Figiel does so across her oeuvre while also exploring the reasons that keep women from speaking out. She uses powerful and innovative literary techniques to overcome the ways in which even gendered violence largely remained less openly spoken about in the Pacific.

The factors that make writing openly about these issues—and therefore the expression of gendered violence in tropical Pacific prose writing—challenging are multiple and various in nature. Some are due to internal factors of Samoan society, and some are due to external factors imposed by colonialism. Firstly, of course, is the issue of trauma. As previously mentioned, trauma events often fall outside the bounds of prosaic language. Second is the matter of taboo. Many characters in Figiel's work are shown as not even able to talk about violence or sexual matters within their own lives. This especially relates to the female characters of Lili (Alofa's friend) and Pisa (Alofa's mother). For an insider and a woman writer to be writing openly about domestic and gendered violence in the tropical Pacific and chronicling the nature and extent of abuse that occurs in this region defies customary cultural conventions and taboos.

This thesis has already touched upon the external factors that make discussing gender ed violence in the South Pacific's literatures challenging. As Edward Said points out in his work *Orientalism* (1978), generalising concepts about whole cultures and places form some of the most ingrained, widespread, and insidious kinds of discursive colonial violence. There is a long history within colonial representation of representational violence, and prose forms of writing about the Pacific are where this colonial violence has extensively occurred. What's more, the novel itself is a colonial import, and the dangers of repeating discursive colonial violence in the novel form are acute.

One of the goals for Figiel is to encourage other Pacific authors to speak out and express their culture through their own eyes and perspective to contrast it with foreign writing on the culture, such as Margaret Mead's stereotypes of the wanton tropical girl in her famous anthropological tract, *Coming of Age in Samoa* (1928). nine months of research' , between 1925 and 1926, Margaret Mead's nine months of research on adolescent girls in Samoa and its conclusions indicating that Samoans are overtly sexual and enjoy casual intercourse is not the only colonialist work authors like Figiel need to contend with on these matters. In contrast to Mead's representation

of Samoan teenagers as having lax and generally pleasant experiences of youthful sexuality, throughout the novel, Figiel's Alofa forms her definitions of sex based on traumatic experiences with male-female relationships.

There is also another risk associated with the overturning of previous colonial stereotypes. Counter-discursive stereotypes have also been circulated in neo-colonial discourse. Most famously, Derek Freeman's criticisms of Mead's work as a sexual fantasy and his counter-work described Samoans as "brutal criminals mostly good in rape, assault, manslaughter and troubled with psychological turbulence" (Abubakar, 2018, p. 109). Freeman has also portrayed Samoa from the outsider's point of view in ways that risk being reinvoked by stories of gendered violence told by insiders; Figiel portrays such violence as normalised and prolific. There is, therefore, a risk in telling any story of the Pacific if writing about it as a generalised place where, as evidenced in Margaret Mead suggesting all women are sexually promiscuous or Derek Freeman suggesting in counterpoint, all men are violent. A risk in using a colonial form like the novel or in writing so openly and extensively about these issues in the tropical Pacific, then, is to reinforce such stereotypes and orientalist caricatures.

Figiel, however, resists such generalising narratives. Her ways of avoiding presenting localised violence metonymically as the whole story of her beloved Samoa are just part of her arsenal of creative resistance, as we shall see. For instance, despite the fact that gendered violence is a recurrent theme in Figiel's work, it is not the exclusive focus of her writing. Likewise, in *Where We Once Belonged,* not every vignette in the novel is about gendered violence. The novel consists of a series of independent but connected vignettes, many of which feature other topics, such as myth, humour, and other daily occurrences as would be typically woven into *fāgogo*. Therefore, the form of the narrative as well as its content together contradict the false impression that violence defines the Pacific way of life or Samoan society and is more pervasive than it is in reality.

Figiel uses other techniques to address stereotypes, such as those raised by Freeman. Certainly, acts of violent reprisal are documented throughout *Where We Once Belonged.* Despite demonstrating violent reprisals in some instances for sexual transgressions, in other instances, Figiel shows that transgressions go unpunished; this suggests that while violence exists, it is not without exception.[22] Another way Figiel overcomes the colonial stereotypes presenting Pacific Islanders as a homogenous society is by showing Samoa's internal diversity. Figiel notes that across villages,

[22] For example, Lili's (unmarried) pregnancy goes unpunished, Fili's pregnancy is aborted, Lealofi (the son of village's pastor) is unpunished for a sexual act with Alofa, and Fa'amaoni (the pastor's daughter) is not punished for being caught drunk and naked (as noted by Abubakar, 2018, pp. 114–115).

islands, and cities, there are different cultural mores and different levels of education. For example, girls dress differently going to Apia (p. 36), and their exposure to the English language depends on the school they attend (p. 208).[23] Moreover, Figiel shows that local communities have distinctive reactions and treatment of *fa'afafine*[24] (p. 54), premarital pregnancies (p. 59), courtship (p. 214), interracial relationships (p. 72), and crime (p. 32). In one particularly clever vignette in the novel, "The Centre" (pp. 65–91), when asked about the centre of Apia, each of the responders shares a different answer, signifying that each person in Samoa is differently situated. Each sees the centre of Apia differently, and thus, by implication, when it comes to the issues of gendered violence Figiel raises recurrently throughout the novel, we can assume that each reacts to and processes issues of gendered violence differently, depending on how they are situated. In these ways and more, *Where We Once Belonged* avoids presenting the region of Samoa as a homogenous place or coinciding exactly with imposed stereotypes in ways that might further feed into the Orientalised concept of the region fabricated by Western anthropologists.

Sia Figiel also finds other ways to avoid reinscribing the problematic anthropological generalisations of sexually wanton Samoan maidens and all-pervasive patriarchal violence that have been imposed by outsiders. She reveals Margaret Mead's claims of teenagers' sexual freedom and promiscuity to be absolutely false by describing the harsh beating and head shaving of Alofa after she is caught performing oral sex on her crush (p. 220). Despite the physical and emotional abuse perpetrated by males, she contradicts Derek Freeman's Orientalising of Samoan men as brutal and ruthless by presenting Soia's twin sons, named for Freeman, as transgender: "Freeman (Pagoka-ua-faasaolokoiga) and Derek (Keleki) both turned out to be fa'afafige. Keleki returned from Hawai'i with breast implants, and Pagoka-ua-faasaolokoiga leads a life of sin in Apia with sailors and unhappily or happily married men" (p. 68). Despite the seriousness of the gendered violence Figiel does reveal, this is a humorous spin on the Freeman controversy that reveals several layers of colonial imposition and postcolonial response through hybridity.

Beyond dealing with external representations of Samoans as stereotypes of sexual wantonness or violence, there are internal constraints against speaking out that extend beyond cultural taboo. As

[23] For example, while Tu's grandmother is banished from her village Vaiala for losing her virginity to a black person, Lili in Malaefou is only gossiped about and expelled from school; there are no serious repercussions. The example of how Tusi (Alofa's grandmother) treats Pisa is a perfect example of the regional differences. Pisa brought her baby wrapped in a newspaper. Tusi shouts at her and is more preoccupied with what people would say rather than the condition of the baby. People in Malaefou care more about their reputation than the actual state of their affairs (Abubakar, 2018, p. 111).

[24] A specific term in Samoa to refer to a 'third sex' loosely correlating with either transvestite or transgender identity.

Figiel portrays in her novel, gendered violence is difficult to speak about and write about openly in large part because of the pervasiveness of close community and family ties throughout Pacific society. Samoans live close to their family in one house (*fale*) and within a village that is an interconnected extended family (*aiga*). Within the *aiga*, older family members watch after younger family members and impose harsh discipline, which is typically regarded as love and affection. Every mother's responsibility is to raise her children to become responsible adults. Parents strongly encourage their offspring to bring pride to the family and severely punish any acts that could shame the *aiga*. As a result, an extreme and antiquated form of Christian morality policing a woman's sexual purity becomes the greatest value (Abubakar, 2018, pp. 112–113). As one Pacific woman has put this, in a 2019 interview for *The Guardian*: "[w]hen any of us get molested or raped, we consider our family, and the family of the perpetrator, and how the whole village will be impacted" (Roy, 2019). In the society Figiel chronicles, where women are often blamed for sexual transgressions involving boys, men, and older male relatives, these issues not only mean young women cannot find opportunities to speak outside of the community but also that dysfunctional patterns of abuse trap families—and women in particular—within cycles of violence. Surrounded by relatives within isolated villages, circumstances shape a culture of silence that prevents expressing oneself freely. Taboo and banishment apply here as well. Families impose sanctions on other families, Figiel shows, and others are limited to speak out because they have been made aware of so-called 'scapegoat' relatives who are banished if they speak out. The most prominent example in this novel is the character Siniva, who is so banished from the family upon her return from education in New Zealand that Alofa does not even know Siniva is her relative—her father's sister.

Judith Raiskin (2008) describes the masterful portrait of Siniva as that of an insider who has learned to critique her own society and is thus wholly rejected by that society:

> Siniva, the village fool and madwoman prophet of Sia Figiel's 1996 novel, *Where We Once Belonged*, having returned to Samoa with a BA and MA in history after ten years in New Zealand, sits in the marketplace yelling at the tourists: "Go back where you came from, you fucking ghosts! Gauguin is dead! There is no paradise!" Represented as the first student to leave Samoa on a scholarship, Siniva is expected by her family and village to use her *palagi* (white) education to secure a job in government or business. Instead, she returns, committed to reminding her village about Samoan cosmology and the traditions of the old religion, accusing the pastors and nuns of killing the Samoan gods. She is beaten by her father and brothers, ostracized by the women, and considered to suffer from ghost sickness. Siniva voices the fury of the intellectual who, educated by the colonial machine, sees beyond the

> advantages offered her as an administrator of that machine (as a teacher, bureaucrat, professional) and becomes instead a critic of colonialism on behalf of her people, who reject the criticism as madness. (p. 15)

As Alofa matures and as her life appears to take the shape of Siniva's—first living under her guardianship and second living a life in exile in the aftermath of Siniva's death—she too must navigate the possibility of wholesale rejection by her society. She accepts the inherited curse of Siniva when Alofa, at some point, sees the same bird of tomorrow as Siniva did (the bird has tattoos of the two historical emblems of traditional wisdom), and she starts to think as "I" and detaches herself from the collective harmful impositions (Lacabanne, 1999, pp. 66–67). The rejection by the society is pervasive and multi-generational and often related to breaking sexual taboos.

Violent recrimination for speaking out is portrayed by Figiel as seeking revenge against those who speak out or break the taboo in ways that can extend beyond death, as, for example, villagers write offensive messages on Siniva's grave (p. 239). They not only despise her for being an outcast and committing suicide but also fear her coming back to haunt them. It is worth noting, thus, that the sense of collective belonging to the community remains a complex aspect in Samoa, especially through the prism of Figiel's portrayal. The *aiga* or family and community can be a force for collective wellbeing as well as a force of shame, ostracism, and intergenerational hurt and violence. Consequently, as Figiel shows and as other researchers have documented, when youth suffer, they do it in loneliness as they cannot express themselves because they are afraid of what the community will think of them and how it will judge them (Raiskin, 2008, as cited in Henderson, 2016, p. 224).

Yet, despite these challenges of representation and issues of reprisal for speaking out, Figiel finds ways to demonstrate that gendered violence and sexual abuse are practically a part of daily life in the Samoa she portrays. In just some of many examples, Lili's father, Isoua, watches women taking showers from hiding (p. 12); the bus driver looks at minor students in an inappropriate way (p. 19); young girls get access to Mr Brown's pornographic magazines (p. 10); and villagers are involved in multiple extramarital affairs (p. 25). All these instances are hard topics to deal with in a culture of taboo and secrecy. Moreover, the risk of representing them too plainly misrepresents the diversity of places like Samoa, as already mentioned. Nevertheless, through her orally infused prose forms, Sia Figiel finds creative and culturally appropriate ways to discuss these matters. First of all, she presents the story from the perspective of a thirteen-year-old girl, Alofa, and her two close girlfriends, seventeen-year-old Ma'alili, "Lili," and sixteen-year-old Moamoalulu, "Moa." Through the confidences and secrets they share, readers get to listen in on the confidences of female oral utterances. In this, the girls and women are presented as a form of a separate "moon circle" within

society as Figiel creates a safe girl-only space for them to share their secrets. The reader's perspective closely follows the girls' perspectives as they recount and laugh about their relatives, tell legends, sing, and reveal intimate stories within the inner sanctum of their friendship circle (p. 22). In this way, the girls are presented as sharing in a safe space away from the fear of recriminating violence, and readers are initiated into the moon circle as listeners-in, instructed in the need for privacy, secrecy, and discretion.

Another way that Figiel cleverly avoids breaking taboos about openly speaking of these matters is her use of a narrator who avoids making explicit statements. In the village, sensitive information is not broadcasted but whispered amongst trusted people. For instance, in the vignette "She was sixteen when the eye of the water became clear" (pp. 59–64), the people of Malaefou do not know the identity of the man who has impregnated teenage Lili. Lili reveals it as a secret only to her best friends, who do not speak openly about it, even to one other person. Even the reader does not know for sure. The same refers to the relationship between Lili and Mr Brown, which is only hinted at but not spoken openly, even as village gossip finds coded ways to make it a regular topic of conversation, not unlike Figiel's prose, which mimics the technique of 'constantly whispering' (p. 10):

> Everyone in the village was talking about her and Mr Brown. They were saying that the word keigefaigaluega was only a front for what Lili really did for Mr Brown. Women were constantly whispering about her. (p. 10)

Because some of the violence in this narrative falls outside the bounds of narratable language, Figiel cleverly depicts the way that traumatic experiences are unspeakable and take a long time to process, interweaving them into the plot in the forms of intimate prayers, voices, and thoughts still mimicking all girls' oratory. When presenting girls' feelings and observations, she "uses tropes in connection with upward or downward movements" like "swirling," "falling," "slapping against" (Lacabanne, 1999, p. 70). These directional descriptions of motion add depth to Alofa's internal sensations, conveyed as confused and difficult to articulate.

Related to the difficulty of speaking and writing openly because of trauma and close family ties with little to no opportunity to speak openly beyond them, another issue that makes communicating gendered violence openly—in both real life and in prose forms of narrative—so problematic is its normalisation among Samoan society. We see in Figiel's work that characters themselves within society do not always recognise the violence because it has become so normalised and pervasive or because children are exposed to it so young. On the first pages of the book, we learn that children are often the persons of interest for local predators: "Boys paid her money just to smell her panties, grown men paid her money, too, just to smell her panties and bra" (p. 12). Some

adults hide and watch school girls taking a shower; female students feel uncomfortable as the bus driver "wiggled his tongue in the mirror every time one of us looked at him" (p. 19). The father, Filiga's, beatings are perceived by the Samoan society as dutiful parenting and thus love. Growing up inside not only a dysfunctional family but inside a community in which these behaviours are not deemed dysfunctional means that these girls do not glimpse a world outside these norms. Figiel thus portrays the way the girls live in a society that normalises ubiquitous corporal punishment (p. 15) as well as physical fights between families and adults (p. 45).

Figiel also subtly reveals how even molestation becomes invisible within structures where healthy sexual boundaries and expressions of love are rarely expressed. The molestation of girls is normalised to the point where Lili, aiming to comfort Mr Brown, is ready for intercourse with him: "I wanted to comfort him you see… the way I comforted Ike when his father died. So I took off my panties and went into Mr Brown's arms" (p. 113). Figiel reveals how Lili mis-codes Mr Brown's lust towards her as love: "She knew he was a good man… she knew it and we knew it, too. He was the only man who ever loved her. He was the only man *she* ever loved" (p. 115). This tragic picture exemplifies how a girl who is taken advantage of is manipulated into developing feelings for a much older man, not having learnt real affection before. Pisa also mistakes her husband's indifference for affection: "Whether that meant appeasing his mother, his sisters, the *aiga*—these were surely all signs of his alofa which he never verbally expressed to her in public or in private" (p. 109). In another vignette, called "Penises, eels, and death" (pp. 166–182), the dire effects of the ordinariness of violence are visible in Alofa's thinking process as she identifies the teacher's punishment as the extension of love and family discipline: "After all, love meant guidelines and rules and punishment" (p. 171). In yet another example, in the vignette "Real love" (p. 222), Alofa contemplates, "Being beaten up is alofa—love. Real love. Real love is when children are beaten up bad by their parents" (p. 222). Figiel here shows that expressions of raw patriarchal power and violence are accepted as signs of love.

