

NAHAU, PIHI MANUS, PILAPAN: HEGEMONY'S GENDER AS ARTEFACTS OF HISTORY

INTRODUCTION: CONNECTING PAST AND PRESENT CULTURE AND HISTORY IN THE PACIFIC

It is a pleasure to contribute to the book forum on the republication of the book *Culture and History in the Pacific*. My contribution comprises two parts. In the first part, I briefly reflect on the book and its current relevance and highlight some issues that resonate with me. In the second part, I provide a more personal response to the book. Together, I hope that this two-part reflection shows the important place this book has in mediating past and present contributions and challenges in anthropological practice.

First published in 1990, the preface to the book highlights its historical significance in breaking the traditional geographic and political divides between Soviet and Western anthropological scholarship. This was significant because it happened around the end of the Cold War. The book's chapters provide important insights into historical and cultural processes as documented at that time in Pacific history with a focus on Polynesian and Melanesian scholarship.

While many of the issues in the book have evolved over time and continue to resonate today, the book is also rebirthed into a different set of relationships and discourses. For example, an anthropologist interested in culture and history of Hawaii today would be more likely to engage with scholars such as Kauanui (2018)

who combines queer and feminist scholarship and concepts of biopolitics to draw attention to how traditional non-binary and non-Western gendered norms of Hawaiian society shape contemporary Hawaiian sovereignty movements. In places like PNG, anthropology turned to examining emerging class differences (Gewertz and Errington 1999) and increasingly urbanised social lives (Goddard 2005). Transnational families and relationships between diaspora and home communities are important topics in contemporary Oceanic societies (e.g. McGavin 2017). Anthropology has contributed to policy discourses on issues like gender and HIV/AIDS, and sorcery related violence and masculinity. The advent of mobile technology (Foster and Horst 2018; Suwamaru 2014) and social media have changed discourse and social engagements. Pacific Studies has flourished with inspiration from the works of scholars such as Epeli Hau'ofa (1994) and Teresia Teaiwa (Teaiwa et al. 2021). Pacific Islanders, like Regis Stella (2007), are also focussing on White Western actors and discourses as subjects.

The Cold War period shaped the context of the authors of the first publication of *Culture and History in the Pacific*. By contrast, in today's global political arena Oceania people find themselves at the centre of geopolitical forces and rivalries. Since 2001, with an increased flow of asylum seekers, the controversial Tampa affair, the 9/11 terrorist attack, and Australia's intense internal political debates, the Pacific Islands of Nauru and Manus, in PNG, have

hosted Australia's offshore detention policies of asylum seekers. Geopolitical rivalry between China and the US have intensified security discourses. These discourses tend to marginalise Oceanic people from decisions that shape the region while overshadowing real challenges such as climate change. Other issues, like global commoditised demand for food, extractive industry resources, and urbanisation are, as McDonnell, Allen, and Filer (2017) show in their examination, driving land grabs and changing the relationships between Oceania people and their ancestral lands.

The 1990 publication of *Culture and History in the Pacific* did not portend some of these contemporary challenges nor did it engage in policy discourses. Today's scholars interested in studying culture and history in the Pacific are more likely to find that the people and communities they engage with will be caught up in the local impacts of these global forces. These are important considerations because of the ongoing debates about the relevance of anthropology.

Yet, *Culture and History in the Pacific* remains an important resource because it provokes important analytical and methodological questions about past and transforming Oceania society. For me, three themes emerge through the chapters. The first theme relates to the deeply embedded gendered binary between male-dominant and female-marginal in examining societal order. The second involves the relationship between material and sociocultural processes. The third theme highlights the need for greater attention to methods and fluidity across disciplinary approaches. Whereas all the chapters focus on analysing particular case studies ranging from Hawai'i and Tonga in Polynesia to Kula in Melanesia, Marilyn Strathern's chapter, 'Artefacts of History: Events and the Interpretation of Images' (Strathern

1990 [2021]) struck me because she argues that important anthropological insights are missed because of the traditional disciplinary boundaries that divide social and cultural studies from the study of material culture.

The other reason why I was drawn to Strathern's chapter is because of her *Gender of the Gift* (Strathern 1988) which has cemented her hegemonic status as a theorist in gender and personhood in Melanesia. My understanding of Strathern is that both *Gender of the Gift* and the chapter 'Artefacts of history: Events and the Interpretation of Images' disrupt the received wisdom and persistence of binaries or dichotomies in scholarship about PNG society: male-female, Western-Indigenous, modern-traditional, individual-dividual persons, material-social and so on.

In her chapter, Strathern begins her argument by problematising the arrival of Europeans into Melanesia as an event that is often narrated as unique. Drawing a parallel between this 'unique event' and, say, an event that an anthropologist might observe in the field and interpret in the social context, Strathern argues that Melanesians did not necessarily focus on contextualising the European. Rather, she notes that,

Europeans initially presented a particular kind of image. Images that contain within them both past and future time do not have to be placed into a historical context, for they embody history themselves. It follows that people do not therefore have to 'explain' such images by reference to events outside them: the images 'contain' the events. (Strathern 2021: 25).

She suggests that for Melanesians, the arrival of Europeans may have been akin to the emergence of the artefact, performance, or

image and a different set of questions may have included: What was the cause or producer of this event or performance? What meanings did the producers ascribe to it? What meanings can the viewer ascribe to it? That is, the material and social world are not different spheres. I will elaborate further on Strathern's paper, but first some qualifications are needed. I think Oceanic people knew from the outset that the arrival of white people presented a different form of power that they had little choice but to contend with. Even if they did not have full view of the social context behind the Europeans' arrival, the power of guns, coercive control, missions, colonialization, and state power rapidly changed the world view of our people. In addition, Oceanic people applied their own interpretative frameworks to the events and images they saw and experienced and the acted accordingly and with agency.

