

# An Oceanic revolution? *Stella* and the construction of new femininities in Papua New Guinea and the Pacific

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In August 2012, a new magazine for women was released in Papua New Guinea (PNG). Entitled *Stella*, the magazine provides an ideal opportunity to analyse shifting constructions of gender among educated, employed women in PNG and elsewhere in the Pacific. Drawing on interviews, surveys and readers' letters, this article discusses Papua New Guinean women who, because they display 'modern attributes', are maligned and discredited as 'inauthentic'. It then goes on to document the ways in which *Stella* is enabling such women to assert themselves anew. Arguing that the publication of *Stella* marks the arrival into the public sphere of a group hitherto consigned to the margins of Pacific societies on the basis that they represent an 'inauthentic minority', the article makes an important contribution to scholarly discussion about the emergence of new femininities in PNG and the Pacific.

**Keywords:** Oceanic identity, transnationalism, Pacific, femininities

## INTRODUCTION

In August 2012, *Stella*, a new magazine was launched at Vision City, a large shopping complex in Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea (PNG). Described on the website as a 'thinking woman's magazine from Papua New Guinea for the Pacific', *Stella* is the realisation of 33-year-old editor Amanda Donigi's dream to create a magazine that she 'would want to read' (Donigi A., 2013, interview with author).

An hour after launching *Stella*, Donigi spoke with Heather Jarvis from ABC's Radio Australia. Responding to Jarvis' question about why she had decided to make the magazine 'pan-Pacific' rather than just focused on Papua New Guinea, Donigi said:

I was going to start with just Papua New Guinea and then I decided that there's so much that we share across the Pacific that we should all be proud about, uniting for, shouldn't be dividing ourselves up across the Pacific because even though we do have our individual cultures, there's so many similarities and we should be uniting for those and being proud of our Pacific heritage as well as our own individual country's heritage. (ABC Radio Australia 2012)

Confirming the arguments made by many scholars of the Pacific (see for example McDougall 2003; Van Meijl 2004; Jolly 2007) Donigi's response indicates that she, like a growing number of educated Pacific Islanders, espouses an inclusive and expansive vision of Pacific community. Privileging 'unity' over differences and being Pacific over local and national identification, Donigi sees Pacific heritage as something that can be celebrated alongside other identifications.

In Donigi's home country of PNG, this pro-regionalist feeling would appear to be particularly common among the tertiary-educated members of society, a significant proportion of whom have travelled extensively and completed at least some of their education overseas (Crocombe 1976; Mishra 2005). For most in this group, connections to their family's village or traditional place are more historical than 'lived': they are and have always been transnational subjects. Because their 'social and cultural ties to a specific place have been attenuated by distance, education, engagement in employment and intermarriage' (Macintyre 2011: 92) those in this group are unlikely to espouse identities based on tribal, local or traditional connections. Instead, they portray multi-faceted identities that reflect transnational consumerism, diasporic experience and their engagement with a wide world, including via the Internet (Linneken 2004).

This profile certainly fits Donigi, the second of five girls born to an Australian mother and Papua New Guinean father, Peter Donigi, a lawyer and former Ambassador to New York and Germany. After spending her primary school years in Port Moresby, Donigi attended a British High School in Germany, completed a degree at the University of Queensland in Australia and worked in South Korea and Taiwan before returning to Queensland to do a diploma in writing, editing and publishing. Returning to live in Port Moresby in 2009 Donigi continues to travel on a regular basis, both in her role as *Stella* editor and to visit family and friends outside PNG.

In highlighting Pacific Islanders' shared cultural heritage and ways of life, Donigi echoes a call for regionalism made by Epli Hau'ofa, the Tongan-born child of missionary parents who grew up in PNG and who was a leading academic at the University of the South Pacific (USP) in Fiji. Hau'ofa's use of the term 'Oceanic' is similar to Donigi's use of 'Pacific Islanders' in that both emphasise 'common heritage and commitment' in 'a world of people connected to each other' (Hau'ofa 1998: 401–02). Advancing the concept of Oceania and Oceanians as part of the attempt to 'search for ... names for common identities that are more accommodating, inclusive and flexible' than national or ethnic associations, Hau'ofa (1998) writes:

As the sea is an open and ever-flowing reality, so should our Oceanic identity transcend all forms of insularity to become one that is openly searching, inventive and welcoming. ... the formation of an Oceanic identity is really an aspect of our waking up to things that are already happening around us.