Perhaps the most egregious incident of gendered violence presented in this narrative is the case of criminal rape of a minor through incest. Lili's rape (p. 62) at the hands of her father and beating afterwards into silence and submission prove the strong feeling of shame and threat of revealing the terrifying truth. Figiel describes how Alofa and Moa find Lili: "There she was, lying on the floor, her clothes all ripped apart, her face covered with blood. We couldn't believe what we saw" (p. 62). Here, the text shows that language itself breaks down. Lili's private testimony of incest and rape comes out of and is received as part of an emotional maelstrom rather than a direct form of speech:

> Then the words came like a little hurricane, or perhaps a tornado…
>
> 'It was Iosua.'
>
> … Picking my body up, swirling-swirling to the sky, past birds, past the coconut I've always wanted to dimb…
>
> 'It was Iosua.'
>
> … Silence. Body falling-falling to earth…
>
> 'It was Iosua.'
>
> … Slapping against banyan roots…
>
> 'It was Iosua.'
>
> … My whole skull breaking to pieces, and water spilling out… no blood, no blood. (Figiel, 2007, pp. 63–64)

The revelation of incest is so oblique that it takes a careful reader and observer of family relationships and genealogies in the novel to uncover the true nature of what has transpired. Through this episode, Figiel reveals the complexity of gendered violence, especially involving the young; she also reveals how speaking out can lead to ostracism, victim blaming, and banishment, and the survivors of incest and rape often remain voiceless. These issues Figiel describes align with social research about gendered violence in Samoa, which has revealed that in fear of the recriminatory consequences, women still avoid reporting abuse to the police, as "Samoans do not involve the police in things that happen within the family unless the consequences are very serious" (Ministry of Women, Community and Social Development, 2017). Even though formal reporting does not occur in these stories, Figiel's work provides a way for these stories to be told, and as such, *Where We Once Belonged* gives voice to these voiceless women who cannot otherwise speak out.

In the shape of whispers, allusions, and unfinished sentences that contour her writing, Figiel informs the alert and careful reader, who is thus empowered to read attentively and re-read the text for concealed information that otherwise goes unreported and remains within the private seclusion of the family environment. Revealing unrealistic expectations imposed on females, Figiel unveils the double standards for both sexes within Malaefou's society passed down intergenerationally. Indoctrinated in the village's arrangements, females are socialised to become subservient and complicit. Young girls dream of weddings, even if it means becoming proselytised into sexist beliefs. Figiel shows that the patriarchal attitude is remarkably intergenerational and sometimes passed

down from mothers to daughters. Tu's grandmother from Vaiala (even though she was a *taupou*[25]) "was practically disowned when the family found out she had lost her virginity… and to a meauli[26] of all things" (pp. 71–71), another example (but here an intergenerational one) of the ways women who transgress sexual taboos are faced with rejection. Grandmother Tausi places blame on her daughter-in-law Pisa for her son's failed marriage and imposes old-fashioned rules on girls. Tausi's daughter, Alofa's namesake, commits suicide under pressure as she is forced to marry a Matai twice her age. And, even as others (men and women) in the community are sympathetic to the transvestite, they cannot speak of their more modern sentiments openly. Instead, it is the older generation of women who lament openly at *fa'afafine* Shirley Girl's funeral in sexist terms, "It is the will of God" (p. 51).

Perhaps this is why mothers tell their daughters to take an example from Makaoleafi ('Afi') (p. 2). Even though on the surface Afi knows how to seem knowledgeable and obedient, behind her parents' back, she fights the teacher and receives money from men in exchange for letting them smell her underwear; this is why her peers describe her to be "a snake in disguise" (p. 2). Consequently, "girls make their mischiefs in concealment, talk in whispers, live a two-way life; behave differently before the adults or parents and amidst their peers" (Abubakar, 2018, p. 113). The main narrative perspective follows Alofa as a cipher for the narrator. Since the young student (Alofa) does not attempt to give the false impression of perfection like Afi, she deems herself as "in-between," explaining, "that is to say we were not completely good and we were not completely bad" (p. 5), which illustrates the absurdity of expected standards. Throughout the novel, Figiel reveals how young women are socialised into these double standards. They need to be home straight after school, and when talking back, they might hear in return a violent threat such as "one more question out of your mouth and I'll call the boys to tie you up like a pig and beat the shit out of you" (p. 139). That such a threat is from the pastor's wife is even more revealing, as she forces various rules on girls during the Bible afternoon classes and when disobeyed, "she would pull our ears or pull our hair or slap our faces…" (p. 140). Contrastingly, young men get away with any wrongdoings.

Moreover, it is often because of their dishonesty and cunning that some women are held responsible for actions that are outside of their control. One example of this is Pisa, Alofa's mother. Before Pisa's marriage, she is a young girl from Savai'i hoping to leave for New Zealand on a scholarship. Everything changes when she meets Filiga, who seduces her and lies (p. 106), saying he is not married. Filiga's multiple affairs are unpunished as he represents "behavior that does not get along well with what he preaches" (Ahmed, 2019, p. 5). And, when Filiga takes on a new wife, Logo

[25] A daughter of a matai, a high status "princess."
[26] Person of black ethnicity.

threatens to kill his lover (p. 99), not Filiga. To her horror, Pisa ends up in his family household with their toddler daughter. Ignored by her partner, as well as disrespected and beaten by his mother Tausi (p. 104), she vents her internalised anger on Alofa, refusing to name her for the first three months of her life, scolding her, and directing all her frustration towards the poor girl (pp. 154–155).

While it is again the next generation of women who suffer, Pisa's example shows that "Western Samoan women are part of their oppression" (Ahmed, 2019, p. 7). bell hooks (1999), describing the pattern of domestic violence in Afro-American/black communities, suggests that women attack other women and children as a result of the societal acceptance of male violence against females. It constitutes "a deeply internalised pain and self-rejection" and "informs the aggression inflicted on the mirror image" (hooks, 1999, as cited in Ahmed, 2019, p. 8). Nevertheless, Samoan women are resilient. They laugh loudly even though it is "viewed as a dangerous and subversive activity because laughing inherently disturbs order and silence" (Solar, 2010, as cited in Ahmed, 2019, p. 8).

Therefore, the gendered violence depicted in *Where We Once Belonged* is exogenous, endogenous, and customary, too. Women (as well as some men) suffer from both externally imposed colonial violence and internal patriarchal oppression in what constitutes a double colonisation, which is clearly portrayed in Lili's predicament. Mr Brown incorporates a colonial power taking advantage of the young girl. He is the first representative of the external patriarchal violence the girls encounter. The figuration of colonialism is also reflected in Mr Brown's presence, as he works at the bank and his magazine causes girls' misbehaviour. Cornflakes at his house become an "emblem of a consumer desire fuelled by the very presence of colonialism" (Ahmed, 2019, p. 3). He is in possession of the girlie magazine, which girls find by accident, thus exposing themselves to visual violence that later extends to actual abuse by Mr Brown. Later in the novel, in the egregious account of Iosua raping his own daughter Lili, readers come to see how Iosua embodies the representation of domestic, regional violence from within. Yet, Lili now has a place to turn. At some point, terrified, ostracised, and despised by her own society, without her fault, poor Lili seeks help from Mr Brown.

On top of that, Figiel depicts the hypocrisy of the patriarchal system when she makes Filiga, who is presented as violent and hypocritical, a disciplinarian of the village. Alofa's father emblematises the patriarchal figure who imposes exemplary punishment on girls. When Afi is caught with the girlie magazine, he beats her and shaves her head as an example for other children and teenagers. As a result, society is hierarchical, giving the most weight to men as women and girls who are affected by this violence have no power. Women's value diminishes if they are infertile or do not birth sons. Filiga's first wife, Vaisola, commits suicide not being able to get pregnant, and

consequently, because of these attitudes, Alofa believes that unless she gets the "moon sickness" (her period), she too is going to die. The double bind women find themselves in is revealed in her girlhood attitude that never menstruating would, in fact, be worse than death because she would never marry, as "[g]irls who didn't get it and lived would never find husbands. No one wanted someone who was forgotten by the moon" (p. 120). Samoan women are objectified and measured by their birthing capacities, which has a direct impact on their psyche and sense of worthiness.

5.7 Girl Power

Despite the lowly position of these girls, who are portrayed as trapped and completely lacking in power to extricate themselves from colonial and patriarchal violence, as well as from intergenerational and female-on-female violence, the author of *Where We Once Belonged* manages to give the greatest voice in her novel to women. This is a revolutionary approach to storytelling within the tropical Pacific. Reflecting on her own childhood in the 1970s and 80s, Figiel recalls "it was an extremely painful time growing up in Samoa," and thus explains this narrative choice to advance the position of powerless girls: "within the social hierarchy young girls are the ultimate bottom of things. I wanted to prioritise their voices" (Figiel in Ellis, 1998, pp. 75–76). Where women in Samoa cannot speak out because they have no power, this novel prioritises the female teenager's voice, reversing the hierarchy by centring the narrative on the girls' moon circle, as boys are outside of it[27]. Moreover, in order to adjust the spoken language used by a young girl, Figiel purposely uses "native vernacular" to mimic what would seem authentic in real Samoan life, proposing a genre of "performance prose" (Nunes, 2007, p. 11)[28] that both mimics the safety of the private female oral utterance of the young girls and which avoids relying too heavily on established colonial forms. In this way, as Cheryl Nunes (2007) explains, Figiel "utilizes such techniques as enacting syntactic fusions of Samoan and English styles, sharpening the tone of her sentences, and inserting appropriate Samoan words into the text, all within an effort to expose Samoan orality through her literary voice" (p. 44). This can be seen in an exemplary way in the following passage documenting a private conversation between the three young girls:

> 'No, I won't tell. I swear. I won't tell.'

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[27] This story speaks of particular women characters in a particular place in time, and this is not to imply that all of Samoan women in all times everywhere have faced universal subordination and voicelessness. For example, at the time of writing the current Prime Minister is a woman.

[28] Figiel confesses that her writing was published a book due to the encouragement from Epeli Hau'ofa and Albert Wendt. At the beginning it was planned as readings to the audience, which resonated more with the artist, who perceives herself as mainly a "performance poet" (Figiel in Ellis, 1998, 77).

'Swear to God!' they yelled out. 'Kauko i luma o le Akua!'

'Swear on your father's name!'

'But he can't even see us! He's at work!'

'Swear! Kauko i luma o Filiga!'

Lili (laughing this time), 'Swear on your namesake Alofa's grave!'

'Eat shit!'

'Swear to God again... and mean it!' (p. 13)

In general, the insertion of Samoan language and forms into an English text helps Figiel indigenise the European colonial form of the novel. By interweaving legends into her fiction and drawing on clear oral traditions like *fāgogo*, *su'ifefiloi*, and *solo*, Figiel also introduces the way that this prose builds on poetry and finds ways to speak that contain poetic elements, especially in ways that draw on orality. When discussing *su'ifefiloi* threading throughout her books, Figiel explains that it means to "sew" a "mixture of different flowers" (Figiel in Ellis, 1998, p. 74). When they are combined in the form of a necklace, they become *ula*. During the ceremony of *taualoga* and the dance of the "ceremonial virgin," people weave various songs together, in one, just as Sia Figiel joins the individual scattered chunks of her story in one piece (Figiel in Ellis, 1998, p. 74), restoring lost dignity to the women characters whose stories of indignity she tells.

Picking up on this key element of Figiel's language use, but charting other elements of indigenisation, Nunes (2007) sheds light on the oral context in which Figiel's works are created. She quotes John Charlot, who underlines the importance of "storytelling, poetry, and chanting" in Samoan orality; chants and prose can either "supplement each other," "be essential parts of the storytelling," or "can be merged to create a unique version" in the way Figiel's extended prose has done so (Nunes, 2007, p. 6)[29]. Nunes (2007) goes on to explain, "Samoan language is very rhythmic, it's very lyrical, very sing-song," noting that Figiel tries to "Englishise" is on purpose for every Pacific Islander to notice that their mother tongue has been remembered (p. 6). Hence, the Samoan language is frequently used to target specific audiences and resonate with young female Samoan readers who are familiar with an uneducated village form of Samoan writing in particular. Very often,

[29] Referring to the research of Allesandro Duranti, Nunes (2007) makes it clear that the speeches constituted a crucial role in Samoan politics, as the speaker needed to decide of when to use the selection of certain "genealogies, proverbs, metaphors, and terms of respect" (p. 7) to manipulate the events and peoples' reactions within the community.

Figiel leaves whole sentences in their original Samoan form, with no English translation to resonate with her target audience. Unlike Momoa Malietoa Von Reiche and Jully Sipolo (Makini), Sia Figiel does provide the reader with a small glossary; however, it is modest and gives little explanation of the meaning of the full sentences in Samoan language or cultural events taking place in the novel, leaving alone the slang and vernacular. Her target readers are both Samoans, South Pacific Islanders, and Westerners. As Marsh (1999) argues, this conscious choice to either issue a relatively concise glossary or skip this part altogether means "giving priority to the author's indigenous audience and furthering the struggle for the assertion of cultural identity," whereas for the recipient, "unfamiliar terms stimulate investigation and further enlightenment" (p. 348).

This style can be classified as speaking in code, using insider codes and outsider codes. To a certain extent, Figiel's use of humour—often making funny or sarcastic remarks when speaking of Robert Louis Stevenson, for instance—is another example of her use of insider codes through 'inside jokes.' Just like Albert Wendt, Sia Figiel composes a "hybrid" language in the form of a literary instrument called *Va'ai*, "relexification" (Kruse-Va'ai, 1998, p. 8). Even though she writes in English, she replaces English words with native language equivalents without restructuring grammar and syntax. Consequently, this approach allows her to present how people in Samoa speak in everyday life. As a way of respect, it provides a mirror for the girls of Samoan society, in particular, who have otherwise been forced to conform to unrealistic images imposed by outsiders.

Other ways Figiel writes for an 'insider' readership include the use of colloquial Samoan. Pupils at school are taught to write in Samoan using the letter "t"; however, in everyday vernacular conversations, people use the letter "k" when talking (Figiel in Ellis, 1998, p. 73). In this way, Figiel cleverly places non-Pacific readers closely connected to her text, speaks specifically to Samoan readers, and includes and makes welcome all readers from across the Pacific, while creating a text that draws in all readers on its own terms.

Figiel also uses other coded ways of women speaking, as seen, for instance, in the ways the girls recount hearing about Filiga's marriage: "He had suddenly married Eleele dirt because, according to some women, he left a bread baking in her oven" (p. 53). Since Alofa is only a thirteen-year-old girl, Figiel also consciously miswrites English, applying incorrect grammar and phrase structure to show the girls' innocence and immaturity when they seem to be too young to understand information passed in between adults. The innocence of the girls is also portrayed in the way Alofa and her friends do not pronounce certain words correctly:

'So you're not from Amelika?' we asked her.

'Of course I am. Oregon is a part of the fifty states of the United States of America.'

'Oh! We said, pretending we understood her." (p. 170)

When Figiel illustrates shocking and sexualised content from Alofa's innocent perspective, and mimics safety in the circle of her friend group, the reader sees how Alofa, Moa, and Lili go through the events of their upbringing together. This is evident even from the novel's very first confessional line, when readers are told, "When I saw the insides of a woman's vagina for the first time I was not alone" (p. 1). The girl circle that repeats throughout Figiel's novels allows a form of safety for stark utterances. In some ways, Figiel's girl circle—while at once revolutionary in its assignment of female voice agency, might also be seen as an adaptation of traditional *talanoa*. According to Alliance Community in American Samoa, talanoa means telling stories that lead to effective decision strategies in the community as well as sharing experiences and individual knowledge. The community may be a source of pain, in Figiel's work, but it can also be a sense of strength, particularly in providing the girls the security and shelter of solidarity.