Notwithstanding these brief qualifications, Strathern's argument resonates with me because I understand her to be cautioning us that when anthropologists focus on trying to interpret events too narrowly as illustrations of the societal and cultural context, this may obviate or render the event itself as superfluous because we may—erroneously—assume that the meanings of events can only be created and understood within the social and cultural context surrounding it (Strathern 2021: 38). By contrast, she draws parallels with material culture in which an artefact—like an event—itsself has meanings ascribed to it by those who use and produce it or by the viewer. Strathern (2021: 39–40) highlights this by pointing out that when artefacts are displaced from the original time and space where they were produced, they can still be given meaning or are recontextualised as preserved forms and given new meanings produced by a different set of actors. Similarly, Jolly (2016) highlights how the

Western world's different curation of Oceanic artefacts acquired by Captain Cook reveals that the same artefacts removed from their origins and moved between spaces, move different audiences in different ways. In Keesing's (1990 [2021]) chapter the ethnographic evidence of the *kula* in Massim at different moments in history could also be read as a series of 'events'—artefacts—occurring within its social context while simultaneously being ascribed meaning by different producers of the events and interpreted by different anthropologists so that each perspective and moment reveals itself as the system. Today, there is plethora of diverse contemporary Oceanic scholarship that engages with the fluidity between material and social culture (For example: Mahina 2010; Ka'ili, Mahina, and Addo 2017; Hermkens and Lepani 2017; Ohnemus 2003; MacKenzie 1991; Riles 1998; Rooney 2021; Barlow 2018).

Like artefacts, the perception, contextualising, and presentation of culture and history are contested. Strathern's argument can be applied to our understandings of gender relations. This reminded me that women of PNG are embedded in the social relationships and structures that mutually define them, but they also need to be understood independently of the theorising conceptualisations often applied to interpreting them. I now provide a more personal, less conventional reflection as a way of thinking about how to apply Strathern's argument to consider anthropological discourse around women and leadership in Manus, PNG, taking women of rank and, in particular, my mother's story, as *the* artefact.

PILAPAN: AN ARTEFACT OF HISTORY

When the conference that conceived *Culture and History in the Pacific* took place, I was

a teenager oscillating between my maternal family in Manus and paternal family in Australia. My mother, Nahau Kambuou Elizabeth Rooney, was by then a prominent female leader and politician in PNG. One of my childhood memories was seeing her disembarking—beautiful and flamboyant as ever—from the aircraft at Momote airport in Manus flaunting a black tote bag with the words, ‘Never underestimate the power of a woman’. If you knew her, you already imagine her cheekily laughing as the men around her commented on the bag. She was bold and unapologetically powerful. She was also generous and kind and joyous. As a shy daughter, teenager, and young woman I adored her. Of course, we did not always see eye to eye and at times we clashed. I also challenged her. She was my mentor, advisor, greatest teacher, and critic. In 1990 when the *Culture and History in the Pacific* was published, our father died on Manus. His story is intertwined with mother’s. His remains are buried in Manus beside hers.

In those years, anthropology, its kinship and structures, its ancestors and contemporary leaders were nowhere in my mind. It was only much later, as a mature student in 2012 that I began to learn more about anthropology and its footprint embedded deep in PNG society and history. To highlight my ignorance, I only discovered in 2016 that my mother featured in the documentary ‘Anthropology in Trail’ as an early Indigenous critic of Margaret Mead and anthropological practice (Gullahorn-Holecek et al. 1983). I have sometimes been asked to comment on Margaret Mead’s scholarship on Manus, often in the context of the racialized portrayal of Manus Islanders during the height of the Manus Regional Processing Centre between 2012 and 2019, and other critiques related to the racial history of anthropology in PNG. One reason why I have resisted engaging

on these debates is because I feel that it would reinforce anthropology and Margaret Mead’s hegemonic status, while detracting attention away from the important need to privilege a Manus point of view at this time. That is, no Manus Islander should live their life feeling like they need to prove their knowledge in terms of the anthropological interpretation. I understand this to be the essence of my mother’s critique of anthropology. As someone who engages in anthropology, I have learned that anthropology is also a culture and society with hierarchical structures and gatekeepers. To write and publish in this space, I am often compelled to cite classic—Western—anthropologists, placing me at odds with my mother’s critique. For this reason, I found Strathern’s chapter compelling because, in addition to my own ongoing resistance to dominant anthropological forms of portraying life in PNG, it allows me to turn my spotlight onto my mother. That said, as I will show below, I do think there is a symbiotic and ongoing relationship between peoples and scholars who study them, and I find myself needing to revisit ethnographic studies of Manus to excavate the evidence I need to position women’s leadership as an artefact of Manus society. Specifically, in my contribution to this book forum, I am attempting to apply Strathern’s argument to my mother’s story to highlight the three themes of gender, the links between material and social cultural processes, and finally, methods. My mother passed away on 15th September 2020. Amidst COVID19, I was fortunate to be able to return home to PNG and accompany family to repatriate her to Manus for burial. My mother’s social, cultural, and political power and agency in life and in death was palpable during her funeral and amidst my deep grief, my thoughts swirled around questions about how to capture the essence of a powerful woman whose hegemonic status not only

makes other women more visible but that, also reinforces the hierarchies of powers—setting her apart from other women while setting her equal to men in ways that disrupts, disturbs, and threatens dominant patriarchal and patrilineal ideologies and structures.