Hau'ofa may be the first to call this emerging identity 'Oceanic', but his ideas resonate with those of other Pacific scholars. For instance, articulating a proud post-colonial identity based on shared origins and ethnicity, Bernard Narakobi (1980)

described what he called the 'Melanesian Way' in a series of articles published in the *Post Courier*, PNG's national newspaper between 1976 and 1978. Though difficult to define, 'the Melanesian Way' is characterised by difference from Asians and Europeans, and emphasises diversity, spirituality and the significance of relatedness. Narakobi also spoke of unity across Melanesia, writing:

Our ways are not so varied and contradictory as many have claimed. Our unity springs not from the nation state, common currency, common banks, the police and the military ... We are a united people because of our common vision ... [which] has evolved over thousands of years. (Narakobi 1980: 7)

Around the same time as Narakobi's articles appeared, Ron Crocombe, Professor of Pacific Studies at the University of the South Pacific, produced his influential essay 'The Pacific Way: An Emerging Identity' (1976). Like 'the Melanesian Way', the 'Pacific Way' was difficult to pin down: 'the Pacific Way has no single precise meaning, but it carries a core of basic ideas and emotional responses plus a range of other meanings which can be attached to it according to context' (Crocombe 1976: 2). Also, like Narakobi who emphasised a 'common vision' and 'a common cultural and spiritual unity' (1980: 7), Crocombe describes a Pacific 'brotherhood' characterised by 'common interests and origins' (Crocombe 1976: 4–5). Crocombe saw the Pacific Way as irrelevant for isolated villages. It was rather 'of the most value to the mobile elite of the Pacific Islands: the politicians, the senior officers of government, leading churchmen, the few leading islands businessmen and so on (Crocombe 1976: 7; see also Lawson 2010). Given the mobile elite was almost exclusively composed of men, it is difficult to see how Pacific women's voices, concerns and hopes might fit into this apparently emancipatory discourse.

Critiquing Crocombe, Sudesh Mishra (2005: 366) writes:

For Crocombe, the legitimate speakers of the Pacific Way are elite islanders, who employ it as a 'symbol of Pacific unity' (Crocombe 1976: 8) by actively excluding Europeans, Asians, women and subaltern villagers, that is to say, the vast majority of the inhabitants of the terrain encompassed by the term 'Pacific'.

Mishra (2005: 367) then argues that 'what redeems the Pacific Way [in the present] is its radical reconfiguration by those excluded constituencies who negatively constituted the discourse in the first instance', including women. Nevertheless, as Lawson (2010: 312) notes: 'this project ... has a long way to go'.

Referring to the shared values and ways of Pacific Islanders, Donigi echoes these ideas while simultaneously inserting women at the centre of a new articulation of Oceanic identity. Grasping the emancipatory aspects of transnational identifications, she creates a hopeful vision of Pacific womanhood characterised by that which is 'shared' with those outside PNG's borders.

In this article, I discuss *Stella* as a manifestation of that which is 'already happening around us' (Hau'ofa 1998). Drawing on data including interviews, surveys and content analysis, which captures the perspectives of Papua New Guinean

women readers of the magazine, I argue that through *Stella*, women in PNG and the Pacific are asserting themselves anew. Given the tendency in PNG to malign and discredit educated women and those displaying ‘modern attributes’ (Macintyre 1998: 223), *Stella*’s recognition and celebration of this group marks an important shift in identity politics in the region. This article documents and discusses this shift and the ways in which it reflects the emergence of new femininities in PNG and the Pacific.

In the next section I discuss the ways in which the ‘modern’ women who constitute *Stella*’s target audience are construed as outsiders in PNG. I then go on to show that *Stella* helps to shift the terms of the debate about such women, moving away from dismissals of them as ‘non-representative’ to instead construct them as a growing force.

## OUTSIDER WOMEN

In 2007, I conducted twenty-seven interviews with tertiary-educated Papua New Guinean women living in towns in PNG (see Spark 2010, 2011). These interviews provide useful background information about the Papua New Guinean women who make up the target audience for *Stella*. The majority of the research participants in this 2007 study had completed part of their education overseas, most in either Australia or New Zealand. Despite the supportive friendships these women had with one another, most expressed a sense that they didn’t quite ‘fit’ into PNG society. For some, this included the feeling that their extended families saw them as ‘odd’.

Discussing these matters, 25-year-old Joanne, who had completed her secondary schooling in New South Wales, said, for example:

I feel I’m different in my home, my family and my own society ... It gets lonely I’d say trying to be, not trying to be different but just trying to be who you are. You know people don’t seem to get you as you are.

Referring to her sense of difference from her family, she added:

They don’t see. I wanted them to see with my eyes but they can’t see it ‘cause they still see, their whole life is here. They haven’t moved out of where ever they’ve been. ... They just look at me as weird and they think I’m going to get married to a white man.

Having visited and lived in other countries, places that most members of their families will never go, Joanne, like many of the women I interviewed, expended funds and energy to maintain links with the world beyond PNG and with like-minded others. Working for an Australian company that gave her opportunities to travel overseas, Joanne spent a significant amount of her salary on the Internet to maintain connections with friends in Australia. Such spending supports the evidence that such ‘outsider’ women in the Pacific represent a growing market force.

