

# UPNG Students' Voices: On the Melanesian Way

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## Can Melanesian cultures be preserved?

### Emeteria W.:

Bride Price should be preserved and practiced in 21<sup>st</sup> century PNG. When you see something you want, you would do whatever it takes to get it. Not only that, you'd also want to show some form of appreciation for what you get, wouldn't you? This is the underlying reasoning as to why Bride price should be preserved and practiced in the 21<sup>st</sup> century Papua New Guinea.

The practice of Bride price in its simplest form works like this: When a couple gets married in patrilineal societies, the man's family pays a monetary value to the woman's family. Despite all the economic, social, and political changes Papua New Guinea goes through, I believe Bride price should be preserved and practiced in PNG, for a number of reasons:

Firstly, it builds and maintains relationships between not only the two families, but also all the parties involved. These days, when a man makes it known that he wants to pay bride price, he receives contributions from not only family, but friends as well. Secondly, it shows appreciation to the woman's family for all the hard work they have done in raising their daughter. Thirdly, it depicts the value that the man has for the woman. Though one cannot buy love or affection, one can surely show some form of appreciation for what they value. In this day and age, what better way to show such appreciation than through money? Finally, Bride price ensures responsibility to look after and maintain the relationship. As, if one puts a lot of time, effort and money into something, one would very well ensure that such thing or person is better taken care of.

However, if Bride price is not preserved and practiced in Papua New Guinea, it would do a number of things: Firstly, it would definitely ensure that this cultural practice that makes up our "Papua New Guinean Ways," as envisioned in Goal number 5 of the National Goals & Directive Principles in our home-grown Constitution would die out completely. Now that is not what our Founding Fathers envisioned when drafting up our Constitution. As, though they envisioned for development to take place, but not at the expense of doing away with our Papua New Guinean ways. Secondly, the not preserving or practicing Bride price depicts to the community that the man not only has no appreciation of the woman's family, but also that he does not value the woman with whom he professes or claims to want to share his life with. Finally, without Bride price, not much care would be taken to maintain the relationship, as not much time, effort and money was put in to show appreciation of the relationship in the first place.

Bride price builds and strengthens relationships. It shows appreciation to not only the woman's family, but to the woman as well, as to how much he values the effort it took to raise her, and the person she is. Also, it places an obligation to nurture and care for the marriage.

A good example that encompasses all the points I have made can be seen in the bride price ceremony I witnessed a month ago, when I was in Vanimo for the weekend: a cousin brother of mine was to marry a

woman from the Gulf Province; her parents had asked for K 12,000.00 as bride price. So began the bride price contributions to which his relatives and friends donated what they could, to help him out. At the end of the day, he collected an astonishing K 31,700.00, which may not seem like much, as in other provinces, where the sum collected can go much higher. But, where I come from, where more emphasis is placed on tradition rather than modern money, this is quite a lot. Thus, K 12,000.00 was paid to the woman's family, and the surplus was left to pay the people who helped to facilitate the collection of the bride price. Now, this payment built a new relationship between my cousin's family and his wife's family. Along with that, it also ensured the maintenance of his existing relationship with those that helped him out, such as his family and friends. Further, this payment also depicted my cousin's respect and appreciation for his wife's family, by abiding by their requested amount, to show his gratitude for the effort they had put into raising their daughter. It also made my cousin's wife feel valued, for if one values something or someone, they will put the time and effort, as well as money, to show their appreciation. Finally, as my cousin had put a lot of time, effort and money to show his gratitude and appreciation for his wife, there exists no obligation on all parties involved to make such relationship work.

They say, "What comes easy, won't last, and what lasts won't come easy." Hence, due to the time, effort and money put into the cultural practice of Bride Price, this would result in longer lasting marriages. It is just up to us all, individuals, that this practice of Bride Price is preserved and practiced in the future. After all, what are we, Papua New Guineans, without our cultural practices? That is like being a painter without a brush.

### Angela H.:

Melanesian cultures are bound to change, and changes are bound to happen! Do Melanesian people (men, women and children) to this present time wear grass skirts and ropes and leaves as clothing? NO!

Perhaps some of those in very remote areas, but not the majority of the people. The majority of Melanesians have adapted to the changing environment and have conformed to the standards of the present times. In the same manner, Melanesian cultures have changed enormously to accommodate for the changes the people, or the conduits and executors of the cultures, are experiencing.

Culture, unfortunately, cannot be preserved, because it is not an object that can be stored in a jar for future discourse. Culture is values, culture is ideas, culture is practices and norms, and culture lives with the people. However, people don't live forever, and neither does culture.