There is so much that is hegemonic and yet so mysteriously unknown and threatening about women in all societies and within anthropology. The following kinds of jumbled up words came to mind, as I searched for a way to connect my recent grief, experiences, emotions, and witnessing to the task of reflecting on *Culture and History in the Pacific*.

The email, carrying the book, arrives.

I am still in grief.

I leave it.

Later, I open and glance.

For this cult like book. Circulating like a secret gift. Finnish and anthropology are the centre of the world.

For Mama, Manus is the centre of the world.

I look. I search. Where is Manus? It's nowhere.

I search for Mead. Only a momentary mention.

I look for my deep secrets. I cannot find much.

Words. Clever words.

Words that now hurt. Words that I know help to excavate.

That deep past that I did not know existed.

Those secrets and gossip that are taken and turned into known.

I choose Strathern.

Mama. A powerful woman. Narrated mainly by men. When she died.

Women. Manus. How do I bridge between now, then, myself, this book, Manus, Anthropology?

Marilyn Strathern. Margaret Mead. Nahau Rooney.

Later. Now. I add Anne Dickson-Waiko.

Mysterious powerful, hegemonic women.

They are just a few. There are too many of them. Only one me. How do I?

How did I choose? How did I know?

Well, I didn't. They just choose you. I had no choice. At this time.

I talk about kinship.

Matriarchs. Papua New Guinea. History. Anthropology. Politics.

Manus.

Mead the mother of American. Manus, her laboratory.

Strathern a matriarch of the British anthropological tradition. Gender, her brand.

Dickson-Waiko a matriarch of the history of women.

For my beloved mama – Nahau my, our Manus matriarch.

May I?

If I may be allowed, to reflect on these women.

I do not know them enough. I should.

PILAPAN: WOMAN OF RANK

My mother was often narrated as a *pilapan*—a Manus woman of rank—in Manus society. A cultural and historical understanding of women's political leadership is important because in Oceania today, driven by international rights discourse and donors' own engagements in the region, gender equality, women's empowerment, and women in political leadership permeates much of scholarship. Training, courses, research all seek the answers to how to get women engaged in the political arena and what structural barriers exist to prevent them. Given this contemporary research and funding context, scholars might ask, how does a PNG woman attain power or political leadership in a patriarchal society where violence is prevalent? What is a *pilapan*? How does a woman attain the status of *pilapan*? Do *pilapan* really exist? What was the context that made the *pilapan*? Are contemporary Manus islanders creating *pilapan* for their purposes? And so on.

These questions are interesting and could definitely provide insights to Nahau Kambuou Rooney's life and the issues that Manus women face. If one chose to approach her life this way, then one would search for historical ethnographic evidence of women's leadership, *pilapan*, and Manus women's political power.

Classic ethnographic accounts by Margaret Mead (1934), Reo Fortune (1935), and Theodore Schwartz (1962) explain that Manus societal structure comprises a dichotomy between *lapan*—leaders and *lau*—their followers. Even though their ethnographic focus was among the Manus—Titan speaking—people, they acknowledge that this societal structure was widespread. Schwartz (1962) explains that *lapan* is the 'upper rank of a two hereditary rank system common to all Admiralty cultures. It

is now used also as *Lapan*, the word for God' (ibid.: 643). On the other hand, *lau* are the lower rank or followers of *lapan*. Otto (1992) observes that this structure applies more or less, with varying terms, throughout much of Manus society. As with all power, as Otto outlines, the title of *lapan* is contested, and though it can be inherited, generally one must earn the title by engaging in social practice. Signifying its contemporary currency across the Manus, the Provincial government assembly is called the *Lapan* house of assembly. In this paper, I am using the term *lapan*, not in the Manus-Titan context described by Mead and Schwartz and others, but rather in the broader contemporary context in which it has gained a wider currency throughout Manus. As my paper is focused on a feminine lens on leadership in Manus, a thorough interrogation of this contemporary usage of the term is beyond the scope of this paper.

Mead (1934) documented the existence of *pilapan*, or women of high rank in Manus society. According to Mead, a *pilapan* is a woman who comes from a *lapan* family or is the daughter of the senior leader *luluai*. *Luluai* is a title and office instituted under the Germans. These positions formed part of the German administration and were designated to chiefs or appointed leaders. The Australians continued this system when they took over administration after WW1. During WWII and post-WWII, detailed accounts of *lapan* and *luluai* can be seen in Schwartz (1962) and Schwartz and Smith (2021). Gustafsson's (1999) work on gender relations among M'buke people highlights complementarity between men and women and women's hold on cultural powers.

Hints of Nahau's political roots can be found in the post-WWII period which saw the ascendancy of the Paliu Movement. The Paliu Movement was the brainchild of the

charismatic Manus leader, Paliau Maloat, who gained a reputation during and after WWII in his various roles in the colonial administration as well as a leader who resisted colonial control and advocated for equality. Upon his return to Manus after WWII, Paliau Maloat established the Paliau Movement which was also shaped by cult movements. Schwartz and Smith (2021) highlight that it is difficult to separate the spiritual, religious, and political aspects of the Movement. Whichever way one frames the Movement, it was a powerful phenomenon that gained momentum and spiritually and materially shaped the lives of many Manus people (Schwartz and Smith 2021; Otto 2021; Maloat 1970).