Despite the complex origins and expressions of gendered violence in the societies, circles, and lives of the Samoan characters she chronicles, it must be said that Figiel makes it clear: Colonialism has brought this violence. Just as Alofa's aunt Siniva points out, whatever else the cause, gendered violence has its roots in colonialism. Yet, where experiences—such as those experienced by the young girls in this novel—are so pervasive and so shared, and where violence comes from inside the family, from intergenerational cycles of violence, trauma, and abuse, these syntactic forms of resistance provide some ways of speaking out, but not stopping this violence. Perhaps the most powerful tactic of resistance Figiel creates to both exogenous and endogenous forms of double colonisation, beyond these syntactic forms of speaking out, is the character of Alofa, who becomes a cipher for the author Sia Figiel. In the character of Alofa, Figiel offers a genuine, in-between figure of resistance.

5.8 Daughters for the Return Home: The Outcast Figure

Just as Albert Wendt was interested in the figure of the son who returned 'home,' Figiel too is interested in this figure of return. Alofa's self-avowed status as an 'in between' is thus particularly resonant, as Figiel ultimately explores two figures in her novel *Where We Once Belonged* who are presented as outcasts: Siniva and Alofa. When explaining the appearance of Siniva, Figiel states,

> I had to talk about why I left Samoa, which is all in Siniva, with the exception that I'm sitting here and she's not. That was such a real thing to me the choice [of suicide] that Siniva took was one that I was considering for a very long time. (Figiel in Ellis, 1998, p. 72)

Figiel admits that she was the first in her village to obtain a tertiary education and discloses the way this caused her to rebel and question Christianity, which brought much disappointment to her family, eventually impacting her decision to live overseas.

Getting an education beyond Samoa appears to have been integral to Figiel's experiences, just as it was for Siniva. Perhaps this is because the colonial education system within Samoa is also an instrument of oppression. When it comes to the education Alofa receives at school, Sia Figiel portrays the Western-indoctrinated teachers as all-knowing scholars who are somehow disconnected from the core of spiritual knowledge and rely only on their education, which the character of Siniva rejects as "darkness" (Devine, 2006, p. 126). She appears to be the real Enlightened individual in that context. Nevertheless, this is also the reason why she is isolated by her own family, which eventually leads her to suicide. The teaching children receive at school aims to adjust them to Western thinking, which often seems out of place, unrelatable, and inappropriate. The school where Alofa goes is attended only by Samoan children.

Moreover, the Samoan sense of individuality is still purely related to fa'a Samoa, even if postcolonial and hybridised. This resistance against prevalent colonialism is essential in the core construction of Samoan identity, and as we watch Alofa's adolescent development, we realise that schooling and family are part of the ways in which these young women are trapped by Samoan community structures and at the same time oppressed by Western individualistic education. Independence is impossible for these young women who document the way that a girl in this society "was always with someone…nothing was witnessed in the 'I' form." This is perhaps the most stubborn form of resistance to Westernised education in Samoa, as young Alofa reflects that she cannot make sense of the task her teacher Miss Cunningham has assigned her, to write her personal story: "'I does not exist, Miss Cunningham. I is 'we …always.'" Across the novel, Alofa's development gradually requires her to move away from this communal 'we,' which has in its early days offered her friendship and shelter but which in puberty becomes threateningly conformist to faa'Samoa in its spectre of forcing young women into patterns of abuse, acquiescence, and denial. When she is banished to live with her Aunt Siniva, because of being caught with a boy doing a sexual act, she becomes the mirror of Siniva, who allows her to continue her education —an exile from her aiga, but one who is able to have her own thoughts, and move away from the communal way of thinking to become her own self, an 'I.'

Thus, Alofa, as the novel's cipher for the author, finally chooses her own path at the end of the novel by breaking with the core tradition of society, coming to articulate herself as an "I" instead of the "We." Instead of choosing to follow harmful patterns, she draws conclusions based on

experience in the form of individual and critical thinking. Alofa stands up against societal expectations and demonstrates the willingness to occupy the position of Siniva. While for others the only way out is suicide, Alofa finds an alternative solution by leaving and finding affinity with the family in the diaspora before coming back and deciding to stay. Alofa is, therefore, "a powerful image of postcoloniality: a subject looking at itself as object and ridiculing the mechanism that created its object status" (Tawake, 2000, as quoted in Compoc, 2011, p. 127). She refuses to follow the steps of her "role models," Siniva, Vaisola, and Alofa (other Alofa, aunt), as she does not commit suicide (Compoc, 2011, p. 131). "The thousands of deaths of her body" shows how Alofa is doubling and dissociating from the reality around her. She needs to protect herself from the atrocities and cruelties which seem to be incomprehensible and impossible to be true. Nevertheless, she remains strong and "fights from within the private sphere" (Compoc, 2011, p. 133). At some point, Alofa becomes the Nafanua, the warrior, as "Figiel privileges the mythical female body in her legends as a way of validating the role and status of women in her fiction and, by extension, in Samoan society." At the final stage of the novel, an octopus visits Nafanua (Alofa) and provides her with "a sexual bliss," which "celebrates the full humanity of Samoan girls and women," and allows her to heal from her wounds (Compoc, 2011, p. 148).

The message conveyed across *Where We Once Belonged* is that the diaspora openly talks about violence in Samoa. Pacific Islanders residing in New Zealand, the United States, Australia, and many other locations across the globe break free from the cycle of abuse and become "I" at the end. They raise the discussion around the question of who can speak for whom. Sia Figiel occupies a crucial role as a part of the diaspora. Being both the insider and the outsider—an 'in between' like Alofa, she becomes a bridge and a point of reference to both worlds. She finds a new way to reconcile these two contrasting identities of both a representative and a stranger. She reinforces the message of Epeli Hau'ofa's "Our Sea of Islands" (1994) that due to the dynamic migrations, many Islanders are now part of the diaspora, scattered around the globe and refusing to be exiled.

This is a powerful position for both Alofa and Figiel. But it is one that also means that despite the outside recognition she has received, Figiel continues to struggle to be accepted as an author within Samoa, where I was told repeatedly, "Figiel is not good; she is crazy."[30] Neither being a direct spokesperson of Samoa nor being accepted fully by those outside Samoa because of its strong indigenous elements impeded the publication of her second novel, *The Girl in the Moon Circle*. Even

[30] Personal communication.

though it was written in English, Figiel states that she was told the novel was "too Samoan in style, structure, themes, narration, and essentially everything" (Figiel, 1996, quoted in Nunes, 2007, p. 46).

5.9 *The Girl in the Moon Circle* (1996b)

Sia Figiel's first publications in the 1990s raised many controversies and public discussions since her novels talked about the matters that many avoid in their prose. It seems that underlining the role of narratives as an attempt to define feelings and ideas usually said it between the lines however not articulated directly in her storytelling. Most importantly, her stories place women first as the ones experiencing injustice and finding ways to cope with pain and isolation individually. Sia Figiel continues to illustrate the hardship of belonging, trauma, physical and emotional violation, and gender inequalities in her second novel *The Girl in The Moon Circle* (1996b). The strength of the protagonists in this composition, just as in *Where We Once Belonged* (1996), underlines the necessity of speaking truths and sharing stories from one's own perspective listening to one's own heart, feelings, and body.

In Figiel's conception, however, she had polished her technique by her second novel. Figiel explains:

> [T]here's much more an awareness of sentence structure, actual aesthetics on the page, how a piece lies on the page. And the economy of language, saying as much as possible in as few words, which is probably the poet coming out, constant experimentation with language in the written form. (Figiel in Ellis, 1998, p. 77)

Despite the avowed issues finding publication, *The Girl in The Moon Circle* (1996b) was published soon after her first novel *Where We Once Belonged* (1996). In it, the main protagonist, Samoana Pili, also known as "Ana", age ten, lives in the same fictional village of Malaefou. And, similarly to Alofa, she talks with her friends about the aggression and sexual abuse from adults that they experience or observe. The recurring tropes and similar characters foreground the uses of the *fagogo* form, and also continue the structure of *suifefiloi,* which "winds" the comfort and consolation in the narrative through the inclination of bonds between mistreated girls, helping them to cope with their pain (Sinavaiana-Gabbard, 1998, p. 484). Certain names repeat themselves, such as the name of the village, Malaefou, grandmother Tausi, or the teacher's name, Mrs Samasoni. The application of the same names in both novels serves a type of storytelling that underlines the importance of storytelling in Samoan society. Therefore, this element of traditional oral storytelling is explicitly visible in the presentation of Malaefou, the village where the action of the first novels of Sia Figiel takes place. Just as the story of one event, myth, or figure passed in a spoken way to another person has dozens of different versions, Malaefou is never the same. Meleisea (1999) describes it well: "The

what, the who, and the where all depend upon the orator's village, district, and genealogical links" (Meleisea, as cited in Marsh, 1999). During an interview, Figiel provides an elaborate answer:

> Well, what is truth in an oral tradition? That is what I wanted to bring across, the many different versions in an oral tradition. It's interesting, I use the same legend to explain Malaefou, you know, the village in both books, and it's different in *The Girl in the Moon Circle* than in *Where We Once Belonged*, and that's what I want the reader to be aware of. There are different ways of telling stories according to people's memories, you know, Alofa tells it differently, the leaves in *The Girl in the Moon Circle* with Samoana tell it differently. But it's the same village. That is a good example. (Figiel in Ellis, 1998, p. 74).

The trilogy of Sia Figiel's novels can be divided into the three stages of female's life: childhood, teenage girlhood, and womanhood. While the first novel, *Where We Once Belonged*, tells the story of the teenage girls' coming of age as in part a response to Mead's work—first through menstruation, then through falling in love, and finally discovering the family's secrets and first sexual experiences, the next novel tells the story of childhood. With the publication of *The Girl in the Moon Circle*, Figiel presents still traumatic and painful experiences of growing up in Samoa, although this time from the perspective of a more innocent child. Finally, with *They Who Do Not Grieve* (2000), Figiel explores the perspective of womanhood and takes on intergenerational trauma.

The Girl in the Moon Circle opens with Samoana Pili as a ten-year-old girl who can barely write in English. Her interests are pretty simple, indeed typical for a small girl; her world revolves around her family, school and girlfriends. Throughout the trilogy, and especially in *The Girl in the Moon Circle,* girls are always reunited within their girls' circle, "[a]t the circle there are things we talk about and the things that we don't. The things we don't talk about bring bad luck. Or ghosts. So we don't talk about them. Ever" (p. 5). The narrator goes on to rehearse—and therefore tell about, within the shelter and sanctity of the all-girl moon circle—all the things that are forbidden to speak of. As the narrator continues, she mentions that they would not talk about the baby Lole gave birth to and who died after Eseta "sat on her accidentally and crushed her little body" (p. 5).

As the narrative unfolds, we discover that the girls suspect there is something suspicious about the event they are forbidden to speak about. Even though they are apparently too young to fully understand, their discussions reveal that Lole most probably killed her child, just as Faela is another girl who buried her little baby "in a 3 pound pisupo can" because the pregnancy was a result of incest. Even though adults are sometimes unaware that girls have access to these kinds of knowledge through the exchange of information and gossiping, these are the secrets girls are

perfectly aware of, even at such a tender age. Just as in her previous novel, here Figiel describes girls talking not only about rape, incest, miscarriage, and murders but also about suicides which haunt the whole community like a plague, all of which they are supposedly forbidden from speaking about openly:

> Talking about suicides awakens their ghosts. Angry ghosts. Restless. Should who have no place to belong. Suicides cut themselves off from their families. From the village. They bring eternal shame to everyone. To their mothers especially. Who gave birth and birth to them. Who end up living the rest of their lives in grief. Always. Who mourn-mourn-mourn. Always. (p. 6)

Attentive readers who remember the unspeakable suicides in *Where We Once Belonged* (1996) know the names of these suicides. Their names are never mentioned in a daily life, and their stories are attempted to be forgotten to the extent that people from outside the village or young people are not even aware of the past events. Young and empathetic Samoana Pili, however, sees through this; because open grieving is disallowed, melancholy never ends for their mothers who cannot forget their deaths. This is perhaps what makes the topic of Figiel's third novel *They Who Do Not Grieve* so particularly confronting. It speaks of the women's intergenerational trauma and the aggression executed by women on women.

The Girl in the Moon Circle (1996b) introduces the character of Siala, who can be seen as an equivalent to the previous representation of the village's fool, Siniva. After Siala comes back from the scholarship study in New Zealand, she brings controversy as she "shocks" (p. 10) and "mesmerizes" the girls (p. 11) by her behaviour:

> The new Siala was the complete opposite of the old. Breaking all the rules. Who smoked not only cigarettes but cow shit. Who didn't go to church. Who believed in ghosts. Who had sex with old men. With Situpo even. Because of the experience she said. Because sex is beautiful. She said. Utterly beautiful. She said. And our parents were lying by telling us it wasn't. And that they really didn't care about us but their own images. She said again. Image girls. She'd say. That is so much more important than you. You don't count. (p. 10)

Describing this figure from the perspective of a much younger girl than Alofa gives the reader yet another view of how the outcast figure is admired by the very young who are fascinated by her. They understand her behaviour as brave and original as they have not yet suffered enough of the consequences of following their own path and making their own choices as young teenagers or young women. The fear and shame that come from independent choices and the desire for freedom

have not yet entered their consciousness and have not yet started dictating their life choices. In contrast to Alofa, Samoana does not understand intercourse as a shameful, forbidden, and traumatic experience but perceives it as a mysterious and liberating force, in all likelihood, because of her young age and innocence.

In fact, Samoana is fascinated with Siala. In contrast to Siniva, what happens to Siala remains unknown to the young girls, from whose perspective this novel is told, and the reader is simply informed that she left Malaefou and nobody was aware of where she could have been residing. In her internal monologue, Samoana reflects on Siala as a mystery, coming to the conclusion that she "was like a machine," "scrutinizing everything" and "analysing everything to death as if it was a science project" (p. 11). Finally, Samoana concludes that she feels very sorry for her as the family is a "sacred 'we'" which Siala cannot seem to understand, telling her that love does not exist. For the young and innocent Samoana, the 'we' is not a constraint but instead "the virtue that makes you forget about you and think of others first" (p. 12). Samoan society is characterised by the tendency of a collective approach, which favours groups over individuals also in narratives (Henderson, 2016, p. 323). Samoan teenagers are encouraged to communicate as a part of this community even though the violations experienced by young people are their personal tragedies that they suffer from alone. Therefore, as observed by Wendy E. Cowling (2009) "men are not always particularly estimable, while women have to be strong, and strong-willed, or they would not survive emotionally" (p. 9). Sia Figiel raises these complexities through Samoana from *The Girl in The Moon Circle*, who thinks of love as the concept strictly related to being a member of a group with responsibilities towards its members:

> And I felt sad for her because she was not living. But rather existing. And a sad existence at that because I didn't feel like she did anything with love. Alofa. The virtue that makes you forget about you and you think of others first. (p. 12)

Despite and perhaps because of this very innocent perspective conveyed in *The Girl in the Moon Circle,* we see very early on in the narrative that the girls' existence is, however, not surrounded by love but by danger in the form of gendered violence that erodes the edges of their innocence from a very young age.

As Sinivaiana-Gabbard notes (1998), the moon circle girls "speak casually of the snow-cone man who gives them free treats in exchange for sexual favours from their friend Misa who 'really doesn't mind.'" Even Samoana at times discounts this as gendered violence, normalising it because it exists as a shared, matter-of-fact experience in the girls' lives. Nevertheless, Samoana says about the snow-cone man molesting her girlfriend Misa, "that didn't count because they were never alone and

we were all present whenever he squeezed her nipples for free snow-cones and twisties and lollies" (p. 11). As a matter of fact, she admires Iona and Siala for being resourceful and rebellious in contrast to the apparent hypocrisies of other villagers pretending to conduct the godly life.