Culture as experience has lost its originality, because of the influence of Western modernization which is the dominant drive in our societies today. Culture as practice today is an integration of our traditional culture and the Western culture, and I am sure that in the next 100 years, Western culture will drown our Melanesian culture, and the generation then will eat, talk, work, and live like the Westerners.

It is evident that, in our local areas and towns, children have shifted from speaking the local vernacular to Tok Pisin or English. Their tastes in food and social activities have also shifted from fresh farm produce to manufactured goods. They now play cards and watch television, and refuse to do the traditional games and songs. If we are to save and preserve our traditional cultures, the target groups

are the children. But how can we reverse their state of mind, or redirect their thinking, when there is so much around them that will never let them choose?

So stop going against nature, let nature take its course; let us live our Melanesian lives together with our modern lives, because CHANGE is inevitable, and cultural preservation is impossible.

### Rebecca N.:

Melanesian culture has never been preserved in the past; thus, it will certainly not be preserved in the future. Culture is the way a society is organized, and how it functions. Melanesian way is seen as culture or the way in which society is organized. PNG has over 800 languages, and each represents a different culture. Being so diverse, the Melanesian Way cannot encompass all the cultures; therefore, Melanesian cultures cannot be preserved.

The Melanesian way has not worked in the past, as it has been changing due to colonial influence. It cannot be preserved today, due to modernization and change. Huge changes have taken place in the society: instead of smoke signals, people now use mobile phones, canoes have been replaced by large ships and cruisers, etc. Can a human body stay the same age forever? Likewise, the Melanesian way cannot remain the same – change is inevitable.

Change is evident everywhere; hence, the Melanesian Way cannot be preserved – it, too is prone to change.

### Clarissa:

The Melanesian culture has never been and will never be preserved:

What is Melanesian Culture? Melanesian cultures are diverse, and they are prone to change. To preserve something means to keep it in its original form, to keep it intact. But, how can you keep culture intact, when it is prone to change? Therefore, Melanesian cultures have never been and will never be preserved.

Culture refers to the way we live, the way we dress, the way we work and talk. Traditional attires, dances and songs are just a small aspect of culture, which is the entire way of people's lifestyle. The lifestyles of people in Papua New Guinea have been changing, in the sense that people have changed, along with the development of the country. These changes are evident in the way we dress, in the way we interact with each other, and move from one place to another:

- Clothing: People have moved from grass skirts to skirts and from ass targets to hot pants.
- Transport: In the past, people walked from one place to another, and were pretty much confined to a particular area; however, now we have different modes of transport, such as cars, ships, planes, etc.
- Another example is the way we talk and the language we speak: English, and the local vernaculars have changed, in the sense that new words and phrases have been created.
- With the introduction of new technologies, our lifestyle has drastically changed.

Culture is prone to change, it cannot be preserved. If you look at yourself now, you are not in traditional attire, and the language you speak is different from the language spoken in the past. Therefore, Melanesian Culture has never been and will never be preserved.

### Belinda P.:

The Melanesian culture is a mixture of so many different cultures and traditions. It is very diverse. To 'preserve' something means to keep it in its original form. This is not possible for Melanesian cultures, because:

a) Change: 'Change' means transforming from one state to another. Change is inevitable in life – every aspect of life is prone to change. Accordingly, Melanesian cultures are prone to change and, because of it, they cannot be preserved.

b) Western influence: In the early days, colonizers, missionaries and explorers came and settled on our soil (Papua New Guinea). When they arrived, they brought so many different influences with them; thus, they influenced our dressing, our beliefs, and generally our whole way of life. Our ancestors were very eager to try out these new influences and, as a result, the Melanesian culture in its purity was lost, to this day. History repeats itself; thus, Western influence is a barrier to preserving the Melanesian culture.

c) Development & Technology: Generally, our people are compelled to adapt to these changes, and in doing so, we lose touch with Melanesian culture. It is also vital to see the benefits of such – the development taking place around us, and all the new technologies have made our lives much easier, haven't they? The obvious answer to this question is in the affirmative. Therefore, our people, and especially today's generation, are not aware of the "Melanesian" culture, and to preserve it will be quite impossible.