For Nahau Kambuou Rooney, the Paliau Movement was the impetus that drew her Lahan, Bullihan, Nali speaking, Usiai people to migrate to the south coast. Nahau's father, Kambuou, was a *lapan* and the *luluai* of Lahan people during this movement. Kambuou, referred to as Kampo by Schwartz (1962) and Schwartz and Smith (2021), was one of Schwartz's informants. Detailed accounts of Kambuou and others can be found in Schwartz's (1962) and Schwartz and Smith's (2021) accounts of this period. The Paliau Movement was later revived as Makasol (Otto 1992; Kais 1998; Dalsgaard 2009; Pokawin 1989), as the Makasol, and later, around 1989, as Win Nesian (Otto 2021; Schwartz and Smith 2021).

In addition to Mead's observations about *pilapan*, Schwartz (1993) also acknowledges the pre-existence of *pilapan*. Schwartz (1993) notes the term *kastom* 'refers to culture-constructs purported to represent and import some piece of past culture into the present'. Among the ethnographic data he examined to explicate the term *kastom* is one observation made in 1973 when, upon returning to Manus, he was surprised to see Paliau Maloat and his wife,

'costumed as *lapan* and *pilapan* of old' (Schwartz 1993: 532). Putting aside the specifics of his paper, here I draw on his acknowledgement that *lapan* and *pilapan* both existed in the past Manus.

Yet, despite Mead's (1934) ethnographic observations and Schwartz (1993) noted above, contemporary accounts of Manus politics seem to eschew the pre-existence of *pilapan*. For example, Otto (1992) notes that the Makasol, the contemporary form of the Paliau Movement, viewed their proposed government, compared to the official community government, as being consistent with Manus tradition. This is demonstrated in the name itself including the word *kastam*—Manus Kastam Kansol (Council) and the title *Lapan Pilapan* for all members of the Council. He explains that *pilapan* refers to the feminine *lapan* but goes on to qualify that 'it should be noted that in traditional Manus culture women could not become leaders' (Otto 1992: 58). Kais (1998), also examining Makasol similarly, notes that:

Included in the gathering of *lapans* is the idea of '*pilapan*' (high ranking women). *If it ever existed in Manus* [emphasis mine], it must have been traditionally rare, taking note of the fact that Manus is a patrilineal society. But then, one must remember that this is part of the new way of doing things. Innovation enables the Movement to exist, thrive and move forward. The inclusion of *pilapans* is Paliau Maloat's and, therefore the Movement's recognition of the women's role in society and a way of raising their social status so that it encourages them to be more active in the community. (Kais 1998: Chapter 2, Paragraph 4)

According to Kais (1988), before Paliau Maloat died, he had appointed a collective leadership

to take on the Paliau (Makasol) Movement after his passing. This group included a female, Nanau Titley, who was president of the *Pilapan Club* (Kais 1998: Paragraph 28). Dalsgaard (2009: 274) notes that generally *lapan* are male and that *pilapan* is the feminine equivalent of *lapan*, though, he notes, ‘women could not be leaders in traditional Manus cultures’. Resonating with Kais (1998), Dalsgaard (2009) notes that the ‘term *pilapan* gained importance in the Paliau Movement, where *lapan* and *pilapan* originally was employed to indicate that everyone was of high rank. The Movement has today an organised “*Pilapan Club*” (Dalsgaard 2009: 274). Dalsgaard (ibid.) notes that the ‘term *pilapan* gained importance in the Paliau Movement, where *lapan* and *pilapan* originally was employed to indicate that everyone was of high rank’. Dalsgaard seems to suggest a non-gendered use of the term *lapan* and *pilapan* by noting that under the contemporary Movement, ‘everyone was called *lapan* or *pilapan* and thus of equal rank’ (ibid.: 275).

These accounts seem to reflect some ambivalence about the term *pilapan* and women’s leadership status in Manus. On the one hand, there is an acknowledgement that the term refers to the feminine form of *lapan*. On the other hand, the qualifications of whether *pilapan* ever existed or women’s leadership sit at odds with Mead’s (1934) observation about the existence of women of rank in Manus society but they also suggest that women were not allowed to be leaders in Manus custom and that *pilapan* was a contemporary construct.

Despite these contemporary observations that Manus women could not be leaders, Manus society produced one of the most powerful women in PNG’s immediate post-Independence period, one of only 3 women elected in 1977, the first female cabinet minister, the only woman elected in 1982.

ARTEFACTS OF HISTORY

Drawing on Strathern’s argument, I can see how studies that focus on social structures and rules can render a political Manus woman as invisible, non-existent, or a superfluous anomaly who may merely serve as an illustration of society.

What if we shift away from societal rules, and instead flip the ethnographic gaze to focus on Nahau Rooney’s life as the artefact—the event—rather than on the belief that Manus women could not be leaders? What if we focus on her life story as the event, the artefact to be understood on her own terms even if she lived and worked in a highly patriarchal and patrilineal society. Women were and are excluded and marginal. Women are powerful and resistant and act with immense agency, but they do so within this patriarchal context.