Despite her relatively advantageous economic position, Joanne’s daily life is characterised by various forms of harassment and marginalisation. She said, for example:

I get harassed all the time [because of] the type of clothes I wear or the jewellery or probably the makeup and ... 'cause I wear shorts, the shorts you're not supposed to, like what I'm wearing now, I can't pretty much wear it.

In a context in which wearing the 'wrong shorts' is interpreted as a form of rebellion against male authority, Joanne pays a high price for maintaining an identity constructed through reference to global discourses and fashions.

As the few anthropologists to discuss modern, urban-dwelling women in PNG concur, fear and anxiety about changing gender roles in PNG are frequently masked as concerns about 'class' and differential access to power and opportunity (Zimmer-Tamakoshi 1993; Macintyre 1998; Jolly 2005). Discussing these matters, Margaret Jolly (2005: 151) argues that the views of educated and employed women are dismissed 'as unique or inauthentic because they belong to that suspect class of educated, urban women intellectuals (regularly opposed to that locus of authenticity, the uneducated, ordinary, rural woman, see Jolly 1992)'. Punished for their perceived distance from the 'grass roots' of society, successful Pacific women are regarded as betraying their proper gender roles. In contrast, men who embody 'modernity' may be envied but are rarely maligned. Given this context, it comes as little surprise that Joanne would seek out communities in which her activities and preferences are normalised and celebrated.

Joanne mentions her shorts as the embodiment of her difference and the reason she is harassed. Discussing matters of appearance, including 'the trouble with trousers' (2008), Maggie Cummings (2013a) writes about young Vanuatu women's contestation of the locally prescribed ways of 'looking good'. Noting that '[t]he face of Vanuatu is that of the *mama* (mother)—the married, visibly Melanesian, church-going, village-dwelling mother who is respectful of both *kastom* and Christian (most often male) authority', Cummings (2013b: 33) examines what wearing trousers means for Ni-Vanuatu girls and young women. She argues (2013: 34) that this group are attempting 'to rede-fine, and re-embodiment—though with limited success—relationships between *kastom* and modernity, the local and the foreign, black and white, rural and urban, past and future'. However, like Joanne's shorts, Ni-Vanuatu women's trousers are readily critiqued as an improper display of their modernity. Rendering them morally questionable, their trousers undermine these young women's desire to be taken seriously and thus, their capacity to control the 'speech acts' they produce with their choice of clothing (see Gill 2007: 69). Indeed, as Cummings (2013b: 60) notes: '[w]hen it comes to nation building, national identity, and national pride, it is not clear how or whether young women are supposed to participate in the present'. Construed as threatening the very project of nation-hood, including because their clothes express their internationally-oriented selves, trouser-wearing women are deemed inauthentic, threatening and subversive all at the same time.

In a recent chapter on transnationalism, Maggie Cummings (2013: 383) suggests the need 'to understand the social change associated with globalization (and, by association, the global flows that characterize transnationalism) not as something that

happens *to* the people whose lives we study, but rather, something that they themselves *do*, participate in, drive, and shape through their own choices, actions, feelings, and theories'. Concurring that it is important to consider the prospects and positives of transnationalism, I would argue that women in the Pacific participate in, and engage with, aspects of transnationalism precisely because doing so enables new ways of being and knowing themselves *as* Pacific women.

It is in this light that I interpret Stella's arrival and significance. Rather than describing educated, 'modern-looking' or single PNG women as inauthentic or otherwise suspect, the magazine honours diverse Pacific women—including those living outside their countries of origin. Indeed, through Stella, 'outsider' women are not only 'participating in the present', but are in some instances newly constructed as the 'movers and shakers' of the region (Stella media kit). Paradoxically, the very factors that make these women outsiders—being educated, in the paid workforce, independent of men—are the same factors that enable their status as consumers and allow their entrance into the public world of the magazine. Moreover, through *Stella* they become part of a community of women, thus reducing the sense of marginality that may contribute to feelings of isolation and powerlessness. In this sense, the name 'Stella' plays an important role for not only is it common in the Pacific, as Donigi says, because it is a girl's name, 'it's like having a friend to you as well ... someone's there for you if you need an ear' (Donigi A., 2013, interview with author). As a close examination of the magazine reveals, contributors and readers feel themselves to be part of a circle of intimacy and friendship. While this is characteristic of women's magazines (Le Masurier 2009) it may have particular significance in the Pacific where, on the basis of their 'modernity' and perceived transgression of 'proper' gender roles, 'outsider' women are subject to discursive, symbolic and physical violence (see Toft 1985; Zimmer-Tamakoshi 1998; Wardlow 2006; Haley 2008). Conversely, in the community of *Stella* readers, Pacific women can wear their modernity on their sleeve without fear of reprisal and in the knowledge that they are more likely to be interpreted as embracing the transnational future rather than as rejecting or 'betraying' the 'traditional' past.