Some examples to prove my point:

1. Changes in the language of communication: our ancestors spoke purely in their local dialects; however, today, most people speak English and Tok Pisin, which had not been part of Melanesian culture.
2. The means and media of communication have also changed. In the past, people used smoke signals and shells to communicate; today, we use mobile phones, email, FB and other social networking media to communicate.
3. Transportation has changed dramatically. People used to walk on foot or travel by canoes in the past; now, there are cars, planes, ships/boats to travel on.
4. Dressing has also changed. Our ancestors used to wear different types of traditional attire and leaves to cover themselves; today, we wear skirts, hot pants, denim jeans, shirts, shoes and slippers – and the list goes on.

The Melanesian culture is so diverse – trying to preserve it would be quite impossible!

### Jerome S.:

I strongly believe that preserving culture the Melanesian Way has never worked and will never work. What IS the Melanesian Way? Is there even a system that exists today that can be called a “Melanesian” system? Customs and cultures are subject to the inevitability of change. The lives and routines of our forefathers were infiltrated by the first colonial white men, followed by the huge Western influence on the ‘Melanesian Way’ today.

The customs of our forefathers cannot be preserved, because the same Melanesian cultures will have changed over time, and, ultimately, what we practice now (that is, if anyone actually still does) will be so different from what our forefathers practiced in the pre-colonial era. Trying to preserve culture over time is like trying to stop a dead body from rotting away into decomposition. All cultures of the world are subject to change, and Melanesian customs and cultures are no exception. Therefore, preserving culture the ‘Melanesian Way’ is impossible.

The ‘Melanesian Way’ started to disintegrate as soon as the colonizers landed on our shores. When the white men got our forefathers to trade their bows and arrows for cigarettes and trinkets – that symbolized the adoption of Westernization that is so common these days. How can we say we can preserve culture the Melanesian way, when we have given up grass skirts for trousers and are listening to radios and stereos, instead of traditional songs, played by flutes and kundu. “Melanesian Way” never worked in the past, in the colonial days; it has no place in our future of technology and gadgets.

We can’t preserve the “Melanesian Way” – there are so many different cultures in PNG, it’s impossible for one system to cater for more than 800 cultures, some of which are barbaric and not even accepted by other parts of the country. There will definitely be conflict, and conflict results in destruction, not preservation.

### Eden K.:

The sad fact is that our Melanesian culture – the clothes we wear, the language we speak, ways of cooking, hunting techniques, rituals and festivals, our beliefs and the traditional system of government – is dying out, overtaken by Western ideologies, beliefs, languages, etc. We may come up with many reasons as to why it is so. The early missionaries arrived in the Pacific in the 16- 1700s. They brought with them their religion, beliefs, lifestyles and practices, and forcefully tried to convert our ancestors. They lured them with tools made of steel and metals, cloths and other items.

Today, we see this influence is in a different form. The Western countries have greatly influenced the generation of today with their luxury lifestyles. Many young people, educated in the Western education system, are losing grip of their own traditional customs, beliefs, practices, and so on. This has caused a great change in the way people live and treat each other. We are becoming more and more like the Westerners.

In most Western cultures, people live greedy and competitive lifestyles. They consume many resources – many more than our traditional Melanesian cultures. They have bigger mines to extract minerals from our environment to feed and support their lifestyles. In our Melanesian culture, we value our land,

forest, sea, and every living thing in it. It is the opposite for the Western cultures – very sad, but a real fact.

The Western system of government is one of the major influences, compared to our traditional system. We only have Chiefs who make all the decisions, but the Western nations brought their democratic system which replaced ours. We believe in protecting our environment and all its resources, not exploiting or destroying it for one's own benefit. All these are no longer in effect. The demand by our generation for those expensive lifestyles has put a strain on all our resources. Kids have to go to school to learn their ways, unlike in the past, when children learned practical things from their elders. In the educational system, you must spend half of your life to learn how to live in their complicated world. Start school as early as 5 years old and finish around 30 or 40 years old. Also, we can see many Melanesians adopting Western leisure activities, such as sports like rugby, soccer, swimming, cycling, and so on. There are lots and lots of examples that you can think of.

There are good and also bad sides to these changes taking place. We should be more careful and analyze our practices and adopt the good ones. It is inevitable – these changes in culture are bound to take place, and we do not have a choice. But, as much as possible, we must preserve our Melanesian culture – it is dying out very fast.

### Isaac U.:

Can Melanesian culture be preserved? – This is a hot issue facing everyone in our societies today. Since it is being exposed to the Western world, or the outside influence from foreigners, there is an on-going contradiction between the two cultures – that is, between the Western, or introduced culture, and the Melanesian culture. People in our society today are facing cultural conflicts, whether to keep our culture (the Melanesian Way) or to adopt the Western culture, and make it part of our lives.

