Chapter Eight

BLACK STONE AND THE POETICS OF EQUILIBRIUM: THE POETRY OF GRACE MERA MOLISA

(Book Cover of Black Stone 1983)

"Amazing Grace"

Grace Mera Molisa died in January 2002 from complications arising from diabetes. The tributes that poured in from around the world indicated the impact she had as an activist on behalf of women, and as a political figure, an environmentalist, a poet, and loved friend. She is survived by Sela Molisa, her husband and Vanuatu's Minister of Lands, and by three children, Viran, Pala and Vatu.

"Amazing Grace" was an affectionately used nick-name for her within South Pacific Non-Government Organisations, political and feminist circles. She was viewed as "amazing" owing to her personal fearlessness at confronting oppression and political hypocrisy, her radical way of thinking about women's initiatives, about sustainable development of the environment, and about how Vanuatu should realise its Independence, and for her uncompromising stand for women and the improvement of their quality of life. By her more enlightened peers she was often seen as someone ahead of her time; by less sympathetic onlookers she was dismissed as a 'radical'. For her work in politics and women's affairs she suffered public ostracism and loss of employment, and for her poetry she became famous in the literary circles of the Pacific. Indeed, this pioneer of Ni-Vanuatu Independence, women's rights and indigenous arts was "amazing" by anyone's standards. Her nickname also puns on the title of the popular hymn, which evokes themes of salvation for the lost, justice for the oppressed, and freedom for the enslaved – themes and images which Molisa strategically manoeuvred in her public roles. In her role as a poet with a strong commitment to fairness, truth, and equality, she saw herself as having a communal responsibility to be a 'poet of the people' with a central preoccupation: the restoration and maintenance of equilibrium in cultural and gender relations.

Molisa's poetry and political activities (including her commitment as an environmentalist) endeavour to restore balance and equilibrium from a Melanesian (the 'true people of the place') standpoint. In the colonial era Vanuatu was ruled by a Joint Condominium between Britain and France – torn apart and separated under two distinct political and social administrative systems that dictated the implementation of two different language, education, religious, policing, and medical systems (Appendix A: Vanuatu: A Brief History).[1] The pull of two different imperial cultures and the constant power struggles between them ultimately

[1] Note that this Appendix appears at the end of Chapter Nine (also on Molisa), as well as two other Appendices and 'Works Cited', which refers to Chapters Eight and Nine.

tipped the scales of power against indigenous people in their own communities. Whereas colonialism operated on a 'divide and conquer' policy (Vanuatu 42), Molisa called for indigenous unity, responsive to Walter Lini's call for the development of a "Melanesian Way" (Vanuatu 63), with self-defined and self-determined goals. Like Makini, Molisa not only sought to develop a "Melanesian Way" by deploying indigenous metaphors throughout her poetry, but by addressing the area of women's rights seeks to restore balance.

After briefly examining the formative influences on Molisa's life (more detailed background information is provided in Appendix B), her literary context in Vanuatu, and the poetics of politics inherent in her poetry, this chapter explores her poetic strategies to address the imbalance of power: primarily between coloniser and indigenous person, but also between Ni-Vanuatu men and women. It is the contention of much feminist and anthropological research in the Pacific that prior to colonialism there were social, cultural and political systems in place within indigenous societies that had mechanisms for dealing with potentially oppressive imbalances of power between the genders: for example, matrilineal clans, and the fostering of women's and men's separate and autonomous organisations (see Jolly, "Woman"; "Woman-nation-state"). Colonialism undermined many of these mechanisms because they did not fit into the Western model of civilised 'Christian' societies. Furthermore, colonialism implanted and reinforced its own destructive models in social organisations,[2] and in its ordering of ruling bodies, food and economic production and so forth. For Molisa, poetry provides a key means of addressing imbalances, restoring equilibrium.

Molisa's poetry is informed by the fact that she is an assertive, highly-educated, well travelled, community-oriented, Christian, politically adept Ni-Vanuatu woman in a post-colonial society that is highly volatile. Her Christian faith serves to complement and strengthen her strong sense of nationalism and cultural pride. Having been grounded in her native Ambae ways, she was confident and successful in both indigenous and Western cultures and education systems. She achieved many 'firsts' as a Ni-Vanuatu woman in education and politics (see Appendix B: Molisa's Biography). As this and the following chapter will demonstrate, Molisa used poetry (among her other talents) to follow the footsteps of her father, a man who argued for unity in cultural diversity when a common cause was at stake.

---

[2] For example, the promotion of nuclear families instead of kinship-structured families often severed women from the supportive network of extended families and made them heavily reliant on (and susceptible to the domination of) one man – the husband.

Because Molisa's poetry is stylistically shaped and influenced by her politics, her indigeneity, and her gender, and on first impression seems to be message- rather than image- oriented, polemical rather than lyrical, it has been vulnerable to dismissal – even if inadvertently – on "literary" grounds. In a paper presented at the 1988 Pacific Writer's conference in London, Griffen briefly examined how Molisa appropriates the English language for feminist purposes. She summarised Molisa's work as a powerful and dynamic example of the type of "message poetry" found throughout the colonised Pacific, placing it in opposition to that of Wordsworth, a poet of "emotion recollected in tranquility" (14). Unfortunately such an opposition plays into a stultifying 'arts *versus* politics' binarism. Subramani's survey of Pacific Literature, South Pacific Literature: From Myth to Fabulation (1992) exhibits a similar tendency. To describe poetry solely as didactic, exhortatory, rhetorical and dogmatic, with the single aim of mobilising public sentiment, as Subramani does when describing Vanuatu poetry as a whole (50), is to use the historical specificity of the work as a means of denying its value. Subramani himself *begins* to break down the binary opposition when he links hortatory poetry to older genres of oral literature (53). However, for others the words 'polemical' and 'political' are used as a type of final judgement rather than as a means of opening the poetry to broader contexts. My aim, in this chapter and the next, is to demonstrate the effectiveness of Molisa's poetry as a functional political tool and the richness of her use of poetic language and metaphor.

The Literary Context in Vanuatu

The first forum for indigenous creative writing in Vanuatu, following the tradition of the Kakamora Reporter in the Solomon Islands, was a magazine published and edited by Father Walter Lini called the New Hebrides Viewpoint, which began (a year after the Kakamora Reporter) in 1971. The magazine was linked to the New Hebrides Cultural Association, which eventually became known as the indigenous political party, the Vanuaaku Pati, and funds from the magazine supported its administration (Lini 25). Like its Solomon Islands counterpart it provided a forum for the exchange of ideas, and for political and social commentary.

Occasionally it published poetry and ran competitions for the best poem of the year (Subramani 17), thus linking the practice of art with the political struggle for independence. A more specialized literary forum was established in 1975, a productive year for anthologies,

with the aid of the South Pacific Creative Arts Society. Albert Wendt edited Some Modern Poetry From Vanuatu, a 43 page volume containing 33 poems by various authors. Wendt noted in his brief introduction that the anthology contained most of the poetry written in English by Ni-Vanuatu. Some contributors had never written before, and others would not write again. Some, however, such as Donald Kalpokas and Albert Leomala, would further develop their writing to become reputable poets. The collection featured poetry written in both English and Pidgin dialects, and was vigorously anti-colonial, often directly addressing French and British colonials and demanding that they return to their own countries. Other poems exhorted indigenous people to action, lamenting an inheritance of dispossession in their own land. In the same year a collection of poetry by young New Hebridean poets writing in both English and Pidgin, entitled Some Modern Poetry From the New Hebrides, was also published by Mana, as well as Gong: Young Voices from the New Hebrides (Suva: SPCAS), an anthology edited by Anne Stamford. As was the case with Wendt's anthology of Vanuatu poetry, this would also be revised and reprinted (in 1983) with the same title and publishers.

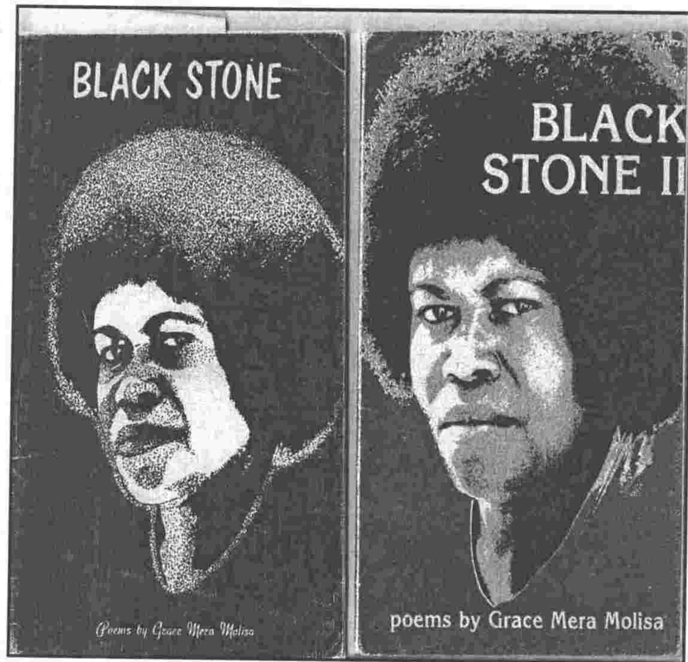
Walter Lini's autobiographical account of the pre-Independence years, Beyond Pandemonium, was published in 1980, three years before Molisa's Black Stone (Suva: SPCAS Mana Publications). In 1984 Joshua Mael authored Tunuen Telamun Tenout Voum (Port Vila: USP Centre UPS), a collection of short stories in the Paama language, and in 1987 Molisa produced her second collection, Colonised People (Port Vila: Black Stone Publications), followed by a third in 1989 entitled Black Stone II: Poems (Vanuatu: Black Stone Publications). Black Stone Publications was founded and managed by Molisa herself. Also in 1989 Sam Ngwele published his first collection of poetry, Bamboo Leaves: A Collection of Poems (Suva: Commonwealth Youth Programme, South Pacific regional Centre and the South Pacific Creative Arts Society), and in 1991 Jo Dorras and Peter Walker co-authored a play, The Old Stories: A Play about the History of Vanuatu (Port Vila: Australian South Pacific Cultures Fund). In 1997 Molisa's poems were translated into French and published in Noumea (Pierre Noire / Grace Mera Molisa; Poemes Traduits par Dewe Gorode. Noumea, Nouvelle-Caledonie: Grain de Sable, 1997). Molisa published numerous non-fiction works reflecting her involvement in politics (Raet Blong Pipol: Wea Rod? Port Vila, Vanuatu: Blackstone Publications, 1991; Governance in Vanuatu: In Search of the Nakamal Way. Canberra, ACT: Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies, Australian National University, 1999), women's rights (Woman Ikat Raet Long Human Raet

o No?: Convensen Blong Stopem Evri Kaen Diskrimineisen Agensem ol Woman (Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women). Port Vila, Vanuatu: Blackstone Publications/Sun Publications, 1991), culture ("Tahi Gogona, An Origin Myth from the New Hebrides: Five Interpretations." Eds. Ruth Finnegan and Raymond Pillai. Essays on Pacific Literature. Fiji Museum, Oral Tradition Series, 2. Suva, Fiji, 1978) and the arts ((Local Global: Indigenous Arts Communications Networking. Port Vila, Vanuatu: Black Stone Publications, 1994).[3] Active until her life was cut short, Molisa's last work, Women and Good Governance (Port Vila, Vanuatu: Blackstone Publications, 2002), was published posthumously.

