

# The Female Immigrant as Subject: Poetic Twins and Triplicates in *The Last Virgin in Paradise* and *Frangipane Perfume*

Kimberly M. Jew  
University of Utah

*The Last Virgin in Paradise* by Vilsoni Hereniko and Teresia Teaiwa and *Frangipane Perfume* by Makerita Urale explore the lives of Pacific Island women who are bound by family obligations, patriarchy, limited resources and opportunities. While native traditions regulate their sexuality and codes of behavior, colonialist eyes objectify their bodies, two forms of cultural oppression that shape and define their social and material value, as well as the scope of their personal journeys. Though men have featured more prominently in the broad literary discourse on Pacific Islander immigration<sup>1</sup> - either venturing to new lands for work and adventure, or returning to their native home for ethnic affirmation - Hereniko, Teaiwa and Urale cover new theatrical territory in staging the Pacific Islander female immigrant as a unique and complex subject.

In this essay, I will discuss how the playwrights advocate for a distinctly Oceanic feminist perspective on female immigration, rooting their characters in gendered given circumstances that are shaped by a fusion of social pressures commonly felt in a postcolonial world. These pressures create palpable tension and conflict in the women's pursuits of individual freedoms, and perhaps not surprisingly, the female characters Temanu, Hina, Tivi, Naiki, and Pomu find their deepest emotional connections in their bonds with one another. Male characters appear to negatively distract these women from authentic forms of self-knowledge and independence.

Indeed, the female subjects in these two plays create a distinct spiritual and emotional wholeness through their mutual relationships: while Temanu and Hina's relationship is akin to that of twins who poetically mirror one another, Tivi, Naiki and Pomu create a sustaining and symbolic sisterhood that is reminiscent of triple goddess imagery. In this regard, the women and their relationships are abstracted as an exclusive community of "Women" - presenting a formidable counter-narrative to the literary tradition of lone Pacific Islander male travelers.

The complex question as to the true and ultimate impact of colonization on native women is intimately woven into *The Last Virgin in Paradise* (first performed in 1991). Based on a story told by Teresia Teaiwa (Banaban and African American) and dramatized for the stage by Vilsoni Hereniko (Rotuman), this work openly mocks a white European man's late life quest for the ideal virgin wife. Ironically, he seeks such an "untouched woman" in what he imagines to be a sexually vibrant, free-loving island paradise on the edges of civilization. What he finds on the fictional Pacific island of Marawa,<sup>2</sup> however, is a modest, conservative and ambitious young woman, Hina, who unbeknownst to him is not a virgin. Like Gallimard in David Henry Hwang's acclaimed play, *M. Butterfly*, a western man's self-serving racial fantasies only succeed in blinding him to the complexities that stand in front of him. And just as Hina's virginity and Song Liling's female gender are creative fabrications, the invented nature of Marawa further opens up the play's possible meanings; ultimately Marawa serves as what Diana Looser refers to as a "microcosm

within which to deconstruct a variety of past and present stereotypes and assumptions about the wider Pacific.”<sup>3</sup>

Crafted into this story are three traveling women, Jean, a white Australian anthropologist who has recently arrived at Marawa to study sexual harassment among the native peoples, Temanu, a young half-Marawan woman in her mid-twenties who is returning to her birth country after a long absence, and Hina, a late teenage Marawan girl of little means, who is the eagerly desired “last virgin in paradise.” Each of these female figures and their journeys embody Teaiwa and Hereniko’s exploration of the positive and negative effects of colonization on Pacific Island women. Most poignantly, the poetic twinning of Temanu and Hina, as two young cousins who momentarily cross paths - one returning home to Marawa, the other venturing forth into the western world - is a telling vision of the diversity in responses to colonialist impact. As *The Last Virgin in Paradise* demonstrates, the legacy of colonization has created new gendered identities and opportunities for women like Temanu and Hina.

In her study on colonialism’s effect on the status of Hawaiian women, Jocelyn Linnekin writes:

In order to assess changes in women’s status one must ask questions that are culturally nuanced: authority in what areas? Status in what contexts, and from whose point of view? Did women have particular practical alternatives, and how successful were these as modes of resistance?<sup>4</sup>

Linnekin argues that the greatest hierarchical divide in pre-contact Hawaii was not gender but rather the strict class structure that defined native Hawaiian society. She further argues that despite women’s exclusion from certain religious and eating practices, they maintained a high degree of personal autonomy within the scope of their daily lives. Women also were able to inherit land and were commonly abstracted to significant mythological meaning; the precious Hawaiian land itself was considered feminine.

In considering colonialism’s ultimate impact on the status of women, Linnekin, as the quote suggests, refrains from making an overarching judgment: the answers lie in the details and contexts of specific historical moments. Given her preference for “gender parallelism”<sup>5</sup> between men and women of Hawaiian society, she believes that women ultimately benefitted from colonialism in certain ways, but yet suffered, along with the whole of Hawaii, in other ways. The relationship between the two cousins, Temanu and Hina, demonstrates just this nuanced view of colonialization’s reach on similar Oceanic communities.

Clearly drawn to contrast with Hina, her younger cousin, Temanu is a privileged half-Marawan woman in her mid-twenties, who left the island with her parents at the age of twelve so that she could pursue an elite education in Australia. Her father, the oldest son, boldly married a white Australian woman, an intimate act that highlights the porous nature of postcolonial intercultural relations. Hence Temanu, a beneficiary of her father’s opportunities, possesses all the markers for higher status over Hina: she is half-white, wealthier, educated abroad and the daughter of Hina’s father’s older brother. Her language as well as her western dress, and the fact that she has chosen to stay at the tourist hotel with the other visitors to Marawa, all indicate that a great part of her subconscious identity associates with the colonizing, non-native culture. Indeed, while Helmut, Jean and Hina may be more easily recognized in terms of colonizer and colonized, Temanu’s “in

betweeness” is a unique and contemporary outcome of colonialism, a quality that makes her highly accessible to a variety of spectators and critics.<sup>6</sup>