As to my own personal feeling and observation, I would like to not preserve the Melanesian culture, because of several mitigating and aggravating factors. We must be aware that we are all living in a changing world, and we cannot confine ourselves to a particular culture that does not have much influence on other societies around us, all over the world. If we are confined to our own Melanesian culture, we will be behind the rest of the world.

Melanesian culture is confined to the Melanesian societies only – there is no Melanesian cultural influence on other societies to any extent. However, the Western culture has a major influence on the Melanesian societies, as a result of which many of our Melanesian cultures are gradually diminishing, and are replaced by foreign culture. What we have to bear in mind is that the world is a changing world. Everything is changing, and everyone will adapt to the culture that has the most influence on people's lives all over the world. Therefore, I, for one, strongly believe that Melanesian culture should not be preserved.

The world is going through a major transition in people's way of living. Different religious beliefs are introduced, innovations and technologies are at their peak, and globalization is penetrating into every society. Therefore, we have to adapt to the culture that has the most influence – if not, we will live our

own Stone Age Melanesian Way. We must adopt the Western culture, to keep up with the rest of the world.

The English language is becoming an international language; we, Melanesians, should embed that language into our culture, and start to speak it, because everything now, in this era, is communicated through English.

Also, since the Western influence introduced the Western style of building houses (i.e., permanent buildings), we have to keep up with that. We can no longer live in our traditional bush material huts.

Lately, the Member of Parliament for Kerowagi Open, Honorable Camillus Dagma, told his people that natural resources are diminishing at an alarming rate, and that, therefore, everyone must make an attempt to build permanent housing, to avoid inconveniences in the future, when all the natural resources are gone.

Therefore, I would strongly argue that, since our Melanesian culture has no influence on other people in the world, we must do away with it, and adopt the Western culture.

### **Olivert W.:**

Our Melanesian cultures cannot be preserved, due to the rapid changes taking place in the society as a result of globalization. With globalization, people begin to move from one place to another, looking for better food, clothes, formal jobs, and they begin to forget about their cultures.

Melanesian cultures can be preserved through writing them down for future generations to at least have some idea about their cultures. However, many people nowadays are much happier about the new civilization and Western lifestyles, and they find it unnecessary to describe their cultures in writing – black and white. Do we need to practice our traditional lifestyles in cities and towns? If we preserve our cultures, would the future generations read and practice them? Think about it, my friends!

Melanesian cultures cannot be preserved. For example, social media have a large impact on many lives of Melanesians, where they do socialization online, business online, and as a result, many people are enjoying the period of time we are living in. Therefore, I, for one, strongly convince you, my fellow friends, that our Melanesian cultures cannot be preserved! Thank you very much for your ears, and think about it. That's all.

### **Ryhen T.:**

Melanesian culture CAN be preserved. Melanesian culture includes more than 900 different cultures in the Melanesian area of the South Pacific, manifested by the linguistic variation in the region. These cultures are under the threat of extinction – should they be preserved?

Imagine a society without a culture to identify it. It's imaginable, where the society can lose its value. The Australian aborigines, for instance, are people who are slaves on their own land. For a Melanesian country like PNG, preservation is possible, because our very own Constitution allows us to recognize and

preserve our culture. In this country, we, the People, own the land rights. Land is a unique aspect of Melanesian culture.

Australian aborigines are slaves on their own land, because they do not own the land, like we do in PNG. They don't have a form of identity, because they don't get attached to any land. Thus, how can they preserve their culture? Our culture is attached to the land which binds people together. Our Constitution allows for the preservation of our culture. People in the country are mindful of their belonging.

Melanesian culture can be preserved. For instance, the Waitiki Treaty, which is between the indigenous Maoris and the white settlers, provides for full protection and preservation of Maori culture and land rights. However, in PNG, natives control the country, in terms of government. Thus, since the law already provides for it, the preservation of our Melanesian culture is inevitable.

Melanesian cultures can be preserved, because they are attached to the land, they are not hanging loose. The National Parliament shows or portrays the intention to preserve the Melanesian culture. Also, the National Museum, and the recent hosting of the Melanesian Arts Festival.

A unique thing I discovered during my sightseeing at the Melanesian Arts Festival Center is that Melanesians are proud and true contenders of the Culture. I am very patriotic about my culture, and about the country as well. Melanesian culture is what distinguishes Melanesia.