### **STELLA: EXPLORING THE MAGAZINE'S CONTENTS**

The magazine contains many feature articles about, and interviews with, women who are leaders or otherwise inspiring in some way. Many of these are Papua New Guinean women, including, for example, Julie Soso, the recently elected Governor of the Eastern Highlands Province and Ipul Powaseu, the Chairperson of the PNG Assembly of Disabled Persons. Others are Papua New Guinean women living overseas, such as Dame Meg Taylor, PNG's first woman lawyer who lives in Washington DC in the USA, and Jocelyn Leahy, who has established a Pacific art gallery in Queensland, Australia.

*Stella* also contains many articles about women from elsewhere in the Pacific, including, for example, Stella Muller, a New Zealand born Samoan who started a

company selling 'Hot Samoan Boys Chilli Sauce'. Using bird's eye chillies grown in Samoa, Muller describes herself as having 'global aspirations' and as wanting 'to make a practical and direct contribution to Samoa's economy and country profile' (*Stella* Issue 4, Feb–March 2013). Another article focuses on the international figure of Vanessa Quai, a singer from Vanuatu. The articles highlight these international women's connections with their 'culture' and places of origin, while simultaneously portraying them as members of a Pacific community. For example, describing Quai as a 'Pacific music queen', the author of the article about Quai remarks that she 'has toured and performed in Australia, New Zealand, Canada, Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands, New Caledonia, French Polynesia and Tahiti' (*Stella* Issue 3, Dec 2012–Jan 2013).

Another, and one of the more radical of the Pacific women featured in *Stella* is Courtney Sina Meredith, a poet and playwright of 'mixed Samoan, Mangyan and Irish heritage'. In response to Donigi's question about her new play, *Rushing Dolls*, Meredith explicitly addresses the ways in which both *Rushing Dolls* and *Stella* manifest the new breed of Pacific women:

A Rushing Doll is everything I ever wanted to be. She is actively engaged with her dreams; she is ambitious, loud-mouthed and loyal. There are few Pacific Island female infrastructures for being, for young women represented in daily life beyond netball and youth group. I should note that such leadership roles in the community are crucial and I deeply respect what they seek to achieve, however there's another order that is rising and that group is not the minority. (*Stella* Issue 4, Feb–Mar 2013)

Donigi echoed this, saying 'I think it's (i.e. *Stella*) a minority voice in the sense that there's nowhere for it to be out there but I think it's not necessarily a minority opinion' (Donigi A., 2013, interview with author).

Alongside the articles about inspiring women, the magazine also features 'feminine pleasures aplenty' (Le Masurier 2009: 103), including articles about beauty, fashion, health, travel and the arts. Moreover, it does so in ways hitherto neglected by the media, including in the Pacific. For instance, in the first issue, *Stella* published an article about the importance of sunlight for Melanesians. For Donigi this reflected the need to discuss 'issues that affect us as Melanesians, Polynesians and Micronesians across the Pacific rather than just regurgitating the same health issues that might not really be relevant to us' (Donigi A., 2013, interview with author).

The magazine has also featured several articles about fashion designers, some of whom say that their aesthetics are inspired by the colours and 'way of life' in the Pacific. *Stella's* fashion page featuring second-hand clothing purchased in Port Moresby (Figure 1) reflects the reality that second-hand clothes shopping is a major pastime in PNG. The second-hand clothes page features whole outfits purchased for the sum total of PNG KINA 10–20 (AUD \$5–10), simultaneously showcasing fashions that push the envelope in PNG, but doing so in an inclusive and affordable way.

The significance of representing contemporary fashions cannot be underestimated. Discussing the Duna people who live in the northwestern corner of the





Figure 1 'Second-hand fashion page', *Stella*, Issue 1, Aug–Sept 2012.

Southern Highlands Province, Nicole Haley (2008: 35) notes: 'women—who are considered to have transgressed local gender codes by wearing shorts or trousers—[have been] stripped, publicly humiliated, and sexually assaulted in punishment'. Such violence makes clear that in PNG, women's subordination is 'properly' displayed on bodies clothed conservatively in women's wear, with the quintessential item being the *meri blaus* (as worn by Jennifer Baing, see Figure 2). As such, *Stella's* celebratory display of women wearing a wide range of fashionable clothing is inextricably related to the magazine's contestation of gender roles and power in this context.<sup>1</sup>

Another PNG-based aspect of the magazine is the 'vox pops' with ordinary people about subjects such as Christmas or Valentine's Day. There are also articles about subjects of interest and concern for women in PNG, including, for example, a personal reflection on bride price by prominent radio personality Thelma April Ninjipa, and multiple examinations of the PNG Constitution and law in relation to various issues, including sexual harassment in the workplace and equality and participation.