By using the voice of minors as narrators, the author is able to "cast a relatively direct light on both the often violent community relationships and the power inequalities that both victimise and form her young protagonists" (Ramsay, p. 9). In Sia Figiel's novels, children dream about living abroad, travelling, watching TV, and having a pink wedding with twelve bridesmaids and five hundred guests. Therefore, the narration, which presents the atrocities such as incest, rape, and physical violence from their immature perspective as observers, is mixed with their childish games, fascinations, and interactions in a way that would otherwise be too overwhelming to handle. The story is told by a naïve and honest teller, a young child who does not yet face the stigma of judgement but seems to have a fresh insight as they are still in the process of learning their environment and surroundings.

Violence against children and women is a prevalent problem in Samoa which makes authors elevate their concern regarding subjects deemed by the society as private (Figiel as cited in Cowling, 2009, p. 34). Additionally, violence is acceptable to a certain extent if it does not bring any serious complications (Boodoosingh, et al., p. 39). In Figiel's *The Girl in the Moon Circle,* children decide not to discuss the sex-related scandals, being conscious of their severity as they identify some of them as incest:

> We don't talk about Feala's miscarriage. And the thing came out a lizard. A rat. Buried in a 3 pound pisupo can. We don't talk about it because we all know who the father is. Which makes her sisters with her own baby. (p. 5)

The girls in the circle are terrified of what happened to their friend Ina, who was severely beaten and had her hair cut as a result of allegedly flirting with the pastor's son. Being humiliated and hurt by her father, she decides to commit suicide.

Afi, Alofa, and Ina, all experience the punishment of having their hair cut, which affects their well-being. Scissors can be seen as the symbol of violence directed to deprive the woman's body of their self-confidence and sense of beauty (V'a Perlini, 2003, p. 117). Another significant metaphor is related to the figure of Mr Brown, who is perceived as a symbol of Western influence and globalisation on tropical Pacific societies (Ahmed, 2019, p. 3). The magazine with photographs of naked women disturbs and challenges Alofa, who is distressed and does not understand the natural reaction of her body for excitement caused by nudity. Filiga, Alofa's father, is cheating on his third wife with his daughter's teacher and is the authority that punishes the village's children. He is also

responsible for shaving Afia's head. When Alofa is caught naked with Lealofi, it is her father who beats her. This brings her to contemplate their relationship: "I was his daughter- once. And he hated me for that" (p. 220). According to Va'a Perlini (2003), "(…) A Samoan husband like Filiga, whose sexual misconduct is condoned [is] as an essence of the male ethos" (p. 50).

Gendered violence in the story of Malaefou is also clearly seen when Pisa, Alofa's mother, is punished by her spouse's family for giving birth to a baby girl. As a consequence of all the suffering she experiences being a woman, she makes a decision to raise her daughter as "ugly". Alofa says: "I was never to know that I was beautiful" (p. 154). Pisa sees feminity as a shame. Through the stories of Sia Figiel, the reader can draw the conclusion that even though there are men who seem to be unable to control their sexual behaviour and violate others, these are women and girls who are thought to be responsible for any mistreatment that befalls them. Moreover, the men's misleading and ignorant ways cause fights between mothers, sisters, and girlfriends, and continuously disrupt the solidarity of the feminine community.

Despite their young age, girls and boys are not protected or exempted from severe physical abuse and punishment. When Samoana and her siblings come back from school, their mother Lafitaga (Lafi) is enraged. She asks them to bring the branch and she starts the beating. The children are not exactly sure how they deserve the beating and what they have done. Lafitaga is described as "[y]anking Ivoga by the ponytails and starts hitting her skinny legs," as "Ivoga screams in both pain and surprised confusion" then "hitting Isaia across the face with the branch" (15). Samoana's mother yells at her, "[s]hut up or I'll snash my fist into your mouth. Do you hear me? I stop immediately. Knowing perhaps that she didn't beat me because I was the youngest. But the one with pee running down my legs" (p. 16). The situation further suggests that the young girl is often spared from physical violence as she is still very little; hence, her viewpoints and how she understands her surroundings are still indifferent to a certain degree. After she starts to calm down, Lafi hugs her children, who are deeply confused. They say, "[t]his is how my mother shows utter affection towards her children" (p. 16). Presumably, this is a pretty standard treatment and dynamic in the impaired families of Malaefou, yet the reader learns that these were the repercussions of the conflict between Lafi and their aunt Lupe as the latter took and wore her bra without asking. Enraged Lupe, ashamed and bothered by Lafi's accusations, tells her, "Now pack your things and go the hell back to Savaii where you come from you bloody bitch! And don't even think for once you can take any of the children!" (p. 18). Lafi used her anger not towards the thief in her family but towards her own children, feeling offended and attacked by the threat of abandonment and being chased away to Savaii, where she initially came from. This dynamic of the hatred between females and the generational trauma that

affects them, especially after getting married and becoming mothers, is developed further in Figiel's third, powerful novel based on the experiences of womanhood, *They Who Do Not Grieve* (2000).

5.10 *They Who Do Not Grieve* (2000)

Before the publication of her third novel, Sia Figiel explained the source of inspiration behind the book title, which comes actually from one of Aotearoa New Zealand author Witi Ihaemara's novels *Nights in the Gardens of Spain* (1995). In it, Ihimaera shares a quote from William Wordsworth, "We shall not Grieve, but rather find strength in what's left behind" (Figiel in Ellis, 1998, pp. 77–78). As Figiel explains, "So I'm exploring grief and death, how people come together, how people go apart, and so the language and the tone of melancholy, grief, there's so much you can do with language" (Figiel in Ellis, 1998, pp. 77–78). At the time of this 1998 interview, Figiel revealed that her third novel was going to explore the environments dominated by matriarchs and "the dynamics of women separated by generational lines" (Figiel in Ellis, 1998, p. 78). Therefore, she opens her book with a quote from the *Holy Bible*, "[b]lessed are they who mourn, for they shall be comforted."

In *They Who Do Not Grieve*, Figiel explores her female heritage and reconciles the painful intergenerational trauma that haunts Samoan girls, consisting of female-on-female aggression. She also defies the taboos *not* to grieve the daughters and forbears for whom taboos forbid speaking of and who thus haunt the society of Samoa forever. Through her masterful use of storytelling and narration, Sia Figiel brings together the stories of three generations of female family members in two families, juxtaposing the modern with the traditional and using the voices of two characters. Malu and Alofa's history interweaves the story structure even though they do not meet personally in the novel. Nevertheless, what ties them together becomes the main plot. The novel explores how their grandmothers Lalolagi and Tausi used to be close friends until the affair and betrayal that came to separate them forever. As the stories of one generation echo through the next, carrying the inheritance of the violent toll of abuse, so do their imagined and actual lives within the three separate parts of the book. The tattoo of a Samoan woman, the *malu*, which is thought to have been brought from Fiji by conjoined twins, Taema and Tilafaiga, who were "[b]orn stuck back to back" (p. 177), is the central focus of the book.

Unfinished tattoos have a haunting effect on women's lives, and the twins' ghosts follow them around. The guilt and sorrow that come from not getting the whole tattoo can haunt a woman for the rest of her life. Like illicit love and broken promises, the guilt and anguish of not finishing the tattoo ceremony go hand in hand. In this Samoan tale, two closest friends, a tattoo, a treachery, and the generations-spanning fallout all come together. Judgment, humiliation, loss, and infidelity occur throughout the novel, interlaced with domestic violence and adultery. Being secretive brings an

emotional burden and, therefore, serves as a reminder of the price one has to pay in their avoidance of confrontation. As she observes the island's American residents, young Malu witnesses how the unhappiness of the 1900s continues into the 1960s.

In her article "Representing Pacific Tattoos: Issues in Postcolonial Critical Practice" (2008), Mandy Treagus explores the modern role of tattooing as a tool in discovering one's ancestral ties, identity, and culture and its use as a significant trope in this novel. *Malu*, the female-specific tattoo of cultural significance, "provide[s] the text with its narrative structure and its primary trope" as the tattoo brings into contact with both the internal and external parts of the personal and social body, shaping its relations with other people as well as building one's personal belonging (Fleming as cited in Treagus, 2008, p. 185). The elements that connect the women in the story are their promise to themselves not to repeat the mistakes of their ancestors, and "absent mothers, both shamed and dead for exploring sexuality outside strict boundaries" (Treagus, 2008, p. 185). It is only by going on this deep, intergenerational and indeed inner journey that both the characters in the novel, and Figiel herself as narrator, seem to be able to finally fulfil this promise and overcome an intergenerational curse.

The concept of grief recurs in this, as does the *fagogo* reappears in the form of twins (now Stone and Cloud women). The twins ask Alofa to behead them with a sword as she is not capable of hearing them, regardless of their efforts. They ask to be buried together, and when Alofa cries in her protest, they respond, "Do it girl. Just do it. And we will rest in peace. We will rest. But promise us one thing: that you will not forget us. This is all we ask of you. Promise us, Alofa. Promise us" (p. 177). Rather than obeying the taboo against speaking out, remembering here becomes a promise Alofa and, therefore Figiel, must keep. It is crucial in this context as it is the only condition the twins impose. Their ultimate pain is the pain of vanishing from one's memory—of being forgotten and not mourned.

Additionally, the symbol of twins brings to one's mind the concept of protection, especially in the context of tattooing, as it can be translated into one's expansion through the incorporation of intangible signs that can serve as a form of shielding (Gell as cited in Treagus, 2008, p. 185). Moreover, the twins promise Malu that her tattoo will provide her with empowerment as the design of the female *malu* (a form of a traditional tattoo for females) is the combination of natural elements of life placed on the insides of her thighs.Treagus (2008) concludes that "[t]he grief that the title alludes to is that of generations of women who have suffered because their pursuit of sexual experience has provoked punishment." These women transcend the stifling sorrow that has consumed their grandmas' life, symbolised by Lalolagi's only partially finished tattoo, to growing in strength and command of their sexuality against clashing powers (p. 186). According to Ellis (2006),

"[i]n the Samoan ideal, a completed tattoo is created when the young recipient's body has achieved its full growth" (p. 696). The character which exemplifies it perfectly is Malu, who "empowered by her own *malu*, claims her right to express her sexuality and the choice to have a child outside of marriage" (Treagus, 2008, p. 186).

As Treagus (2008) notes, "any sexual activity by young unmarried women is punishable by banishment, physical disfigurement… or other forms of abuse" (p. 186). It is this shame and banishment that repeats through the generations in *They Who Do Not Grieve*. Readers learn that Malu's grandmother, Lalolagi, once had an affair with the tattooist, whose enraged wife, learning of it because of a betrayal by jealous Tausi, tore her ear apart in conspiration with other villagers. Meanwhile, the man disappeared and was not held to account, while Lalolagi became a shame to her family for being forced to have the incomplete *malu*:

> Thus did my grandmother go through life. For she had decided in her punishment to live (whereas others took their lives – living an impossibility after failing such an operation). Her punishment to live with the pain of shame she had put her family through (*was* putting her family through)… (p. 14)

Grandmother Lalolagi's destiny is haunted by the betrayal, which condemns her to a cycle of female-on-female intergenerational violence. Her own daughter has committed suicide. Her granddaughter's life is haunted by the memory of her dead mother. She calls her granddaughter Malu "a slut" and "a whore" (p. 11) and hurls offensive, caustic language at her. The image of this behaviour evokes a catastrophic intergenerational trauma, clearly shows how a young girl is forced to endure verbal and physical abuse. Consequently, for her, "[t]he present is full of uncertainty. Full of questions. Full of misery, confusion. Silent anger" (p. 12). Malu is thus an orphan who is haunted by her mother's tragic youth and is not only belittled by her grandmother but also by village children, as she admits, "I carry my grandmother's pain, my family's shame, in the letters that spell my name, M-A-L-U" (p. 13).

Juniper Ellis (2006) also observes the intergenerational trauma behind the pervasive woman-to-woman violence in this novel when she notes that, "[t]he women who punish Lalolagi use *malu* to confirm social patterns by recording their violation" (p. 694). Further, "[t]he women punish the trespassing woman, emblazoning the scandal on her body, while the tattoo artist, who wished to emblazon his love on her body, disappears" (Ellis, 2006, p. 694). Moreover, Tausi and Lalolagi were close friends who decided to have malu to celebrate their friendship. Nonetheless, Lelolagi is betrayed by this woman, who alerts the tattooist's wife about the affair as she manages to get her tattoo completed in the meantime (Ellis, 2006, p. 694). This can be understood as an ultimately vain and cruel betrayal of one woman by another, caused by simple jealousy.

The story of *They Who Do Not Grieve* is the last part of the trilogy continuing the stories of characters in the previous works. Here, Alofa, just as in *Where We Once Belonged*, is the daughter of Filiga and Pisa. During her mother's funeral, she bursts into laughter after the priest cherishes Pisa's memory as if she led a life of a saint. Other women pinch her to the point of leaving marks on her body, call her a "bitch" (p. 181). In this novel, it is Alofa's behaviour at the funeral that leads to her banishment from the family home and her living with Siniva. Under these conditions, Alofa becomes overwhelmed with sorrow as her father quickly remarries with Eva, and she notices this 'replacement wife' is not poorly treated like her own mother was:

> She was not treated the way Pisa was treated. She didn't have to go to the back. Her family had all that it took for a girl in her position not to *have to* go to the back. Where Pisa spent most of her life. Sweating in the fire. Eyes burnt in the fire. Cooking. Cooking. Cooking. (p. 183)

Alofa comes to realise that her mother led a very hard-working life, being abandoned and humiliated. She realises that her mother, whom she had hated in *Where We Once Belonged,* has herself been a victim and has passed on this victimhood to her daughter. In defiance of remembering the dead, this brings to mind a memory, and thus, through allowing herself to grieve, she feels empathy with, and a kind of reconciliation with, her deceased mother:

> Suddenly, I heard a familiar sound. It was the rustling of feet on leaves. I was remembering Pisa. The woman who gave birth to me. The woman who became many things so that I could be alive. The woman who became 'damaged goods' so that I could be. The woman who told me nothing about life or death. 'Expect nothing and you'll get nothing' she used to say in that unspoken language only she and I understood. (p. 185)

Alofa recognises the bond of the intergenerational trauma between her and her mother. She notices the sacrifices her deceased mother made to keep her last shreds of dignity, and spousal respect, and provide shelter to her daughter. The presence of this intergenerational 'curse' that needs breaking is so strong that even Filiga's mother and Alofa's grandmother, Tausi, who has herself perpetuated violence towards Pisa, feels the ghosts surrounding the house as she recognises it is haunted. The phantom of Pisa comes to visit Alofa and she falls sick when Pisa asks her "Why have you cut the branch of the mango tree?" (p. 183). As the reader may recall, it was Filiga's first wife Vaisola, who hung herself on the tree, not being able to birth a child, and this appears to be a reference to that event chronicled in *Where We Once Belonged.* Consequently, Filiga writes to ask his sister in New Zealand to come and see their mother as she is unwell. In her response, she insists

Alofa is present, as without her, "the mango tree will die" (p. 184). When Alofa returns from her aunt Sisi's place, her grandmother says to her, "Alofa. Come. You're late. Let's pray for the mango tree. Let's pray" (p. 184). Thus, along with coming to a certain reconciliation with the past, some of the protagonists in this novel start to allign with one another. The ones who passed even years back now come back in the forms of visions and memories. *They Who Do Not Grieve* presents the power of reconciliation with the past, unblocking curses, and dealing with inner as well as outwardly manifested ghosts that have passed down gendered violence from generation to generation, even from women to women.

5.11 Conclusion

Where We Once Belonged remains a perfect example of the stylistic, grammar, syntactic, phonetic, and semantic tools Sia Figiel applied "to her advantage in portraying a Samoa that is genuine, tangible, and compelling" (Nunes, 2007, p. 47). Figiel adjusts her forms of storytelling for the audience of Samoan girls and young women, among whom she creates a knowing, almost conspiratorial 'insider's chatter' in the stories of the three girls Alfoa, Moa, and Lili, as well as the extended Moon Circle. She also calls on the importance of genealogy in Samoan orality. However, she adapts this to show both the complexity of families connected to the cross-Pacific diaspora and the way that the all-enveloping role of family traps these girls in a social environment in which there is little escape from family dysfunction and violence.