Melanesian culture can be preserved, despite the pressure of change by foreign civilizations. The main reason is because the Constitution of the country provides for its recognition and preservation. Also, the natives own the land. Thus, Melanesian Culture is well rooted in the country for preservation, unlike the culture of the Australian Aborigines. Preservation of Melanesian Culture is inevitable.

### Sherlina P.:

In the past, our Melanesian way of doing things and ways of living were different from how we do things and our ways of living today. Why has preserving Melanesian culture in the Melanesian way never worked in the past and why can it never work today? Because of the influence of Western cultures.

Western influence has changed the way of life of our Melanesian people – it changed their way of dressing, cooking, and living. It changed their lives through introducing new technologies in communication, medical care, transportation, and also by bringing Christianity to the heathen.

As we look back on our ancestors' old days, they wore traditional wear, they used traditional utensils to cook their food, they didn't have light to brighten their homes. They were nomadic, and used fire (smoke) for communication, as well as kundu drums. When the colonizers came, they introduced Western things to the people, and taught them how to speak English and Tok Pisin. So, again, preserving culture the Melanesian Way never worked yesterday, it does not work today, and will never ever work tomorrow!

Thank you.

### Livai K.:

Cultures in general cannot be preserved. All things are meant to change. For instance, one cannot cross the same river twice. One cannot remain 16 years old forever. However, there are some aspects of culture people can preserve. Culture refers to the way in which people do things existing in time immemorial. Hence, I will go for preservation of a particular aspect of Melanesian Culture, which is its Art and Design. Why? Because

1. Art and Design promote tourism
2. They are unique and vary from province to province
3. Those arts and designs have a million stories to tell to those who study them and are interested in Melanesian Art and Design.

Finally, Melanesian Art and Design are in high demand in the global market.

For example, we have a unique currency, such as K20, K2, K5, etc., different from other countries, because it is our traditional Art and Design. In addition, the 5th Melanesian Festival of Arts & Culture attracted tourists from all over the world. Our unique Art and Design have been incorporated into modern building, such as Parliament House.

During the 5<sup>th</sup> Melanesian Festival of Art & Culture, the Minister for Tourism and Culture stated that Papua New Guinea is a unique country, because of its wide range of arts and cultures. For instance, the Sepik art and design is not similar to those of Milne Bay Province. These skills in Art and Design are inherited from generation to generation. For instance, it does not need a man from Sepik to graduate with an Arts degree from UPNG to do the best design ever. And, as stated earlier, Art and Design can create job employment in the tourism industry, to improve people's standard of living. Therefore, Arts and Design must be preserved. The ways in which this can be done are as follows: the government can allocate/make funds available to build museums in each province, so that locals with the best designs can sell them, to be kept in those museums. In addition, all provincial governments should budget for their own provincial art and design cultural day.

### Nadika P.:

Melanesian culture is a diverse culture, with different people having their own culture, beliefs, and languages. With the recent turn of events, the question of whether Melanesian culture can be preserved is of importance. To be frank, it cannot.

The Melanesian culture is dying out, due to the changes taking place in our societies. With the education system in place, the so-called 'white men's' way of life is being taught and encouraged to be practiced, while the Melanesian way of life is discouraged. A clear example of this would be to help your relative/family member in a fight. This is, however, changing, due to the fact that, on the religious basis, this is not right. And PNG as a whole is a Christian country, and also this act is forbidden by the laws imposed by the Parliament. This clearly supports the fact that Melanesian cultures cannot be preserved.

Also, with technology, Melanesians are forgetting their traditional way of communicating, i.e. making a fire, so that smoke rises, thus communicating the message of a gathering. This was slow and ineffective,

compared with the modern communication system, such as the use of mobile phones, laptops, etc., which is fast and effective. This again supports the fact that Melanesian culture cannot be preserved.

Melanesian culture is slowly dying out, because Melanesians are adopting new ways of life that are effective and make life easier. Examples of this would be the ways of cooking, the type of shelter, etc. Melanesian way of cooking involved mumu, cooking food, such as sweet potato, in the ashes of the fire. This takes time, and has been substituted nowadays with electric stoves, ovens, microwaves, etc., which make life easier, instead of working for hours. So, Melanesians tend to use the cooking method that is not the Melanesian way, doing away with the Melanesian way of cooking.

A clear evidence of our culture dying out is that children, though from a Melanesian society, cannot speak their mother tongue. Though they may be born and raised in their own Melanesian societies, they may still not be able to speak their own language or understand what the elderly people are saying. This is even worse for children whose parents are working and who live in the towns. They do not know anything about their language or culture. This clarifies and establishes the fact that Melanesian culture cannot be preserved.