Thus, to know Nahau Rooney’s story and her place and her shaping of society is to know her in her own terms, who produced her, who lived with her, whom she lived among, and who and what gave meaning to her life. She is the artefact, the event, the performance, that needs and deserves to be understood. Epistemologically, she is that intransigent ‘material object’—the event, the performance, the image, the phenomena—that is at the same time both the raw material of society and the illustration of the social context. (Strathern 2021: 38)

Given Mead’s (1934) observation that *pilapan* are women who come from *lapan* families or are the daughters of *luluai*, it follows that as the daughter of a *lapan* and a *luluai*, Nahau could easily have drawn the title of *pilapan*. But, in my understanding about her, it was also her own tenacity and capacity to overcome adversity and cultural obstacles from an early age (see Rooney 2020) and her political work over the years that stood her apart

and earned her this title and recognition. With her progressive success in being able to remain grounded in her culture and society while attaining an education in the Western system it is not surprising that she would have begun attracting attention as a potential political leader. After some years progressing through the colonial education system and the national level public service machinery to reach the level of executive officer for Somare's pre-Independence house of assembly, she returned home around Independence in 1975. Upon returning to Manus she noted that,

I worked with the local government council, which later became the area authority. As executive officer to the planning committee on the constitution, my task then was to travel around Manus. We had to interview people, and had a well publicized preparation for the constitution. It was during this time that the people of Manus recognized what I could do for them. They felt that perhaps I should represent them in the national government. (...) it was obvious that people wanted me to stand for elections. (...) I expected I was going to win. And that was it. (Rooney in Gilliam 1992: 34)

As she told us during our interviews and as recounted during the orations presented during her funeral processes, she was sought out and invited to contest the elections by a significant group of all male councillors of the Manus local level council. This support, plus the pre-existing networks previously established by her father, Kambuou, gave her a clear victory in the 1977 elections.

Her first parliamentary cycle was tumultuous. As Minister for Justice, she became embroiled as the central figure in the 'Rooney

affair' which saw her sentenced to jail and pardoned by Prime Minister Somare. This set of events led to the downfall of the Somare government for which she was blamed. Some viewed her actions as breaching the PNG Constitution while others viewed her decisions to stand up against an all-foreign panel of judges as an act of sovereignty at a time after Independence. Regardless, the Rooney affair—involving the jailing of a Manus and PNG woman—was instrumental in catalysing the Indigenisation of the PNG judicial bench.

By the next national elections in 1982, her political power was perceived as a formidable threat to her political opponents in Manus. In some quarters, she needed to be moderated because of her role in the controversial 'Rooney affair' and because she attracted support at the national level. Her feminine power that made her a threat to the political order also needed to be moderated. During the 1982 elections Nahau Rooney (1985) noted,

It is at the election time that being a woman is perhaps the most contentious. My achievements and the controversy of my ministry days were not, in fact, election issues in the way I had expected. The biggest challenge came from educated men who seemed to think that it somehow reflected on their 'manliness' that I, a mere woman, had achieved fame and recognition. It was in this second campaign that the question of whether it was right for a woman to lead became an issue. (Rooney 1985)

This is interesting given that in the 1977 elections she was invited by a group of councillors and traditional leaders across Manus. Thus, we can see how 'tradition' and 'custom' can be used by educated elite men to reframe the rules of political engagement.

As Pokawin also elaborates, Rooney's political opponents actively set about to undermine her and specifically to remove her. A general sentiment during the 1982 elections was that,

Rooney's womanliness had been used as a weapon to get what she wanted in politics. (...) Rooney, however, was a formidable opponent. (Pokawin 1989: 250)

Moreover,

Rooney's talent was recognised from the time she was elected in 1977 and made a minister in preference to Pondros. Her style, however, was not generally liked. There was demand even by the politically sophisticated section of the community to replace her. However, this demand may have arisen because of her success at the power game and, even more, because she is a woman. (Pokawin 1989: 277)

By the 1987 elections, the political context in Manus and PNG was changing. As Otto (1992), Dalsgaard (2009), Kais (1998), Pokawin (1989), and Wanek and Wormald (1989) note, within Manus, the Makasol movement, the contemporary revived Paliau Movement, was now a strong local actor. Wanek and Wormald (1989) note that a number of candidates had parental links to the Paliau Movement and this shaped some of the dynamics. As I noted above, being the daughter of Kambuou had influenced Nahau Rooney's success in the 1977 elections. By 1987, it seems that the kinds of gendered dynamics that worked against her during the 1982 elections still prevailed. For example, noting that her downfall seemed to have less to do with her political leadership and skills and more to do with internal Manus politics, Wanek

and Wormald (1989) highlight some of the cultural barriers that Nahau Rooney faced:

The fact that she was a woman was in itself a *defiance of tradition*, for a *lapan* (leader) was always a man. It followed from this that she should not have been allowed to hold betel nuts when she spoke at the launching of her campaign, for this was a *lapan* privilege. The betel nuts were also a source of *lapan* power. If a *lapan* held a bunch of betel nuts when talking, he had to be obeyed unquestioningly. However, if a *lapan* dropped a betel nut during his speech, he would sit down quietly, for his power had temporarily at least been sapped. Nahau Rooney, it was claimed, had not only illicitly held the bunch of betel nuts, but had dropped one and still gone on with her speech. Moreover, her opponents accused, she had allowed *garamuts* (large drums) to be beaten at her own hotel, the Kohai Lodge, at the outset of her campaign. This too was a grave impropriety for *garamuts* should only be beaten in triumph or in joy, and must never be beaten before a war. Rooney's beating of the *garamuts* was called immodest and an outrage. Traditionalists also held against her the fact that she had a naturalized husband of Australian origin, a source of foreign ideas and values from which people in Manus should be trying to free themselves. The idea of a woman in power was itself a result of European influence. (Wanek and Wormald 1989: 200–201)

These observations are interesting but they still sit at odds with Nahau's story as a Manus female leader or *pilapan*. These traces of Nahau Rooney's political journey as told by herself and interpreted by others suggest that there is more

to understand about the historicization and contemporary gendered dynamics in Manus politics.