Across the three novels, the reader is able to trace the stages of women's lives, growth, empowerment in womanhood, and their fight against generational trauma. The readers are introduced to Samoana's world through her perspective as an innocent ten-year-old who is often spared from beatings, and is hence blind to the actual cruelty of the atrocities and sexual harassment she observes. We see the teenage Alofa in a tale of coming of age, opening her eyes to hypocrisy and postcolonial double standards. And we end with the adult women characters Alofa and Malu, who face the intergenerational trauma of women's hatred towards themselves and other females. As Treagus (2008) states, Figiel's perspective is informed by "multiple understandings of Samoan culture which force the insider/outsider dichotomy to collapse" (p. 187) as she opens her writing to both Samoans by indigenising her writing, as well as to the international audience thanks to her Western education and exposure through the years.

Her armoury of tackling gendered violence is impressive, and even intergenerational. But it comes at a cost. As one of the first diasporic authors in narrative prose, she drew on generations of storytellers, poets, and orators who came before to lead not only the renaissance of postcolonial Pacific narrative but to use it for an important cause: addressing and healing unspeakable levels of

gendered violence. In the decades that followed, she opened the way for many contemporary authors and poets to follow her footsteps. But during the time of writing this thesis, it would appear that her own ghosts caught up with her. In May 2024, she was arrested for the murder of a Pacific female academic Caroline Sinavaiana Gabbard.

By writing about madness (in, for instance, the way Figiel introduces the character of Siniva in *Where We Once Belonged,* but also in her delving into the sources of the intergenerational female-on-female violence in *They Who Do Not Grieve*), Figiel challenges the binary perspective of colonised and coloniser, asking questions that stimulate the reader's involvement in questioning social norms, and in particular by portraying "limitations of rationality, bipolarity, hierarchy, authority, and the socially acceptable" (Luangphinith, 2004, p. 62). All of Figiel's narratives show that reality, and the complexities of trauma, can be seen in different ways depending on the standof the individual as "more inclusive visions of self and history" (Luangphinith, 2004, p. 62). But ultimately, Figiel's narratives, just like her own life, also reflect the troubled process of identity creation for women in the region of the tropical Pacific. For women who remain in Samoa, the postmodern identity process creation is never-ending and especially difficult for those who fight to be accepted in their double-colonised communities. The complex elements of recognition, acceptance, and identity for diasporic women have also been pointed out by sociologists (for example, Dhiffaf Al-Shwillay, 2022) and literary scholars (for example, Wilson, 2018). While Figiel raises the way in which the 'in between' woman writer can find ways to speak out boldly to explore and address complexes of gendered violence in tropical Pacific societies, her work is also a testament to the extreme difficulty of speaking out against, and stopping, this violence.

Chapter Six

Narratives from The Tropical Pacific: Further Female Perspectives in Literary Prose

6.1 Summary of the chapter

This chapter considers more recent work since Figiel's taboo-breaking publications and continues to consider the role of the Pacific diaspora in relation to Samoa in particular. It explores the themes of family, love, and violence in the works of Lynn Pulou Alaimalo, focusing on *Lovefolds of Our Upbringing* (2015) and *Pintail Foundation* (2016). Through these novels, the author portrays the strong familial bonds present in Samoan culture, even amidst violence, trauma, and abuse, with characters like Lulia fiercely protecting her children while grappling with societal challenges such as harassment and sexual assault. The narrative also touches upon cultural storytelling traditions, such as su'ifefiloi, and how they are woven into the prose and poetry of Samoan literature, especially in works like *Sourcing Siapo*, highlighting the intersection of personal struggles with cultural heritage and identity.

In this chapter, January grapples with the emotional trauma of her past, particularly her abusive relationship with her mother and her strained connection to her father, reflecting on the generational scars that impact her life. Despite this body of work that shows the growing strength of women's narratives to speak out on these difficult topics in the Pacific Island context, the work itself continues to reflect on the pressures placed on women's Pacific voices against speaking out. It is noteworthy that *Sourcing Siapo* highlights the silence surrounding violence in Samoan culture, particularly against women, and the consequences of breaking this silence, which often leads to stigmatisation and isolation. The chapter explores themes of personal and cultural trauma, the struggle for self-identity, and the complex dynamics of forgiveness and healing, both within family and community contexts.

6.2 The Protection from Violence: *Lovefolds of Our Upbringing* (2015) and *Pintail Foundation* (2016)

The concept of *alofa*, the Samoan word for "love," usually remains the common welding characteristic for traditional Samoan storytelling. Strong family ties and their fundamental meaning in Samoan culture are visible in the two novels of Lynn Pulou Alaimalo from American Samoa—*Lovefolds of Our Upbringing* (2015) and *Pintail Foundation* (2016). These stories prove strong family connections regardless of repeatedly present violence against women.

Lovefolds of Our Upbringing (2015) is a multi-perspectival and polyphonic novel composed of ten chapters, each alternately presenting daily life from the perspective of a mother, father, and

children. Iulia is in a happy marriage with her husband, Tala; however, she experiences assaults and hatred from his side of the family. She is fearless and would do anything to protect her children (Paulenyscha- Pauly, Danielson-Danny, Henry, Samu, Arthurlyna- Liga, and Arieta- Alieka). Even though she is committed and does not avoid a fight to protect her children, the constant threat from adults and her local surrounding is very much present. Iulia recalls, “I was caught in outbursts and rude confrontations from my husband’s family several times'' (p. 93). She recalls one of the examples when her family-in-law's (Pule and Kilia’s) children started a fight with her at school:

> The next day as Tala proceeded out to work, I spotted Kilia’s daughter Risati and confronted her about the comments made towards Pauly. Later in the afternoon, I was struck in the head with a cricket bat by Kilia and her daughter Risati. (p. 94)

The conflict arises to such an extent that Danny complains: “To think being near relatives is a cozy state is a mesmerisation. We go to sleep in machetes and wake up to machete feelings every day. That is not a healthy state” (pp. 49–50). Although the children’s stories describe the fear of being assaulted or molested, they stay feisty and react immediately, aware of the impending danger. Their reaction is illustrated by the example of the bus driver thinking of harassing Paulenyscha:

> His ignorance quickly changed into a smirk. He winks his ugly pupils at me and immediately closes his fist.
>
> ‘Pervert!’
>
> The aura of harassment loitering in our community today is so ridiculous. Anyone will discover that the eye-winking habit is a normal act out of gross men who are better off creatures with lewd acts. It is sad. I wish I could just kick his face while he sits there holding the wheel smiling at the passengers and winking at me through the rearview mirror. But I need to get to school immediately so his life is spared. (p. 30)

Iulia is presented as a loving and caring individual who married her spouse Tala out of love. She does not experience any abuse from him. Iulia plants self-confidence and trust in her children by listening carefully to anything they say, attending all the school events, always standing up for them, and acknowledging, for instance, Danny’s trauma:

> I have known him all these years to be my hip child who never leaves my side, my child who is still traumatized with many days we fought with my husband’s relatives and whose eyes have dramatically opened up to blood, sweat and tears when we first moved here. (pp. 84–85)

In the same way, Tala remains a proud and supportive father. Despite the harsh reality of living conditions, he enhances respect towards other people. Tala thus resembles the idealised Samoan protective father portrayed in sure of the discussed storytelling, for instance, *Sourcing Siapo*. He cries when he needs to punish Arthurlyna:

> All this wishful thinking takes me back to the swing that nearly landed me on my behind today. I'm not mad at Dad. I am just disappointed every time he dreads to hit me. I dislike the tears that always comes down his face during a belt session with me. He must have so many hopes for me but I don't even know. (p. 119)

Pintail Foundation (2016) is a sequel published the year after *Lovefolds of Our Upbringing* (2015). In the opening, the author likens the significant values of the family and the sense of belonging to the migration of a grey duck in the tropical Pacific:

> Wherever Samoans may pursue endeavours in the world, they will always remember the ties, biomes, and aura of their beginning. From cities, skyscrapers and from many countries afar… home remains unforgotten to Samoans. In the Pasifika circle and over yonder, there's a Samoan proverb that my people are well-versed in that goes, "E lele le toloa ae ma'au i le vai." No matter where a grey duck flies, it will always return to its wetlands—home. (p. xii)

While the story presents the importance of strong family ties and the long-distance relationship between parents and their children, it reveals some disturbing aspects. A criminal offence, *moetolo* is performed by "sleep crawlers." As Sotiata Seiuli (2016) indicates, it is a type of rape, which is condemned and "if a perpetrator was caught in the vicinity of the family home, male relatives would ensure he received a good beating, a clear demonstration of their role of guardian of family honour" (p. 31). This form of sexual assault is illustrated by the example of what almost happened to Arieta as she recalls:

> I felt my shorts gradually lowering below my thighs and away to my feet. My stomach disgruntledly churned in a cottonmouth heave of fear as the shadow leaned over to dab a wet kiss on my lips. Alcohol wreaked as liquidy drool pooled on my cheek, as the face worked its way lower. My stomach turned reflexively, signalling my knees to respond to stranger's face. My hand maneuvered quickly to flip on the light switch. (pp. 13–14)

Arieta manages to switch on the light and alarm her family. Since she recognised the predator, her family was able to find him. The first attempt to catch the offender is instant. However,

the beating is received by coincidence by some other person, a random drunk. Nevertheless, her brother Danny manages to find the perpetrator: “I grew tired of beating that fool up. My aunts said it was cruel of me to beat him down within his last breath. They said I could’ve gone to jail for beating the scabs off his healing scars again” (p. 49). He adds: “As far as I was concerned, Tino learned and would continue to learn his lesson whenever I saw him” (p. 52). The incident provokes different reactions from the people in their village. Some people accuse Lusia and Arieta of teasing men: “In the end, my sisters were blamed as taunting him or were accused as being the parties who has somehow asked for it” (p. 51). Danny, however, insists, “He was a moekolo, a night creeper who deserved what he got” (p. 51). Iulia is shocked by the victim-blaming assumptions of churchgoing ladies, and states:

> Those churchgoing ladies made some patently false assumptions about my daughters. They assumed that the reason a sexually depraved young man could pray on young women was because the girls were “naughty.” This was completely ridiculous! And I made it abundantly clear to those wrong-headed women rationalizing the criminal behavior of these men who roamed the streets at night in the shadows, lying in wait, looking for weak, unsuspecting victims to violate in an unguarded moment. No, their stupidity against my daughters would not stop me from cracking some heads. (pp. 24–25)

6.3 Samoan Storytelling: Su’ifefiloi *in Sourcing Siapo*

The other type of poetry, remaining similar to yet distinguishable from its commonly understood classic form, is su'ifefiloi—which sis present in the work of Jacinta Suataute Galea'i, *Semoana: A Novel in Prose and Poetry* (2005). This particular form of composition relies on the combination of the voices of different participants who, together, create a sequence of songs for a special occasion. The outcome introduces the unique story and setting with a special accent put on the culture of Samoa and its values. The same multi-perspectival narration is included in the narration of *Sourcing Siapo* (2016) by Lynn Pulou-Alaimalo. The book’s formal linguistic qualities combine the forms of letters, memories, prayers, dialogues, third-person narration, poems, and songs. All these forms relate to the Samoan traditional forms of narratives, which can be classified as “alaga’upu/proverbs, fāgogo/fables, faleitu/comedies, pese/songs, solo/chants, tauloto/poems, and tala le vavau. Tala le vavau is frequently translated as myths and legends” (Lilomaiava-Doktor, 2020, p. 123).

In order to explain the reasons behind the title *Sourcing Siapo*, it is worth quoting a personal anecdote of the Samoan author, activist, and educator Penina Ava Taesali (2016, Notes):

> When I was first united with my father and relatives my Aunt Tauvela gave my sister and me large pieces of the Tongan tapa. My Aunt explained briefly how the siapo was made; "it is women's work only and it is very hard work…" (n.p.)

Since siapo remains a traditional Samoan cloth made from the u'a (mulberry tree) through repeatedly pounding and beating the plant's inner bark, the metaphor of siapo for family saga is symbolic. As summarised by Eleanor Berry on the back cover of the book, the variety of memories and shreds of childhood memories in this book are combined into an individual story as "it is a single whole— a journey-quest to find, remember, and reconcile mother, father, siblings, ancestors, languages, races, and cosmologies." The form of a novel spread over 93 pages combines the elements of spoken and in print poetry, prose, and oral storytelling. The novel is characterised by the same continuation of the same saga and the manifest of family ties as in the stories of Lynn Pulou-Alaimalo.

In a novel, Delores, born in Marysville, California, is a mother of ten. Growing up in poverty in San Francisco, she often suffered from starvation, and as her children say, "we think she lived on the streets she said there / was nothing worse and a quarter cup of orange juice / is all you need for one day / we inherit what we cannot help" (p. 13). Delores has her first child (November) at nineteen years old to a street musician. Later, she marries Samoan Iopu Teasali, with whom she has six children—January, March, May, August, June, and September.[31] Their divorce harms the kids as they all have a strong connection with a caring and devoted father. It is suggested that the reason for their splitting might refer to his extramarital affairs: "…we didn't have to hear "Your Father's whores" again" (p. 34). Life becomes utterly miserable once the judicial separation is finalised and the father moves out: "The last time we see father is in the Yolo County Courthouse / the next day the drunk moves in / father Tamā" (p. 21). On the day the stepfather moves in, the domestic violence begins— "the drunk grabbed us by the neck / knocked-up hell / we'd swallow it year after year we became champion swallowers" (p. 30) and "to belt to coffee-cord to fist to kiss to buckle to switch to run to bolt to wall" (p. 36).

The departure of the beloved Iopu is heartbreaking and marks the beginning of a nightmare, especially for one of the daughters, January. While "the drunk" fathers three more of their palagi[32] mother's children — October, July, and December — January becomes the victim of his abuse:

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[31] As the story continues, we partially learn the children's true names. For instance, October's real name is Octavius, while September's Matthew Aryc.

[32] In Samoan 'palagi' means "somebody who is white" or not Samoan.

> January is twelve years old she is asleep the drunk is on her bed mother is watching television he is pressing his large hand down over her mouth and nostrils Don't move shut-up stop moving he is suffocating her he stinks reeks of rot-gut.
>
> He convinces mother January is dreaming nothing changes except from that day forward it is up to January she decides to become cedar tree. She is already Hercules. (p. 33)

A girl is deprived of the care and shielding of her Samoan part of the family—"her cousins aunties uncles grandmothers protectors have no addresses no phone tears flooding sheets renamed Caucasian mother sees only a lover not a thief or a freeloader we see a bad excuse for a father" (p. 33). Years later, she writes in a letter to her mother:

> The first time I sat on his lap his hands went up and under my clothes when the butterflies and flowers fled from my brand-new short set that grandmother bought me I kicked like Black-Beauty she is thunder galloping all the way to the ocean but he grabs harder. (p. 34)

The butterflies on the clothing show how fragile the child's innocence is and how easily and suddenly it leaves when it is hurt. Even though the girl tries to escape from the grip, her desperate moves are compared to the strong,beautiful, and determined animal. She is going to fight for the freedom of her mind. It is mainly through January's eyes that the reader can trace her struggles through adult life and her complicated relationship with her mother and siblings. She recalls her mother's vanity in sorrow:

> I couldn't count the years or the tears locked inside my jaw I remember your obsession with glamor a flat stomach your questions for May and me Am I more beautiful than Lorna? After each child you'd lose the weight fit back into your size -6 hot pants and tuck-in your white blouse it's the one thing you lived for your men. (p. 47)

January visits Tamā in the ICU. She is willing to forgive him, even though he does not recognise her. The older sister's love is strong as she feels for her mourning younger siblings whose biological father has just passed away in the hospital bed. Nevertheless, she is not free from the trauma, which will affect every aspect of her life forever:

> a garden of fibroids balloons red globes of pomegranates diseased clitoris-nipples-breasts hide body parts descending into the abyss she cannot find her future (please help) or her beloved's first kiss and her blanket of warm lilies dissolve (the girl where

> did she go?). Romance is a drought on the unwritten page as the drunk dumbs possible suitors to think just like him. (p. 50)

She remembers the butterflies on her shirt from the first time she sat on the drunk's lap: "I surrender my stooped back and stutter my waitress and receptionist prisons I surrender my sorrow. I want to recover the possible world awaiting at the gates butterflies who were once warriors" (p. 55). Just like the butterflies, the warm lilies from her blankets dissolve too. Her depersonalisation of self, which began with the first time she was harmed as a child, continues through her struggles as an insecure woman in an adult life.