### Boash K.:

Melanesian cultures cannot be 'preserved.' Just look at the rapid growth of modernization in our societies – just look at how this generation is sucked up in the system! Reasons:

1. Western influence: Note that Western influence has touched every life, from the little to the big. It has changed our traditional food, fashion, thinking (reasoning), and even our norms and values. These are the core fundamentals of our culture. They are our identity. They are all gone – you just have to look around, and you will see none of them being practiced. For example, the practice of mumu, the use of vernacular, and many other old ways are very rare now.
2. Social media – it is one of the main factors of influence on the young ones' lives. Now about 85% of the students in Papua New Guinea are engaged in social media. They are directly influenced by what they see. As a result, there is a change in their fashion, language usage, and even their reasoning.

Now we understand that Melanesian cultures cannot be preserved from the contradicting forces of Westernization that has ripped off our cultures. A very good example is that, in the past, Melanesian discipline on fashion was very strong. Especially girls were not allowed to wear jeans and tight pants. They were strictly disciplined by their parents and elders not to put them on their bodies. However, this has greatly changed in the early 2000s. From 2007 onwards, this fear and respect have lost their validity. Now you just have to look outside your window and you will see countless numbers of girls who have moved with the change and have violated the Melanesian fashion.

Therefore, I just want to remind you all that Melanesian cultures cannot be preserved – today or in the future.

### Judy D.:

Bride Price should be maintained in the Melanesian society! A body without a head is just the same as us, Melanesian people, without our cultures and practices. Our unique practices have not only attracted the world's attention, they have attracted the world's attention, but have maintained the peaceful living of the Melanesian people. Bride price is another unique practice which is now becoming a controversial issue, because of the increase in educated women's population. However, this does not change the fact that it is still our culture, and that it should be maintained in the Melanesian society.

Firstly, respect and honor is an important part of the Melanesian society. Bride price is a way of showing that when a man pays bride price, everyone in the community recognizes him. He earns respect for his family as well, and people regard him as a real man in the society. It also, in a way, shows the wealth of his family.

Social needs of a person include the sense of belonging, or creating friendship with other people. When people marry, they move to a different place, to be with either the man or the woman. Bride price strengthens this relationship with the man's tribesmen and the woman's tribesmen, and so they are free to mingle with each other. For example, a Sepik lady married to a Highlands man. The bride price is a symbol of friendship that will allow people from both sides to sit together and talk at gatherings, share food, etc., say hi when meeting in other places, or help in times of trouble.

If something of high value is given to you, you would like to give something back as appreciation, wouldn't you? A daughter or woman is regarded as of high value by the parents and relatives in a Melanesian society. That is why parting with her is usually seen as a painful occasion. Bride price payment by the man is a way of saying Thank You after raising and training up a fine wife for him, which will be an asset for him for a lifetime.

Bride price also increases the wealth or supports the woman's family, if they are not that wealthy. Not only his in-laws, but the community as a whole. For example, a wealthy businessman marries a lady from the village. He can buy vehicles which will help in transporting them around, and also fund a clinic maybe or a local school, which will help in the development of the area.

Finally, our cultures and traditions are unique. Why should we trade them in or omit them from our lifestyles? They are beautiful, unique – they portray who we are – beautiful, caring, and loving people. If all our cultures are gone, what would we be? A pale imitation of Europe? Therefore, bride price should be maintained in our Melanesian society.

### Steven N.:

Why do you think we call ourselves Melanesians? Or, in the PNG context, why do you think we claim ourselves to be Papua New Guineans? In my view, we call ourselves Papua New Guineans and, in the regional context, Melanesians, because of one thing, and that is our common identity. Our identity is not found in the Western world and its ways, but it is found in our valuable cultures, traditions, customs, and the Melanesian folklore we mutually share in each society. Our forefathers realized the importance of maintaining our valuable customs and traditions, and kept them. Eventually, those valuable customs

and traditions have been passed on to us through adoption by generations, from one to the other. But in the contemporary PNG context, some of our cultural practices and customs may be considered outdated, maybe due to Western influence and change in time and space. Hence, the important issue to be addressed is, can Melanesian cultures be preserved?

Melanesian customs must be preserved at all costs, because our cultures give us our identity. Bernard Narakobi, a founding father of this nation and a person who critically and extensively wrote articles and books on the 'Melanesian Way,' said at the Waigani Seminar (Port Moresby) in 2009 that "our culture is our identity; if we lose our culture, we lose our identity." This is true for PNG and Melanesia. For example, we easily identify people of Eastern Highlands Province, and the Hela wigmen with the people of the New Hela Province. Hence, people are identified with their cultures.