There has yet to be any significant critical commentary on this emergent body of writing in Vanuatu, let alone an in-depth critique of Molisa's work. As the above survey indicates hers has been the dominant female voice in emergent Vanuatu creative writing.

Molisa's Body of Work and her Role as Poet

One cannot get past the dynamism of Molisa as a poet and public figure in political and community affairs throughout the Pacific. She is vocal, volatile and triumphantly visible. The covers of each of her publications are cases in point. The cover of Black Stone (1983) consists of a white imprint of Molisa's face on a black background. Although published by Mana, this image has become a trademark used in many of Molisa's works. Figuratively and literally in the poetry as in her involvement in politics, issues are 'black and white' – clear, decisive. The self-portraits represent Molisa's relatively high profile and her unapologetic presence in both poetry and politics. Clearly, Molisa is the power behind the text. The image of Molisa's head looks directly into the reader's eyes, her body language indicating challenge, personal daring and strength. In Black



[3] See Works Cited for a full list of Molisa's publications.

Stone (1983) Molisa's face emerges from a black background, a colour linked symbolically with the new nation of Vanuatu for which "Black Stone" is a metaphor, referring both to the volcanic foundation of the land and also to its indigenous people (see "Vanuatu" in Black Stone). The emergence of Molisa's image from the black background of the cover in Black Stone (1983) thus links her voice with that of the indigenous people, and of the political party she was involved with at the time, the 'New Hebrides National Party', which distinguished itself from Francophone competition by renaming itself the 'Vanuaaku Pati' and renaming the former colony of New Hebrides "Vanua`aku", meaning "Our land" (Plant 10). In her poem, "Victim of Foreign Abuse" (Black Stone 12), this indigenous political party is identified with the "rural mass movement" as opposed to the "self-interested petty bourgeois dissident urban fringe". Black Stone addresses an Independent nation just three years old. It is primarily concerned with the birthing pains of a newly independent nation tackling issues of national identity, neo-colonialism, corruption, tourism, freedom of the press, and the oppressive situation of women.

Black Stone II (1989) retains the same cover with a few modifications of colour and detail that serve to modernise it. Though Molisa's pose is slightly different and the shot is closer, she remains looking from her left to right, staring straight into the reader's eyes. The background is purple, a colour that may refer to the canonical feminist palette. The image of Molisa is toned in white, grey and black, and seems closer to a photograph than to the line drawing from Black Stone. A more realistic effect may have been the aim, with the implicit message that this is a real woman with real concerns. The title remains in white against a black background. However, the black colour is not part of the cover background, but emerges from Molisa's natural, distinctly Melanesian hair, reinforcing the connection between the author and indigeneity. This collection, written six years after the first, speaks more questioningly of the identity crisis of a growing nation, of the "false gleam" of Independence, and the daily reality of neo-colonialism. It speaks directly of the concerns of the general population of Vanuatu: those who have seen Ni-Vanuatu come to power and are aware of the problems of indigenising a doubly foreign (hence doubly alienating) system of government entrenched over 73 years in the Joint Condominium; those exposed to the dangers of neo-colonialism; and those who remain disempowered in the new system as in the former colonial one.

The cover of Molisa's second volume, Colonised People (1987), differs significantly from

those of her first and third collections of poetry, dispensing with the recognisable headshot of the author, and signalling a shift in her subject matter, and in the target group for whom she 'speaks'. In contrast to the confrontational pose of Molisa looking out towards the reader in a posture of formidable strength and power, the cover of Colonised People offers a black and white photograph featuring a young, bare-breasted Ni-Vanuatu girl supporting a baby on her hip. Both stare out from the black and white print directly into the eyes of the reader. The background from which they emerge is a blur of images, possibly people or trees, perhaps suggesting an absence or loss of community identity.

This cover suggests that Molisa is presenting the views of an otherwise invisible community represented by this young girl and baby – women, girls, mothers, wives, sisters, daughters, children – those who remain outside the realm of national decision-making but whose lives are the most affected by such decisions. Molisa is unabashed about claiming to speak for those unable to speak for themselves or represent themselves at a national level: "I believe that everything I say for women I say on behalf of that group" (Griffen, "Interviews" 76). The volume conveys the continuing plight of women in a newly independent nation and addresses some of the promises made in the nationalist rhetoric of Independence which were particularly aimed at women – promises still to be fulfilled by those in power. And the poems range across the social spectrum of women's lives in both urban and rural contexts.

All of Molisa's poems are written in English. Although she has demonstrated her ability to cross language barriers and appeal to indigenous, Anglophone, and Francophone readers alike by producing tri-lingual publications,[4] these are notoriously time-consuming and expensive. Although Molisa was first literate in the Ambae dialect, English became the dominant learned language of literacy throughout her formal education. As other Pacific

[4] In 1991 Molisa published Woman Ikat Raet O No? ('Have Women Got Rights or Not?'), a tri-lingual non-fiction publication (in Bislama, French, and English) which announced Vanuatu's ratification of the United Nations "Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women".

authors have noted, it is often easier to express oneself in writing in English despite one's thoughts being in one's mother tongue. Furthermore, as seen in the experience of other writers protesting against neo/colonialism, Molisa may have felt that she was less constrained in challenging the establishment under the 'protection' of writing in English. Like Thaman, Molisa may have felt less constrained by *kastom* and tradition by writing in English. Indeed, it may be no coincidence that Molisa was dismissed from her job as Second Secretary to the Prime Minister soon after she published the tri-lingual publication Women Ikat Raet o No?, which informed Ni-Vanuatu women of their legally enforceable rights.

However, perhaps the issue of her intended readership was decisive in Molisa's choice of English as the language of her poetry. Although she speaks "on behalf of" Ni-Vanuatu women (Griffen, "Interviews" 76) – the disempowered, the dispossessed, and those rendered voiceless by abusive power hierarchies – she is not necessarily speaking *to* them. Those who lack political, social and economic power do not need to be told that they are disempowered. They need to be told of their rights and informed how to realise them, and this Molisa does more directly through informational publications written in Bislama (the pidgin lingua franca of Vanuatu) with a wide appeal to grassroots organisations and rural communities.[5] In her poetry however Molisa's primary intended readers are the male 'power brokers' of Vanuatu, who remain the decision makers, as she stipulated in an interview:

> I am telling anybody else who doesn't know and needs to know in order that they make decisions that are in line with the problem areas that exist; in order that those decisions made in the light of the real situations address the needs and solve the needs. So, really I'm trying to express what the silent bulk of womanhood has not found voice to express before. Really I am talking to our decision makers who are mostly men (Griffen, "Interviews" 76).

Molisa's use of English thus reflects the Anglophone bias of the Vanua`aku Pati members, most of whom were educated in an English system (Griffen, "Interviews" 76; Jolly, "Woman-nation-state"), and it may also reflect the fact that English (and Bislama) are by far the predominant languages spoken by people, even in areas where French education programmes have been longest established (Jupp and Sawer 551). Molisa's choice of language may also have an international political dimension. By employing English she potentially exposes the internal politics of Vanuatu to the global English-speaking community.

[5] The three official languages of Vanuatu are English, French, and Bislama. Bislama arose from the colonial period, primarily for communication between the colonisers and the indigenous peoples, but it also strongly served to link groups of different dialects throughout Vanuatu (Jolly, "Birds" 347). It has now become a distinct language.

The following section briefly explores Molisa's types of poetry, and in particular, how Molisa's communalist politics inform her work.

Molisa's Style of Poetry

Like the majority of first generation Pacific Island writers publishing in English Molisa had no formal training in or involvement with creative writing prior to the publication of her poetry. She comments that only her many years of "pen pushing" as a teacher gave her confidence with writing as a medium of expression, and that she began writing poetry "by accident" when she responded to a public call for Vanuatu to be more tourist-friendly. Indignant at the eurocentricism being imposed upon her own people because they were not being accommodating enough to the prescriptive needs of foreigners, Molisa argued that, on the contrary, Vanuatu needed more "intelligent tourists" (Griffen, "Interviews" 75). A piece of her prose published in the Vanua`aku Pati newspaper attracted comments about its poetic flavour, so Molisa decided to employ a 'cut and paste' method and turn it into a poem:

> Since it was a very short piece, I simply rearranged it, just for fun, chopped the lines into short sections, lined them up one after another, and it became the very first poem, "Vatu Invocation" (Griffen, "Interviews" 74-75).

Molisa's account of stumbling into poetry – by accident and for fun – downplays the extent to which, throughout her poetic career, Molisa has been extremely self-conscious about her role as 'writer' and about the possibilities of poetry as a communicative tool and political weapon. In 1993 she commented:

> [T]he doctor, the dentist, the journalist are all using their acquired book-knowledge band-aiding immediate short-term needs. On the other hand, the writer writing consciously for the well-being, the shaping of the collective life of a community, culturally, religiously, politically, economically, for the developing of a people's character and mentality now, but more especially towards the future, involves a long-term situation which takes into account things that have happened in history, our present realities and concerns for the future welfare of humanity as we live in our villages in our home countries. And when the kinds of knowledge that are written about happen to go beyond national borders, they become inputs into the whole body of global knowledge (Griffen, "Interviews" 80).