The most prominent lines are the words January writes to her biological father, cherishing her ancestry and referring to the position of women in the society of her forebears. The family who would support her, unlike her mother (p. 63), who projected on them impossible standards—"we endured bad trips on LSD mother fed us diet pills black-beauties" (p. 67). The oldest daughter remembers, "Run run run / I was sweeping your kitchen floor. / He comes up behind me / I can't remember he is pinching my breasts / swearing into my ears / "Get down!"" (p. 68), when she escapes to her neighbour who calls the police. Her mother forgives "the drank" as he "stopped for a week maybe more… I can't remember how long he'll stay sober. I remember it doesn't matter drunk or sober" (p. 69).

Without her Samoan (father's) part of the family, the children feel scared and believe one day their father will rescue them, screaming at "the drunk:" "'Dad goin go home and when he does / "Dad goin kick your ass to the moon!!!'" March hollers" (p. 72) but "We waited. / But Dad never came / And Mom was there / as absent as God" (p. 73). January manages to find her father in San Francisco when she turns thirty-one. Through her difficult relationship with her mother, it looks like January finds enough compassion to forgive her as the mother gets older and suffers from dementia. When she is elderly, she says to their children, "I don't want to hurt anyone anymore" (p. 83), which a reader can find at the beginning of the story when the children say, "we count her tears lift her / into our wings whispering / into her seashell ears / we will protect you mother" (p. 11). At the end of the novel, January refers to her prayers from childhood: "a man's free will / if violence rules the house / how does one get out?" (p. 38).

> Hail Mary Full of Grace
>
> let her tell her story
>
> I hear the higher choir of angels
>
> Lord Hear My Prayer.

Unlock the gates let her in

this world forced her into a role

she couldn't fit in (p. 84)

January reminds the reader of the strength represented by Samoan women, also as warriors and protectors, the "princesses" who gain nobility through sacrifice and acquired wisdom. As Daisy Bentley-Gray (personal communication, March 10, 2023)[33] underlines, the history of exceptional women warriors reaches back into ancient times. For instance, the title of the Woman King was given to Salamasina, who, as the Tafa'ifā, possessed all four chiefly titles for parts of Samoan lands. Since then, no male has ever been able to follow. According to common belief, Salamasina is an ancestor of current Prime Minister Fiame Naomi Mata'afa. Other important figures include Nafanua Toe Tama'ita'i, the empress that January describes as a "Warrior Goddess" (p. 52):

> Auntie says ie is fine-mat in Samoan. It takes one year to weave the ie Auntie says siapo is the Samoan tapa It's women' work, hard work pounding bark into cloth. Grandmother Suliana told May nobility is earned in our culture. The malu is for perfection for Samoan nobility grandmother was raised as a princess but not the same as American or British princesses the Samoan princess works hard she must earn her nobility. I wonder what it means father when you said the ocean is many colours but most people only see blue. I miss you, my beloved. (p. 57)

The act of telling one's story can recognise personal or cultural violence, ease the act of forgiveness, soften the pain, and help with recovery. In some cases, some sort of relief can be felt when a victim of a crime hears the confession from the abuser (Hayner, 2001, p. 2). According to the spiral of silence theory, however, individuals often choose to remain silent due to the threat of isolation as well as "doubt[ing] about one's own capacity for judgement" (Noelle-Neumann, 1974, p. 43). Therefore, the encouragement to share one's testimony is crucial in order to compose valuable storytelling on gendered violence. Judith Herman (2015) notes that admitting to being abused or assaulted can often elicit further shame and stigmatisation.

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[33] I spoke to an expert Daisy Bentley-Gray (Unitec, Mt Albert Campus, Auckland, New Zealand, personal communication, March 10, 2023) about traditional gender roles in Samoa.

6.4 Lani Wendt Young: Overstepping the Boundaries of Taboo

In an interview for the station *One*, Lani Wendt Young describes her experience as a person nominated to collect people's stories after the earthquake and tsunami in Samoa in 2009. Since the natural disaster, the survivors' narratives have been gathered and published in *Pacific Tsunami "Galu Afi"* (2010). With her voice shaking, the author tells the story of a mother who lost her nine-year-old daughter, whose body was still not recovered. Despite the oppressive humidity and relentless wet, together with her relatives, a woman built an enormous bonfire throughout the night. When asked why, she said, "I don't want my daughter to be lost and afraid of the dark.And if she's out there, I want her to be able to find a way home" (Lani Wendt Young, 2012, 4:54). Seeing the devastating repercussions of the tsunami, Lani Wendt Young decided to pursue her dreams and become a writer to fulfil her long-delayed aspirations. This Pacific author, the ACP Pacific Laureate selected by the African, Caribbean, Pacific Group of States in 2018, has become highly recognised for her series of novels dedicated mainly to teenagers. First, *Telesā* (2011) is a fantasy inspired by ancient Pacific mythology, whereas the *Scarlet* series comprises four contemporary romance stories.

The writing of this Samoan author is not limited to popular themes; it oversteps the boundaries of taboo to tackle issues of violence against women in the Pacific. Lani Wendt Young is a remarkable spokesperson against gendered violence in Samoa. In her 2013 blog, she published a letter she wrote to the Chairman of the National Council of Churches in response to his victim-blaming statements in an interview with *The Samoa Observer*. In this blog, she courageously describes her powerlessness as a seven-year-old victim of rape. Lani Wendt Young's testimony has been met with many positive responses from women who experienced abuse. However, outraged family members had a different reaction — "One condemned my disclosure as "disgusting" and "bringing shame on our family" (Young, 2013). Bringing shame to a family brings the threat of being cursed by the matai (chief) or the head of the family (Ioasa-Martin & Laurie Jo Moore, 2012, p. 390).

According to the studies conducted by Anne-Marie Tupuola (2004, p. 122), the fear of bringing shame to the family was so strong that some girls revealed thoughts of committing suicide in case of pregnancy. Given the kinds of shames and silences that are chronicled in so many of these stories, one should highlight the space Lani Wendt Young created in her collection of short stories *Afakasi Women* (2019). An Afakasi woman is a term meaning 'half-breed,' half caste or mixed ethnicity; yet, through this figure, we see the empowerment of Samoa—that even within the Pacific, there are many mixed heritages, ways of being and mixing that are sometimes oppressive and sometimes liberatory tools. Here, the author presents what it means to be a Samoan woman, including the variety of feelings and sensibilities that surround the female identity of the woman in

Oceania. While some of the stories portray the cheerful happening, there are moments of personal tragedies. “Don’t Tell” begins with the following frightening lines:

> “Don’t tell or I’ll kill you,” he said, his breath hot and wet in her ear as he covered her mouth with his huge hand.
>
> “Don’t tell or I’ll kill you,” he said, emerging from the shadows, grabbing her from behind as she bathed in the outside tap.
>
> “Don’t tell or I’ll kill you,” he panted as he crushed the breath out of her and did his bad things to her in the stifling darkness of her mosquito net. (p. 79)

Despite the threats, Susanna decides to tell her mother what happened to her at the hands of her stepfather, Ioane. In disbelief, her mother punishes her for lying and slaps her face. When she confesses to her school friend Matelina, the girls mock her, writing profanities on the bathroom wall, Susanna pamuku. Her teacher, Mrs Esera consoles her and encourages her to go back home after Susanna locks herself in the school bathroom, refusing to do so. When she is back home in bed, the thing she predicted and feared the most happens again, her stepfather rapes her. The next day, finally, the teacher communicates the report of the assault to the principal, who alerts the police. Regardless of the doctor’s examination and the confirmation of the victim’s testimony, the girl’s mother blames her for ruining things for their family, with no consideration for her daughter’s feelings and harm. While the relatives collect the money for Ioane’s defence at court, Susanna is sent to live with her aunt Mina, where she “would cry silent tears under her sheet and pray again and again that her mother would forgive her and come for her” (p. 83), her mother staying at the same house with her daughter’s perpetrator.

The court date arrives, and despite the admission to guilt, expression of deep regret, and promise of generous offerings (*ifoga*) in forms of “[n]o less than six whole pigs, ten cartons of herrings and one hundred fine-mats” being accepted by the girl’s family, the judge remains impassive. The defendant is sentenced to six years in prison for the sexual abuse of a minor. Tragically, nobody validates her hurt, which could never be undone, and the family continues to comfort the felon— “Ionae’s mother and sisters wailed loudly as he was taken away to Tafaigata. Every day they took turns to bring him home-cooked meals so he wouldn’t have to eat the bread soup that the other prisoners were served.” Ioane’s relatives consign Susanna to the fate of living with her auntie forever. Bullied and taunted at school, she decides to cease her education and help in the household. The story finishes with a sorrowful scene as Susanna’s cousin, Alietta, approaches her late at night:

> She was crying and couldn't stop trembling. She was confused and afraid. "My cousin – he came to my bed last night," she said. "He did bad things to me. I tried to make him stop but he wouldn't. He threatened to hurt me if I tell anyone. What should I do?"
>
> Susanna looked her in the eye. Without hesitating she said, "Don't tell. Don't tell anyone anything. Ever." (p. 87)

Silence and speaking is the major theme of this chapter. These stories clearly speak about both the cultural impetus to stay silent and the need to break that code by speaking out. In Samoa, many women are accompanied by a male relative who is supposed to reassure them that she will not involve herself in any sexual activity. What is more, "The role of the young woman is especially intricate and important in some traditional Samoan communities because her demeanour, behaviour, and sexuality tend to reflect upon the honour of her family" (Tupuola, 2004, p. 120). As Anne-Marie Tupuola (2004) notes, she herself risks being reprimanded by her *aiga* for writing a chapter on women's sexuality and social codes that they need to comply with.

The fear of being judged, abandoned, and cursed leads to the decision to commit suicide rather than have a baby in "A Sister's Story." Italia, a young sixteen-year-old student, becomes pregnant with her boyfriend Aleni's baby. As the days pass, her twin Loma, from whose perspective we learn the whole story, catches her painfully vomiting in the bathroom. She learns Italia's well-kept secret and observes how her "beautiful, smart-first-in-class and going-to-be-a-lawyer-one-day sister" (p. 104) "become(s) shockingly thin, shockingly fast" (p. 111) while "[e]ach day must have dragged on as her body rejected all food and even began to rebel against water" (p. 112). For the next two weeks, Loma tries to cover up for her sister, whose health kept on deteriorating: "I (Loma) remember coming home from school to find her passed out on the floor, green liquid congealing in her hair" and "But more than the vomit, it was crying that I remember the clearest. When she wasn't throwing up, Italia was crying. Hopeless, defeated tears that made no sound" (p. 112).

Eventually, the situation becomes alarming. Loma makes a decision to make their father aware of Italia's condition. What happens next frightens the twins:

> The scene that followed between an angry and disappointed solo father and his pregnant teenage daughter is one that I'm sure my dad has replayed countless times in his mind. Words were hurled, vicious, hurtful words, like, 'Slut! … bring shame on our family, on me … wasted your life, your potential … after all that I have done for you … a waste of my time … no longer my daughter …'

> For the first time ever, my father hit one of us. The firstborn. A stinging blow echoed through the house, stunning all three of us.

The next day, at 11:30 am, Italia took her life by hanging herself on the mango tree in the yard of their property. The reactiveness to the her suicide by the locals is filled with resentment. They seek to find the responsible for blaming with no reflection on the factors that led to the ending of girl's young life. The relatives blame their palagi mother, who escaped from their father to New Zealand when the girls were only three years old, only to be "killed by a drunk taxi driver in Auckland two weeks after she got there" (p. 107). However, the most devastating part is the reaction of the father, who cannot seem to overcome the bitterness caused by his deceased daughter's pregnancy and the perpetual anger as she had committed a mortal sin:

> After the funeral, my father never spoke her name again. It was a terrible, shameful thing my sister had done. Shameful for our family, shameful for my father. Like slapping his face in front of a crowded room. Like spitting on us all in the most public way possible. My father was marked forever – a man with a daughter who had killed herself. To get away from him? To get back at him? Because of him? So many whispers, so many hushed conversations, so many silent questions itching to be asked behind every sympathetic face and pitying smile. 'How did she do it? Who found her? What did she look like? How pregnant was she? What really happened?' (p. 106)

The reader can see how the fear of being publicly judged and evaluated frightens an adult man to the extent that it deprives him of mourning his daughter. The feeling of inferiority to the members of his community with families more socially successful than his own makes him blind to the mental and physical suffering of his child, who found it unbearable to come forward to everyone as a teenage mother. As Loma realises, "[w]hy couldn't I have realised then how betrayed and abandoned she must have been feeling? / First the faithless Aleni, then her own body and finally even her sister, her mirror image no less" (p. 114). Upsettingly, the stigma of premarital pregnancy haunts her name even after Italia's death. The protagonist feels abandoned by her boyfriend, denounced by her twin sister, blamed by her father, and mortally judged and cursed by her village.

In "Red Hibiscus – A Fairytale" (2019), when Masina is encouraged to attend the pastor's school in order to "learn more about Jesus and how to be a good girl," her grandmother Lefaga scowls, "She's already a good girl" (p. 168). As the story continues, the deceitfulness of the priest unravels. The story "Red Hibiscus – A Fairytale" reflects a particular type of saga that matches the canon of a mythological Polynesian tale where "a large part of their adventures takes place in the

Heavens or the Underworld, or in other supernatural spheres. Moreover, supernatural features form a substantial — perhaps the predominant — proportion of the material of these sagas" (Chadwick, 1968, p. 244). The hands of a priest are compared to "hungry eels" (p. 168), which brings to one's mind elongated, wormlike bodies. With clarity of mind and a purely new moral spine, children are capable of the twisted manipulation the pastor sneaks into the story of King David and Bathsheba. When the priest implies that the woman in the Bible has purposely seduced the emperor while leaving, Masina poses a question: "Maybe Bathsheba didn't know King David was watching? Maybe she was just having a bath? Why didn't King David just look away?" (p. 169). The response she receives reassures Satan's doing in both the female's behaviour and her motives as the girls are discouraged from wearing makeup, dressing nicely, being playful or even wearing their hair down. When the pastor expects Masina to stay after class, she makes up an excuse to leave as "[e]els pushed at her as she struggled to break free. Snapped their teeth at her as she ran out of the room" (p. 170). When the girl is back home, she tells Lefaga about "[t]he hungry eels that would never be satisfied. Never stop" as "[s]he relaxed into the bone and blood strength of her grandmother's embrace. Fear and shame left her" (p. 171).

On the same day, the spirit of Teine Sā appeared to the pastor on his way home, calling his name and luring him into the woods: "She had long brown hair to her waist, a red flower tucked behind her ear. She wore only a piece of cloth tied around her waist, and the bare skin of her breasts gleamed with oil in the sunlight" (p. 172). The narrator describes, "A pool of fresh spring water ringed with gleaming black rocks. The woman stood in its centre with her back to him, washing her long dark hair in the silver coolness." The goddess bathed just as Bathsheba did; however, unlike in the Bible story, she consciously tempted a man to join her "as she beckoned to him. "'Come…'." As he stepped into the pool, "[h]e did not hear the rustle of many wings in the trees. Or the rasping call of the lulu" (owl) (p. 173).Late in the evening, Lefaga brings a basket to the garden and calls Masina to help her plant a new supplement. While they dig up the hole, they see "an owl on the mango tree and every so often Lefaga paused in her work to return its enquiring cry." After the ground is ready, the grandmother takes out the pastor's head from the basket with "[a] line of crimson at the neatly served edge of his neck" and claims, "There is only one way for men like this. And it always ends here" (p. 175).

