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Ceridwen Spark

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Understanding the Barriers that Confront Educated Women in Papua New Guinea

Ceridwen Spark

Introduction

Every year aid agencies provide scholarships to enable people from countries in the Pacific to attend schools, training colleges or universities overseas. In 2007, the Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID) awarded 130 Australian Development Scholarships to Papua New Guineans. The combined total for other Pacific nations was 59 (<http://www.ausaid.gov.au/publications/pubs.cfm>). This bias in favour of Papua New Guinea (PNG) reflects Australia's historically unique relationship with the country and its proximity and significance for Australia in terms of regional security and development agendas. In PNG, 56 per cent of the 2007 AusAID scholarships were awarded for postgraduate study. There are two kinds of AusAID tertiary education scholarships: Public Sector and Open/Equity scholarships. Organisations are required to nominate candidates in the former category. As far as possible, the scholarships are distributed evenly between men and women. The gender distribution, however, depends ultimately on the nominations that are received and more men are nominated than women.

It is widely assumed that international higher education experiences offer students opportunities they would not otherwise have had, including the chance to gain an education superior to that on offer in their country of origin and to experience another culture first hand. While the benefits of education for individuals may be recognised, aid agencies do not exist to enhance individual lives but, rather, seek to influence 'development' on a country-wide scale. For instance, AusAID's stated aim is 'to assist developing countries reduce poverty and achieve sustainable development, in line with Australia's national interest' (AusAID n.d.).

The assumption that the education of one person will contribute to overall human resource (and ultimately economic) 'Development' means that the commitment of aid agencies to education scholarships fits 'within the paradigm of Human Capital Theory which relies on social "Development" occurring once individuals are equipped with skills' (Sales 1999, 415). Seen as an 'important agent of modernisation' and 'an instrument of democratisation and social equity', higher education is thus attributed with the capacity to meet 'national needs' (Jayaweera 1997a, 245).¹ And yet, as several critics have noted, Human Capital Theory 'discounts important societal forces [because] it presupposes a neutral and ahistorical context' (De Vries 1989, 457; see also Jayaweera 1997a, 1997b). In so doing, the theory significantly overestimates the capacity of education to empower women.

Greater gender equality is increasingly seen as a key to the advancement of development goals; and education, as a starting point for female empowerment and 'female participation in the institutions of the modern state' (Macintyre 1998, 219). There is

no doubt Papua New Guinean women gain much from their overseas education experiences. Nevertheless, when these educated women return to PNG they must seek to advance their careers in a strongly gender-biased context, in which their skills are less likely than other factors to shape their experience, professional life and capacity to influence 'development'. Sri Lankan gender specialist Swarna Jayaweera argues that '[w]omen's educational experiences . . . take place in a context of heterogeneity in which higher education can reduce, reproduce or widen gender inequalities' (1997a, 245). Consequently, although scholarships are distributed between women and men, the outcomes among those who gain such awards and education are strongly differentiated by gender.

In PNG, gender combines with other factors to influence the likelihood of individual women gaining an education. Christine Fox, writing on this situation, states that 'systematic subordination of women in households and communities continues as the reality for women' (1999, 33), and continues:

Moreover, the physical well-being of girls and women is seriously threatened by increases in domestic violence, in child abuse and in the fear and experience of sexual assault and violence in schools, further education, workplaces and public places. (1999, 35)

Cultural beliefs about women's roles, a lack of financial resources and the high cost of schooling mean that there is greater investment in educating boys, and girls' education is sacrificed readily. Women in remote areas are also significantly disadvantaged compared with their urban counterparts who are both physically proximate to schools and more likely to come from households where one or both parents is educated (see Johnson 1984, 132–34). Weeks's study of the social backgrounds of tertiary students in PNG (1976 cited in Johnson 1984, 132) reveals which females in particular benefit in the inequitable system. He shows that women in tertiary institutions are more likely to be from coastal provinces, to come from non-village environments and to have fathers employed at higher socio-economic levels. The evidence from the small study discussed here supports these historical data, confirming the significance of location and socio-economic positioning to educational opportunity and attainment among girls and women in PNG.

