

#PNGMANUP [PAPUA NIUGINIAN FEMINISM]

#VISUALFEMINISMPNG

#Feminism is a word that is rarely used or uttered in Papua Niugini. The second wave of #westernfeminism or #womensliberation coincided with the lead-up to Papua New Guinea's independence in 1975. Through global agencies such as the United Nations and the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA), feminism's initial influence infiltrated Papua New Guinean society at a pivotal time, giving women such as Meg Taylor, Nahau Rooney and Josephine Abaijah a place and a voice in national politics. Forty-six years on, educated, empowered and culturally rooted PNG women continue to assert their #feminist and #intersectional agendas at local and global levels through music, performance, storytelling and protest, amplifying their own and other PNG voices using social media platforms. A powerful tool for both good and bad reasons, social media and mobile-device technology enables and empowers Papua New Guinean women's voices, bodies and perspectives in social and cultural contexts that do not always value PNG women's opinions. Australian-based artist and interdisciplinary storyteller Wendy Mocke is one of very few PNG women who utilises #feminist #womanist and #feministaf hashtags through her Instagram accounts. Working with PNG women and trans-women based in Papua New Guinea and Australia, the Meri Project, via Mocke's Instagram account @melaninhaus and other online platforms, allows viewers to access audio-visual stories of multidimensional experiences of what it is to be a woman and Papua New Guinean in 2021. After several decades of gender equity initiatives by grassroots PNG women and international women's development agencies, the global pandemic year of 2020 saw PNG reach a historical juncture as a nation through a significant cultural shift of societal respect towards women. Facebook was a crucial entry point into a nation-wide examination of how gender-based violence is eroding the foundations of PNG society and cultural values. Olto Thomas, a law student at the University of PNG, used social media to amplify her voice and opinion of women's rights, safety, and freedom in Papua New Guinea through a visual post on her personal Facebook account. Standing independently, Thomas is pictured holding a cardboard sign declaring "PNG IS NOT SAFE TO LIVE AS A FEMALE", igniting a rigorous and acrid debate between PNG men and women, who maintained a safe distance via Thomas' social

media account. Visually, Thomas's image reflects self-assertion, self-empowerment and to her own opinions as a PNG woman. In response to the brutal death of Jenelyn Kennedy, Thomas, along with hundreds of other people, marched in the streets of Port Moresby in July of 2020. The protest march organised by Jenelyn's family and #menofhonourPNG preceded a "Shine the Light Vigil" initiated by the #PNGmanup movement. This vigil was live-streamed from Port Moresby via the PNG Man Up Facebook account and utilised hashtags #justice4jenelyn and #jenelynslaw. Jenelyn's death was first made public by PNG's Chief of Emergency Medicine, Dr Sam Yockopua, via Twitter. His tweet combined with Jenelyn's family's permission to publish the image of her tortured body in The National newspaper sparked the male-driven initiative to promote positive masculinity and cultural change in Papua New Guinea with the movement #PNGmanup. Through their Facebook page, #PNGmanup encourages everyday and elite men to take a pledge to #stoptheviolence with various hashtags such as #nobail and #nocompensation aimed at women's families, which refer to culturally outdated forms of indigenous patrilineal reconciliation customs in PNG. The arrival of fourth-wave feminism in Papua New Guinea came at the cost of yet another PNG woman's body, allegedly tortured by her husband and the father of her children in late June 2020. Global politics, this time via the hashtag movements #metoo and #blacklivesmatter, coincided crucially with PNG's highly engaged and social-media literate society, enabling PNG men to initiate significant social and cultural change – change that is long overdue but welcome.

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// About the Author

Lisa Hilli is a contemporary artist, a PhD Candidate at the Australian National University, and International Fellow at the German Maritime Museum. Her practice led PhD research is focused on the visual representation and sovereignty of Papua Niuginian women through photography and filmmaking. Lisa is interested in how visual narratives of Papua Niuginian women's bodies have been constructed historically and how Papua Niuginian women use the lens today as a tool for agency and self-empowerment.

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