Her sense of communal responsibility, and her sense of poetry as superior to other socially

valued (and paid) professions, are especially informative. However, the professions Molisa cites do indicate the ideals she aims for. While doctors and dentists may heal people's bodies, poetry may heal people's minds; and while journalists make knowledge public, expose truths, and educate the community about what is immediately occurring in their own world and beyond, poetry does the same, but in a longer time frame, and with a focus on fundamental principles. For Molisa, while there is room for what she terms "passive poetry" (which she defines as "poetry for poetry's sake"), poetry of higher value "generates corrective action" (Griffen, "Interviews" 78). For Molisa the *primary* role of poet involves a serious commitment to social transformation.

Molisa's Local Global: Indigenous Arts Communications Networking (1994) is an account of her experience at an Indigenous Artists' Conference in 1993, Ottawa, Canada, with the theme "Beyond Survival". The purpose of the conference was to gather indigenous artists together in order to share concerns and experiences, and encourage a sense of global mission. Again, according to Molisa's definition, the artist's responsibility is primarily to the community rather than to the individual:

> Artists, people skilled in expressing the feelings and visions of their people play an essential role in establishing, recording, documenting and preserving the Cultural Identity of their people, their experiences, feelings and situations of their time (29).

The assumption here is that the artist needs to be in touch with the community, not, as in the popular Western image, isolated from it, let alone a tortured genius in exile. However, it needs to be noted that in post-colonial societies the same Western dilemmas are beginning to emerge. In Papua New Guinea, Beier observes the disconnection of artists from their more traditional societies with the creation of urban centres and island metropols, and the impact of diverse cultural, social, religious, and regional influences on an art that is no longer specific to the artist's own village or area (Beier 1).

For Molisa, community service through art remains a priority, and her sense of this responsibility is couched in an intense religious language:

> Artists are gifted by the Spirit of their Community to distill and express the essence of their community's cultural social, political and economic environment through whatever form of art the Artist employs. The same Spirit of Creativity, the same spirit of the Creator moves Artists (Local 30).

This, despite the fact that the community may be, as Molisa lists the possibilities:

> Oblivious
> Indifferent
> Persecuting
> Acclaiming (Local 31).

Molisa's intense community commitments do not, however, exclude the deployment of non-traditional, contemporary, experimental forms of expression, even in her most seemingly didactic poetry. Cases in point are Molisa's notorious 'table' poems, the insertion of actual governmental statistical tables *as* poems in poetry. In Colonised People Molisa includes two such table poems entitled "Ni-Vanuatu Women in Development" and "Usual Occupation of Vanuatu Citizens 15 Years and Over 1986 Urban Census". In 1995 I took part in a vigorous debate in the Pacific Literature course held at the English Department of the University of Hawai`i at Manoa, about the "status" of such pieces as poetry. How far, it was asked, can the genre of poetry be used as a political tool and retain its creative integrity? Was such writing a crude attempt at masking politically damaging information as poetry, or a clever experimentation with poetry in a politically dynamic context? Most argued that such blatant 'cutting and pasting' was invalid, as poetry: the tables conveyed statistical information only,

NI-VANUATU WOMEN IN DEVELOPMENT

Achievement	1980		1981		1982		1983		1984		1985		1986	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
Parliament	39	0	39	0	39	0	39	0	39	0	39	0	39	0
Council of Ministers	9	0	9	0	9	0	9	0	9	0	9	0	9	0
National Development Council	-		-		9	0	9	0	9	0	9	0	9	0
First Secretary	10	0	10	0	10	0	10	0	11	0	11	0	11	0
Second Secretary	12	1	12	1	12	1	12	1	12	2	12	2	12	4
Third Secretary	-		-		-		-		11	0	11	0	11	0
Head of Department	46	0	46	0	46	0	46	0	46	0	46	0	46	0
Deputy Head of Department	12	0	12	0	12	0	12	0	12	0	12	0	12	0
Public Service Commission	-		5	1	5	1	5	1	5	1	5	1	5	1
Teaching Service Commission	-		-		-		5	0	5	0	5	0	5	0
Judicial Service Commission	-		4	0	4	0	4	0	4	0	4	0	4	0
Doctors*	-		-		-		-		-		-		10	0
Lawyers*	-				-		-		-		-		2	0
Computer Programmers / Systems Analysts*	-		-		-		-		-		-		2	0
Forestry Workers*	-		-		-		-		-		-		16	0
Transport Equipment Operators*	-		-		-		-		-		-		470	0
Machinery Fitters, Mechanics etc*	-		-		-		-		-		-		221	0
Electrical Fitters*	-		-		-		-		-		-		73	0
Plumbers, Welders etc*	-		-		-		-		-		-		70	0
Total occupation	128	1	137	2	146	2	151	2	163	3	163	3	1027	5

19

There are no women Heads of Department, but five women are heads of very large sections:

1) Mrs R. Vira	Philatelic	1980-87
2) Mrs R. Lolo	Women's Affairs	1980-87
3) Mrs M. Worek	Scholarships	1980-86
4) Mrs R. Tor	Public Training Centre	1985-87
5) Mrs T. Hains	Vila Central Hospital Manager	1980-86

Sources: * 1986 Urban Census (Urban population only; figures for other years are not available.)
Vocational Training and Labour Market Report, 1987
Statistics Office, NPSO

20

and lacked any 'poetic' quality. Interestingly, although Albert Wendt included "Ni-Vanuatu

Women in Development" in Nuanua, the second Pacific anthology (1995), he omitted the final section of the poem, which references an official documentary source as: "1986 Urban Census, Vocational Training and Labour Market Report, 1987 and the Statistics Office, NPSO."

The very strength of the table poem lies, in my view, in its "documentary" statement of powerful facts. The table poem is exactly that – a table poem. It was read as such by Wendt and viewed as an important statement made through the genre of poetry.

The creative act of the table poem is to be found in its very nature. By reproducing the table – otherwise invisible within government records – within the context of poetry, Molisa makes its message poignant, powerful, and above all accessible. It takes on multiple meanings, in its own terms and in relation to surrounding poems, transferring its bleak facts to a larger and more varied group of readers than would otherwise be the case, and generating an emotive dimension: an angry protest at women's invisibility, and their under-representation in the paid work force, despite government rhetoric minimalising the inequalities suffered by women.

Father Walter Lini's Beyond Pandemonium: From the New Hebrides to Vanuatu (1980) – an important book which traces the journey from dual colonisation to Independence – provides an insight into the many women's issues that were marginalised at official policy levels, and explains why, in poems like "Ni-Vanuatu Women in Development" and "Usual Occupation of Vanuatu Citizens 15 Years and Over 1986 Urban Census", Molisa draws direct, "statistical" attention to the occupational and social inequalities suffered by women. Although Lini acknowledges the importance of the national economic input of women, he argues against instituting programmes specifically addressing women's needs because of their potential to arouse adverse "custom" reactions, and (the classic patriarchal argument) fear of dividing the nation. Furthermore, he adds "…there is a danger in concentrating too much on women's affairs and forgetting that, in our society, men's values need to keep pace with these changes" (34).

Molisa's table poems, in my view, represent a sophisticated *poetic* deployment of an apparently simple technique, and are matched, in other poems, by a highly controlled and sophisticated command of the English language. Much of her poetry is dependent upon word play and

word-association, a deliberate use of technical language, and a compacting of formal, metrical, prose utterance into lines of no longer than four words, and commonly only one or two words, creating pillar-like visual effects, enhanced by controlled employment of poetic technical devices, particularly the use of assonance and consonance. "Hilda Lini", a poem about one of the first female Members of Parliament (and a personal friend), recounts the difficulty of the political road ahead of her protagonist as a young woman in a sexist, colonial society:

> Hilda is
> Vanuatu
> womanhood
> barbarized
> vandalized
> suppressed
> oppressed
> spurious
> allegations
> scurrilous
> accusations
> misjudgemental
> miscalculations
> indiscriminately
> incriminating.
> the
> indignity
> and
> ignominy
> of such
> abominable
> abhorable
> inhuman
> injustice
> cannot
> last
> forever.
>
> Powerful
> men
> can
> fool
> some
> of the women
> some
> of the time
> but not
> all
> of the women

all
of the time. (Colonised People, 26-27)

The method injects energy and feeling into the language, reflecting the national and personal turmoil felt during the period of transition, and it also forces attention onto the words themselves, detaching them from their familiar rhetorical, prose contexts. Molisa breaks with traditional poetic forms acquired through her eurocentric education, and as Griffen observes, makes the word a "site for struggle" in a new structure that seems designed to serve her own purposes rather than be evaluated against the coloniser's literary canon (Griffen, "Women"), although her ironic play on English phrases and clichés demonstrates that she too can play the game of colonial English. "Vatu Invocation" is an extreme case of playing the colonisers' game, in which Molisa draws upon the central canonical text, the Bible, in an ironic post-colonial "Lord's Prayer":

Heavenly Father
omnipresent
in London
Paris
and Canberra.

Look down
with mercy
upon us
your naïve
and gullible servants
doomed
to the colonial legacy of
watching
passively
from the periphery
our prime resources
raped
for the gratification of
corporate greed
and
individual
pleasure seekers.

Give us
this day
divine guidance
in our choice
of tourists
technical advisors
investors
and entrepreneurs…

Grant that we may receive
HIGH CLASS tourists
who will appreciate
our cultural diversity
our primitive grotesque artifacts
and revel in
the unadulterated beauty
of our virgin bushes
and natural environment.

Lead
our young men and women
not
into the temptation
of prostituting
their bodies
for the tourist market
particularly
in the Hotel Industry
as has inevitably
happened
in more developed countries…

This
we ask you
heavenly father
in the name of Burns Philp
Air Vanuatu
and the Tourist Authority.