Even more than most women's magazines (Ballaster *et al.* 1991; Sheridan *et al.* 2002), *Stella* conveys a strong sense of community, including through a productive recycling of contributors and subjects, some of whom are Donigi's friends. For instance, Jennifer Baing, who features on the front cover of the first issue, is a friend of Donigi's and has since written several articles for the magazine. While this community of women clearly pre-dates *Stella*, it is also being built and strengthened in and through the magazine.





Figure 2 'Stella front cover photo of Jennifer Baing', *Stella*, Issue 1, Aug–Sept 2012.

Many articles note the importance of Christianity in the lives of these women, including those presented as 'globally successful' modern women. For instance, reflecting the strong Christian faiths of most Pacific women, the article on Vanessa Quai also focuses on her 'chastity choice', and thus an aspect of her identity unlikely to be highlighted in any western magazines that were not primarily designed for a Christian audience. Yet Quai's modern pop star appearance suggests a very different version of Christian womanhood to the one embodied by the Catholic women discussed by Hermkens (2007, 2012), Hermkens (2008). In their efforts to emulate the Virgin Mary, the Catholic women discussed by Hermkens emphasise obedience, submission and self-sacrifice, including when it comes to responding to violence. Conversely, Quai's chastity choice may be as much an expression of her youthful independence from men as it is of her Christian commitment, thus giving her more in common with the educated women in PNG who are avoiding marriage on the basis that they associate it with a curtailment of their freedom and ambitions (Spark 2011). While 'models of [female] emancipation derived from Christianity ... may be unsettling for those of us without faith' (Jolly 2005: 154), they are an irreducibly important aspect of the majority of Pacific women's self-construction as 'modern' subjects. For many women in the region, the benefits of a Christian community echo those of belonging to a magazine community in that both are 'dynamic and unbounded' (McDougall 2003: 64), while offering 'new kinds of opportunities ... for local collective action and for making productive connections with the outside world' (McDougall 2003: 65).

In summary, *Stella* represents an impressive array of Pacific women, most of whom nevertheless embody versions of femininity that are Pacific in their orientations, interests and commitments including, for example, to Christianity and family (see Macintyre 2011). At the same time, the magazine implicitly subverts expectations about what Papua New Guinean women 'should' look like (modestly dressed and without make-up), be doing (gardening, cooking or tending children) and where (in the village or garden and certainly somewhere local rather than international). A site for the creation and public exposure of new versions of femininity in the Pacific, the magazine is giving women like Joanne a voice and a community.

## READING THE READERS

As (Le Masurier 2009: 106; see also Le Masurier 2011) has argued in relation to the Australian women's magazine, *Cleo*, academics have a 'desire ... to hear the voice of the reader as subject as they make sense of their reading'. To conduct her research on *Cleo* as it appeared in its early years, Le Masurier (2009: 6) drew exclusively on readers' letters because she wanted to analyse the reader from 'times past' without the attendant risks of 'distortion, confabulation and forgetting'. When this article was written, *Stella* had yet to celebrate its first birthday. As a bi-monthly publication, it has only just released its sixth issue. Because the research is contemporaneous with the period in which the magazines under discussion have been produced, it is reasonable to assume both that readers' perspectives are fresh (notwithstanding the normal potential to forget some details) and that societal shifts around gender issues of a magnitude that would affect readers' perceptions have not yet occurred.

Because distortions of time and memory are less of a risk when it comes to analysing the meanings readers are making of *Stella*, this research utilises a mixed methods approach in order to gain insight into the meanings *Stella* readers are making of the magazine. The following analysis draws on blogs, readers' letters, surveys, interviews and a focus group. There are various benefits of the mixed methods approach, including achieving a balance of voices by accessing opinions among those expressed in the public domain (i.e. readers' letters and blogs) and, through open-ended survey questions and interviews, being able to explore in greater depth the phenomena to be investigated. The addition of a focus group also provided an opportunity to hear how three Papua New Guinean women 'thinking aloud together' made sense of the magazine and its impact.

In total, 15 Papua New Guinean women took part in the research. Participants were aged between 21 and 35 with the average age being 28 years old. All but one are single and only three have children. All but one have either completed tertiary education or are in the process of doing so, with some having completed double degrees or postgraduate degrees. Seven of the participants lived in Goroka, PNG, while seven currently live either in Melbourne, Sydney or Canberra in Australia. Notably, the women who took part in the research have much in common with the reader portrayed in the

media kit that *Stella* distributes to potential sponsors. This describes readers as female (77 per cent), aged between 18–44 years old (with the core age being 28), well-educated, ‘career-oriented and ambitious’.

Discussing the magazine on her blog, Pauline Vetuna, a Melbourne-based writer of Tolai origins (from East New Britain in PNG), says:

I’m not given to hyperbole (lie) but this is the Magazine I have been longing for. Based in Port Moresby, it is a Magazine that speaks to an Indigenous Pacific Islander demographic across Oceania who are **politically engaged, ethically aware, aesthetically conscious and creatively/artistically ACTIVE** (emphasis in original). Independent, pioneering people in both the home countries and in the Pacific diaspora that I know and love (emphasis in original).