When PNG became independent from Australia in 1975, one of the aims of the newly drafted Papua New Guinea Constitution was that there would be: '[A] rapid increase in the equal and active participation of women in all forms of economic and social activity' (cited in Macintyre 1998, 211). Today, however, as is pointed out repeatedly in both government reports and scholarly articles about PNG (Macintyre 1998, 2000; Brouwer, Harris, and Tanaka 1998; Amnesty International 2006; Eves 2007), there is little to no evidence of gender equality in any of the areas of health, education, employment and politics.

A recent Amnesty International report provides a concise summary of the situation:

At the national level in Papua New Guinea much of the basic formal framework . . . is in place for recognising the State's obligation to respect, protect, and fulfill women's human rights. However, commitments made by the Government of Papua New Guinea at the national level have rarely been matched by sustained, properly resourced implementation measures. The result is that women in Papua New Guinea have largely achieved their rights on paper, but are consistently denied the enjoyment of those rights in practice. (2006, 25)

The optimistic idea at the time of independence seems to have been that some girls and women would become educated, and demonstrate the benefits of having done so. The new nation state would then introduce the legislation and equality would follow. Reports and scholarly research from the independence era and into the 1980s anticipate a time when women would participate in the modern state. For instance, 20 years ago Paula Brown, discussing the impact of education and change on the Simbu, wrote: 'traditional gender roles do change. Perhaps a new generation of educated, urbanized . . . women will participate in national affairs and politics' (1988, 137).

In reality, the educated Papua New Guinean women of today are both in the minority and construed by many Papua New Guineans as inauthentic, especially in relation to their uneducated 'grass roots' village-dwelling counterparts. Seen as having transgressed their gender roles, they are perceived as threats by both women and men and subject to additional forms of discrimination. Anecdotal evidence and newspaper reports suggest that educated women may be more subject to verbal and physical attacks on the street or in buses (see, for example, the 2008 *Papua New Guinea Post Courier* stories of 12 April, 15 April and 21 May). These attacks are made possible in part because of educated women's visible difference (for instance, wearing jeans) from the majority of PNG women. Also, however, such attacks are to a great extent culturally sanctioned as the proper response to women who have stepped out of line or *brukim banis* (broken the fence) (see Wardlow 2006, 24; and chapter 2). As Holly Wardlow (2006, 3–4) makes clear in her ethnography of *pasinja meri* (literally, passenger women), women who are seen to have transgressed their gender roles—whether by assuming a degree of sexual or socio-economic autonomy—are perceived as being in greater need of violent circumscription by the men.

Because of the perception that they constitute a threat to the social order, educated women also experience aggression in more intimate settings. Rebecca Morley writes that 'evidence exists in the ethnographic literature that wife beating may be increasing in some Papua New Guinean societies, especially among educated women who are less willing to submit to their husbands' authority than are more traditional women' (1994, 38). This demonstrates that in PNG, far from helping to confer protection against gender violence and discrimination, education may in fact exacerbate it. These insights support the need to document the lived experiences of educated women in PNG.

Analysing this small but significant group, this article elucidates the experience of those who, because they are simultaneously privileged and marginalised, have tended to be invisible to researchers. There are various ways to explain this gap in the vast literature on PNG and gender. The most straightforward, however, is that because tertiary educated, professional women in PNG are in a minority, research on and writing about them is not seen as a priority. Another related but distinct reason is that focusing on such women—who, relatively speaking, are privileged in terms of education level and opportunity—would appear to constitute what Laura Nader called 'studying up', a practice about which many researchers remain wary, primarily because, as Nader put, it they 'prefer the underdog' (1972, 303). Yet, until women are representative participants in the political processes that determine change and outcomes for women, there can be no realistic solutions to the critical problems confronting women in PNG.