Although it is common critical practice, Molisa's poetry need not be solely reduced to its predominantly political and message-orientated form. It is also energised by extended metaphors or symbols which function as motifs bringing together her personal and political concerns. The title of two of her volumes, "Black Stone", draws attention to a primary metaphor in her work, reflecting the geography and geology of Vanuatu, the Independent nation itself, and Molisa's determination to recognise and restore balance and equilibrium to the state of Vanuatu and the state of Ni-Vanuatu women – volcanic rock. It is to this rich structuring metaphor in her poetry that I now turn.

Chapter Nine

BLACK STONE, VOLCANIC ROCK: POLITICS AND CULTURE IN THE WRITINGS OF GRACE MERA MOLISA

"A symbol is as useful to the soul, as a tool is to the hand." (Jean Toomer, Essentials).

"Woman I Bildimap Vanuatu" (Who Will Carry the Bag?).[1]

For Molisa, the symbol that reflects much of the essence in her poetry is the volcano. This archaic vault of power and its manifesting properties can be seen as a metaphor for Molisa the person, the poet, the politician, the proud Ni-Vanuatu. It informs her poetic meaning, it feeds her creative imagination, it signifies both the personal and political and shapes her poetic soul, finally coagulating black, harsh, uncompromising, and indelibly onto the page.

Black stone is both a figurative and literal reference to the volcanic foundations upon which the islands of Vanuatu are built. It is cleverly used by Molisa as a metaphorical framework for two of her three collections, (Black Stone (1983) and Black Stone II (1989), and provides the name of her publishing company, which published her second and third collections as well as numerous non-fiction, informational publications. Its significance for her poetry is first introduced in the title poem of her first volume:

> "Black Stone"
>
> Black Stone
> Molten lava
> solidified.
>
> Solid
> jagged forms
> starkly
> awe inspiring.

[1] An approximate translation is "Women build up Vanuatu".

Black Stone
flowing free
from depths
unknown
a viscous form
coagulated.

Jet black
sleeping fortress
weather rock
come wind or shine.

Black Stone
hard
and obstinate
indelible
solidity.

Black Stone
bird of wealth
solid bedrock
dwelling of death.

Eternal essence
of immortal soul's
steadfast fixture
founding Man's
physical cosmos.

Threshold
of the spirits
transfixed
to the stable
equilibrium
of constancy
and permanence.

Black Stone
immovable
immobile
Black Stone (8).[2]

The poem describes the volatile nature of the volcano that both creates and destroys, forming permanent foundations while in constant transition. As earth unknown, it is also injected with personality ("obstinate") and hence, is potentially knowable; it is "eternal", not just in its bedrock solidity but in the spiritual history embedded in it. Figuratively, it unites the cultural and linguistic diversity of Vanuatu in a post-colonial era, where a *national* front is

[2] The last three stanzas appear on same page, starting from the third stanza, line five.

essential in global politics (Lini 63). Elemental in the geography of Vanuatu, the volcano as a symbol speaks across cultures, providing a point of shared reference for otherwise distinct island-based peoples.

In personal terms, the volcano also identifies Molisa's poetry as a "site of struggle". The pinnacle structures formed by words on the page suggest columns of volcanic rock, thin pillars of black on white, the connection hinted at in the lines:

> Solid
> jagged forms
> starkly
> awe inspiring (Black Stone 8).

Indeed, although we read down the poem, as each poem is visualised as a whole, it also appears, in another perspective, to 'rise up' from the page – perhaps another creative realisation of the meaning of "Vanuatu", which also translates as "land standing up" (Jolly, "Woman" 7). The act of standing connotes independence and self-determination – identifying Molisa's thematic concerns on both nationalist and feminist levels. Like her father before her, Molisa attempts unity in diversity in the aftermath of a colonialism that ruled on the "divide and conquer" principle. Arguably there are only a few indigenous metaphors able to bridge Vanuatu's cultural and linguistic diversity. It is a place where the phrase "*wan wan aelan*" (each separate island) is used to reflect the level of heterogeneity of the islands. There are approximately 110 different languages and dialects of the more than eighty islands that constitute Vanuatu, and hundreds of autonomous clans (Huffman; Jolly, "Woman-nation-state" 15). Finding shared metaphors is perhaps easier in predominantly monocultural societies such as Samoa or Tonga where there is one indigenous language and one generally observed form of cultural practise (notwithstanding minor internal and regional variations). Only the broadest metaphors are able to cross the numerous "cultural beaches" (Dening) within the island 'nation' of Vanuatu, a notion which is itself a colonial construct formed out of indigenous necessity (Jolly, "Woman-nation-state"). The forced physical and ideological unification of previously culturally and linguistically diverse, and often autonomous, regions under the banner of 'nationhood' does not necessarily unite peoples in practise, nor in relation to one another.

Molisa's metaphor of the volcano is also used to evoke the Melanesian principle of '*man ples*'.

The Bislama dictionary definition of this noun defines it as "a local person; Melanesian (as opposed to European)" (Crowley 140). It is an English-derived phrase ("man place") used to distinguish indigenous people from foreigners. Jolly defines the term as "a condensation of people and place" ("Woman-nation-state" 6). It defines the holistic relationship between people and land which all Ni-Vanuatu (and most island dwelling Pacific Islanders), regardless of differences in language, culture, religion or geographical location, may identify with. Such meanings become evident in the seventh stanza of "Black Stone". Here, the "Eternal essence" of the volcano which existed prior to human life is an ever-present force that determines the physical "cosmos" of humanity, the system of order and harmony in the universe (Haddock 80). This holistic relationship with the land is evident in genealogy, myth and legend, pre-colonial religion and worship. It is one of the principles invoked by Molisa throughout her work. In the aftermath of dual British and French colonial control, the assertion of rightful citizenship via indigeneity and the land is strong and convincing. The blending of land and people in the image of volcanic rock means that any separation can only be superficial and temporary, so that the image also functions to celebrate the reclamation of political identity.

In addition, black stone can be seen as a reclamation of racial identity, affirming an indigenous identity that had been subject to colonial racism. "Black Stone" celebrates that primary Melanesian signifier – blackness. The colour black is nationally identified and celebrated in the indigenous Ni-Vanuatu flag. It was the dark skin pigmentation of the North West Pacific Islanders that saw them historically placed at the bottom of the European defined racial hierarchy. Dumont d`Urville introduced the term 'Melanesia' in 1832, which defined a region of 'Black Islands' or 'islands of Black people', and initiated a colonial history of racism (Keesing 3). But Molisa, in accordance with nationalist ideology, has claimed blackness as a primary identity. The black solidified magma with its underlying layer of red-hot flowing lava is a pictorial representation and celebration of Melanesian humanity – of black skin and red blood. The association between the colour red and blood (or racial identification) is also made in the national flag. Such an image visually reinforces the indigenous principle of '*man ples*' – the unification of land and people.

Molisa draws attention to this connection in an interview about her first collection:

> Black Stone [the collection] really talks about Vanuatu...vatu being the term in a number of our Melanesian languages meaning 'rock'. Vanuatu, of course, is not a

simple name. It has lots of meanings that don't have any quick equivalents in English, but it is all those things that we believe make us what we are, especially our relationship to the land and its origins (Griffen, "Interviews" 77).

An official explanation of the nation's new name is given in the government publication produced for the celebrations marking the tenth anniversary of Independence:

> '[V]anua' mean[s] land, home, state, origin; and 'tu' mean[s] to be, to exist, to stand, to aspire, to hope, strength, roots, history, the past, the present, the future, infinity. Put together, Vanuatu means Our Land Forever! (Vanuatu 26-7).

Importantly, the indigenous frame of reference needed to be derived from life *prior* to the advent of colonialism:

> There was a strong feeling that the name of the emerging state had to reassert forcefully and indelibly our existence. The new name had to reflect our existence before the arrival of Europeans and long after their departure. The new name should recall our being ravaged by the impact of their contact, our resistance, resilience, endurance and survival (Vanuatu, 26-7).

These official definitions have obvious parallels with the symbolism of the volcano as Molisa explores it in "Black Stone". Indeed, Molisa's poetry views the relationship between the metaphor black stone and the new nation of Vanuatu as interdependent and reciprocal. The poem prior to the title poem, "Black Stone", in Black Stone is entitled "Vanuatu", and is constructed in the same visual format:[3]

Vanuatu

Ageless Vatu
primeval source
of creative forces
ad infinitum

Vanuatu
our land
in perpetuity
our people re-born
for eternity.

The battle of wills
in the course of law

[3] This 'pinnacle format' occurs only in one other instance in the collection - see "Ladies of Precedence" (47).

is frontier to
the untrodden path
of our development.

The birthpains
of Nationhood
reverberate
by year
to temper
with duress
active democracy.

A melanophone
philosophy's
renata thrust
thwarted
by bureaucracy's
technocracy.

Autonomous
state - craft
a bitter - sweet
fruit
of sovereignty struggle.

Statehood
costs
eternal
alertness

Pillars of the Nation
Vatu offspring
born of oblivion
in vexing rebellion
stay steadfast
Vanua`aku Vanuatu (7).

"Vanuatu" asserts a pre-eminent existence prior to colonisation and bears witness to political and social turbulence, as the country attempts to realise the essentially foreign concept of nationhood. In turn this requires the implementation of another foreign concept – national democracy.

The Black Stone collections are about Vanuatu in transition – prior to, during, and after attaining Independence. According to Molisa and the official government definition, 'Vanuatu' the nation and 'Vanuatu' the word are both described in volcanic terms. Both poems evoke the same tone of primordialism, an essence of being which is eternal and

infinite; of timelessness in transition, and of struggle to form and maintain equilibrium. Hence, "Black Stone" and "Vanuatu" are intimately connected poems, and by extension, relational concepts. Molisa is explicit about this connection in another poem "Blackstone Milestone" in which she writes that "Blackstone means Vanuatu....Blackstone is Vanuatu" (Molisa, Local 11-13).

"Vanuatu" may be seen as an invocation to the nation as well as Molisa's personal manifesto to the newly formed nation to recognise what binds the culturally and linguistically diverse peoples of Vanuatu together (that is, as "Vatu offspring", born of the everlasting land). "Black Stone" illustrates the complexities behind the transition to Independence, and conveys what it means to give birth to a new political identity while maintaining cultural and spiritual integrity.