But the greatest sign of Temanu’s privilege lies in her active awareness of the dual forces of colonization and patriarchy on both herself and other Marawan women. In many ways, Temanu’s political activism may be read as a sign of Pacific literature’s growing weariness of western education, even when the westernizing force is embodied in a well-intentioned, half-native woman.<sup>7</sup> Of the three traveling women in *The Last Virgin in Paradise*, there is little question that Temanu is the most vehemently feminist and anticolonialist. While Jean feels she must keep an objective distance from the Marawan people to study them, and Hina appears to lack any drive to change the social forces that have determined her future as a trophy wife for Helmut, Temanu has returned to her native home to instigate broad social change based on her privileged world view. As she says to Jean,

You foreigners want progress and development too, so why should you deny Marawa people the same? If you want equality for your women, why shouldn’t Hina have the same?<sup>8</sup>

Temanu’s zeal for justice blinds her to the cultural differences between her life and Hina’s, and ironically highlights her own personal desire to impose an outsider vision of an ideal Marawa onto Marawa itself. As the play points out, Temanu is ultimately as foreign to Marawa as Jean and Helmut, and her social agenda just as questionable.

To the idealistic Temanu, Helmut and his quest for a native virgin wife is the materialization of all that she abhors about western civilization and its encroachment onto Pacific Island culture. Throughout the play, she embraces the role of the angry and outspoken agitator, seeking to convince an apparently naïve Hina to reject Helmut. The culmination of her passion is expressed when she barges into Helmut’s hotel room, stops his aggressive sexual advances towards Hina, and steals away the bride on the couple’s first night together. The two cousins spend the night in Temanu’s room, a time and space that allows the two women not only to bond more deeply as family but also to see the deep differences in each other’s perspectives and experiences.

Though she is not ultimately successful in keeping Hina from leaving Marawa with Helmut, Temanu demonstrates a real and symbolic shift towards a more native identity through her dress. On one hand, she begins to wear local clothing as the play progresses, and perhaps most poignantly, she decides to move out of the local tourist hotel and into aunt and uncle’s home in the village. Poetically-speaking, Temanu replaces the daughter the parents have just lost. In keeping with the play’s careful optimism, Temanu is on a trajectory to better understand the people she pledges so vehemently to protect.

Hina, “the last virgin in paradise,” offers a striking contrast to her cousin. Named after an early Oceanic goddess figure that is commonly associated with the moon, ocean and female domestic activities, Hina is the idealized vision of a native beauty.<sup>9</sup> Having danced in the opening sequence of the play, Hina first enters the hotel space to bring her aging fiancé to her village. The stage directions read:

Hina is the image of the beautiful South Seas maiden – young with flowing black hair, brown skin and barefoot. She is dressed in a grass skirt and *pandanus* bra...a hibiscus flower in her hair.<sup>10</sup>

Though Hina’s currency as an erotic fantasy gives her a certain power over a man like Helmut, she is characterized as decidedly lower status in comparison to her more privileged

cousin. As the poetic twin to Temanu, she embodies the less fortunate, victimizing outcomes of colonialist contact. As Linnekin argues, native women became consumers in the new colonialist economy, stripped of their abilities to make goods such as cloth and other specialized items that had historically raised their value within their communities.<sup>11</sup> Hina has not escaped such a fate as she has easily become a pawn in her friend and family's desire to consume Western goods. As revealed in the play, Hina's marriage is arranged by both her family friend, Jeke, and her parents. Raw financial motivations underlie Hina's marriage; Jeke has been offered a cash fee for finding Helmut a virgin wife, and Hina's parents view this arrangement as a windfall for future gifts of European earrings, dresses and cigarettes.

As the play begins, Hina is unsure about marrying Helmut and appears to lack the ability to articulate her attitudes towards matters of intimacy and marriage. Upon meeting her cousin for the first time, she wilts under questioning:

Temanu: And do you love him?  
Hina: Love?  
Temanu: Yes, do you love him?  
Hina: I say yes to him already.  
Temanu: But you're not married to him yet. You can change your mind.  
Hina: Why?  
Temanu: You don't love him.  
Hina: I don't understand.<sup>12</sup>

Hina's apparent weaknesses and lack of worldliness only serve to incense Temanu and prompt the outspoken cousin to advocate even more heatedly for her feminist platform, which is often characterized in comical, exaggerated terms.

The greatly impassioned Temanu, who at one points envisions her fighting self as a plucked chicken with its tail raised high, cannot see Hina's ultimate strengths and her ability to achieve her personal goals. But by looking more closely at Hina's quiet actions through *The Last Virgin in Paradise*, it becomes clear that this lower status native woman, who is both a blank canvas for Helmut's erotic racial fantasies and a form of currency for her family's consumption of western goods, is a person of considerable strength and resourcefulness. In contrast to Temanu's power which lies in her western education, social mobility and traditionally masculine combativeness, Hina's power resides in an understated resilience, perhaps a feminine energy reminiscent of her ethnic namesake as an Oceanic goddess of water.

For instance, in the beginning scene of the play, when Hina and Helmut first encounter Temanu and Jean at the hotel, Hina is easily able to handle her lascivious and controlling fiancé. Momentarily caught between Helmut's desire to leave for the village immediately and Temanu's request to speak with her alone, Hina very simply tells a protesting Helmut that she will speak with her cousin. "Please, Mr. Helmut, I speak to Temanu, alone."<sup>13</sup> Using gentle and polite language that emphasizes her desire for solitude, she transforms Helmut into a mumbling fool who can only weakly offer a time limit on the women's conversation as he exits the area. Later in this same scene, an increasingly lusty Helmut asks Hina to take off her *pandanus* bra for a photograph; when she hesitates, he tries to undo her top. Her response is sharp and clear, "No, Helmut, no! Not here, Helmut. No!"<sup>14</sup> Her negative response prompts the photographer, Jean, to refuse to take any photos

of the couple without Hina's top on out of respect for Hina's modesty. Thus from the earliest moments of the play, Helmut is set-up for failure; though he may envision himself as the empowered male colonialist feasting upon the child-like hospitality of the Marawan people, he soon learns that his privilege has its limits.