Others have analysed macro data to demonstrate that educated women are constrained by social and economic structures and gender roles and relations within the family and beyond (Jayaweera 1997a, 1997b; Sales 1999). In this paper, I draw on

qualitative research to enable a deeper examination of why education alone neither ensures, nor even necessarily promotes, gender equity in PNG. Discussing two case studies collected as part of a larger study of educated women in PNG, I argue that women's socio-cultural circumstances must be taken into account when considering the ambiguous value of education for Papua New Guinean women. Outlining the factors that thwart the development of both women's personal and career goals, capacity to contribute to their organisations and the 'Development' of PNG, I argue that it is important to continue to provide scholarships for women. Though education is by no means a panacea against the various forms of violence to which many PNG women are subject, it is seen by many women as a route to economic independence and thus 'the only means they have of avoiding the constraints that men place on their lives' (Macintyre 2000, 167). This does not mean, however, that it is either fair or realistic to burden these women—who are, after all, construed as 'inauthentic and nonrepresentative' (Macintyre 2000, 153)—with the task of leading the country to 'see the light'. Rather, the case studies examined here suggest that while Papua New Guinean women can benefit from participation in higher education, this participation is not enough to force change in ways that would seriously enhance the status of women in PNG.

The Research Method

In November and December 2007 the author conducted research with 27 educated women in two urban contexts (one coastal, one in the highlands) in PNG. The women who took part were friends of the author's educated friends and were recruited using the snowball method. Each participant completed an eight-page questionnaire in which she was asked a range of demographic questions as well as questions about the challenges she faces as an educated woman in PNG. The women took part in semi-structured interviews that were recorded and transcribed for the purposes of analysis. The interviews included questions about background and childhood, especially in relation to education and equity, as well as questions about studying overseas and career and current prospects. The semi-structured nature of the interviews yielded detailed accounts of the women's perceptions of these matters. The interviews were conducted by the author in English and lasted between one and four hours. The transcripts were coded and analysed by the author with particular attention paid to recurring themes.

This paper draws on two case studies collected as part of the larger study. In this instance, the case study approach was selected as the best method of presenting the data on the basis of its capacity to yield significant and detailed insight into the real lives of women in PNG.

The case studies were chosen because of their typicality. Molly and Lisa, the women whose case studies I discuss, both won Australian Development Awards to complete tertiary degrees in Australian universities. As such, and given that in 2000 only 209 in 100,000 Papua New Guinean women were enrolled in tertiary education (AusAID 2001, 4), they represent the 'invested in' upper end of the educated minority of women in PNG. Molly and Lisa, however, are representative of the larger group that took part in this research because they, like 19 out of the 27 women I interviewed, had gained either a secondary or tertiary qualification or both overseas, the majority (73 per cent) in Australia. In demonstrating the following characteristics, Molly and Lisa also reflect the larger sample: both come from families committed to their education; both were determinedly

single at the time the research was conducted; and both expressed concern about being in partnerships with men, especially because of the impact they felt such partnerships had on women's careers. They identified with Western liberal values such as gender equity and the belief in companionate marriage and saw traditions such as the payment of *braid prais* ('bride price') as outdated or abused in contemporary PNG. Both lived in an urban context and saw themselves as being somewhat outside the mainstream of PNG society. Both were also financially independent but sought to contribute where possible to meet the needs of family members. Molly and Lisa were also typical of the larger group in their desire to pursue further education. For these reasons, these case studies are strongly indicative of the overall picture of educated women in PNG. The differences between the women are also pertinent, however, allowing useful comparison. Molly, in her 40s, had more life experience than Lisa, including being divorced, raising children and surviving domestic violence. The two are also from different provinces originally, Molly from the Western Highlands and Lisa from North Solomons Province. Both, however, lived and worked in a Highlands town when the research was conducted.²

Molly's Story

Molly, a 47-year-old woman and mother of five (one biological and four adopted) children, is completing a two-year social sciences cadetship at a government organisation in the Highlands. She spent her early years in a village in the Western Highlands of PNG. To this day, most girls in rural parts of the highlands gain little formal schooling and are married in their mid-teens. Molly's parents were different, however, in that they decided to send her to school. Molly is not sure why her parents went against the norm but thinks their decision to educate her was driven by their curiosity to see whether she could be 'a bridge from the traditional . . . to the modern age'. Her parents were criticised by other villagers who thought it wrong to allow Molly to be educated, saying 'she is not a man, she is a woman'. Because Molly had to go away to attend school, villagers also expressed concern about her mobility, saying she should not be 'allowed to go out' from her home. This is because women who have lived outside their local area for long periods of time are thought to be especially vulnerable to the immoral and corrupting influences of outsiders (Wardlow 2006, 143).