Vetuna’s words are echoed by many who write in to *Stella*. For example, letters to the editor include the following statements: ‘Dear Stella. So excited for your launch and for the concept! Been wanting a woman’s Pasifika magazine for soooo long! Huge congratulations on your success!’ (*Stella* Issue 2, Oct–Nov 2012). And: ‘Been hooked since the first issue as it is fresh, hip and made for the ordinary Pacific woman’ (*Stella* Issue 3, Dec 2012–Jan 2013). And this positive feeling continues in the fifth issue, the latest at the time of writing:

Just picked up my first copy of Stella yesterday. Totally adored it ... didn’t see any Internet “cut’n’paste” articles that would have me tossing it aside. Stories were relevant and obviously targeted at the modern young PNG woman who also happens to be part of the Pacific Islands community, and the magazine itself shows so much promise of how much better PNG and its people could be. (*Stella* Issue 5, April–May 2013)<sup>2</sup>

These letter writers emphasise their status as Pacific Islanders, echoing the magazine’s own construction of a community of ‘thinking women’ with ethnic origins in the region, rather than in a specific or sub-national location. Thus, Donigi’s last-minute decision to make *Stella* a Pacific rather than Papua New Guinean magazine both reflects and solidifies community among women whose identities are already constructed through reference to multiple places and influences beyond PNG’s shores. This is exemplified by Vetuna, who says:

That was really interesting, just picking up a magazine and thinking well I can totally relate with every single story in here and every single one of these women ... I can be in Melbourne and pick up a magazine that is based in Port Moresby and get everything that they’re talking about. (Vetuna 2013, interview with author)

For Vetuna, as for many *Stella* readers, whether they are Papua New Guinean women living outside PNG or ‘Oceanic’ women living in PNG, the magazine recognises and reflects their ‘insider-outsider’ status in ways they have rarely, if ever, experienced through their engagements with the media.

The excitement of the letter writers and bloggers was also evident in the survey responses and among interview and focus group participants, with the quotations below echoing the sentiments expressed in the letters:

The photographs of Papua New Guinean (Melanesian women/girls) were spectacular. I was impressed both by the photography and the style. It really set a precedent for the magazine content. I enjoyed the stories too. I loved the feature stories towards the end of the magazine. A really nice touch'. (Eare, aged 30, Melbourne)

The best part of *Stella* is the fact that it is PNG owned and it reflects ideas of strong Pacific Island women of the region sharing their stories, art, fashion and creating a world for PNG that competes next to Australian standards of publishing. The quality of the magazine and of the articles/pieces that are in it, put into light the talent that PNG women have and showcase the capacity that PNG women and Pacific Island women have in sharing not only their traditional/cultural heritage but also their smart intelligent and independent personalities. (Betty, aged 30, Canberra)

The strong positive response to *Stella* supports Donigi's view that the magazine is addressing a significant gap in the market. Donigi says she wanted to create something that she 'could relate to and wanted to read, something she could 'see herself in' and that would enable Pacific Islanders 'to tell our stories from our perspective' (Donigi A., 2013, interview with author).

In addition to addressing the absence of Pacific Islanders' perspectives from the media, Donigi also emphasises the neglect of women as a media audience:

[*Stella* is] definitely targeting an audience that has been underestimated in the past ... People don't really consider the female much in our culture, we have a particular role in society and we're supposed to fill it so what we're also doing is breaking those stereotypes. We've done interviews with female pilots and we have been talking to truck drivers at the mines who are women, women that are breaking out of the restrictions of what's the cultural norm and showing that we have more value than staying home and looking after ten children, cooking dinner and sweeping the floor. (Donigi A., 2013, interview with author)

Thus, in speaking to and about women in the Pacific, *Stella* challenges the twinned marginalisation of this group by both the western and local media. At the same time, the magazine explicitly confronts accepted norms of femininity in the Pacific in which a 'good wife' is subservient to her husband, enhancing his status by taking care of his pigs, gardens and children. Though the specifics may differ in urban contexts, educated and working women are still expected to display their 'womanly credentials' by having meals on the table in a timely fashion and running a successful household, including managing the demands of child care. Being late home from work or away from the household because they are attending work functions after hours can result in 'trouble', including jealous accusations. Women who find themselves in these situations may face verbal and physical abuse (see Toft 1985; Macintyre 1998; Zimmer-Tamakoshi 1998; Spark 2011). Countering this attack on women who work, *Stella* profiles working and single women, something that Pauline Vetuna describes as a 'huge' (2013, interview with author) change in this context. By normalising and celebrating women entrepreneurs, pilots, artists and lawyers, *Stella* implicitly confronts



Figure 3 'Stella front cover photo of Agatha and Lemba Augwi', *Stella*, Issue 4, Feb–March 2013.