The wedding night scene is written in the classic comic formula of the over-sexed groom and the sly and reluctant bride. Hereniko and Teaiwa, however, introduce elements of non-realism into this scene through the use of Hina's ghostly grandparents who watch over their beloved Hina on her wedding night.<sup>15</sup> In the short episode before Helmut and Hina enter the hotel room, the grandparents argue, flirt and commiserate with one another, a rapport that is broken up by the grandmother's frequent chasing of the grandfather around the room, playfully demanding sexual favors. Later in the scene, however, Helmut's demands for sexual favors take on a decidedly darker tone. As Hereniko and Teaiwa demonstrate, colonialist and sexual politics are intimately intertwined. Helmut's cruel attempts at seduction include alcohol, a red negligee and a philosophical discourse that reveals his own racist perspectives. In response to Hina's refusal to change into the red negligee in front of him, Helmut says:

Don't you natives practice free love under the coconut trees? That's what the books say. You have no hang ups like us, sex to you is like drinking whiskey. You can never have enough of it.<sup>16</sup>

Hina's tart but insightful response, "But if we like that, there be no virgin left,"<sup>17</sup> only serves to inflame Helmut's desire for her.

During the honeymoon scene, Hina successfully deflects Helmut's advances with gestures of modesty, distracting questions about his books and personal life, making moral judgments that kissing and nudity are dirty, and eating a native chicken dish while licking her sticky fingers with teasing gusto. As a last ditch effort, Helmut throws himself at her only to find that Hina has grabbed the toupee off of his head. As she runs screaming through the room, with the toupee attached to her fingers, her ghostly, unseen grandparents follow suit, leaving an embarrassed Helmut to cover his bare scalp with his hands. After Temanu and Jean abruptly enter the room, Hina throws off the red negligee in disgust and without a word, leaves the honeymoon suite with Temanu. A bald and drunken Helmut is left to console himself through conversation and drink with Jean, who like Hina, rejects his offer to spend the night in his bedroom.

Thus Hina, a figure who both outrages the feminist Temanu and beguiles the colonizing Helmut, who has been exchanged by her parents for dresses and cigarettes, demonstrates her quiet empowerment throughout the play. Despite her lower status, she proves to be a feminist character; much like Temanu, she is conscious of her gender role in society and critical of the patriarchal forces at work in her life journey. Ultimately Hina functions as a poetic mirror to her symbolic twin, Temanu, in highlighting the different forms of female power and cultural identity that are possible in this new, postcolonial era in Marawa.

The final moments in the play solidify the special relationship these two women share. Having decided to leave for Europe with Helmut, Hina shares with Temanu that she is no longer a virgin, that she had enjoyed a brief, loving embrace with the village philanderer, Jeke. Temanu, surprised, perhaps having also believed Hina was "the last virgin in paradise," asks what she will do once Helmut finds out. Hina explains,

Helmut? There are ways...Right now, let him dream his dream. Let him think I virgin. That his problem. But don't worry. I have brain too. Like you!<sup>18</sup>

Referring to Helmut as her metaphorical passport out of Marawa, Hina openly shares that like Temanu, she has her own dreams; she wants to explore the world like her cousin has been allowed to do. Unlike Temanu who envisions herself as a savior of a people she hardly knows, Hina has a more grounded view of the choices that lie before her. Though she seems to recognize that Helmut may potentially misuse and abandon her someday, she still embraces the rewards of her journey as worth the likely risks. As the two women say goodbye to one another at the airport, Hina succinctly sums up their momentary crisscrossing paths as diverse female immigrant subjects: "You come to find roots, that fine, but I...I want to find my wings too!"<sup>19</sup> One imagines that in the years to come, when they meet again, the two cousins will have much to share.

*Frangipane Perfume* (first performed in 1997) is notable as "the first Pacific play to be written by a woman for an all-female cast."<sup>20</sup> Weaving together the story of three sisters who have left Samoa to live and work in New Zealand, the playwright Makerita Urale (Samoan) explores a two-week period during which Tivi, the eldest sister, discovers that the man she has been "saving" herself for has rejected her in favor of a more sexually open woman. Working as night cleaners in an office building, the immigrant sisters spend their days and nights bickering with each other, balancing the care for their ill, aging father with their daily job of cleaning toilets and bathroom floors.

Like *The Last Virgin in Paradise*, *Frangipane Perfume* focuses on the female Pacific Islander immigrant subject, developing a feminist critique of the specific socio-historical conditions that shape, for better or worse, the journeys of their traveling women characters. Ultimately these two plays argue that women find healing through their mutual relationships, a vision of an essentialist form of feminism in which women find empowerment through their separation from domineering patriarchal figures and systems. What women create amongst each other is held up to be powerful, nurturing and sustaining. In looking at *Frangipane Perfume*, this essentialist feminist vision is embodied in the relationships among the three sisters, Tivi, Naiki and Pomu, which like the twinning of Temanu and Hina, is poetically abstracted. As will be discussed, the relationship between the three sisters hints at imagery of the triple goddess, a female deity that represents all three phases of a woman's life.<sup>21</sup> Though challenged by society at every step of their immigrant journeys, these three sisters, together, create a compelling emotional and spiritual wholeness among themselves.

To fully understand Urale's feminist critique, it is important to explore its highly experimental structure, an artistic framework that embodies the lived experiences of her subjects. As Michelle Keown suggests in *Pacific Islands Writing*, *Frangipane Perfume* is in line with other contemporary plays that seek to use demystifying strategies such as dramatic juxtaposition to reveal a darker truth behind the stereotypes of Pacific Island women.<sup>22</sup> Unlike *The Last Virgin in Paradise*, which followed a more traditional use of linear time, causal action and climactic structure, *Frangipane Perfume* is decidedly post-modern. The play's eighteen short episodic scenes create an emotional world of fracture and isolation, juxtaposing non-causally related scenes that range from flashbacks, nightmares, monologues, realistic and expressionistic episodes, fantasies, and dance scenes. In short, Urale avoids offering a detailed, moment-by-moment storyline of Tivi's

## *The Female Immigrant as Subject*

rejection by Okisene, the Samoan man she hopes to marry, but rather presents a colorful collage of actions, reactions, and states of feeling that emanate from the subjective experiences of the three sisters.