Throughout "Black Stone", Molisa emphasises opposing forces in her central metaphor. Black stone, and by extension, the nation of Vanuatu, embody forces that oscillate between balance and imbalance, producing various degrees of tension. Black stone is described as simultaneously static yet moving; it is stone yet lava, solid yet fluid; it evokes creation and death; it is molten, soft and malleable yet jagged and stark; it is knowable yet mysterious; free moving (as seen in the image of the flying bird, and the hissing consonance sounds of 's', 'c', 'x', 'phys' in stanzas 7 and 8, evoking steaming movement) yet coagulated (as felt in the immovable and immobile rock); it is both fixture and essence; it is alive yet sleeping; it is permanent and constant yet in continual transition. Black stone reflects the volatile nature of the volcano and its lava, which while seemingly solid on the surface may have rivers of hot lava streaming beneath; while seemingly dormant, it may become active and explode when oppositional forces lose equilibrium.

It is primarily this state of equilibrium, defined as the "state of rest produced by the counteraction (defined as "action in opposition") of forces" (Concise Oxford Dictionary), that Molisa invokes in her exhortation in "Vanuatu": "Stay steadfast / Vanuaaku Vanuatu". Black stone (the hardened foundation upon which all life exists) and by extension, the Vanuatu nation, is only possible by a creation of balance, a maintenance of equilibrium, and the unification of differences. Fluid lava needs to coagulate, as mentioned in the third stanza, that is, "to change from fluid to a fixed state" (Concise Oxford Dictionary). The necessary realisation of nationhood in a post-colonial context is fraught with problems. The transition

from multiple and independent clan and regional allegiances to one centralised power base has been far from smooth (Jupp and Sawer). "Vanuatu" uses such words as "battle", "frontier", "birthpains", "duress", and "vexing" (connoting irritation, torment, and distress) to describe this transition. In "Black Stone" the conflict is played out in the opposing forces and the often uneasy alliance of natural elements. But both poems posit that steadfastness or equilibrium is needed in order to realise truly national aspirations, and face the world as "Vanuaaku Vanuatu" (Vanuatu 7), an indigenous Vanuatu.

Internal Imbalance: Women as Colonised People

Molisa's call for national equilibrium and steadfastness in the post-colonial era applies especially to equality and balance between the sexes, an issue explored in her second volume, Colonised People (1987). In the long graphic title poem (Appendix B) the imbalance is as clear as the pain and degradation suffered by women at the hands of men:

> Vanuatu
> Womenfolk
> half
> the population
> remain
> colonised
> by
> the Free men
> of Vanuatu (9).

Molisa poetically addresses this internal imbalance in her middle collection in two primary ways. Firstly, in a strategic literary move, she equates colonisation with sexism. Secondly, she draws upon the discourse of rights in order to advocate for women's rights. The volume also seeks to create unity in diversity (a balancing of counter-acting forces) by appealing to the highly heterogeneous nature of Ni-Vanuatu women while emphasising their *common* experience of their gender and their humanity.

Colonised People had its origins in Molisa's interactions, during the 1980s, with the Council of Chiefs, the Vanuatu Christian Council, and various trade unions and other organisations, about the status of women in Vanuatu. In her capacity as an advisor to the Vanuatu National Council of Women (otherwise referred to as the VNKW – 'Vanuatu Nasonal Kaonsel Blong ol Woman'), Molisa argued for the importance of women's issues to the nation and the need

for female representation in parliament, which was non-existent at the time. The volume was published prior to the 1987 elections with the specific purpose of "preparing the attitudinal and mental groundwork for the possibility of any political party fielding women candidates" (Griffen, "Interviews" 75). The 1987 election saw two women voted into Parliament: Molisa herself, as a candidate for the Vanua`aku Pati (in power at the time), and another woman from the opposition. Molisa states that Colonised People fulfilled her first objective, which was "raising the consciousness and involving women in the current Vanuatu democracy and administration" (Griffen, "Interviews" 76). While acknowledging that her poetry was by no means the only factor in the election of women to parliament, she is adamant that it had been a "part of that continuing effort" (Griffen, "Interviews" 76). Certainly it had only helped in her political cause.

The poetry in Colonised People informs readers about the plight of Ni-Vanuatu women, offers solutions, and chastises certain groups of people and ideologies that continue to discriminate against women. Its overall aim was to promote a responsible, accountable and "truly" independent nation – the definition of which should adhere to the United Nations CEDAW (Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women) declaration. Despite numerous pre-independence promises to address the oppression of women, many of these promises had remained unfulfilled, and women continued to be colonised by men in a mixture of indigenous and eurocentric power structures. Colonised People forcefully argues that Vanuatu as a nation can only realise true independence once women are freed from male oppression, and able to contribute to a growing global movement that asserts that the equality of women has been a national afterthought for too long (Morgan).

The first Ni-Vanuatu poem to take women's inequality as its theme was a bi-lingual poem by Mildred Sope ("Chusum", translated as "Choice") which appeared in the Pacific literary magazine Mana, in 1975:

> Laef blong woli I blong man I laikem
> Man I mas chusum weswe hem I go (8, 9)
>
> ["Life in this world is for man to / Make his choice"].

Unfortunately Sope's writing career appears to have petered out, despite the quality of the

work she contributed to this 1975 collection. However, her cause would be resurrected just over a decade later through Molisa. Recognising the power dynamics behind women's lack of choice Molisa graphically examines exactly what it means in the life of women as "Colonised People". The sixth stanza of the title poem explicitly links patriarchy with imperialism and regards it as a form of colonisation:

> Man's
> colonial
> domination
> of Woman
> is exemplified
> in the submissive
> subservient
> obedience
> to Man's rule
> and authority
> which takes
> Woman Vanuatu
> for granted
> as
> a beast of burden (9).

In this passage Molisa uses colonisation strategically as a metaphor for sexism rather than using the word 'sexism' or overtly advocating 'women's rights', which might otherwise have alienated her conservative readers. Because the language of anti-colonialism was familiar, and widely accepted in discourses promoting nationalism, its association with injustices to women might engage more serious address to the injustices themselves.

In "Colonised People" the use of violence is seen as rooted in, enabled by, ideology. Domestic violence, in particular, is seen as one of the outcomes of gendered colonialism. Viewed as chattels, women become the property of men, and then – in a colonial stereotype commonly used to describe Melanesian women – 'beasts of burden'. In her typically polemical, list-like style, Molisa assaults the reader with numerous horrifying instances of brutal physical abuse, excerpted from seventy-three reported cases within a dated six-month time span. The brutality is emphasised by the direct, coldly clinical, dryly factual manner in which the events are narrated, perhaps lifted directly from the medical reports themselves. There is no need for metaphoric flourish or imaginative embellishment. The fact that this truth is more shocking than any concocted fiction is repeatedly demonstrated:

Six months pregnant
kicked
in the abdomen
punched on the head
perforated eardrum
scalp lacerations...
haematoma
deep penetrating wound,
fingers chopped off
epistaxis
orbital
haematoma. (10)

The brutal descriptions of violence against women are listed, one after the other, for sixty lines in a mechanical, understated tone. In the interspersed medical words, "haematoma" and "scalp lacerations" appear like a recurring mantra, punctuating the rhythm of the poem, echoing perhaps the steady rhythm of (male) fist against (female) flesh. Cynical in tone, their use suggests that the medical healing of women is performed merely to enable them to re-enter the cycle of abuse and consequent powerlessness:

...because
their battered bodies
require suturing
re-structuring
re-construction
for the next
onslaught
and slaughter
because
Man is BOSS
Man I Kat Raet
therefore
in Vanuatu
IT IS RIGHT
according to
the THINKING
and PRACTISE
of Vanuatu (11)

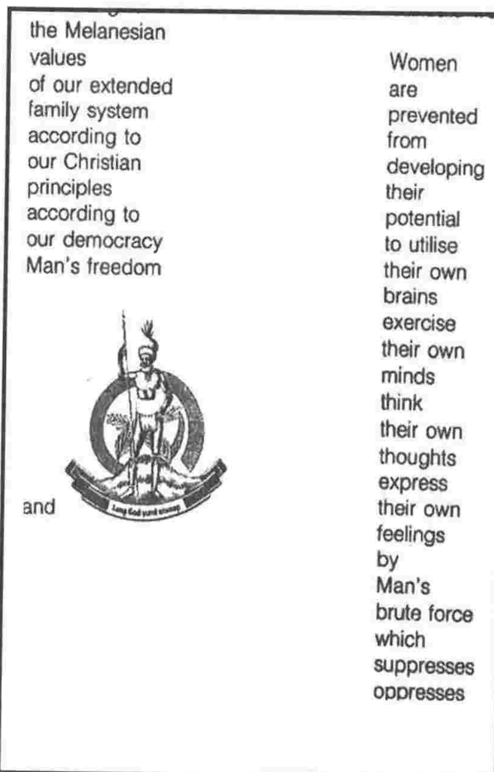
An array of sound effects – alliterative, onomatopoeic – repetitions of words and syllables and lines, and capitalised words, energises the writing, hammering the point home.[4]

[4] In particular, the recurring 's','str', 'xt', 'sl', and 'ss' sounds suggest the slicing of some kind; perhaps of the victim's flesh by her perpetrator, inevitably, of a surgeon's knife.

Molisa's choice of words also exposes the patriarchal nature of the power structure. The word "BOSS" used to describe "Man", evokes colonial overlords and indigenous servility reminiscent of blackbirding days and forced labour recruitment tactics. By using colonial terminology Molisa again draws an unspoken parallel between the earlier and post-colonial eras. The following line appears in Bislama ("Man I Kat Raet") and along with its initially capitalised letters, emphasises the parallel between colonial and post-colonial ideologies. The double entendre on the words "Raet" (to indicate a fair claim or entitlement) and "RIGHT" (to mean proper or correct) subverts the seeming naturalness (and hence the normality) of male domination by pointing out that perhaps patriarchy is not a natural practise, but rather, a deliberately structured system of thought and practise (hence capital letters) that has been invented and adopted by men in order to control women. The poem clearly implies that a fundamental change in thinking and attitude is required before behaviour is changed.

As one of Molisa's longer poems, this five page diatribe against the public sanction of domestic violence incorporates the official logo of Vanuatu in the middle of stanza thirteen, a device – in this context – loaded with subversive meaning (12).