Molly continued her education, however, and at the end of grade four left her village to attend a Catholic school in another part of the Western Highlands. The nuns taught her and the other girls 'to think independently and value [them]selves'. Molly's experience of empowerment among Catholic women educators echoes that of many women educated in mission schools, particularly in areas such as Milne Bay and Manus where single-sex education for girls has been promoted strongly within the mission education system (Brouwer, Harris, and Tanaka 1998, 37). Molly noted, for instance, that many of the 'girls that have passed out from that school . . . can think and act and do things . . . they are determined to achieve what they want'. Because the Catholic school only went to fourth form, Molly then enrolled in Aiyura National High School in the Eastern Highlands town of Kainantu. She 'dropped out' in the final year because she got a job in a bank and thought she 'might as well' take it up.

While working in Mt Hagen, Molly met and married her husband, a medical laboratory technician from Simbu who had been educated in Australia and who was

working at Mt Hagen hospital. This was a traditional (*kastom*) marriage involving the payment of *braid prais* ('bride price') to Molly's family.

Shortly afterwards, Molly enrolled at Mount Hagen Nursing School. Unfortunately, Molly's Australian-educated husband was not as supportive of her career advancement as he had first appeared. When she became a nurse and began to advance in her career 'he would become jealous, beat [her] up and tell [her] that it was because of his name that [she] was getting recognition and ...advancing in [her] career'. Although in PNG education is seen as 'the key to advancement' (Brown 1988, 131), educated men are not necessarily any more equitable in personal relationships than non-educated men. Indeed, in Susan Toft's (1985) study of domestic violence in Port Moresby, educated men demonstrate themselves to be as capable of brutality and violence against their wives as non-educated men (see also Josephides 1994).

In addition to being subject to domestic violence, Molly suffered the embarrassment of her husband's affairs, including one with their adopted daughter. Molly says that before she went to Australia to study she was 'always forgiving' and 'accepting' of his violent, adulterous behaviour. This needs to be seen in context. Violence against women, particularly in the Highlands, is regarded as 'a valid way for men to assert authority over partners who are deemed lazy, insubordinate or argumentative' (Amnesty International 2006, 12). As such, and despite the sense of shame and injustice individuals may experience because of domestic violence, it is largely normalised. Furthermore, in the patrilineal customs of the Highlands, the assets Molly and her husband created, including gardens and houses in their villages of origin, would accrue to him in the event of divorce. In most cases, especially if *braid prais* has been paid, custody of the children is also given to the man on the basis that children are part of the property of the marriage. These circumstances prevent many PNG women from leaving violent and adulterous relationships.

After going 'as far as she could' in her nursing career, Molly completed a Diploma in Health Education and became a training officer with a provincial government in the Highlands. In this role, she suffered gender discrimination in that she was given no real powers, nor the means to conduct her job properly. This included having no access to a phone or a vehicle and not being given housing as part of her employment (the provision of housing for senior employees is standard practice in urban PNG) despite the fact that, as the Human Resources manager, she was responsible for a workforce of over 500 people. She said the men in equivalent positions had access to phones and vehicles and, when she talked to her bosses about the fact that 'they didn't even provide me the funds to manage the place, to run the place and that they got [her] to endorse their decisions without any consultation or allowing [her] to do her job', she was 'threatened' with the loss of her job. As with many of the women with whom I spoke, however, the problems Molly experienced working for the provincial government were not exclusively at the hands of male co-workers. Several of the women with whom Molly worked accused her of gaining her position through the provision of sexual favours. This is a common charge directed at women in senior positions.

During this time, Molly applied for and gained an Australian Development Award to undertake a Bachelor of Business at a small Queensland university. The three-year degree enhanced her qualifications and gave her the opportunity to work in what she saw as a gender-equitable environment. During her time in Australia, Molly was able to send her biological son to the university child care, whereas in PNG she had to rely on relatives: an unpredictable and expensive involvement as it implied the provision of board and food for

the young female relatives sent from the village to help. Some of Molly's adopted children remained behind in PNG; others had not yet come to live with her. In Australia, Molly enjoyed the chance to experience another culture and increased personal freedom and mobility, including going to discos and drinking when she felt like relaxing. The story of her return to PNG after completing her degree is, however, less sanguine.