Describing a sequence of scenes may help clarify the narrative line and its staging. For instance at the nadir of the play, in “Scene Fourteen, The Siva,” the three sisters attend a dance in hopes of seeing Okisene. Tivi, who had recently rejected Okisene’s aggressive sexual advancement, proving that she is a “good girl,” now believes that he will propose marriage. In this scene, as with the play in its entirety, no other characters are on stage except for the three women. Okisene’s presence is seen only through the women’s responses to him. As Tivi sees Okisene, she becomes immediately shy and insecure, and her sisters push her forward to speak with him. But to the sisters’ great dismay, Okisene asks another woman to dance. Pomu, as befits her intellectual but emotionally clumsy personality, describes the action:

Now he’s talking to her. It looks like he is asking her - yes, for a dance.  
Now they’re dancing. He’s licking her ear? He’s sucking at it? His hand’s  
on her bum.<sup>23</sup>

After an inconsolable Tivi screams an expletive, breaking out of her typically prudish outer-shell, the three sisters quickly transform into dancers, dancing out a range of negative feelings about men’s empowerment in the areas of sexuality and love. The stage directions read:

Suddenly, the stage is transformed as the girls perform a dance. The SLEAZY DANCE is slow, dark and disturbing. Their movements re-create the feelings of women being sexually violated - all the creepy unwanted macho attitudes against women as sex objects. For Tivi, the movement represents her shattered dreams and her sense of betrayal by Okisene.<sup>24</sup>

In the next scene, “Scene Fifteen, Big Misa,” the three women emerge from their sleazy dance rubbing their bodies as if sexually violated. But once again, the theatrical mode suddenly shifts and the women enter into an explosive expressionist group rant. Taking turns, each woman confronts her sisters, speaking out past and current tensions, secrets and grudges held only within their private family world. Pomu accuses Tivi of caring more for Okisene than their father, and tells Naiki she is too cowardly to admit she is gay; Tivi calls Naiki a slut for wanting to sleep with women, and tells Pomu that she’s so spoiled by their father, she can’t take care of herself. Naiki confronts Tivi for acting like a Christian martyr, and calls Pomu a freak whom no one understands. The scene ends with a mutual scream, “HATE YOU!”<sup>25</sup>

From this expressionist, dialogue-based scene, the women move into “Scene Sixteen, The Machete Dance,” where they perform a wordless, but strenuous fight-dance with machetes: Tivi is the last dancer standing as her sisters fall to the wayside in exhaustion.

By framing her play in a bold, theatrical framework that is overtly disjointed and ever-changing, Urale challenges her audience members to interpret the narrative line through their intuitive sensibilities. As the play shifts from present moment to flash backs to nightmares, and expresses its action through highly theatricalized dialogue, monologue, movement and dance, audiences are forced to focus on the emotional tones and reactions of the three immigrant sisters as they struggle against a collage of patriarchal and colonist

forces. In other words, the play's chaotic and overwhelming structure reflects the sense of disempowerment felt by the three women.

That the act of immigration has caused great suffering for each of the women is made clear by both the given circumstances and their depiction as dysfunctional characters. As Hina may learn once she emigrates from Marawa, life for Pacific Islanders abroad is surely difficult; as women, these travelers must carry the dual burden of their native culture's gendered norms and expectations, while also dealing with the patriarchal attitudes of the dominant culture in their host country. A constant state of feeling "in-between," if not culturally inauthentic, appears common to those who leave one home for another.

This complex burden of immigration is especially keen in the case of the three sisters. First, the given circumstances of their lives is bleak, bordering on tragic: as the play clarifies, the women's parents were once strong and healthy in Samoa, raising them in an especially large and privileged *palagi*<sup>26</sup> home with a beautiful frangipane tree on the property. Scenes and stage directions of the three women as little girls indicate a strong emotional closeness among the sisters, who once shared the same childhood bed, as well as with their youthful hopes and dreams. However, by the time the play has begun in New Zealand, the mother has passed away and the father is enfeebled and disaffected. Needing to support their father's mounting medical needs and expenses, the three young adult children work at the lowest social rung of New Zealand society, cleaning the bathrooms of wealthy business people, working late at night so as not to be seen or heard.

As seen in the opening image of this play, their physical labor is draining: as the lights come up on what first appears to be a group of women moving sensuously in the shadows becomes the daily reality of Tivi, Naiki and Pomu on their knees cleaning the floors. Their work is not only repulsive due to the scatological elements, but also harmful to their back and arms; the overwhelming smell of the urine and cleaners prompts Pomu to fantasize about the smell of frangipane perfume, an oil made by the women in her village in Samoa. As Pomu was very young when they immigrated to New Zealand, she has no direct memory of these flowers or how they were processed. To soothe her homesickness for a home she never knew, she constantly presses her sisters to tell her how the perfume is made. Ironically, Tivi and Naiki do not want to remember this scent or its production: for Tivi, it brings up painful memories of her past happiness, and for Naiki it is a reminder that they are forever marked as lowly Samoans in white New Zealand society.

The act of immigration from Samoa to New Zealand has not only led to debilitating circumstances, but to an unfortunate warping of their personalities and relationships. As with *The Last Virgin in Paradise*, a desire to abstract the female characters for poetic and thematic purposes is evident. Whereas Temanu and Hina are bound in a special mirroring relationship as symbolic twins, the three sisters Tivi, Naiki and Pomu collectively suggest the powerful imagery of the triple goddess. Quite simply, the triple goddess is a vision of the fullness of Womanhood. Often traced back to the Celtic mythology of Brigid, and later translated into St. Bridgit of the Catholic church,<sup>27</sup> the triple goddess is a deity who is embodied by three feminine forms: the maiden, the mother, the crone. Each form reflects a different, crucial phase in a Woman's life; the maiden is pioneering, free and blossoming into her sexuality, the mother is nurturing and all-powerful, and the crone is knowledgeable, wise and sometimes destructive.