Its central figure is a man in traditional dress holding a spear. In the background, a pig tusk and cycas leaves form a circle, evoking the dawning of a new day. An official explanation of the logo appears in the government-funded ten year anniversary publication of Independence, <u>Vanuatu: 10 Yia Blong Independens</u> (1990). The central figure represents a Melanesian chief. The spear symbolises his role as defender and protector of his people. The shell money armbands represent his role in economic exchanges and as a distributor of goods, services and resources. The cycas leaves connote peace as a result of chiefly authority and jurisprudence while circular pig tusks indicate unity and wealth (Jolly, "Woman-nation-state" 29). The logo is inserted at the end of


the Melanesian
values
of our extended
family system
according to
our Christian
principles
according to
our democracy
Man's freedom

and

Women
are
prevented
from
developing
their
potential
to utilise
their own
brains
exercise
their own
minds
think
their own
thoughts
express
their own
feelings
by
Man's
brute force
which
suppresses
oppresses

stanza thirteen, and appears to exult in Vanuatu's official ideals and its adherence to "Melanesian / values" and "Christian / principles". The base of the logo, "Long God yumi stanap", serves to finish the line and translates as "In God we are Independent". The emblem signifies the meshing of *kastom* and indigenised Christianity – both are viewed as intrinsic to the indigenous identity of the newly sovereign state.

But, as Jolly points out in her feminist anthropological article on the nation-state of Vanuatu, the symbol used to represent the new nation of Vanuatu is inherently flawed. The "Melanesian chief" is far from representative of the general post-colonial citizen of Vanuatu. The central figure is not only from a specific region and culture (the spear, pig tusk, and cycas leaves are traditional symbols of male rank specific to the Northern islands of Vanuatu), but gender specific. In fact, the logo very significantly *edits* the image (a mid-nineteenth century European lithograph) from which it is derived. In the original the man wore a comparatively smaller *nambas*, a costume characteristic of Efate, and a waist girdle complete with a long pandanus tail behind him. The male figure in the contemporary logo is also significantly older, conforming more to the image of a *kastom jif* of the Northern Islands. Finally, a Melanesian woman and a child accompanying the man have been entirely removed (Jolly, "Woman-nation-state" 29). The erasure of the more familial representation was thus a deliberate act. Significantly the choice of the Ni-Vanuatu flag and the national anthem was subject to public debate and national competition, but *not* the national logo, whose design was decided by the curator of the Cultural Centre at the Vanuatu Museum, Kirk Huffman, a Ni-Vanuatu sympathiser of French origin.

Why, in the midst of national rhetoric upholding equality, were the woman and child figure removed? The official explanation is that women *are* in fact present in the national logo! Vanuatu: 10 Yia Blong Independens explains:

> [T]he mat in front of the man recalls the importance of agriculture in our traditional economy. Mats are the product of women's labour, and women are the producers and managers of our agricultural economy (28).

Women are thus symbolised by the mat and ground upon which the man stands. The soil from which he emerges is covered in mats, representative of women's presence and women's labour in the traditional agricultural economy. The logo is thus a prime example of women's *invisibility*, and places women conveniently 'under foot'. The significance of its presence in

Molisa's text should by now also be clear. Visibility is a central theme of all her collections, emphasised (as discussed earlier) by the visual elements on their covers. Throughout her poetry Molisa consistently calls for the recognition of women as equals and fellow humans, not divorced from humanity as some lower sub-species, but as equals in decision-making. Indeed, the title of a 1990 women's anthology which Molisa was pivotal in organising, Who Will Carry The Bag?: Samfala Poem We I Kamaot Long Nasonal Festivol Blong ol Woman Long, is taken from a poem which illustrates the hierarchal disempowerment of women: they are at the bottom, bearing the heaviest of loads.

Why is there a disparity between the contemporary national logo and the original image? Why was the familial image of the 19th century lithograph deemed inappropriate to symbolise the new and Independent Vanuatu? By contrast, the logo of the VNKW of which Molisa was a founding member, resurrects the image of a representative family, underlining from a Vanuatu perspective the importance of visible representation.[5] The VNKW logo features a family (albeit a Christianised nuclear version) of father, mother, and child (in the middle), all holding hands – united, inter-relational, and interdependent. Included are the familiar symbols of the pig tusk in the background with cycas leaves (or feathers) forming a border around the family who appear to stand on rocky ground (a reference to either Vanuatu soil or black stone – Vanuatu's geological foundation of volcanic rock). Comparatively, the VNKW logo is inclusive. It places primary importance on unity, peace and prosperity. Such principles are not just for the exclusive realisation of women, but for the family, community and the nation.[6] In the poem "Colonised People", the National logo is placed just below the line "Man's freedom", reinforcing the poem's message.

As graphically portrayed in Colonised People, Molisa's table-poems ("Ni-Vanuatu Women in Development" and "Usual Occupation of Vanuatu Citizens 15 Years and Over 1986 Urban

[5] In Molisa's explanation in the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women in Women Ikat Raet Long Human Raet O No?, published in her capacity as chairperson of VNKW Information and Publication committee, the cover is cornered by four powerful symbols/logos including that of the United Nations, Vanuatu's National logo and its banner "Long God Yumi Stanap" ("In God We Stand Independent"), and the logo of VNKW and its banner "Yuniti, Pis, Prosperiti" ("Unity, Peace, Prosperity"). A peace dove symbol together with the symbol for woman are also included.

[6] Most Pacific Islands womens' organisation believe that empowerment for women can only be realised through the family and community (as opposed to being individually realised). Ironically, such women's organisations are accused of being exclusive, to the detriment of men (Johnson 56). Although the power of the female collective is common throughout the Pacific (in women's church and village committees, for example), when working or attempting change deemed to be beyond their often male-prescribed roles, conflict and resistance inevitably arise. Once the Ni-Vanuatu Member of Parliament, Hilda Lini, puts forward the proposition that men feel threatened by any exclusive focus on women, especially when men realise that everything does not necessarily operate from and within a male paradigm: "One thing the governments fear is new ideas going to the women, and they don't like activities or programs to be geared just for the women" (Johnson 57). Lini is currently director of the Pacific Concerns Resource Centre based in Suva, Fiji.

Census") reveal that during the time from Independence in 1980 to 1986 very little improvement had occurred in the numbers of women in paid employment. In occupations ranging from plumber to parliamentarian women were still grossly under-represented, if represented at all. Molisa's poems thus illustrate that, despite the anti-discriminatory legal provisions in the law passed at the time of independence (Lini 34; Molisa, "Vanuatu" 215), women continue to be discriminated against, particularly in the areas of freedom of speech and access to political power. It is precisely these two areas Molisa addresses in her poetry, a focus which consequently makes her a very real thorn in the side of the government.

Imbalance In, Through and After Independence

For Molisa it is important for people to understand that women's colonisation continued after Independence, and this is subtly demonstrated throughout her poetry: both within each volume and in the shifts which occur between them, which generate a paradigm for recognising and addressing the existing imbalance between national and gender emancipation. Her thematic emphasis alternates between nationalism and feminism, often viewing them side by side, demonstrating the need for a *synchronic* consideration of cultural and gender issues if "true" independence is to be realised.

Colonised People signals a shift of emphasis in Molisa's poetry. Black Stone (1983) was published three years after Vanuatu's Independence was achieved, and its primary themes were colonialism, Independence and nationhood. The volume is dedicated to:

> our nameless
> numberless
> ancestors
> who waged
> isolated
> battles
> for integrity
> and freedom
> enabling
> our generation
> to harvest
> the fruit
> of their
> labour.

"Vanuatu", the first poem in the collection, glories in new found nationhood, recalling the

"bitter - sweet / fruit / of sovereignty struggle." Black stone, the hardened volcanic lava of Vanuatu's numerous active volcanoes and the source of its land (*vanua*), is Molisa's primary metaphor for the new nation state of Ni-Vanuatu, asserting the timelessness, endurance and solidity of Ni-Vanuatu throughout and beyond the colonial experience. However, while the realisation of Independence was the primary focus in Black Stone, the volume did contain a number of poems (including "Marriage", "Pregnant Blues", "Ladies of Precedence", and "Status Costs", as well as her most widely known poem "Custom") which criticise selective patriarchal reconstructions of culture, to the detriment of women, and this was to become the *central* focus of the new volume.

The ironic title and the dedication of Colonised People four years later clearly announce the shift in emphasis:

> TO THE WOMEN OF VANUATU
> who toil and labour daily, unrecognised, unrewarded,
> just to cope with life's chores and burdens
> and to THE HOPE that Future Generations of Vanuatu Women
> will be able to enjoy a better Life.

The "Colonised People" in this volume are Vanuatu's post-colonial women, as Molisa makes explicit in her introduction: "Vanuatu is now free of foreign colonial domination but Ni-Vanuatu Women are still colonised." In the preface, two *kastom* Chiefs and a prominent male poet introduce the collection and endorse its message of the need to recognize the "rights of women" and to "further develop the potential of and for women and encourage them to participate in politics and government, education, business and all other spheres of national affairs" (5). There is little doubt that the authors of the preface were strategically chosen; this symbolic public stamp of approval from the more conservative echelons of Vanuatu society aimed to encourage receptivity of its 'radical' message in the general community.

While each volume has its own major focus, each thematically interweaves with the others. Of particular interest in Colonised People is a *second* poem entitled "Vanuatu", as if revisiting the first one, which reveals Molisa's keen sense of gender imbalance alongside her familiarity with and contempt for the empty political rhetoric of gender equity. In contrast to "Vanuatu" and "Black Stone" in Black Stone, which celebrate post-colonial Independence, in this collection "Vanuatu" questions such slogans as 'Democracy', 'Christianity', and 'Melanesian

Values' promoted during the fervour of Independence. The first "Vanuatu" poem appears at the beginning of the Black Stone, whereas the second appears towards the end of Colonised People. Furthermore, the vertical pinnacle layout of the earlier poem is abandoned in the later one, whose visual layout deploys multiple horizontal and vertical perspectives.