The official policy of the PNG Public Service Act stipulates that Molly was entitled to return to her position after study leave. Despite this, her 'position was given away while [she] was overseas' and she received no assistance from the Public Service Commission to get it back. This lack of support for the enforcement of rights—despite their legal existence—is endemic in PNG, particularly for women. The authors of the World Bank report on gender analysis in PNG write:

At all levels throughout the justice system women receive unequal treatment; as victims or complainants, as offenders, and in employment opportunities. While there are clearly institutional and structural factors that contribute to lack of access and the opportunity to be heard, cultural and attitudinal factors also contribute to, and compound, gender inequalities and inequitable treatment. (Brouwer, Harris, and Tanaka 1998, 17)

Molly's inability to return to her previous role meant that she was forced to take up fractional short-term positions in private companies, despite this being technically illegal on the basis that she was still on the public service payroll.

At the same time, Molly was going through other difficulties because, when she returned to PNG from Australia, she decided to divorce her husband. This was partly because of the shame he had brought her by having a relationship with their adopted daughter. Molly had also personally changed as a result of her time in Australia, demonstrating that the experience had an even more significant impact on her personal than her professional life. Discussing her husband's affairs, Molly says her attitude changed when she went overseas and 'saw how life was so different . . . that women were valued and they had standards':

I was always forgiving, until I went to overseas for my training and I saw how life was so different and when I came back, I was determined that life is not all about forgiving, accepting, being hurt, and being thrown around like dirt and so I decided that enough is enough and I just walked out of the relationship.

Molly divorced her husband through the village courts and gained custody of their son on the basis of her husband's adulterous relationship with their adopted daughter. As in the majority of such cases (Brouwer, Harris, and Tanaka 1998, 17), however, her ex-husband pays no maintenance costs.

Molly says many women who gain tertiary education overseas experience these difficulties because men (who are almost invariably the employers) feel threatened by educated women's qualifications and potential. As with Molly, this sense of threat and associated jealousy affects both intimate relationships and the likelihood of the women being employed in roles that reflect their enhanced qualifications. Molly said:

Sometimes when a woman is more educated than the man, he kind of feels inferior. And starts to leave the relationship or leave the wife and go out. And sometimes they end up in domestic violence and sometimes they can work it out . . . Because I walked away from my relationship, because, my husband kind of like, he must have felt threatened. And like

he was saying that my achievement was because of him and his name. But I felt that it was because, it was my own, I earned it, whatever achievements, that I had obtained in my life, it was through my own hard work. And the work commitments. Sometimes we've come back with advanced training and given higher positions or you know positions to make decisions, and some men are threatened. They feel threatened. They don't, even in the workplace some men don't want to work with women who are more highly trained. They feel threatened too.

Constituted as a threat both in the domestic setting and the workplace, many women struggle with jealous husbands and employers who fear that the changes associated with modernity 'will remove women from their control and afford them independent ways of understanding their universe and acting within it' (Josephides 1994, 196). Consequently, rather than enhancing their status and capacity to contribute to 'development', the women's enhanced qualifications exacerbate their marginalisation and difficulties in personal circumstances.

Arguing that it is not modernity per se that produces male desire for control, Lisette Josephides notes:

[T]he fact that many of those most in control of their modern destinies (comparative to women) should still have these fears concerning women indicates that though the total modern configuration may appear to them alienating and threatening, it is their wives which personify this threat. (1994, 196)

This is clear when we consider Molly's story. Not only did the Public Service Management Act fail to protect her position, thus leading to the necessity of her 'starting all over again' when she came back to PNG, but also the personal transformation she experienced as a result of her time in Australia affected her personal life in ways above and beyond that which aid agencies intend when they award scholarships to study overseas. And yet the changes that Molly experienced in her sense of herself, her relationship with her husband and what she wanted from life, are relevant to the question of broader social change and whether or not education 'advances' the society in which these women live, or simply makes life difficult for the minority of women in the vanguard of this change.

Readjusting to life in PNG has been challenging for Molly who says, for instance, that she is not interested in being somebody's third or fourth wife:

Other men have been coming and wanting to marry me. I say 'No, I don't go for married men'. So then, I have had insults thrown at me, like 'What, you waiting to marry a white man?' You know like, those kind of insults have come back to me. Because I don't want to make my, put myself down, like, getting involved with married man I don't want to do that.