Figure 4 'Stella front cover photo of Victoria Yarka', *Stella*, Issue 5, April–May 2013.

the notion that engaging in paid or creative work is an improper use of a Pacific woman's time and energy.

Readers appreciate the fact that *Stella* represents (and therefore speaks to) them in a way that no other magazine does:

Ok, for me when I'm reading *Stella* magazine, it's educational, inspiring and motivational at the same time but when I'm looking at the other magazines, they promote western cultures and the products of western, European cultures. It sometimes drives us Papua New Guineans crazy. (Francisca, aged 26, Goroka)

The covers (Figures 2–4) and photography of Papua New Guinean models form an important part of this address. Many readers discuss the pleasure they get from seeing Papua New Guinean women depicted on the front cover:

Most magazines that we grow up seeing are of other women from different countries: white women models and stuff. So you don't see PNG people as being attractive or pretty or hot in that sense. So that's when that's—when I just see it on the cover and I'm like, oh and her hair is just like that and—she looks just like an average Papua New Guinean. (Bernadette, aged 25, Goroka)

I also love that so far *Stella* has used natural looking PNG/Melanesian women as their cover models. I think it helps the ordinary PNG women to be inspired by the fact that the females on the cover actually look like them and not some unattainable, highly photo shopped image of a western women that keeps being forced on us. (Coralie, aged 32, Sydney)

I loved [the article about hair styles] because my daughter can see this and know that her natural hair is beautiful and there are different styles that can be done. (Dorothy, aged 32, Melbourne)

The magazine's depiction of successful women across the Pacific holds out 'promise' and encourages aspiration. As Vetuna put it: 'I look at these women and I think they're doing it, they're kicking arse, I want to be like them' (2013, interview with author). Readers embrace the stories about successful women whom they perceive to be 'role models' and said that they wanted to see more articles along these lines. Coralie (aged 32, Sydney) said for example: 'I especially love that the magazine is giving its readers role models', while Marion indicated that she would like to see more articles about women who go 'through hardship but can manage or survive and be successful' (Marion, aged 22, Goroka).

This appetite for images and information about women 'role models' was evident when I conducted research among educated Papua New Guinean women in 2007 (Spark 2010, 2011). When I asked young educated women whether they had any role models, Marie referred to a white woman she had seen at the airport as a child, saying:

I saw an expat [expatriate] woman at the Jackson's airport once when I was about 6 years old. She was in charge of some men and she looked very powerful in her red suit ... the image of her just stayed in my head ... I wanted to be like her, I wanted to do that. (Marie, aged 25, Port Moresby)

Other research participants suggested that I was a ‘role model’ when they learned that I was combining work with raising my children. These responses suggest a paucity of local examples of women to whom these young educated women could turn for inspiration. Yet, as Vetuna put it ‘there is power [in] seeing yourself reflected’ (2013, interview with author). In this light, *Stella* appears to be addressing not just a gap, but a gaping hole.

*Stella*’s public celebration of successful women only becomes more significant when we consider the daily harassment and discrimination to which educated or ‘modern’-looking Papua New Guinean women are subject because of their difference in appearance and attitude from the majority of women in PNG (see Johnson 1984; Zimmer-Tamakoshi 1993, 1998; Macintyre 1998; Wardlow 2005, 2006). Laura Zimmer-Tamakoshi has discussed the ways in which modern women in PNG are equated with ‘loose’ western women. Several contributors to the volume *Engendering Violence* (2012) also discuss the modernisation of violence against women. For instance, Phillip Gibbs notes how women’s participation in ‘modern activities’ such as driving cars and running businesses (Gibbs) constitutes grounds for attack because such activities are construed as threatening male dominance. In the same volume, Christine Stewart (2012: 229) writes:

geographically mobile, financially independent, beer-drinking, unmarried or no- longer-married woman [are] easily labelled as loose or *pamuk* (TP) (Clark n.d.: 18; Wardlow 2006). In contemporary PNG, where sex has become commoditised and a moral divide between marriage and prostitution has firmed, it is an easy step to perceiving the latter as ‘prostitutes’. (Jolly 2001: 198)

While Donigi has apparently expressed a preference ‘to steer clear of overt engagement with the mire of PNG politics’ (Chandler 2013), in a context in which modern women are the targets of derision, sexualised threats and violence, her commitment to portraying this group of women positively has political implications.

The deeply entrenched interpretations of ‘modern women’ in PNG also explain Eare’s suggestion that *Stella* might be a way of ‘starting a revolution’ (Eare, aged 30, Melbourne). Eare said the magazine would enable those who had no opportunity to travel outside PNG to observe other ways of being, dressing and thinking. For her it was crucial that *Stella* represented ‘other Islanders’, rather than ‘getting a New Idea magazine and you think “only white people can do this”’ (Eare, aged 30, Melbourne). Eare’s comment also suggests the diversity of Pacific women’s identities, with women from some Pacific nations seen as being more powerful in their societies than others. The magazine depicts Pacific women from various Pacific Island nations as having power on their own terms, and not as emulating women in western capitalist societies.