Secondly, we must continue to maintain our Melanesian cultures, because they are valuable and because they are legally recognized. Under the Constitution, Schedule 2.2 provides for customs and ways of PNG to be recognized and applied as valid practices. Furthermore, the Customs Recognition Act of 2002 is the principal legislation which allows our worthy traditions and customs to be practiced and enforced in the legal system. Under Schedule 2.2 of the Constitution, a custom will not be applied or enforced, if it is inconsistent with an existent written law, or repugnant to the general principles of humanity. Otherwise, our worthy customs and traditions are here to stay with us into the future. The reason is that our laws recognize our customs and traditions. Furthermore, our people still practice most of our traditions and customs, such as the bride price system in the Highlands region, traditional dances, traditional songs, etc., performed in different societies.

Thirdly, we must continue to preserve our Melanesian culture, because some of these cultures tend to allow for the creation of good relationships between groups of people, and allow them to resolve disputes and live peacefully. For example, in the Highlands of PNG, where two tribes are in dispute over a piece of land, they will exchange food and gifts, with a view to harmonize that relationship. After this, they will have exchange marriages taking place between the disputing tribes. The bride price ceremony will mark the beginning of a new amicable relationship between the hostile tribes. Hence, the use of custom and traditions enables relationships and fosters peace in Melanesian communities, which is good for us.

You may think that Melanesian customs are outdated and that they should not be maintained into the future. However, our cultures are valuable, unique, and they give us our common identity as Melanesians. There are certain values attached to these customs and traditions, and that was the reason why they have been maintained for generations. Hence, culture is our identity which shaped our face as Melanesians and Papua New Guineans. If we lose our culture, we lose our identity and face.

### Ellery P.:

In the modern world we live in, technology is increasing, and the economic activity is booming. Inserting the culture of Melanesia into this will give back nothing beautiful; it will only lower the growth in technology and economy.

Firstly, we should know that culture holds back people from advancing in life. This is where technology is affected, because people cannot incorporate Melanesian customs with modern technology and change. They have been held back by their customs, dragged back from developing.

For example, bride price can be a factor in distributing technology which is the key into advancing into the modern world. Here girls are seen as barely participating effectively in most things. This is because, once bride price is given, men develop the behavior of owning a woman, which gives them strength to rule over women. My sister is a chemist, graduated in 2009, and married to a Grade 12 dropout. Due to the bride price system, the man feels that he owns my sister. Thus, he did not allow her to find work out of jealousy. We, as a family, had nothing to say, because we are bound by the custom – receiving the bride price means that we transferred the ownership of her to her husband.

So customs like bride price payment stand as a barrier to development and to the participation of ladies in the process of development is lowered.

Secondly, culture is also a barrier to economic development. Modern economy and trade involves zero staffs from the cultures of Melanesia. Australia, Japan, USA did not waste their precious time looking at their culture; their life is preoccupied by developing technology, which stimulates them into developing both themselves and their country.

In PNG, culture like ‘wantok system’ is the core of corruption and economic fragmentation. Where there is wantok system, there is bribery. This, in the long run, develops into selfishness. People want to get what they want, and get out, leaving the system/government blank. So, economy is affected.

For example, in my home back at Yonki, my distant cousin, who was not even an accountant, and had no knowledge in public relations and liaisons, was put into an office of Public Relations or PRO (Public Relations Officer). He did not know what to do, so people from the headquarters pulled the strings and used him as a puppet, to net the land owner benefits going there. And because he is attached with the big players, he does not mind whether his people benefit, as long as he gets paid every fortnight. So, the ‘wantok system’ as one of the cultures in Melanesia, it pulls us down from developing. Therefore, we should do away with those Melanesian customs at all levels.

### Stanley K.:

Melanesian cultures can be preserved the Melanesian Way! Our way of life is good for us – we solve issues by helping each other. God has created us in a specific place, and has blessed us with our own cultures. Our way of life is unique. However, due to technological changes, our people have adopted new cultures which contradict our cultures. That is why we see so many rapes, killings, stealing, etc., taking place.

European ways of living are totally different; they usually say that ‘time is money’; but to us, time is nothing – we can still survive, thus, nothing to worry about. We, Melanesians, have chains of relationships – we know very well who our neighbor is – but Europeans, they do not. We, Melanesians, when someone is down with problems, we help him/her in cash or kind to solve that problem. Europeans don’t live up to that way – they live as individuals.