Not surprisingly, the triple goddess is often embraced in contemporary feminist spirituality, an activist approach to spiritualism that seeks to heal female practitioners by



uncovering the deep power of their feminine identities and life experiences. Broadly speaking, feminist spirituality embraces not only theatrical performance into its rituals and practices,<sup>28</sup> but also the rich lineage of nature-focused, female Polynesian deities. Such a connection among global feminist spirituality, live drama, and native belief systems, all wrapped together in sharp postcolonial critique, is a burgeoning motif among Oceanic playwrights.<sup>29</sup>

In *Frangipane Perfume*, Urale is committed to demonstrating immigration's toll on the sisters' psyches. All three women represent a different facet of the triple goddess, but yet each is terribly warped and disconnected from her true inner-core: all phases of Womanhood are bent out of shape, distorted and unnatural. Naiki is a troubled and troublesome maiden, Tivi is an overbearing, moralistic mother-figure, and the highly intelligent and cerebral Pomu has developed into an unwise, emotionally-unengaged crone who unintentionally causes her sisters pain.

Naiki, the middle sister, serves as the triplicate's dysfunctional "maiden." Though the ideal maiden is meant to represent the youthful promise of being a Woman, a period of grace and promise at the discovery of a new adult world, inspired by a blossoming fertility and quest for romantic love, Naiki struggles to attain any of these qualities. Of the three sisters, she is the most daring, beautiful and sensuous, yet she is unable to find a sense of peace in either her physical beauty or emerging sexual feelings. Naiki's notable sensuality is highlighted early on in the play. In the first bathroom cleaning scene, Tivi prompts Naiki to re-clean a portion of the floor, criticizing her for missing a skidmark. Naiki angrily re-polishes the floor with a demonstrative flair that belies her deep-seeded racial and sexual frustrations:

I hate cleaning. I hate white! I hate it.... We're always cleaning and cleaning. It makes me feel so dirty and dirty.

*Naiki sexily rubs her body taunting Tivi, who is disgusted.*<sup>30</sup>

Naiki's words and actions reveal two pressing social issues that work against her happiness. On one hand, Naiki makes a clear parallel between the whiteness of cleanliness and the whiteness of the dominant New Zealand culture, pointing to the bitter irony of a Samoan woman making floors white for her white employers. Naiki's relationship to white culture is complicated by the fact that she is fair skinned and delicately featured, so light in skin tone that she sunburns easily. As she says in a monologue, she cannot believe Tivi and Pomu are her sisters: "I don't look like them, they look like - savages! I'm different."<sup>31</sup> Naiki's pale, youthful beauty therefore displaces her within both the minority immigrant Samoan community and the dominant white New Zealand culture. Naiki's potential to pass as a mixed-raced Samoan creates a distinct self-hatred in Naiki, and she transfers this self-hatred to her sisters through her frequent snobbish comments that her darker sisters are "bushies" or that the native perfume Pomu covets is "bush oil," a low class perfume made in a Coke bottle.

Naiki's dysfunction is further enhanced by her marginalized sexuality as a gay woman. Neither her sisters nor her Samoan community accept Naiki's homosexuality and thus her sexual growth is stunted, expressed only through veiled sexualized taunts aimed at her moralistic older sister, as seen in the bathroom cleaning scene mentioned earlier, or in her brief fantasies or allusions to anonymous strangers. Though Naiki is beautiful and sensuous, her strong desires cannot flourish in the repressive environment of her family and community. During the course of the play, she refers to three women she finds

attractive; in all cases, Naiki is depicted as a mild stalker of her female crushes. In one instance, she waits at a specific spot to watch a woman pass by so she can smell her scent; in another case, she vows to approach a woman in pink at a public Samoan community dance in an effort to embarrass Tivi and possibly even the unsuspecting woman herself. Her only potentially positive experience with a woman is hinted at in “Scene Thirteen, Mirrors,” when she enters the scene in a dream-state, happily remembering an unspoken, brief encounter that she had just enjoyed outside the other women’s home. This happiness, however, is quickly refocused to the woman in pink whom she sees at the Samoan dance later than same evening.

Tivi proves no healthier than her younger sister, the maiden, Naiki. In *Frangipane Perfume*, Tivi functions as both the lead character who suffers the singular emotional downfall, and the all-power “mother” figure to her motherless sisters. While the triple goddess’s mother is meant to be a deity of nurturance, compassion and family strength, Tivi’s reign over her two younger sisters is fraught with ego, self-martyrdom and coldness.

As established from the beginning of the play, Tivi is the primary caregiver in her family; she monitors her father’s medicines, the family’s groceries and cooking, and assigns the various tasks for cleaning the bathrooms and offices. Of the three sisters, she is the most religious, upholding a promise made to their mother that she and her sisters would attend church every Sunday even when they were tired from their weekly work. Her Christian and native Samoan cultural ethics shape her daily life to a much greater degree than Naiki or Pomu’s.

Despite her intentions to guard her family and respect the traditions that have been taught to her, Tivi is cold towards her siblings. In addition to frequently guilt-tripping her sisters for the additional burden she carries, she openly admonishes Naiki for her brimming sexuality and is dismissive towards Pomu for her intellectualism and interest in science. Indeed, sibling resentment against the domineering and critical oldest sister Tivi is a great part of the dramatic tension that percolates in this play.

Part of Tivi’s coolness toward her siblings may be the simple result of being utterly exhausted from leading the family while working nights as an office cleaner. But ultimately Tivi, like Naiki, holds herself up as superior to her sisters; in Tivi’s eyes she is the most moral, hardworking and Christian of the family. Her dating relationship with Okisene further raises her chances for a respectable Samoan marriage. This exaggerated self-image of high social standing is bolstered by her active dream-life in which she fantasizes about being a “good girl,” a virgin bride who is dutiful to her parents, blessed with a large white wedding, an adoring groom and many jealous bridesmaids. Furthermore, her conservative Christian and Samoan backgrounds infiltrate her meditative and unconscious states: while she prays vehemently for her imperfect sisters’ salvations, she has a terrifying nightmare about having her hair brutally cut off, a traditional form of public humiliation and shaming for Samoan women who have sex before marriage.