Known by her community for her knowledge of herbs and serving as a taulaseā (a healer), the same carer transforms into an executor of social justice in venerable women's defence. The strong figure of a grandmother, called Mamā by a girl, possesses many faces:

> Lefaga wore her fierce face. The one that always made Masina think of a grey owl. Feathered features, with black orbs for her eyes. Black-red lips and teeth sharp as shark tips. The skin of her face, neck and torso stamped with the tattoos of women. Talon fingernails. Dark feathers sprouted along the line of her arms and legs. Unmistakable strength, muscle and sinew. (p. 174)

Lefaga, also portrayed in the form of an owl, is a personification of ancestry wisdom and ancient protection of ancestors outspread for young women, which aims to empower them and reach their potential as Lefaga indicates to her granddaughter: "One day you will be one of us. And you will grow a garden of your own" after they bury the priest's head. Usually, though, even when calm, a woman's face still stayed wise as "she showed most often to the villagers who came to her for medicine and guidance. A wrinkled, worn face like a very old siapo" (p. 170).

Interestingly, according to Franz Steiner (1967), the etymological origin of the word taboo is Polynesian, where "ta" stands for "beat" and "pu" for "conch." The term is design to mean a thing which is "sacred or prohibited in a secondary sense" (p. 31). The taboo in the tropical Pacific context has a great impact on everyday life. Anne-Marie Tupuola (2004) provides an example of discussing the sexually related matters and Samoan's opposition to discussing these matters openly: "…cross-cultural approach to female sexuality proved challenging because of the taboo nature of the topic in Samoan contexts as well as the reluctance of Samoans in general to speak publicly about their private realities" (p. 116). Based on the conservative approach towards the very restricted style of revealing one's feelings in Oceania, it can be noted that authors of the prose and poetry presented in the thesis are undoubtedly overstepping the boundaries of taboos within their societies.

Chapter Seven

Conclusion: Children of Pele

> To offer all Pacific people an opportunity to tell their story, in their own way and with their own voice, I believe that storytelling is key to challenging stereotypes, and to showcase the Pacific's diversity. The most important thing in my mind is giving people a chance to feel empowered, to educate one another and to do so in a new, digital space. (Arieta Talanoa)

In the songs and myths of the Hawaiian people, the goddess Pele holds a place of singular importance. She is a goddess of many things, not least among these is wrath. The women of the Pacific share more than a passing resemblance to the volcano goddess. As Lynda Thomas (1973) suggests in the poem "Volcano", which was discussed in the third chapter, abused women of the cultures across the Pacific possessed a singular capacity to wrest power from their abusers. For this reason, we might justly consider these poets to be the daughters of Pele. These women poets were not inventing new traditions, but they were taking the course of powerful and vengeful goddesses who would take revenge on people who disrespect them. 'The female Jungian archetype of warrior goddess, in the form of Pele and Nafanua, resides deep in Pacific identity.

In the preceding pages, we have seen the historical development of women's writing in the Pacific and the way it has confronted endemic gendered violence, from the very first expressions in anonymous poems in anthologies, to signature and boldly political poetry, where direct expression in prose adapts cultural traditions to provide women with cultural safety and shelter while also overcoming cultural barriers to expression.

Throughout the late 2010s and into the 2020s, social media has been a powerful way that many women around the world have joined together to speak out about the pervasiveness of gendered violence. The next short section of my thesis will consider the place of the Pacific in terms of digital activism such as #MeToo, to reflect on the capacities and limits of narrative to redress gendered violence in the online, digital realm as global reading, writing, and activism begins to change. It will take the opportunity to reflect on the enduring power of narrative, and in particular to consider the particular capacities of literary narrative that may not yet be shared in this online space. It will end with a consideration of emerging literary narratives in the tropical Pacific and conclude with a call for the ongoing work of addressing gendered violence through new forms of narrative.

7.1 Summary of the chapter

The final chapter concludes the chronological trajectory of the thesis from colonial to present times, considering the rise of the #MeToo movement as a form of contemporary narrative, and exploring the limits on it in the Pacific. While gaining traction globally, this thesis reveals that the movement faces unique cultural and societal barriers in the Pacific, where traditional values, family ties, and social ostracism make public testimony difficult. Even so, it shows that digital activism offers a platform for solidarity and change. As Pacific women increasingly use digital spaces to break their silence and confront abuse, the future of advocacy and activism lies in harnessing technology and maintaining cultural integrity, ensuring that new forms of narrative continue to address gendered violence while empowering future generations. This chapter explores the intersection of cultural tradition and modernity in the tropical Pacific, particularly focusing on gendered violence and the evolving role of women in Pacific literature. It highlights how contemporary Pacific authors, particularly women, are using literature to express personal and collective experiences of gender-based violence while asserting their cultural identities and resisting Western influences. Through the work of writers like Jenny Bennett-Tuionetoa and Selina Tusiatala Marsh, the chapter emphasises the importance of storytelling in challenging patriarchal systems, offering a platform for marginalised voices, and connecting the past with present struggles for justice and self-expression in the Pacific community. This chapter concludes with a general reflection of the different affordances and limits of Pacific women's narratives each chapter of this thesis has revealed. It concludes that limits on women's voices persist, but that with each passing decade this body of writing has shown that women continue to also gain strength to speak and write out against it.

7.2 The Diffusion of the #metoo Movement into the Pacific Region

The #MeToo movement, arguably resulting from Alyssa Milano's tweet in October 2017 aroused a worldwide debate on digital storytelling and rape culture. The studies conducted by Irene Lopez et al. (2019) proved that the use of the #MeToo hashtag differs across the globe, where feminist hashtags have different connotations, and different cultural inflections. The French version #BalanceTonPorc was proved to be more aggressive and direct in accusation than its American equivalent. Twitter users sharing their stories tended to use vulgar language and focus on revealing the identity of their oppressor rather than raising awareness by sharing URL links to other resources. On the other hand, in India, #MeToo was often used to blame men for the attacks in general and tended to pay more attention to religion and cultural aspects than in the American milieu.

Fiji has emerged as one of the Pacific regions where women activists are exceptionally vital, hence the area has been credited for Oceania's "technological revolution" due to the advancement

in the use of cell phones and social media platforms (Prasad et al., 2013). Over 40% of Fijians are active online (We Are Social, 2017, as cited in Brimacombe et al., 2018). Online posting has gained a strong popularity because of the government surveillance of the freedom of speech. Moreover, young people find it easier to find space where their voices and opinions can be heard. One of the Fijian participants of the research conducted by Tait Brimacombe et al. (2018) expressed her sense of solidarity and inclusion in a broader community through social media:

> My first real experience was on Facebook when I started sharing on my status of things happening to people I know or to me personally … It created this energy around it where people started commenting on it, showing solidarity and being supportive and sharing their own experiences (p. 513).

In the Fijian context, such an experience is not uncommon. Brimacombe et al. (2018) conclude, "In the context of Fiji's political environment and media landscape, social media is a valuable platform for activists to publish and share statements, news, and information, which would otherwise have limited opportunities for public consumption" (p. 516).

But as we have seen throughout this thesis, many factors often impede social dialogue around gendered violence in the tropical Pacific, including cultural taboos, strict morals and conservative religious standards, social ostracism as well as secrecy, close family ties, and traditional values. On the western South Pacific islands, the reasons that affect sharing one's testimony and making self-disclosure a delicate matter constitute the closeness of relationships between people—lack of anonymity and grave social repercussions. As Prentice (2019) notes:

> Domestic or familial violence is enabled by isolation, while such violence isolates its victims, redoubling the importance of healing social bonds. Indeed, isolation may be a woman's experience within the family setting itself. (p. 148)

These barriers can persist in the digital realm. Even so, digital activism through social platforms appears to be gradually increasing in power, although the diffusion of #MeToo as a movement migrating internationally through diaspora and online platforms is only now beginning to be investigated.

Digital activism has successfully reached out to Oceania's neighbouring areas, such as the Philippines (Quinn, 2019) or Maldives (Almeida, 2018), and to many other Asian areas where online activism has been supported by offline protests and initiatives. Yet, studies have proven that the level of activist engagement—both online and off—relies on internal political structures and government reliability (Lee & Murdie, 2020). The Bayesian model analysis of #MeToo samples of

17,289 and 17,922 tweets from July and September 2019, respectively, conducted by Myunghee Lee and Amanda Murdie (2020), resulted in the characterisation of factors favouring the participation in feminist online protests. The studies proved open political systems to be the most propitious government models as they provide access to direct democracy, respect for citizen's liberty, and protection of the rights of marginalised groups. These studies assume that the context of the digital citizen is first the context of the nation, whereas for many Pacific women, a more relevant context is their place in their extended family and community, or *aiga,* as we have seen in this thesis.

Perhaps this—and uneven internet access among other reasons we have already enumerated across this thesis which make speaking out on gendered violence difficult in these cultural contexts— is why the #metoo movement has found limited uptake within the tropical Pacific islands. Where it has found purchase, the dispersal of the #MeToo movement in Oceania takes place in different social initiatives outside of the hashtag, such as The Brown Girl Woke movement founded by Maluseu Doris Tulifau. Just as we have seen in this thesis that feminism takes its own unique shape in the Pacific, these forms of female activism stress the importance of family values and closeness between its members in terms of loyalty, endorsing talanoa rather than online, dispersed forms of activist redressal.

The diffusion of #MeToo through international social platforms takes place to a certain extent in Islanders' communication across the globe and public media discussions. Here again, the diaspora is critical. In New Zealand, the journalist Alison Mau, editor of the #metooNZ project, exposes sex offenders in workspaces, some of whom are Pacific islanders. Perhaps more powerfully, the *I Am Someone* online campaign gathers hundreds of personal stories of abuse and harassment from Pacific women in New Zealand (2013–2014). The initiative continues the achievements of female silence breakers honoured in the United States by sharing stories of female survivors of abuse. On blogs that provide anonymity, women often describe sexual assault at the hands of a close person of trust. Here, as in the earliest poems analysed in this thesis, anonymity gives women shelter and necessary safety to offer digital testimony and be heard. E-Tangata magazine (2018) has published, through such blogs, the anonymous stories of women of Sāmoan descent who say, "I think a big part of that is that the ones who've hurt us are our family. So outing our assaulter hurts us in new ways, and brings back the old pain," unless of course, as in this post, anonymity can provider shelter. Here we see the continuity of issues we uncovered in previous chapters—that while the closeness of family ties can be a source of strength in the Pacific, it can also be a source of difficulty and complexity, preventing the recognition of women's pain, impeding speaking out, complexifying prosecution of offenders, and furthering silence and shame. Here again, it is unsurprising that those

most active in what is a comparatively small tropical Pacific #metoo movement are those outside the Pacific islands, in the Pacific diaspora.

Yet just as we saw in the early chapters of this thesis that poetry allowed women to gradually gather strength and courage, increasingly Pacific women are displaying courage in online spaces: particularly in the blogosphere, where some have courageously called out community leaders and risked the ostracism of family. As discussed in the previous chapter, Samoan writer Lani Wendt Young wrote a letter to the Chairman of the National Council of Churches in response to his victim-blaming statements in an interview with the *Samoa Observer*. The author described her powerlessness as a seven-year-old victim of rape. Lani Wendt Young's testimony has been met with many positive responses from women who experienced abuse, although the other reaction embodied an outrage of family members: "One condemned my disclosure as "disgusting" and "bringing shame on our family" (Young, 2013). In her blog entry, Fijian writer Tulia Thompson (2013) remembers the strict religious upbringing and parental expectations which prevented her from telling about the abuse: "I can remember thinking that Dad wouldn't cope with knowing I wasn't a virgin." She stresses the damaging consequences of physical upbringing methods, "I can honestly tell you that corporal punishment I experienced as routine as a kid made violence feel ordinary to me." This address ("I can honestly tell you…") assumes that the reader on the internet may also be an outsider, which further demonstrates the importance for Pacific women of telling their stories beyond their local communities, and of comparing their backgrounds to those women for whom such violence is not normalised and routine.

7.3 The Future of Reporting Sexual Abuse through Storytelling, Acknowledgment, and Sharing

The reality of feminist activism and silence-breaking is rarely supported by government encouragement from the highest authorities. The former Prime Minister of Sāmoa, Tuilaepa Sailele Malielegaoi, has openly condemned news media for "Monday to Sunday" over-reporting of sex crimes, including incest, which risks harming the Sāmoan reputation on the international stage, thereby diminishing the problem (Tusani, 2020). Based on the example of the Sāmoan prime minister, the the closeness of media to political structures discourages freedom of speech and activism (Lee & Murdie, 2020). In an interview for *Pacific Beat*, Leilua Lino, child rape survivor and author of the *Safe Garden* initiative, states, "[a]s for me, I fully support the media reporting of the reported sex crimes, because it raises awareness and encourages children to seek help and not keep quiet" (Graue, 2020).

The future of the social media on the Pacific Islands in the next few decades is being analysed from the perspective of globalists and Oceanians. The researchers underline the role of the tropical

Pacific diaspora in their forecasts. The pessimistic standpoint, represented by Rowan Callick (1993, as cited in van Fossen, 2005), states that in this overpopulated region, dependent on the capitalist market, and demanding strategical expertise region, expatriates will become essential by "represent[ing] the true high culture of The Pacific" (p. 10). Yet the more positive perspective, as conveyed by Epeli Hau'ofa's famous essay "Sea of Islands" (1994), is based on the re-establishment of pre-European mentality. In Epeli Hau'ofa's' proposed vision, the expansion of Islanders to other continents continues to expand the power of the voyage and the return, which has always been an essential part of Oceanic communities, but where now "Oceania is bound together by new forms of transportation, information technology and telecommunications" (van Fossen, 2005, p. 13). In both scenarios, diaspora plays a crucial role in providing the tropical Pacific with independence, consistency, and continuity. According to the Migration, Remittances, Aid, and Bureaucracy (MIRAB) theory, the connection between Islanders and their expatriates in the future will strengthen due to the increase in access to technology; rather than dependency, this can be viewed as strength.

Anthony van Fossen (2005) forecasts the successful reception of twenty percent voice telecommunications, indicating 2032 for Vanuatu and 2175 for Samoa. Moreover, Oceanians predict an increase in cultural power transmitted by Pacific media, intercultural news exchange, and finally, creating new bonds with geographically similar areas such as the Caribbean (Van Fossen, 2005, pp. 107–108). Therefore, the role of the internet remains crucial, as Pacific Islanders will look forward to shaping its development (Hargittai, 2000, as cited in Van Fossen, pp. 107–108). No doubt, just as they have shaped their future in literature through drawing on the past, the literary lessons of doing so may also inform the future of digital and other forms of expression in the Pacific.

7.4 The Shape of the Future

According to Ton Otto and Nicholas Thomas (1997), one of the elements characteristic of Oceania in contemporary sociocultural context is "the complex relationship between imaginings of the nation and of tradition" (p. 6). In their introduction to *Narratives of Nation in The South Pacific*, the scholars emphasise the strong link between cultural heritage and modern movements. In contrast to Western cultures, the tropical Pacific does not seek to erase the conventional values that are deeply rooted in society. In its resilient stand against Westernised development styles, the region attempts to uphold to tradition while modernising. Yet this is a complex undertaking as we have seen in this thesis, where among other challenges "the ethnic divisions that render nationalism insecure" and to which we might add, the gender complexities that are only more complex because of nationalism, "derive from colonial histories" just as they do from the ongoing process of modernisation (Otto and Thomas, 1997, p. 6).

We have tracked throughout this thesis how the evolution of written literature in the tropical Pacific occupies an essential position in the recognition and negotiation of complex postcolonial cultural identity. Albert Wendt has called the phenomenon of reading and understanding through our personal perception, "maps and fictions" (Va'ai, 1999, p. 215). The concept assumes everyone possesses their perspective based on shared experience, personal circumstances, and imagination. Those "maps and fictions" create a unique universe that relies on the individual connection within places and people, gathering strength together.

> In this context, creative writing can be seen as an attempt to make sense of suffering and pain, to feel complete in a world that maps out for colonized and decolonized peoples experiences that emphasize their fragility and frailty. Related yet opposed to this is the desire to be liberated, to celebrate and to make sense of the many facets of the self, which is made up of many voices and shifting identities—to externalize, to put outside, what was previously held captive, often in turmoil, inside. (Va'ai, 1999, p. 208)

The analysis and interpretation of the Pacific narratives and their historical context in this thesis argue that they were the roots of a bold tradition that is not only re-emerging but taking new shape, largely thanks to women joining forces, and also to the infused boldness of the Pacific diaspora.