Because of this behaviour Molly is told she has 'changed since [she] came back from Australia' and that she acts like she is a "white woman". This accusation can be interpreted to mean that Molly is seen as arrogant (a *bikhet*), a charge which puts her at risk of violence specifically designed to prevent her from transgressing the gender norms which position marriage as central to social reproduction. Drawing on the work of Laura Zimmer-Tamakoshi, Wardlow remarks that:

men use violence against women (and . . . the threat of violence implicit in labels such as *bikhet*) 'to assert or regain a sense of dominance'. She notes that 'such violence needs to be interpreted in a context of emerging class differences in which elite women in

particular are scapegoated by men of all classes “as symbols of all that is wrong with contemporary Papua New Guinean society” (Zimmer-Tamakoshi cited in Wardlow 2006, 145)

In a sense Molly *is* behaving like a white woman. Her post-Australia desire for a faithful, companionate relationship reflects (albeit idealised) Western norms and expectations about marriage. She believes:

The women in Australia, they've got more freedom, they have got more independence. And the husband, or the partners, the male counterparts, the partners they value them. And they [the women] go out. They [the husbands] do things. Do little things just like making a cup of coffee for them. That's something valuable. Whereas here we finish work or we work in the garden, go home, the husband just comes home, talk, where's my tea and expects us to put a cup of tea in front of him and the food to be ready. And if nothing is there, you know like we get insulted, verbal insults.

Molly's description of returning home from work to what Australian feminists have long referred to as 'the second shift' shows how, in PNG, education can become a double burden for women (see Sales 1999; De Vries 1989). Far from being newly empowered, educated women just 'work harder' (Meg Taylor cited in Macintyre 2000, 151).

Molly's experience, like that of other educated women, suggests outcomes and problems that are unintended and sometimes obfuscated in the optimistic narrative about the relationship between educating women and the promotion of gender equity.

Lisa's Story

Lisa, a 27-year-old woman from the North Solomons Province, grew up in the town of Kieta and attended school there before leaving for Kavieng because of the Bougainville crisis.³ Lisa's parents are both educated; her father (from New Ireland) works for the Department of Works and her mother, a North Solomons woman, is a primary school teacher. Lisa is the eldest of five and says her parents treat their sons and daughters the same way, including expecting all of them to go to school. This is consistent with the strong tradition of educating girls in North Solomons Province.

After three years at high school in Kimbe, Lisa applied for an AusAID scholarship to complete her schooling in Australia. Successful, she went to Rockhampton Girls' Grammar, completing year 12 there in 2000. At the end of her secondary schooling, Lisa applied to study bio-medicine at an Australian university, partly because she was keen to acquire a 'quality' degree from Australia, but also because she enjoyed the independence of living away from her family. She gained an AusAID tertiary scholarship and enrolled at the University of Queensland. Although she had already lived in Australia, Lisa undertook the foundation year required for new Papua New Guinean students before completing her three-year degree. Since completing her degree, Lisa has worked at a research organisation in the Highlands. She was in the third year here when I interviewed her.

Lisa felt women who were educated overseas were the targets of jealousy and discrimination. One of the main ways this was manifested was in access to housing. In Lisa's organisation, the more educated the young women were, the worse they were treated in relation to the accommodation provided. Female support staff with fewer qualifications were given houses on their own; as were well-educated men with equal or

lesser qualifications than educated women. The overseas-educated women were made to share with three (and sometimes more) other women. Lisa resented the lack of privacy and room that this sharing engendered and saw the situation as explicitly discriminatory. She also felt it was related directly to jealousy and suspicion about these women's experiences overseas. Lisa saw this discrimination as being enforced by the older women working in administration, but as something that came from both the older women and men:

The circle of women here, they tend to be very judgemental on you, especially when you go overseas and come back. They think that you've changed and you've lost your identity or something ... the older women, especially when I first came here, they told me not to wear jeans to work that it was against [name of organisation] rules. And I thought gee, that's the only comfortable clothes you can wear and work. So yeah that was one of the things I found very difficult here. And I think mostly it was about dressing because I think women here are more, they are very conservative and so they are not ready to accept some, especially if you're from PNG and you go overseas and come back and then they think that you've totally lost your mind or something.