Tivi, whose public appearance and inner-life are dedicated to trying to uphold these many images of social propriety and morality, is easily set-up to fail during the course of the play. Indeed her downfall and ultimate healing through sisterly love provides the central narrative arc to this chaotically structured play. When Okisene makes sexual advances towards her, she rejects him and a physical altercation occurs, leaving her with significant scratch marks on her arm and a depressed spirit. Tivi’s dilemma constitutes the play’s main

dramatic crisis: having seen an aggressive side in the man she hopes to marry, a man she had idealized as a good, respectable Christian man - what will she do now?

A week after this incident, Naiki and Pomu happily prepare to attend a local Samoan community dance. Tivi tells them that she has a migraine and will stay home with their father, clarifying to her sisters that she has no interest in seeing Okisene. But when Pomu suggests that Okisene may ask her to marry him, Tivi is instantly elated; the image of marriage, and the social standing associated with it, is so powerfully entrenched in Tivi's mind that she decides to overlook their recent altercation and pursue Okisene. With motherly pride, and shaped by a degree of hypocrisy, Tivi leads her sisters to the dance telling them that as the oldest sister, she needs to go to ensure their safety. Ironically it is she who needs protection from the disaster that awaits her at the dance.

Pomu, too, plays a part in the sisters' dysfunctional triple goddess imagery, balancing out Tivi and Naiki with the illuminating mental energy of the "crone." Though Pomu clearly embraces the crone's intellectualism and quest for knowledge, she ultimately lacks the deity's hard-earned wisdom and insight into human relationships. Such wisdom can only emerge from rich, lived experiences and intimate emotional connections, and like her sisters, the standoffish Pomu finds her full personal growth stunted. As Urale demonstrates, possessing knowledge of western science and history without the connection to one's native culture and rituals, or one's sisters, adds another level of "in-betweenness" to a mentally-active female immigrant like Pomu.

To be sure, Pomu is arguably the least developed of the three characters; she is granted less stage dialogue and action than her sisters and is clearly an outsider to their intense and long-standing sibling rivalry. What makes Pomu special and unique as a character, not only within the context of the play under discussion but also in view of the long history of Oceanic female characters in literature, is her striking intellectualism and probing nature. David O'Donnell, in his introduction to *Frangipane Perfume*, sees Pomu's enthusiasm for science as a positive trait, suggesting that she may offer Pacific Island women a new self-image that goes beyond the "good girl" Tivi or "bad girl" Naiki dynamic:

...a delightful and original character who is innocent yet self-educated, who can describe sexual attraction in terms of quantum physics. Pomu represents a positive future for Pacific women – optimistic, inquisitive and embracing of the best of both worlds.<sup>32</sup>

As the play makes clear, Pomu is the odd-woman-out in her family; her cerebral nature and desire to find natural phenomena in her surroundings separates her from her more emotionally charged family members. Her singular passion lies in her love of physics and chemistry, which she believes will reveal all of nature's secrets ranging from the magical power of frangipane perfume to Tivi's turbulent love life. Early in her childhood, her father noted her intelligence and encouraged her to read books and to identify herself with great minds like Einstein. This special paternal attention paid to Pomu not only created jealousy among the sisters but also increased the sense that Pomu is too different for Tivi and Naiki to ever understand. For instance, in one particularly sharp one-liner, Naiki draws attention to her young sibling's unchanging strangeness.

Naiki: Pomu! Pomu! She's so weird sometimes.

Pomu: I like books.

Naiki: See!<sup>33</sup>

Pomu's intellectualism and quest for knowledge clearly aligns her with the crone deity, a figure representing the final chapter in a Woman's nature life that is post-sexual and increasingly post-corporeal. This is a time when the mysteries of the universe become of increased importance to the feminine mind as it moves closer towards death and the after-life. The crone's desire to understand the world around her certainly reverberates in Pomu's greatest demand on her sisters. Pomu, much like Temanu in *The Last Virgin in Paradise*, seeks a connection with a native home that she left at a young age. Pomu's repeated requests to her reluctant sisters to tell her the secrets of making frangipane perfume – questions that begin and end the play – are emblematic of her desperate need to connect to her homeland through the knowledge of facts, formulas and directions. Given her youth, past immigration, and current isolated life in New Zealand, she cannot connect to Samoa through lived experience.

Pomu's role as the seeker of knowledge among her sisterly triplicate, however, ironically highlights her dysfunction as a crone figure. On one hand, while she is apparently self-taught in matters of hard science, she lacks the mature wisdom of living, which results in a level of personal clumsiness that impedes the family's daily functioning. Her sisters often call her *vale*<sup>34</sup> for her child-like irresponsibility and lack of discretion. For instance, very early on in the play, during the bathroom-cleaning scene, Tivi asks Pomu if she has picked up their father's medicine. Pomu demurs and her sisters berate her for failing to help, criticizing her that she had been told numerous times to pick up the medicine. Pomu's response is telling of her immaturity; instead of apologizing and promising to pick the medicine up as soon as possible, she derails the conversation: "Dad knows I forgot. He said back home, people don't take medicine anyway. He said he wouldn't be sick back there."<sup>35</sup>

Later in the play, when Tivi has returned from her church date with Okisene, Pomu lets slip that their father has denegated Tivi for becoming too religious. Naiki tries to stop Pomu's indiscreet revelations to little success.

Pomu: Dad said that you were becoming too –

Naiki: Keep quiet.

Tivi: What?

Naiki: It's nothing.

Tivi: Tell me.