Last night, we, the Western Highlands male students here at UPNG, clashed with our colleagues from Simbu. Four boys were injured due to the clash, one from Western Highlands and three from Simbu – but you know what happened. In the morning, which was the next day, we made a contribution, and Simbus did the same thing. We all came together, sat in a circle in the open air, discussed, exchanged a few coins, and solved the problem in the Melanesian way. Having saved time and cost, which is good, we are now living in the campus as brothers again, as if nothing had gone wrong.

That is why I believe that Melanesian Culture (Way) can be preserved.

### Steven S.:

Melanesian countries that are located in the Western end of the Pacific Ocean are culturally diverse. These Melanesian countries came under Western colonization and influence not long ago. However, there has been a gradual change in the lifestyle of the people, some cultural practices have changed, and many cultures are dying out. The question we should ask ourselves is, can our culture be preserved?

The causes of the changes taking place are too many – education, politics, religion, judicial system, etc. Education is seen as the main cause of change, because it actually shapes and changes the way people think. Melanesians, when educated with Western knowledge, bring it back to their own local societies and influence others to follow some of the Western ways. This contributes to the change in cultural practices from traditional to modern.

Another factor that causes changes in Melanesian cultures is the political system. Melanesian culture is so unique that it also has its own system of governance. However, since the modern system of governance has been adopted, it displaced the systems, traditionally practiced in the Melanesian societies.

Melanesians are full of traditional beliefs and customs that govern and define their existence. When religion, especially the Christian religion, entered most societies, the religious beliefs clashed with all the customs and practices of the Melanesians. This caused the customs and traditions that were once practiced to be rejected, because they contradicted the religious norms and practices.

Melanesians are governed by their own laws which are found in the customs and traditions. Some of these customs and traditions changed, because of the legal system, which viewed these customs as illegal. This changed the lives of the people, and their practices of customs.

Have Melanesian cultures really changed? Compare some of the cultures and customs that were practiced by Melanesians in the past, with those that are practiced today, and with those of other societies around the world.

Looking at Japan's history, it isolated itself from the rest of the world, because it didn't want outside influence. It eventually achieved what it had aimed for, despite some little changes that took place because of outside influence. However, changes still took place, and up until now, no country in the world still lives in the traditional lifestyle. All have changed. Melanesian cultures are vulnerable to change which is a fact we cannot deny.

One change we as Papua New Guineans have experienced is in what we eat. Traditionally, we used to eat food that we harvested from the garden. Nowadays, we only eat store food. In fact, some of the foods we eat from the store, we don't even know what they are made of. Winston Churchill, in one of his speeches, talked about the 'wind of change' – this refers to the Western influence. Whether we like it or not, we cannot prevent changes from happening in Melanesian cultures.

Therefore, we cannot prevent the changes that are taking place – they are for the betterment of our countries and even our own lives.

### Florida G.:

As a Melanesian, I believe that yes, our Melanesian culture can be preserved, despite the everyday influences and changes we have in our societies. This is because our culture speaks of who we are – our cultural identity; it shows our values and beliefs and true tradition of who we really are; it gives the background/ history of our land and its people – something that people must know.

Reasons why:

Firstly, the respective languages we speak from the provinces we come from can be preserved, if we value them, and try not to change them, like some do today. For example, words are being influenced and mixed, so that you sometimes find yourself mixing your local vernacular with the modern language. If we stop changing and influencing our traditional mother tongues with today's modernity, there is a high chance we can preserve that part of our culture and identity.

Secondly, there are our traditional customs and beliefs – these two are most important in any Melanesian society. These beliefs and customs people have must be preserved and passed down through age and time, so that there is still someone in a society to uphold this Past of culture. For example, most Melanesian societies still practice the tradition of feasting – that is one thing we can't easily do away with. It is a clear representation of us preserving our culture.

Thirdly, is our traditional bilas (dressings) and singsings. Though these may be fading away, as soome say, it is due to a mix of cultures and the introduction of modern wears; I believe we still preserve this part of our culture, proven by the cultural and the National Independence days, when our people truly show their unique traditional dress, singsings and customs, giving pride to the citizens. This shows identity as Melanesians – yes, of course, we can still preserve this part of our culture.

Hopefully, you can now clearly see that, with the changes and influences we have coming in so fast, we still have reasons to preserve our culture as Melanesians, because, if we don't, we would clearly indicate that we don't know who we are and where we stand as Melanesians.