PIHI MANUS

In 1990, after her husband, our father, was murdered on Manus, she returned home to take up their business. Here she became more involved in the provincial women's movement. During this time, she was elected as the president of the Provincial Women's Association in 1993. She was instrumental in the Provincial Government Assembly's enactment of the Pihi Manus Association Act which provides for and integrates Manus women into the Manus provincial governance system. Pihi Manus means Manus woman or women in Nahau's Nali language, and Pihi Manus Association has become an important vehicle through which Manus women politically engage across various levels and spheres of Manus society.

Nahau's role in the establishment of the Pihi Manus Association is less recognised in national and international discourses on women's political leadership but it was another chapter in her shaping of the gendered political arena of Manus. As a *pilapan* and long-time President of the Pihi Manus Association, her funeral processes—her *haus krai*—had all the hallmarks of a person of rank. Manus women led the creation of beautiful ornamental artefacts that surrounded her *haus krai* and her casket. Powerful and beautiful orations honouring her were given. I was not so involved in the direct production of these material artefacts, nor did I have much input into the more male dominated organisational and oratory processes. The *garamut* (wooden drums) beats played on the death of *lapan* continuously sounded up to her burial. On her death, people—women

and men—raised betel nut to speak. In the background, when approached, I did use my influence as her daughter to convey and support the Pihi Manus Association request that they be given more time with her deceased body so that they could honour and grieve her. Reflecting the agency and power of Manus women, I was in awe as I observed the leadership of Pihi Manus Association bid her farewell on their terms. As Strathern (2021) argues, these are events—artefacts—to be understood in and of themselves. Be it women's agency in grief or their—our—agency in insisting to be included in the ceremonial honouring of their—our—powerful female figurehead—these events tell us much about society. All who came, men and women, acknowledged her place as a *pilapan* or a Manus leader.

The Manus Open member and the Speaker of National Parliament made the point that

You young men who are here today, you do not know. I will tell this story. Nahau is one woman. She was the first Manus woman to race in politics. And in her first attempt, she won in 1977. Now it is 2020. How many years is that? How many? Forty three and we moving forward and not one other Manus woman has done this. Nahau is the first woman who upon entering parliament got appointed as a cabinet Minister. The first Papua New Guinean woman to get appointed as a minister. So, on this occasion as she lies in her coffin, we must celebrate. (...) Young men and women of Manus, you must hear this. Nahau was also the first female minister, the first minister of government that the courts jailed. Because she stood on her principles that the court was wrong and she was right and she made her decision against the decision of the court. A woman.

(...) *She returned and worked in Manus Provincial Administration. She worked under the provincial affairs and later she was an executive officer in the provincial government and in this capacity the elder councillors at that time, they said, 'That young woman can become the member for Manus.' And all the elders. My fathers, PANGU men, Peter Pomat, Pokapin Pombrulei, and all the elders, they rallied behind Nahau Rooney and Nahau Rooney became the member of Parliament.* (Job Pomat, Member of Parliament for Manus Open and Speaker of National Parliament, 9th October 2020, Manus, on the occasion of Nahau Rooney's *haus krai*)

The President of the Nali Sopat PENABU (Pere Nali M'bunai) Local Level Government—her childhood and home electorate, told his version of the backing she received in 1977:

I will speak about what I know from when I was a child. She was my teacher and I can recall our fathers they engineered this late Nahau Rooney. They engineered her. (...) They said, 'It is this woman, we will appoint her to become our leader.' And when they gathered together, as the Honourable Open Member said, others joined in, Manus came in and this was their leader. This one lying here. They put her on a keyau (chiefly platform) and they sent her forward and Manus wanted her and pushed her all the way to the National Government and today we are talking about her, and this entire week's agenda we will be speaking about her. (Nura Pokop, President, Nali Sopat PENABU Local Level Government, 9th October 2020, Manus, on the occasion of Nahau Rooney's *haus krai*)

Even though her role in the establishment of the Pihhi Manus Association was widely

acknowledged, it was evident that women needed to negotiate our spaces into speaking in the powerful male dominated public arena. During the male dominated official handover of her body to family, representatives of the Pihhi Manus Association persisted in entering the arena amidst calls for them to wait until the male officials departed. The women placed their contribution publicly alongside and as part of the government's contribution. Holding a bunch of betel nut high above her head, the representative of the Pihhi Manus Association announced that

On behalf of Pihhi Manus. We have come. We don't have men with us. We are women. We know we produce gardens. We beat the sago. We sell it and we can buy rice. We don't rely on any man to help us. We want to show that the leader who broke the laws of the haus boi of Manus (Men's house – patriarchal clan laws) – she broke the laws of the haus boi. When she arrived, we women must also hold buai [betel nut]. (...) this woman who is down here. We will follow and carry her strength and her power. She said, 'rise up and move on. Move forward'. (...) On behalf of the women of Manus, we Pihhi Manus, we considered the buai ban but this is our Manus custom (...). Buai is Manus kastam. (Elizabeth Tanou, Representative of Pihhi Manus Association, 9th October 2020, Manus, on the occasion of Nahau Rooney's *haus krai*)

The Speaker of Parliament, Job Pomat, received the Pihhi Manus Association contribution and acknowledged that the Pihhi Manus Association was an official arm of the government under the Pihhi Manus Act.