Pomu: Dad was worried that you were becoming too –

Naiki: Shut up, Pomu... You know what a *vale* she is.<sup>36</sup>

Ironically, Pomu's name means "bomb" in Samoan, a name that not only makes reference to the history of American test bombing in the Pacific,<sup>37</sup> but may also hints at the aging crone's predilection for totalizing decay and destruction. Pomu herself, in her clumsy interpersonal behaviors, tends to cause hurt feelings in her unrestrained verbal commentary and emotional detachment. As previously mentioned, her constant requests to hear about their Samoan home life and perfume-making traditions annoyingly prick at Tivi and Naiki's sensitivities about family and ethnic identity.

Pomu's awkward ability to harm others is perhaps best seen in her approach to Tivi's broken relationship with Okisene. In contrast to Tivi's mainstream heterosexuality and Naiki's brimming homosexuality, Pomu is notably asexual, appearing completely detached from any form of intimate desire. When Tivi tells Pomu she may someday meet a boy, who may turn into a husband, Pomu responds with an evasive game of wordplay based on the words - boys, males and homo sapiens. She then begins to laugh maniacally

while still citing her words, an outburst which causes her sisters, according to the stage directions, to stare at Pomu as if she is having a mental breakdown.<sup>38</sup>

Thus it might seem strange that Tivi would take relationship advice from a person like Pomu, an inexperienced young woman whom she has long regarded as overly intellectual, irresponsible and spoiled. But when Pomu says that it's possible that Okisene may ask Tivi to marry him at the dance, citing a basic hard science theory that "two objects moving at relative speed must be present at one point in time to create physical contact,"<sup>39</sup> a desperate Tivi eagerly accepts this cerebral perspective on love.

Having unintentionally set-up Tivi for further heartbreak, Pomu continues her hurtful actions by describing Okisene's groping of another woman on the dance floor. Though Naiki repeatedly tells Pomu to stop speaking, assuring Tivi that she is much prettier than Okisene's newly arrived immigrant girlfriend, Pomu continues to describe the scene set before them. She even naively asks Tivi if she is going to cry, an odd and poorly timed question that only makes Tivi cry. As Tivi's fortunes continue to plummet at the Samoan dance, Pomu is castigated by her sisters; she is called a *vale* numerous times, with Tivi saying she should never have listened to her. In keeping with her namesake of "bomb," Pomu has set off a fuse that leads the sisters through a series of highly explosive scenes (Scenes Fifteen and Sixteen, described earlier), that culminate in the sisters' unleashing years of pent-up anger at one another, verbally and physically.

As Urale has demonstrated through the complex lives of Tivi, Naiki and Pomu, the act of immigration has the potential to greatly distort the natural lives of female travelers. Disconnected from positive native traditions and identity, the oppressive regulations on their sexuality, employment, education and codes of behavior, all combine to stunt the full growth of female immigrants. In this depressing "in between" world, Urale argues that women cannot reach their full potential as Women: maiden, mother and crone.

*Frangipane Perfume* certainly adds to the Oceanic feminist discourse at play in *The Last Virgin in Paradise*. In addition to creating a poignant, poetic abstraction of the female figures onstage - a symbolic triplicate - this later drama also embraces a clear essentialist feminist perspective. For the female immigrant subjects, healing, understanding and emotional support come most fully through their feminine bonds to one another. Elements of female spirituality, such as Hina's goddess namesake and the ideals of the triple goddess, affirm the special gift women can offer one another. Men and greater patriarchal institutions only function as distractions in this Woman-centered vision. Indeed, there is notably little emphasis on political activism or grand scale social change as remedies to the ills the female immigrants encounter - at least at this step in the Oceanic women's postcolonial journeys.

Ultimately both plays primarily focus on the interior lives and complex relationships that emanate in this community of women, showing how the female immigrants discover their authentic individualities through one another. With careful optimism, Temanu, Hina, Tivi, Naiki and Pomu each discover a heightened sense of realness as individuals, women, Pacific Islanders and immigrants; they also find a sense of peace.

A consideration of *Frangipane Perfume's* movement-oriented ending may help clarify the sisters' transition towards this feminist form of healing. Though Pomu's scientific perspectives may have initiated a series of painful events in which the sisters' troubled relationships are laid bare, her continued desire to understand the magic of

frangipane perfume propels the final healing acts. When the lights come up in “Scene Seventeen, End of Fight/Cleansing,” the three women are back at work, cleaning the bathroom floors. Their energy is greatly depleted, their lives appear unchanged, but yet there is a difference among the three sisters: with the mother-sister Tivi defeated by her rejection by Okisene, Naiki and Pomu are ready to step forward to help her, and to contribute to the family’s material and emotional welfare. For instance, Naiki’s negative attitude towards her work has greatly shifted. In the first line of the scene, Naiki, of her own volition, notices a skidmark that she missed in her cleaning and promptly corrects it. She then proceeds to tell Tivi that after work, she and Pomu will do the grocery shopping for the family, admitting the two younger sisters haven’t gone to the market for years. When Tivi quietly resists her sisters’ help, Naiki quickly offers to get their father’s medicine, insisting that she has to go to the pharmacy for other items as well.

And just as Naiki has dropped her shell of rebelliousness, Pomu too has changed her demeanor. No longer detached and unengaged, she is fully present, directing her full energies to her grieving sister Tivi. The opening stage directions read: “Pomu can’t hide her feelings and her attention is focused on her oldest sister.”<sup>40</sup> Perhaps in hopes of connecting her older sister to a happier time in her life, Pomu presses Tivi to finally tell her about frangipane perfume. Naiki, who had always denigrated the native oil, and like her older sister desired to avoid the topic altogether, also prompts Tivi to tell the story, explaining that their youngest sister wants to understand that special part of their heritage.