VANUATU

Vanuatu is:

FREE	Men are Free, Women are chattels
SELF-DETERMINED	Men determine, Women go along
SELF-GOVERNING	Men govern women
INDEPENDENT	Women Depend on Men
ENJOYING THE FRUITS OF THE STRUGGLE	For Men Only

The Nature of the Nation's Democracy
The Nature of the Nation's Christianity
The Nature of the Nation's Melanesian Values
Is Exemplified in Practice

The apparently balanced visual layout of the poem is deeply ironic, thoroughly undermined by the antithesis between the national rhetoric of freedom, independence and self government on the left hand side of the poem, and the reality of the continuing oppressive situation of women in relation to men on the right hand side: a counterpointing of official 'rhetoric' versus 'reality'. Words in capital letters indicate the slogans of those in authority. The predominant use of lower case letters on the right counterposes the unofficial version of truth. Thus, while Vanuatu is "SELF-DETERMINED", in reality "Men determine / Women go along".

Furthermore, the symmetrical layout structurally highlights the nature of the culture/gender dilemma. "Vanuatu" emphasises the opposition between the official government policy of equality and independence for all, and the reality for women who at the same time remain exploited and oppressed by their men. For indigenous women, cultural freedom and

independence occur simultaneously with gender-based oppression. The structural form of the poem is deliberately composed to mirror the reality that women remain oppressed *in* and *through* this rhetoric. Molisa takes the root word from the left hand side and uses it to germinate sentences on the right. While there may be some truth in what is being officially espoused (officialised through the use of capital letters), it is not the reality for the majority of Ni-Vanuatu women. For example, since Independence "Vanuatu is: / FREE / Men are Free, / Women are chattels". The different context of the word used on the right gives its meaning an ironic twist. The image of the "bitter - sweet / fruit / of sovereignty struggle" mentioned in "Vanuatu" (Black Stone) again resurfaces in this second version, and is in contrast to the enjoyment here of reaping the "FRUITS / OF THE STRUGGLE". Unfortunately, Molisa indicates that the fruits of Independence have soured because they have proven to be "For Men Only". They rot with the realisation that women remain "Colonised People."

Molisa's insight into the problematic relationship between nationalism and feminism is not specific to Vanuatu politics. It links her poetic interest to a much larger global debate, in which – in turn – the perspectives of Third and Fourth world women illuminate problems (and potential solutions) that find resonance in the Pacific. In the global movement for independence, and in various national liberation movements, the status of women is often used to measure the degree of a nation's progression (Jolly, "Woman-nation-state"; Chatterjee; Jayawardena; Morgan). Despite the fact that many women were active in various revolutions and independence movements, women often found themselves identified as "second class citizens."[7]

One poem, by the Malawian poet and scholar, Felix Mnthali, had a particularly strong influence on the debate surrounding women's continued colonisation after independence, and has become identified as forwarding the 'first things first' argument. His "Letter to a Feminist Friend" captures the insistent patriarchal face of nationalism, in its prioritising of national liberation from Western cultural imperialism, over women's liberation. The "Feminist Friend" referred to in the poem is Mnthali's fellow countrywoman Molara Ogundipe-Leslie, herself a Professor of English Literature:

> I will not pretend
> to see the light

[7] A phrase used by the African author Buchi Emecheta in her novel of the same name (see Works Cited).

in the rhythm of your paragraphs:
illuminated pages
need not contain
any copy-right
on history

My world has been raped
looted
and squeezed

by Europe and America
and I have been scattered
over three continents
to please Europe and America

AND NOW

the women of Europe and America
after drinking and carousing
on my sweat
rise up to castigate
and castrate
their menfolk
from the cushions of a world
I have built!

Why should they be allowed
To come between us?
You and I were slaves together
uprooted and humiliated together
Rapes and lynchings –

the lash of the overseer
and the lust of the slave-owner
do your friends 'in the movement'
understand these things?

...

No, no, my sister,
my love,
first things first!
Too many gangsters
still stalk this continent
too many pirates
too many looters
far too many
still stalk this land –

...

When Africa

at home and across the sea
is truly free
there will be time for me
and time for you
to share the cooking
and change the nappies –
till then,
first things first!

In her reply Ogundipe-Leslie pointed to the masculine first person possessive pronoun used to speak for the nation:

> The Promethean person who endured slavery and the slave trade, colonialism, imperialism, and neocolonialism does not have time for women's rights yet. The world has been built by him and he must attend to those pressing issues (502).

Indeed, it is his world that has been "raped / looted / and squeezed". It is a world that he has built. The universalised male ('I') persona is foregrounded when considering that the poem directly addresses itself to an indigenous (fellow-native) female subject. Gender inclusion is selective. Although she is recognised as having jointly suffered at the hands of colonial oppression, she is not acknowledged as having taken part in nationalist struggles. Mnthali's poem is a prime example of the *stigmatisation* of feminism as foreign, inconsequential, and frivolous by its singularly westernised reduction to sharing the housework and changing nappies. Mnthali equates feminism with the feminisation of men and thus their degradation. In doing so, he reproduces a colonial trope in which colonised men are emasculated. One result of this male feminisation is, as Michelle Vizzard points out, that the voice and representation of colonised women within anti-colonial discourse is, once again, appropriated (202-210).

Ogundipe-Leslie firmly debunks this linear model of dealing with oppression, using examples of liberation movements throughout the world:

> Somehow, miraculously, you can liberate a country and later turn your attention to the women of that country – first things first! But such liberators of nations as Lenin, Mao, Machel, Neto, and Cabral, among others, knew that no basic and effective change can occur in a society without the synchronic liberation of its women (503).

From America to Afghanistan to Algeria, women from all over the world have demanded

such synchronisation but continually find themselves sandwiched between rival forces that exploit either their voices or their silences (even within the 'liberation' movements mentioned by Ogundipe-Leslie). The 'woman question' (the value of women's work and improvement of her status) has all too often been shunted aside to make room for more urgent national matters at hand, or as the Palestinian activist Fawzia terms it, "to liberate the land, then the women" (543). The 'woman question' remains an ever elusive, easily postponed agenda, in overwhelmingly male nationalist independent governments.

Meanwhile, women have fought alongside men in independence struggles, but remained neither acknowledged nor rewarded with the same quality of benefits. Some argue that the only way women will gain the acknowledgment they deserve is to organise themselves "outside of male-conceived and male-controlled master plans of development" (La Silencida 176), claiming the freedom to define their own terms and create paths of development that meet their own needs and plans for the future. While many Pacific women recognise that there is little chance of effective change without men there *is* a need for male-conceived and male-controlled ideological structures to be feminised – that is, for women's active input in policies at all levels of society. Indeed, Pacific women are increasingly making it clear that women need to be involved in more of the decision-making processes in their islands, especially when the quality of their own lives and that of their families are directly influenced (Emberson-Bain). The situation in Vanuatu is no different.

The problem with the 'first things first' argument is that, quite simply, the achievement of Independence has not necessarily been followed by attention to women's concerns. Independence has been conceived as an end unto itself, instead of a *beginning.* In Vanuatu, as elsewhere, many women had participated actively in the grassroots movement for independence (Jolly, "Women-nation-state" 7; Johnson). After independence, many of these same women, alongside prominent female leaders in the nationalist movement, finally made public their grievances about continuing inequalities and discriminatory practises against women, and for writers like Molisa poetry provided a weapon against such oppression.

Nowhere was this fact more evident than in 1990, the tenth anniversary of Vanuatu's Independence. As part of the celebrations, between May 6-18, the VNKW organised a "Nasonal Festivol Blong Ol Woman' in Port Vila, attended by more than a thousand women representing the various island chapters of VNKW, women's organisations, clubs, village and

town councils, and church committees. Workshops addressed issues of health, nutrition, the environment, education, domestic and workplace violence, communication, child development, the church, and cultural sporting activities. The festival primarily aimed to engage the support of women for the cause of the nation. However, it also served to mobilise women, and raise consciousness about their specific situation as women. One of many such activities were the poetry workshops facilitated by Molisa, and production and performance of poetry at the workshops resulted in the bi-lingual (English and Bislama) publication, Who Will Carry The Bag?, edited by Molisa, the first anthology of predominantly Ni-Vanuatu women's poetry. In many ways this publication worked to subvert the main intention of the festival, many of its poems serving as a vehicle through which frustration was voiced at an independence that on many levels had yet to be realised by the majority of Ni-Vanuatu women.

Molisa organised poetry reading nights in which strongly felt personal views were given public – and potentially political – space. She created a public forum in which the lack of concrete government policies addressing inequalities between men and women in education, employment, and politics, could be questioned and criticised. Poetry became a political means of questioning the degree to which independence had influenced their lives in real terms. The inclusion of children and male poets in these readings reinforced the ideological commitment to a culturally defined brand of feminism: a rejection of gender oppositional politics, and a shared focus on corrupt and manipulative power structures dividing the nation into powerful/powerless, exploiter/exploited.

The cover illustration of Who Will Carry The Bag? is a simple black and white line drawing of a woman carrying a child on her back, holding the hand of another, balancing a tray on top of her head in which sit a house, a goat, a chicken, a palm tree and a sample of root crop production. It illustrates the overwhelming burden of responsibility borne by rural women who often single-handedly had to cope with the burden of childcare, home maintenance, and food and economic production. The poem from which the title was taken is flanked by two similar illustrations with the addition of a man behind a woman who carries a large bag overwhelmingly out of proportion to her body. "Who Will Carry The Bag?" by Touran Rarua (Appendix B) uses the personal to point to a larger political situation in which women are unfairly treated in a society that sanctions a disproportionate workload for women while continuing to exclude them from decision-making on issues which affect their quality of life.

"Who Will Carry The Bag?" offers a day in the life of a rural family, which serves as a microcosm of larger rural society. Beginning with the shared workload of copra production (and deploying the inclusive third person pronoun 'They'), the poem presents women as the overriding organisers of familial economic production, whose success often 'rides on their back'. While in one sense this can be seen as an empowering portrayal of women's leadership, and an acknowledgment of the value of their presence, in the context of the collection (which persistently berates the unacknowledged work of women and calls for women's "equality"), the poem portrays women's strength as an *exploited* strength. Her presence and contribution to rural production is essential. The question in the title is thus rhetorical.