*Stella*’s depiction of women wearing more ‘modern’ clothing and jewellery was also important for Eare who worries about ‘B’, her sister in Port Moresby and the discrimination she experiences because of her tendency to dress more adventurously than most Papua New Guinean women.

I always worry that people will misread her. Look at her just from how she’s dressed and say 2 Kina Meri (*tok pisin* term for sex worker). Whereas this magazine is like saying...



'You don't have to be 2 Kina Meri to wear a singlet ... You can be progressive, yeah.' I guess that's why I'm happy, like when I read this [Stella] I was like this is good, people like B can survive in PNG, you know? Like she'll be okay, people aren't going to point fingers at her. (Eare, aged 30, Melbourne)

By presenting a range of images of women in the Pacific, *Stella* implicitly queries the coupling of western-style clothes with promiscuity. At the same time, and as some of the research participants mentioned, it reduces the likelihood that women who have spent time overseas will be seen as 'aliens' (Eare, aged 30, Melbourne) by their families and communities when they return to visit or live in PNG.

Normalising versions of femininity considered suspect and 'inauthentic', *Stella* is contributing to the recognition and legitimisation of educated and employed women hitherto represented as traitors to their sex and 'traditional culture'. In doing so, it recasts identity in ways that do not map neatly on to local, ethnic or national identifications but which nevertheless reflect a significant minority of Pacific women's experiences and orientations. Exploding the myth that there are 'real native women', *Stella* presents the many and varied women of PNG and the Pacific without considering their 'authenticity' or otherwise. In doing so, the magazine marks an important turning point in the construction of femininities in the Pacific.

The recent release of *Lily*, a competitor in PNG's apparently emerging magazine market, further consolidates the argument that there is a growing audience for these magazines, a new feminine elite that wants to be heard and represented. However, there are some interesting differences between *Stella* and *Lily*. For instance, when the first issue of *Lily* was launched in June 2013, the expatriate editor and publishing house responsible for the magazine emphasised its exclusively Papua New Guinean focus. Given *Stella*'s pan-Pacific reach, it seems likely that by marketing *Lily* as 'PNG's first women's magazine of this kind' (*Lily*, Issue 1, June/July 2013), the publishers are endeavouring to corner the PNG market, both in terms of readers and the local businesses likely to advertise in magazines. It is also possible that *Lily*'s emphasis on PNG reflects class tensions in which more regional or 'Oceanic' constructions of identity are construed as emanating from the 'elite' members of society and thus as counter to the interests of the majority. This position was articulated by a number of the women I spoke with who wondered whether *Stella* might be 'alienating' all but the few Papua New Guineans who had access to a wider world of education and travel opportunities. These matters deserve more research and discussion as the two magazines vie for an audience and to achieve sustainability.

## CONCLUSION: TOWARDS AN OCEANIC IDENTITY?

Discussing changing versions of identity in the Pacific, Joyce Linneken (2004: 238) remarks that 'global developments—transnational consumerism, migration, the resultant proliferation of diasporic communities, the rapid ascendancy of electronic communication—are transforming the lives of Pacific Islanders'. In seeking to understand

these transformations it is important to consider how gender impacts on the ways in which such changes are experienced and interpreted.

*Stella* provides an ideal opportunity to analyse shifting constructions of gender among educated, employed women in PNG and elsewhere in the Pacific. In doing so, it highlights the increasing relevance of Oceanic, rather than exclusively national or sub-national identifications for this cohort. With scant regard for the debates about women and women's rights that have tended to polarise Pacific women's groups into opposing camps (Jolly 2005), *Stella* presents an impressive array of Pacific women, all of whom nevertheless embody versions of femininity that are Pacific in their orientations, interests and commitments, for example, to Christianity and family. The publication of *Stella* thus marks the arrival into the public sphere of a group hitherto consigned to the margins of Pacific societies on the basis that they represent an 'inauthentic minority' (see Zimmer-Tamakoshi 1995, 1998; Jolly 2005; Spark 2011). Appealing to a strong regional 'Oceanic' vision of identity because this enables them to move beyond oppressive versions of femininity, *Stella* is an important manifestation of the growing force that modern Pacific women represent.

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## NOTES

- 1 Please note I am currently writing another article about fashion in PNG as represented in *Stella* and *Lily*.
- 2 Many of the letter writers refer to a PNG magazine that printed 'irrelevant' articles that were 'cut and paste from the Internet'. Given the absence of other competitors, it is reasonable to assume they are referring to *New Age Woman*, a newspaper lift-out that appears monthly in the *Post Courier*, one of PNG's national newspapers.

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