As Tivi begins to tell the story of the traditional craft, she comes to the part where she must describe what her mother did with the flowers. At first mention of her mother, she is overwhelmed with emotion and it becomes clear that to Tivi, the perfume is a strong and singular reminder of their deceased mother. By speaking her name out loud, Tivi has begun to break through an emotional wall she had long held up. As Tivi halts in her story, Naiki gently picks up the narrative and completes the explanation of how the perfume is made. As their jointly-told story ends, the scene shifts to the dream world, and Tivi and Naiki begin to dance gracefully, creating images that are reminiscent of the sultry dancing at the beginning of the play. As the stage directions describe, “the Siva is a sensuous dance of the perfumed secret Tivi and Naiki have passed on to their youngest sister like a gift.”<sup>41</sup>

Like her sisters, Pomu, too, has been spiritually refreshed by the telling of the story; the stage directions explain that Pomu feels as if she has finally discovered a magical formula that she had search for all her life.<sup>42</sup> Pomu now feel that she is a part of something special, a women’s circle, because “for the first time, her sisters have finally told her what she wanted to hear.”<sup>43</sup> While Naiki finds personal satisfaction in helping her grieving sister, and Tivi finds peace in speaking about their mother, whose role she has sought to embody, Pomu now feels that she is a part of an engaged and sharing community with her sisters. She has been allowed entrance into her sisters’ private memories and made contact with a native tradition – two changes that liberate her sense of belonging and her hopes for the future. As the play ends, with her sisters dancing in the distance, Pomu says, speaking in plural, “We lie beneath the shelter of the Frangipane Tree and we dream and we dream.”<sup>44</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> For instance, landmark works such as *Le Matau*, considered the first full-length Samoan play by Samson Samisoni and Stephen Sinclair (first performed in 1984), and the popular

short novel, *The Whale Rider* by Witi Ihimaera (1987), feature male Pacific Islander immigrants.

<sup>2</sup> *Marawa* means “happy” in Fijian.

<sup>3</sup> Diana Looser, *Remaking Pacific Pasts* (Hawaii: University of Hawaii Press, 2014) 41.

<sup>4</sup> Jocelyn Linnekin, *Sacred Queens and Women of Consequence* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1990) 238.

<sup>5</sup> Linnekin, 232.

<sup>6</sup> In her article, “The Tourist and the Native: Rereading Myths of Conquest in *Lucy* and *The Last Virgin in Paradise*,” Carolyn Cooper writes that due to her own ambiguous placement as an outsider to the world of the play, she finds *Temanu* to be one of the most engaging characters.

<sup>7</sup> Seri Inthava Kau'ikealaula Luangphinith, “Pacific Island Literatures,” ed. John C. Hawley, *Encyclopedia of Postcolonial Studies* (Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2001) 347.

<sup>8</sup> Vilsoni Hereniko and Teresia Teaiwa, *The Last Virgin in Paradise* (Fiji: University of South Pacific, 2001) 40.

<sup>9</sup> *Hina*, and its variants, are commonly used as word-endings to connote the female gender, such as “wahine” meaning girl or woman.

<sup>10</sup> Hereniko, 16.

<sup>11</sup> See Linnekin, section on “Cloth and Colonization.”

<sup>12</sup> Hereniko, 20.

<sup>13</sup> Hereniko, 19.

<sup>14</sup> Hereniko, 24.

<sup>15</sup> The play’s unrestrained mixing of various languages, performance traditions such as the Samoan wedding clowns, and presentation modes (occasional direct audience address) creates a theatrical form that reflects the diversity of the Pacific Islands. More specifically, as Hereniko explains, the mixing of reality with the world of the dead in the honeymoon scene is an embodiment of contemporary religious beliefs embraced by Pacific Islanders. *Va’ ai* (20). Thus the colorful mixing of ages, genders, races, nationalities, attitudes and states of living is intended to add to the humor of this scene.

<sup>16</sup> Hereniko, 51.

<sup>17</sup> Hereniko, 51.

<sup>18</sup> Hereniko, 75.

<sup>19</sup> Hereniko, 74.

<sup>20</sup> David O’Donnell, “Introduction,” “*Frangipane Perfume*” and “*Mapaki*” (New Zealand: Play Press, 2004) i.

<sup>21</sup> The myth of the triple goddess was popularized by Robert Graves in his book *The White Goddess: a Historical Grammar of a Poetic Myth*, published in 1948. The triple goddess is composed of three images: the maiden, the mother, the crone. The triple goddess has been embraced by neo-pagans and wiccans, as well as feminist spiritual practitioners, as a triplicate deity that celebrates the fullness of the female life cycle.

<sup>22</sup> Michelle Keown, *Pacific Island Writing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007) 216.

<sup>23</sup> Makerita Urale, *Frangipane Perfume* in *Frangipane Perfume/Mapaki* (New Zealand: Play Press, 2004) 29.

<sup>24</sup> Urale, 30.

<sup>25</sup> Urale, 32.

<sup>26</sup> *Palagi* means “white person” in Samoan.

<sup>27</sup> Francis Doherty, “Windows on the World,” *Fortnight*, No. 290, Supplement: Radical Ulcers (Dec., 1990) 9-10.

<sup>28</sup> Edmund B. Langan, “Contemporary Forms of Occult Theatre,” *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art*, Vol. 28, No. 3 (Sep., 2006), 23-38.

<sup>29</sup> A prime example of this confluence of perspectives is in *Emmalehua* (published 2002) by the leading Hawaiian playwright, Victoria Nalani Kneubuhl.

<sup>30</sup> *Urale*, 7.

<sup>31</sup> *Urale*, 15.

<sup>32</sup> O’Donnell, iv.

<sup>33</sup> *Urale*, 12.

<sup>34</sup> *Vale* means “idiot” in Samoan.

<sup>35</sup> *Urale*, 6.

<sup>36</sup> *Urale* 19.

<sup>37</sup> O’Donnell, 4.

<sup>38</sup> *Urale*, 27. Also, Pomu’s asexuality is confirmed again at the dance when she declares that she prefers to dance by herself, breaking into a chaotic, heavy metal dance routine that offends Tivi’s sensibilities.

<sup>39</sup> *Urale*, 26.

<sup>40</sup> *Urale*, 33.

<sup>41</sup> *Urale*, 35. Of note, *The Last Virgin in Paradise* also ends with gift-giving between the two cousins.

<sup>42</sup> *Urale*, 35.

<sup>43</sup> *Urale*, 35.

<sup>44</sup> *Urale*, 35.