As Arnold Marsipal, who was elected with her in the 1982 elections, noted in his speech,

The woman asleep in her casket here, is a *pibilapan*. She is a *big meri* – she is a *pibilapan* (...). Yes. I will repeat, *pibilapan* is not about your beauty, no it is where you go down and you serve the people. That is what *pibilapan* reflects. (Arnold Marsipal, 10th October 2020, Manus, on the occasion of Nahau Rooney's *haus krai*)

These events are artefacts of history. Captured on video, the events are powerful images of both the marginalisation of women and of women's agency in claiming political spaces that Nahau occupied and where she had gained renown. Only time will tell how this legacy will evolve as an artefact to be interpreted by different people at different times in history.

In all the speeches people did not question whether Nahau was allowed to be a leader or who gave her permission. Instead, they authoritatively, publicly, and proudly acknowledged her as a leader.

METHODS: ARTEFACTS OF OUR TIMES

Documenting Nahau Rooney's life will involve situating her alongside—not as subject—other hegemonic matriarchs such as Anne Dickson-Waiko, Margaret Mead, Marilyn Strathern, and others. As a Manus woman, and as a critic of Margaret Mead, her story comes into conversation with Margaret Mead's hegemonic status as a matriarchal ancestor of American anthropology, whose work on Manus blankets anthropological writings about Manus. Her story as a *pilapan* also relies on the ethnographic evidence provided by Mead. As a PNG woman, her story comes into conversation with Strathern's hegemonic status as the theorist on Melanesian gender and personhood. To historicise and foreground her life, her story will

come into conversation with Anne Dickson-Waiko's hegemonic status as a pioneering PNG feminist historian who has highlighted the ways PNG women tend to be subjugated in historical records (Dickson-Waiko 2013). Nahau's story comes into conversation with Manus women themselves.

In her death, with help from a small number of family members, I cleaned her rooms. This process itself was a form of confronting erasure. I came across dozens of notes, letters, diary entries, written by her and our father. These artefacts of their lives form a small but important corpus of writing that provide insights to social, cultural, and political histories of Manus and PNG. During her *haus krai*, I found myself preoccupied with trying my best to document this occasion using a combination of my smart phone, my camera, my voice recorder, and writing notes as much as I could.

I have since spent countless hours revisiting the videos, listening to audio, transcribing, thinking about photos that I have taken over the past few years and during her funeral. A prolific and ubiquitous artefact of contemporary global society are mobile phones and the technology that enables users to capture and share images and videos of events across the globe instantaneously. These photographs and videos and audio recordings that record our collective witnessing and participation in events like funerals are artefacts of history.

Strathern's chapter challenged me to take a step back from interpretation and instead try to see these events exactly as they are. As one of the many witnesses to her *haus krai*, I was mutually producing meanings during this event. How might I catalogue and preserve these artefacts of a hegemonic matriarch, so she is not erased or subsumed merely as a subject or rendered superfluous as an illustration of societal context? How do I assemble these artefact reminders of

her life to tell her story in a way that is as close as possible to portraying her story on her terms?

COMPELLED TO ACT AND WITNESS THE EVENT AS THE ARTEFACT

Prior to mother dying and after she died, our ancestral spiritual bird—*pai*—a pidgeon or dove, was already journeying with me. I believe this bird was my maternal Manus grandmother who died many years before I was born. That bird was so powerful. During COVID19 and anxiety at leaving my children, she, or maybe it was my grief, compelled me to travel. That bird, or maybe it was a place in my heart, stayed beside me until I reached home. I could have imagined it. It compelled me to act. The *pai* had arrived weeks before mama died. Perhaps the bird was already preparing to take her daughter home. Maybe I had begun to hear mother slipping away as her voice grew softer and more fragile over the phone. As I heard the concern of our youngest sister who, with her children, was living with our mother. When our mother died, it was almost as though I could hear that bird say ‘Get up! Move.’ That bird almost insisted that I acted, flew, bypassed borders, arrived, engaged, enacted, and witnessed, because, the event or the ‘image must be experienced and witnessed rather than merely summed up and described’. (Strathern 2021: 36)

Strathern also challenges us to

be prepared to switch the metaphors the other way too (...) to talk about people using an event the way they may use a knife, or creating an occasion they way they create a mask or demonstrate personal efficacy in laying the phases of a feast according to strict social protocols. (Strathern 2021: 41)

For example, in Manus, the woven basket, produced by women, symbolises women’s work in the formation of social relationships and social fabric (Ohnemus 2003; Rooney 2021). In the funeral processes, the handing over of Nahau Rooney’s deceased body by the Provincial Government to our family, the vigil organised by the Pihl Manus Association in the building she built, and the post burial mortuary exchange and other events were both knife and basket. All those present and the various and overlapping social groupings that had some bearing on the occasion are at the same time the knife—cutting, slicing, dividing, carving, shaping—and they are the basket—being newly woven, intimate, strong, able to withstand weight, protect its inner contents, and aesthetic. The event itself was gendered and it was not gendered. Both men and women were knives and baskets. Death itself was a birth. Death and birth, men and women, knife and basket—one in the same thing mutually and intentionally, erasing, rupturing, reordering, and forming, reproducing, and creating social relationship. Together these all served as both a knife and a basket of the various relationships and spheres that Nahau traversed in life and that became visible in her death. She *was* the event.