Lisa's description of being seen as different (i.e. as though she had 'lost her mind') was common among the educated women I spoke with, who say many people see them as odd or threatening. This suggests that rather than assuming leadership roles in Papua New Guinean society (as Human Capital Theory would have it), educated women are more likely to be seen as outsiders, at least in this historical moment.

Like most outsiders, these women are construed also as morally suspect. Lisa saw a direct relationship between her status as an overseas-educated woman who wore jeans and the older women's perception that she was morally dubious. The way women dress, and the amount of 'outside' experience they are perceived as having, directly influences whether or not they are interpreted as 'good women' or 'wayward women' (Wardlow 2006) who need to be brought into line if they are not to be a threat to other women's relationships. This is one explanation why it is the older women (and less obviously the men) who take a primary role in making scapegoats of the young women. Also, Lisa feels that she and her overseas-educated female colleagues are discriminated against because they are seen as already 'spoilt' by the opportunity to study overseas. She believes this is why 'the management did not entertain' her requests for suitable housing 'at all'. She said 'they just wanted to make our lives difficult', raising the issue of jealousy from others about her perceived opportunities.

It is not only the women who discriminate against her. Lisa feels that she is 'watched' and that opportunities for promotion and increased responsibilities are utterly contingent on her behaving conservatively and in ways seen to be appropriate for women. This includes her time outside work. She is repeatedly told by her male supervisor that 'there are eyes outside [the organisation] that see what goes on outside' and a senior male colleague 'warned' her that the people who were promoted are those who are in the organisation's 'good books'. This meant you 'don't go out partying and never being sighted with a guy ... and not disappointing anyone'.

Lisa also indicated that because of their child-bearing capacities, women are not given the same opportunities as men:

When I was talking to one of the supervisors, the particular supervisor asked me 'why do you think this person has gone overseas to study?' And I just didn't understand what

they were trying to say. And then they said it's because they are not married and they don't have kids and they don't have other responsibilities on the side. So I thought ooh . . . maybe if I'm going out with a guy then they would think that I would probably fall pregnant somewhere along the line, so it's better not to give them a scholarship now and just wait and see what happens, you know? That sort of mentality.

Other educated women working at this organisation told me that they had been similarly 'warned'. They believed that the male director did not want to employ any more female graduates because they represent a wasted investment when they 'just go off and have children'. The process of nomination for scholarships and promotions is seen as actively discriminating against women with children, or women who are likely to have children (the overwhelming majority of women in PNG). This has implications for both the AusAID program, in which employers are required to support the candidate (as in the Public Sector scholarships), and for longer term social issues such as the extent to which educated women will want to marry and have children. At the same time, however, women like Lisa, who remain outside the structures of marriage and motherhood, are discriminated against precisely because they do not conform to traditional gender roles and expectations.

Lisa, like many of the women I spoke with, was living far from her home province and had no family with whom to associate. This is especially difficult in the Highlands where women are defined in relation to the man to whom they are closest. In Marilyn Strathern's words '[b]y herself she is nothing' (1972, ix). In a society in which women go from being their fathers' daughters to their husbands' wives, young, unmarried women are seen as having no man 'over them' and therefore as more likely to transgress social codes and conventions. This makes them especially vulnerable to the charge of being morally and sexually suspect. It also means they have no one to defend them, either physically or emotionally, in the crucial ways that relatives in PNG do.

These same young women, however, avoid forming sexual partnerships because they are acutely aware of the losses and vulnerability that being 'under a man' entails. As with the other educated women I spoke with, Lisa feels strongly that she needs to complete further studies and secure a suitable position *before* getting married or having children:

What I am thinking [is] achieve everything that you can now before you get married because you really don't know what's going to happen when you get married and you don't know what your husband will be like. Yeah, so it's better to reach those goals and get your masters or your PhD before you get married. And sometimes it's really frustrating here in [name of organisation] because you really want to go and do your masters and continue on with your PhD, but this place just doesn't allow it to happen. And yeah, for us women it just feels like time is just running out. They're just wasting our time. Yeah, it's just holding back things because, yeah, because I am 27 and if I were to compare myself with women overseas, by this age I would already be working on my PhD project or something and not sitting here with honours.