New volumes of anthologised literary work have continued to emerge during the writing of this thesis—a testament of the enduring power of literature, especially for women in the Pacific. These volumes, including *Sista, Stanap Strong!: Voices of Ni-Vanuatu Women* (2021), have built on previous anthologies, poets, and novels that explored themes of gendered violence, which have now exploded in volumes and publications across the Pacific. Savianna Licht, one of the contributors to this recent anthology, pays tribute to the women who have had the courage to write and publish their stories of gendered violence before her, celebrating and thanking women who speak their truth: "Your unwavering strength, sacrifice, and endurance are what bestow hope and inspiration in young people's lives" (p. 148). Another anthology, *Vā: Stories by Women of The Moana* (2021), a collection of short stories and poems by tropical Pacific female authors edited by award-winning writers Sisilia Eteuati and Lani Wendt Young, is noteworthy for being first of its kind in gathering such a strong number of creative, bold, female, tropical Pacific voices: counting thirty-six female authors who contributed to the anthology. As the editors explain in their introduction, Moana is a word used alongside the Pacific "to recognise the Indigenous term for the body of water that connects us" (Fa'aea et al., 2021, p. 3). There is strength in literary connection, and as yet that persists in the published form.

According to the UNESCO Chair in Equity, Social Justice and Higher Education based in the Centre of Excellence for Equity in Higher Education at the University of Newcastle:

> Globally one in three women will experience gender-based violence (GBV) in their lifetime. In Australia one in four women have experienced violence by an intimate partner since the age of 15, but this rate is higher for women from socioeconomically disadvantaged areas, women with disability, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, LGBTQI+ communities, and women living in rural and remote areas. (Burke, 2004, p. 14)

Because of statistics like this one, the importance of the literature is significant in the process of changing the social awareness and legislation regulating the protection of women's rights, enabling them to have quick access to helpful resources and support groups. The English language, once used to impose a foreign culture and suppress native customs, now serves Oceania's women authors who write about the difficult past. Even though the written word is a product and importation of colonisation, it has been adapted by these writers to resiliently convey oral traditions. One might say that its use can serve as a strategy to compete with the written words of the West that do not reflect the issues and needs of tropical Pacific women experiencing gendered violence. Consequently, the written word now aligns with oral practices characterised by the use of spiritual metaphors, legends, and beliefs. But just as women's strong voices are becoming more pronounced in Pacific literature, there is a risk that less literature is being read and published. Unless the criteria for Pacific indigenous literature change and are disarticulated from the Anglo-Saxon canon, the harmful stereotypes of the West seeing indigenous literature as illiterate and inferior might continue.

The flowering of new anthologies and a new boldness in the women's stories proves the ongoing publications of the Westernised diaspora literature from the twentieth century. Ultimately, the questions asked in this thesis concern the development of such storytelling as an emerging and unique form of tropical Pacific storytelling that differs from Western traditions in many ways to better address (in a more authentic and accurate culturally sensitive way) the need to expose societal issues in Oceanic societies. In short, one could ask if these poems and novels are more respectful of customs not only because they have been written by locals but also because Pasifika men and women have inserted traditional ways of communicating about issues faced in their islands into the written format as is known in the West.

As the close reading of the poems and prose in this thesis reveals, gendered violence often refers to different sorts of abuse abuse which vary based on specific dynamics, and parties involved, and settings. This abuse might relate to the relations between females and their generational trauma

where, having endured the oppression from males, they turn against each other or their offspring. Sometimes, this violence would be directed towards fa'afafine or fa'atama. In this last section of my thesis, I will extend my focus on gendered violence to "third sex" members of the Pacific community, where the taboo against speaking out has been even more strong than in heterosexual relationships.

7.5 Matalasi: Crime Against the Spirit

Gendered violence in the Pacific Islands often involves the western concepts of "third gender" or "third sex," which is a cultural norm across the Pacific. The name varies according to the region. For instance, in Samoa and Tokelau the terminology is fa'afātama (in the manner of a man) and fa'afafine (female in a male body). Fa'afafine has linguistic equivalents on different Pacific islands, such as, for instance, Tonga (fakaleitī), Hawaiian and Tahitian region (māhū), Fiji (vakasalewalewa), Niue (fakafifine), Papua New Guinea (palopa), the Cook Islands (akava'ine) and New Zealand (tangata ira tane) (Presterudstuen, 2019, 162).

According to Nancy H. Bartlett and Paul L. Vasey (2006, 660), "fa'afafine, are a heterogeneous group in many ways. Most self identify as fa'afafine, not as men. Some self identify as women even though they recognize that they differ physically and socially from biological women" (p. 660). Additionally, in many ways their behaviour would be feminine as they might prefer to wear make-up, feminine clothes, jewellery, and talk and gesture in a manner typical for women. Some people choose to become fa'afafine voluntarily, though in some cases, children are encouraged to become one by their families (Farran, 2010, p. 14). Moreover, Jeannette Marie Mageo (1992) adds "[l]ike all forms of sexuality and gender, transvestism is rooted in family life. When there are few girls in a family, a Samoan boy may be brought up as a girl. Therefore, the family with multiple offspring are likely to embrace some of their children as fa'afafine" (p. 450).

People who identify as fa'afafine and fa'afātama sometimes become victims of social ostracism, as briefly touched upon in my analysis of Sia Figiel's short stories featuring fa'afafine. This violence, thus, falls into the category of gender-based violence since fa'afafine and fa'afātama are oppressed because of their gender identification. Since in some of the Polynesian societies women have been perceived as of less value than men, Sue Farran (2010) argues, "in Tonga for example, fakaleiti, like other women, were subject to various forms of abuse or disrespect, particularly if they were not of noble birth" (p. 18). As noted by Mengzhu Fu (2015), "[g]ender non-conforming people, transgendered and intersex people are also targets of gender-based violence and have to deal with the tyranny of the cis-sexist binary gender system" (p. 51).

"Matalasi," the winner of the 2018 Commonwealth Short Story Prize for the Pacific, written by the human rights activist from Samoa, Jenny Bennett-Tuionetoa, presents the struggle of a

fa'afatama. The scene takes place in the family's household during the preparation for a wedding. Everyone is busily focused on the ensuring the ceremony takes place on time. While others are occupied with their chores and the guests arrive, Matalasi, a bride, reflects on her situation and recalls her memories. We learn that Matalasi's family installed the metal bars on his window to isolate him and chose the husband-to-be on her behalf.

Matalasi (or "Lasi") has always been reluctant to tell the relatives about the fact that he does not identify as a woman: "He had never told them why he could not be Tito's soa. Why getting a malu would have been wrong. A violation. A crime against his spirit. He couldn't tell them. He dared not." We learn that the sense of being a boy and not identifying with other girls was a very early component of his reactions to his surroundings and continued throughout his life. Looking through the window to the beach, he recalls playing with other children. One of the boys who was recently circumcised was crying. An older girl, Feagai, explained to Lasi that the boy was cut when he turned seven. Since then, Matalasi awaited his procedure with impatience, waiting to be seven years old. When he was five, his mother explained to Lasi, "[y]ou are never going to be cut, Lasi'' as "[o]nly boys are cut." Growing up, he hears only "You are a girl Matalasi! Start acting like one! / Go away Matalasi! Only boys are allowed here! / Stop it, Matalasi. Just stop it." At eleven, he is beaten for climbing trees. At school, he experiences the first heartbreak, having fallen in love with the unaware school teacher, Mrs Mitchell.

The certainty that his relatives would exclude him if he revealed his identity makes Lasi head to the church for his wedding. Once in church, Matalasi stops himself from crying when "[h]is palms became sweaty." The moment comes and Matalasi needs to leave for the ceremony. When asked how he feels, he fears confessing:

> 'Are you OK?' his sister's voice had softened and for a brief moment he wondered if he should let himself break down in front of her. If he should tell her everything. Tell her how walking up that aisle would be walking towards his death. But he knew he couldn't. She would scold him; slap him; tell him to stop being so stupid; to think of the 'āiga; to think of the shame.

Looking in the mirror, fa'afātama says, "It was a beautiful image, he must admit. A beautiful bride. Nevertheless, it was a stranger. A stranger that, from today onwards, he would have to pretend to be." Even the aisle reminds Lasi of a prison being "so narrow, hedged in on either side by full pews, which seemed to have anticipated his urge to escape and blocked it with the formidable bodies of so many strangers." He thinks of the sacrifice he needs to make for his family, the trap in a life with no escape, and the thought of committing suicide crosses his mind:

> He heard his own voice mechanically say the necessary words; words like fibres of cloth, weaving themselves together into a thick, strong rope. He felt his hand being lifted; his glove removed. He saw Tito's son toddle up with the silk pillow. He saw the two gleaming rings lying upon it, side by side. Circles. Cycles. Round and round and round and round.
>
> As the cold, golden band slid over his finger, Matalasi felt the noose tighten around his neck.

Even though, as noted by Presterudstuen (2019), "[t]raditionally, many communities in the Pacific Islands had ways of talking about and understanding sexual development and diversity that were more permissive than what one might find in the global north even today" (p. 164), some part of the communities in the tropical Pacific are either not tolerant of the concept or impose their will on the people identifying themselves as a third sex.

7.6 Conclusions from the Outside Looking In—Postcolonial Literary Criticism from a European Woman's Perspective

As a postcolonial literary scholar from a second-world country in Central Europe, my cultural context is far removed from that experienced by a writer from the Pacific community. I have written this thesis from the perspective of an outsider, but that does not mean that this research is not a valuable contribution to the field of Pacific literature. Outsiders, too, like both fa'afafine and diasporic writers, bring a unique perspective to the study of Pacific literature, although they must constantly remain conscious of the outsider's status. As Mandy Treagus (2008) suggests, "[p]ostcolonial criticism is in danger of functioning as a form of neo-colonial exploitation" (p. 174). Nonetheless, as Machiavelli (1532; 2008) famously observed in *The Prince*, just as "[p]eople who draw landscapes proceed to a low point on a plain in order to study the nature of mountains and higher elevations; they proceed to mountain tops in order to study the nature of the lowlands" (p. 95). Just so, a white European critic is able to view the role of gendered violence in the work of Pacific authors through a distant lens. From this perspective, I was shocked by the kinds of violence that the women of the Pacific experienced in a way that was normalised to the people experiencing it. On my first day in Samoa, upon reading the newspaper, I was appalled to read the headline on the front page "Man jailed for biting wife's ear" (*Samoa Observer*, Saturday 25th of August, 2023).

The perception of critics from the Pacific must necessarily contend with the societal mores that are part and parcel of their cultural context. Personally, I am not subject to those conditions. During my candidature, I had an opportunity to travel to Hawaii, Western Samoa, and Fiji. This introduced me to very regionally specific, culturally diverse, distinctive aesthetics in arts, dance, music, and, most of all, storytelling. I did not come to the Pacific with the desire, like Gauguin, to

exploit the people of this region, but, like that famous painter, I was struck by the intense beauty of the islands and their peoples. I was invited to the University of Western Samoa by Professor Sina Vaa'i and was amazed by students' engagement in poetry reading and their openness and passion for reading out loud Karlo Mila's poem "To All My Sisters" (2020).

Even though coming from different circumstances, I consider myself as a woman who freely fights for her and other females' rights to express themselves and the matters concerning their lives, bodies, and life choices. I believe that the work of the women explored in this thesis is crucial in the universal women's experience across the globe who share their thoughts and feelings with each other, particularly with the belief that they will influence and inspire future generations of women. I have written this thesis as a woman who believes in feminism in its most international sense. When women are talking about #MeToo from the context of a person living Pacific ways, it puts me in a difficult predicament and requires more work to understand their culture, but it also provides me with the perspective of that culture in an international context. Literature, as we have seen, affords this kind of sheltering and multiple perspective taking while not acquiescing on issues of human rights, and not flinching from efforts to achieve greater justice for all.

Perhaps the digital sphere has not yet fully developed this capacity. There is, as we have seen in this thesis, always capacity to evolve and reinvent past forms in new ways. There is also strength in weakness. The greatest weakness of this thesis is that it is written from a position of an outsider, who possesses white cultural privilege. This privilege may also be the greatest strength of the thesis, as my outsider status enables me to speak about gendered violence in the Pacific in a way that is denied to people from within.

The conclusions that should be drawn from the preceding chapters of this thesis relate to narratives around the affordances, limits, and possibilities of women's literature under repressive circumstances. Gendered violence in the Pacific is perpetrated by many different actors and depends on various contexts, circumstances, backgrounds, and social mores. It passes from generation to generation. It is perpetuated both by men against women, and by women against women, and by both men and women against the third sex. Violence is grounded in multitudinous causes that are both cultural and personal. Since 1960s' women's writing in The Pacific has emerged in a very progressive way, and it is unique that it developed in such a dynamic manner in the English language. The journey for these writers has been very turbulent as they have written about double colonialism and stood up against double standards. They spoke of patriarchy in two senses: the chauvinist and the masculine. Building the strong and resilient front of women ready to respond to acts of injustice,

the authors create a web of proud females from the very local Pacific islands to the diaspora in the furthest places on Earth, uniting in the feeling of dignity, perseverance, and power.

7.7 Embracing Endurance and Uniting in Battles

Women's voices are becoming increasingly liberated, bold, and empowering, as "articulating those experiences, they challenge the ideologies and power structures perpetuated by rationalising violence and abuse as 'culture/tradition,' as 'discipline,' or as men's 'right' over women" (Prentice, 2019, p. 155). By writing poetry on themes of gendered violence, these writers express their grief, sadness, anger, and distress.

Given that Selina Tusiatala Marsh's doctoral thesis and lecture program have inspired the structure of this thesis, meaningly the list of poets discussed in the fourth chapter. But also, since I opened this doctoral dissertation with one of her poems, I would like to close the thesis with an excerpt from another, "Fast Talkin' PI" (2009, p. 58–65). In this poem, Marsh simply captures the capacity of Pacific women's writing to unify disparate experiences in opposition to gendered violence. Each of the lines represent the name of the poem or prose title written by Pacific female author. Undoubtedly, Marsh associates herself, and unites with, other women who are brave enough to express their feelings and identity but also their suffering and endurance:

> I'm a lali
>
> I'm where we once belonged
>
> I'm a dream fish floating
>
> I'm wild dogs under my skirt
>
> I'm searching for nei nim'anoa
>
> I'm a native daughter
>
> I'm poétes du pacifique en couleur
>
> I'm light in the crevice never seen
>
> I'm the girl in the moon circle
>
> I'm niu voices
>
> I'm song of love
>
> I'm mi mere

I'm houses

I'm a pinnacle

I'm a nuanua

I'm blackstone

I'm tapa talk

I'm kakala

and langakali

and hingano

I'm tai, heart of a tree

I'm colonised people

I'm praying parents

I'm a shark-skin drum

I'm solaua, a secret embryo

I'm whetu moana

I'm a young artist in contemplation

I'm the choice of your parents

I'm an act of war

I'm na buka vivinei malivi pa zinama roviana

I'm threads of a tivaevae

I'm cyclone country. (Marsh, 2009, p. 64)

This thesis has surveyed a major and understudied body of writing. By nature of its scope and my own context as a researcher, there are important affordances and limits to the contributions made by this project.

This thesis traces the development of a body of South Pacific literature that has grown dynamically from late 19th century to the early 21st century. This is the story of writers sharing their experiences through the channels of poetry and prose, but these stories extend into the present

through the mediums of social media and press. Over this period the literature of the South Pacific has systematically confronted gendered violence in a variety of ways that have become increasingly self-confident. Violence against women has moved from a source of shame to a matter of a public debate. As a critic, I have great faith that the writing discussed in this thesis is just the beginning of an ongoing dialogue within the Pacific and abroad. Creative writing can inapt significant social change.

Nevertheless, there are limitations on what project of this nature can achieve. I have approached this research as something of an outsider with my own preconception. At the same time, the nations of the Pacific continue to struggle against the repercussions of double colonisations, domestic and intimate partner violence, women's violence against other women, vengeance as well as threats from within and without. In a face of these threats, many women may continue to choose not to speak out. My hope, as a researcher, is that circumstances will continue to provide them with a courage and believe that their voice matters.

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