Whereas there can be multiple interpretations of events, and interpretations can be manipulated to serve different purposes, Strathern suggests that the event itself stands on its own, and in witnessing the event the viewer produces their own effects and self-knowledge of the events (1990: 36). In being present, witnessing, documenting through a camera, a video, a photo, I was but one actor in a sea of actors who were mutually the audience and the choreographers mutually shaping and influencing—one of many makers of this performance that we conceived—the funeral processes of Nahau Rooney’s death. We

witnessed the surfacing and telling of her stories and journeys. We were burying a powerful woman: a matriarch with hegemonic power.

We bid farewell to a Manus leader, a pihi Manus, a *pilapan*.

HEGEMONY'S GENDER: MATERNAL AGENCY IN LIFE AND DEATH

Every death is powerful. An abrupt end. We must forcefully move the intransigent deceased body of someone we loved dearly in life into a final resting place—burial, cremation, or other form. We must then work through the abyss of grief as time propels us further from them. We

must also deal with the material reminders of their past presence and their present absence. We make decisions about what we keep and what we discard and erase. We make these decisions while at the same time we are moving in time and in space. The process of death and burial ruptures relationships, compelling abrupt ends, new formations, reorganisation of boundaries of social relationships and kinship, and restructuring of kinship powers.

What is left then are our individual and collective memories, the material artefacts—the photos, videos, and notes and scribbles and reflections made in life, the clothes, artefacts, and belongings, the land property, and other reminders.

Dear Mama,

Silence. Some things are better left unsaid, you once told me. I often wondered about this, especially since you are who you are and so very vocal. I get it too. Do we have to write and say everything? What stories need to be known?

Silence.

Absence. When we are not present. This is not presence. We are absent.

How can we be witnessed? How can we witness?

You are absent. In death you are absent and silent.

Silence. Absence.

But in writing we are forever inked on paper – to be read, to heard read, to be present.

This is the world I am now trapped in. I am trapped in a system where I must write if I am to remain in this space. I must select what to keep silent and what to reveal.

I hear your voice now and I have a sense of what you mean.

I have been listening to your voice on the videos and recordings and news articles.

I have been reading your notes. I have been reading about you. You are not absent, nor silent, nor dead.

You are present.

Yet. I wonder. How much was in that silence you spoke about? In your absence, how much have you taken with you. Never to be known.

Oh, how very little we know, and how so much has been taken into the yonder the other side of the world of the dead. In silence, absence.

Do the dead have agency?

If so, much knowledge is taken to the other side without ever being known – heard, seen, then do the dead have agency?

If my memory of you? Memories? Tears, my name, my blood, by fears – is this me, or is it yours, your mother's, my father's, other's agency?

Is my memory, my emotion about me? Or is it your agency from the other side?

It was only after you died, when I heard your voice remembering your childhood self.

I also realised how much may never be told and that I may also have the power to withhold knowledge; that maybe some things simply never need to be told. I regret not being more assertive with her to document her own story. I regret not taking time out of my own work and family to help her do this. How much knowledge has left this world without ever being interpreted, coded, imaged, or inscribed? In possession of such artefacts as videos and photographs, along with written documents, what does one do? Do we add to the anthropological record and hence knowledge of culture and history in the Pacific? Can anthropology include the unwritten, unsaid, and unknown?

ANTICIPATING THE FUTURE OF CULTURE AND HISTORY IN THE PACIFIC

A focus on Nahau Rooney's life can also shed insight onto Manus women's roles, positions, and agency with Manus political and societal structures and context. The orations and actions during our mother's funeral brought home to me questions about kinship and social relationships. In PNG patriarchal and patrilineal ideology is hegemonic. Yet, many people anchor their authorities and entries into events on the name of cognate matriarchal figures. For many of us, our matrilineage in Manus takes a particular form because our fathers, though they may be locally and socially grounded, are cultural others. In appearing to me, the bird—my

mother's mother—ensured that I witnessed on her behalf. During these events, invoking my matriliney empowered me to engage to bear witness to this powerful woman: my mother. I witnessed this in the way the knife and the basket simultaneously narrated my mother's life and reordered and ordered kinship relations in her death. I too embodied a knife and basket, cutting and making my own pathway into the future with and without her. I see these questions will resonate as society changes. For example, I have explored some of the social implications of Australia's offshore detention centre on Manus society and Manus women in particular (Rooney 2021).

I see three themes woven through *Culture and History in the Pacific*. The persistence of the gendered binary between male dominated societies and marginal women in the analysis of culture and history in the Pacific, the mediations between material and social culture, and methodological questions about how we use ethnographic data and an interdisciplinary lens. Resonating with what many Indigenous Oceania people have been saying for a long time, Strathern's chapter challenges us—then and now—to reframe our epistemic lens to deprivilege the outsider's interpretation and foreground the subject insider producer's understanding. In positioning my mother and various events surrounding her life and death as the artefact, I offer new ethnographic material to examine women's leadership in Manus. I was but one of many witnesses who each produced

our own meanings of these events. Today's technology, smart phones, mobile phones, social media are the material artefacts that enabled me to capture some of these events to relisten and reobserve, to craft my meanings I see in events of other times and spaces. These intransigent artefacts of culture and history inspire me to be bolder about writing Nahau's story in ways that reveal insights about her and Manus women. Thank you for the opportunity to read and reflect on this republication of *Culture and History in the Pacific*. I hope that others will also find that this book opens interesting spaces for continued engagement of these important conversations.

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