In her study of gender and social change among the Simbu, Brown notes of educated women, that '[t]heir schooling and career preparation have not fitted them for a traditional Simbu wife's role of gardening, pig care and rural housekeeping'. She further comments that '[c]areer demands and assignments have in some . . . cases made marriage to Simbu or to men of other ethnic groups difficult' (1988, 135). Given the overwhelming pessimism about intimate partnerships among the educated women I spoke with, Brown's

assessment now seems something of an understatement. Deeply sceptical about the possibility of finding and marrying men who would 'allow' them to have a career, the women with whom I spoke avoided forming intimate relationships with men. Like Lisa, these women strongly equate marriage with the death or disablement of their careers and see career development, including further study, as pursuits that need to occur prior to or outside a relationship, marriage and child-bearing. Few were at all optimistic about forming relationships in which they would be 'allowed' to do anything other than housework and child rearing.

Lisa's friends told me that she was highly successful in her position and recognised beyond the organisation as an expert in her field. And yet she waits, frustrated and discriminated against in a workplace that does not promote on merit. At the same time, Lisa is unable to progress in other areas of her life, such as finding a partner and having children, because her assumption of these roles would inevitably make it difficult for her to continue, let alone develop, her career.

Conclusion

Taking a little-considered group of women as my focus, I have examined case studies that provide insight into their lives and experiences. These make clear that tertiary-educated Papua New Guinean women continue to face multiple barriers and challenges. In particular, the case studies highlight the following problems: male jealousy and anxiety about educated women as competitors (both in the home and the workplace); female jealousy and suspicion about educated women's opportunities and morality; active discrimination against educated women, including in relation to promotion, the provision of accommodation and opportunities for further study; the absence of formal child care; and culturally entrenched notions about women's roles.

Although educated women do not experience these problems exclusively, their educated status seems to exacerbate their experience of them (for instance, male jealousy) and be particularly relevant to them (such as the absence of formal child care). It is thus difficult to construe education as a strategic vehicle for the advancement of educated women, at least in any straightforward way. Various complex factors relating to entrenched power relations and unwillingness, particularly among men, to alter social relationships and the division of labour mean that equipping individual women with a good education, while a start, is not enough to challenge gender inequity in PNG.

Gabrielle Appleford, citing the 1995 work of Elizabeth Harrison, writes:

'an understanding of gender issues from a feminist perspective introduces questions of power, control of resources, and conflict which are potentially challenging and certainly difficult to deal with'. Development practioners tend to shy away from such complexities and challenges preferring instead their 'simple principles' and 'methodological tools'. (Harrison quoted in Appleford 2000, 84)

It is time to examine the 'simple principle' that educating Papua New Guinean women enhances the status of women in PNG. As Brouwer, Harris, and Tanaka, editors of a World Bank report on gender in PNG, write: '[t]he development of a sustained commitment to gender sensitive policies and programs cannot take place unless there are major shifts in attitudes and practices at all levels of government, non government and community administration, and within families and households' (1998, 37). In the optimistic

'postcolonial' 1970s, it was naïve to assume that educated women in PNG would embody and lead the supposedly newly equitable and modern nation-state. In the contemporary era, and with the benefit of hindsight, it is irresponsible. A few highly educated women cannot confront the apathy about, and widespread acceptance of, gender discrimination that characterises the workplaces and institutions of contemporary PNG.

NOTES

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1. For a discussion of international stakeholder interests in PNG, see Ako (2002).
2. To protect the women's privacy, pseudonyms are used and the details of the women's location and workplaces, past and present, have been changed or omitted.
3. In the late 1980s and early 1990s Bouganvilleans were involved in a civil war as a result of internal conflict relating to land ownership and the proceeds and environmental destruction associated with Bouganville Copper, particularly the Panguna Mine.

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Ceridwen Spark is a postdoctoral fellow in the School of Social Sciences and Psychology at Victoria University in Melbourne, Australia. She is widely published including on gender, colonialism and cross-cultural interaction in Papua New Guinea, most recently in *Oceania*, *Health and History* and *The Journal of Pacific History*.