The anthology, partly funded by the government, subversively reveals that ten years after independence women have experienced little improvement in political or economic status. The new consciousness it reveals has several causes. One is linked to education, as Meriam Ishmael asserts in the first stanza of her poem "Girls" (Appendix B):

> I am educated
> I have come to recognize the role of girls;
> Slaves, child bearers, sex mates,
> Where is our future??
> Where is our freedom??
> After ten years where is our Independence? (18)

A similar line of questioning occurs in Dorah Obed's "Who am I?" (Appendix B):

> Education has come to my country
> Independence has come to my country.
> Has freedom come to my country?
>
> I am the mother of the nation.
> I am the producer of life.
> I build Vanuatu.
> Has equality come to my country?"

Unlike Makini's poem "Working Mother" (in Civilised Girl), Ishmael's and Obed's poems suggest that education does not necessarily lead to alienation from the home but to a realisation of the potential power women have in shaping the future. Both poems track a

gradual consciousness-raising, as the poetic personas become aware of the disempowering, easily exploited socialisation of girls and women into roles that inevitably reduce women to their biological function as "child bearer/s" and domesticated workers without wages ("slaves") or personal identity ("pig raiser", "house keeper"). For Obed, token education and the rhetoric of Independence is not enough. In her third stanza the strength of chant-like diction and phrasal repetition ("I am…I am…I build") alongside the parallelism of its sentence structure, establishes the expectation of parallel and harmonious thoughts. However, the formed question of the fourth line abruptly breaks the expectation.

In contrast to the assertive statements that begin with a reclamation of self by using the first person "I", Ishmael's third line replaces the 'I' with impersonal, starkly defined social roles ("slaves, child bearers, sex mates") which inevitably rob the individual of a self-determined future and any modicum of personal freedom. In Ishmael's poem, desperation over the loss (or lack) of a future and of freedom is emphasised by the use of double question marks. However, this is not to presume that the Western 'I' of individualism is necessary to realise the 'I' in independence for, like Obed, Ishmael continues to claim empowerment from women's reproductivity, as primary caregivers of future generations, and nation builders:

> We are the future mothers
> who will bring up respectful children
> We help develop Vanuatu
> We help build this nation.

In such poems Ni-Vanuatu women lay claim to their rights not through an ideology of rights (which may be easily criticised as being foreign and western) but through what Coomaraswamy calls "family ideology" (46), the *kastom*-sanctioned discourse of motherhood. Through and beyond these roles women are seen to adopt the rhetoric of nationalism and are described as active developers, reasserting their significance as fellow "builders" of the nation in partnership with men.

The National Women's Festival helped raise awareness of the "double jeopardy" Ni-Vanuatu women experience when simultaneously facing oppression arising from colonialism and sexism, and it is in this context that Molisa's own poetic exploration of a synchronic solution is especially pertinent. From her perspective, the problem with the 'first things first' argument is that 'second' things are rarely given first priority. More often than not, women's

concerns continue to be sidelined after national independence has been realised. However, the concerns of the nation, and the concerns of women, are not mutually exclusive. Recognition of "internal others" suffering oppressions need not fracture the focus of resistance to universal sources of oppression like colonialism or neo-colonialism. The solution lies in a holistic approach that acknowledges the multi-faceted nature of oppression, and consequently demands multi-faceted approaches defined and executed by the commitment of both men and women. The need to recognise and deal with this double exploitation is seen by the Kanaky (New Caledonian) writer Susanna Ounei-Small as absolutely essential in the fight for Independence: "The priority for Kanaky women must be to struggle together with Kanak men, while trying to change their violent and sexist behaviour" (20). Molisa's solution in the last stanza of "Vanuatu" (Colonised People), is essentially the same. The future lies with balance and equilibrium.

Recognising Imbalance Through Language: The Discourse of Rights

As we have seen, Molisa deploys colonisation strategically as a metaphor for post-colonial sexism in numerous of her poems. A very similar strategic thrust underlies her use of a discourse of rights, in particular, human rights, to advocate for 'women's rights'.

In 1991 Molisa published Woman Ikat Raet O No? ('Have Women Got Rights or Not?'), a tri-lingual (Bislama, French, English) non-fiction publication which announced Vanuatu's ratification of the United Nations "Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women". Although the United Nations declaration was translated almost word for word in three languages, Molisa wrote an introduction in pidjin only, which was thus specifically addressed to Ni-Vanuatu. On the inside cover Molisa inserted the following quotation from the United Nations:

> [T]he full and complete development of a country, the welfare of the world and the cause of peace require the maximum participation of women on equal terms with men in all fields.

In a provocative move Molisa also included in the volume her second "Vanuatu" poem (from Colonised People), whose dominating presence on a full page made a direct connection between the Declaration and Ni-Vanuatu's dismal record in addressing women's rights.

However, this gesture – and Molisa's long record of political activism – was seemingly not without its cost. Soon after Woman Ikat Raet O No? appeared she was sacked from her job as Secretary to the Prime Minister (Walter Lini) and found herself, once again, unemployed.[8] The response sheds light on Molisa's reasons for regarding poetry as a subversive site for struggle, and on its potential to avoid official sanction and censorship. None of Molisa's volumes of poetry – written predominantly in English – attracted any official sanctions, despite being addressed to those in leadership positions. Woman Ikat Raet O No?, however, was written in Bislama, the lingua franca of Vanuatu and thus much more accessible to a wide range of local communities than her poetry. It also informed local women of their legally enforceable rights, many of which were unknown. Such a book would be politically threatening to a government complacent about women's issues.

However, although Molisa's poetry is written in English it is still a potent force, particularly when it operates at a grassroots level and makes connections with communities (as occurred in the workshops at the VNKW festival). Another kind of connection (avoiding the kind of community resistance which might occur if she directly promoted a separatist feminism) was her use, as early as Colonised People, of a discourse of rights as a means of addressing women's issues. The main pitfall in the discourse of rights, according to Jolly, is its tendency to create a hardened dichotomy between tradition (identified with male customary rights) and modernity (identified with women's freedom and the discourse of human rights (Jolly, "Woman"). The discourse of nationalism also encourages this dichotomy with its patriarchal face and its tendency to freeze women in traditional spheres. However, the discourse of rights encourages empowerment through the community, thus opening it up to indigenous appropriation by women to push for women's rights either under the banner of human rights or under the banner of nationalism itself (or both). Of course, such a strategy is not without its own complex problems, but it is one way of indigenising the discourse of rights and loosening the hold of selective male notions of tradition on women.

The discourse of rights was placed on the international agenda in 1948 with the almost universal ratification of the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights. In 1979 the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and opened it to ratification by states (Sotela).

[8] For other incidences of differences of opinion between Molisa and Lini which led up to her dismissal, see Appendix B.

The language of human rights in particular has been used by several educated women in positions of power in Vanuatu (Jolly, "Woman"). Unlike 'women's rights' or popular "separatist" notions of feminist discourse, the inclusive language of human rights avoided creating oppositional gender politics within the community. Molisa and those under her tutelage were aware of this and subsequently reference to women's rights is often couched in non-threatening, non-divisive, inclusive terms based on the community (or depending upon one's perspective, couched in the language of patriarchal nationalism). In stanza sixteen of "Colonised People" Molisa notes that colonialism is to be fought against because women have a "collective right", an "individual right", and a "Human Right", to equality. And colonialism, like sexism, violates these primary rights.

In Molisa's poetry, then, women's equality becomes less an issue of 'women's rights' than part of a larger, global quest for social justice and human freedom. "Colonised People" refers to Vanuatu's support for

> Liberation
> Movements...
> ...for
> freedom fighters
> in East Timor
> West Papua
> French Polynesia
> and Kanaky...(9)

and uses these *general* "human rights" movements to frame her internal critique of women's oppression in Vanuatu. This type of internationalising of women's issues is also exemplified in "Integration of Women" (Colonised People), where the poet asserts:

> ...Women
> are mothers
> of humanity. (14-15)

Indeed, "Colonised People" argues for the recognition of women's intrinsic worth, not simply because they are valuable contributors to society morally and economically, but because they are "Fellow humans / in the human society". Women are important, not just because they help build the nation, but because they *are* the nation – a point the poem is at pains to emphasise. Avoiding the exclusionary tones that might be perceived in a discourse

of 'women's rights', this type of mixing of discourses produces a more non-oppositional stance. Arguably this is one of the reasons why nowhere in Molisa's poetry, or the anthology she edited, are the words 'feminist' or 'sexism' mentioned. Family and cultural values are reinforced by an inclusive, community based politics. The discourse of rights ('human rights', 'equal rights', and 'women's rights') makes for powerful rhetoric, and Molisa knows how to capitalise upon it in poems like "Colonised People":

> ...women too
> are human
> women too
> are people
> women too
> have minds
> women too
> think
> women too
> have feelings
> women too
> have a right
> to be counted
> women too
> have a right
> to be recognised
> women too
> have a right
> to be respected
> women too
> have a right
> to Human dignity
> Women too
> have a right
> to be Free...

However, beneath this language of human rights lies the classic feminist demand: recognition of women's paid and unpaid work. "Women's Labour", the poem which follows this one, puns on labour as "work" and "giving birth", demanding recognition for both: support for procreation, and for the equal sharing of "other / life-sustaining / chores".

Using the discourse of rights as a language of communication within a local island context also leaves it vulnerable to dismissal on the grounds that it is an essentially foreign ideology. Molisa's association with the United Nations and other foreign funding bodies often left her (and the organisations she belonged to) vulnerable to accusations of betraying *kastom* (Jolly,

"Women-nation-state 13). In Vanuatu as in many Pacific Islands the right to 'rights' is customarily based upon an inherited democracy. Furthermore, Jolly notes that the definition of 'human rights' adapted by the United Nations (and its N.G.O Women and Development series) is essentially eurocentric, based on a Western, liberal humanist tradition in which 'human rights' – originally derived from 'men's rights' – has been normalised on the basis of a particular definition of 'human' as 'autonomous' and 'individual'. Such a definition clashes with many communally based cultures in which identity is primarily clan based, regional and relational, and 'rights' are selective and varied, dictated by genealogical birth and rank status.

Similar problems exist with definitions of terms such as 'equality' and 'equal rights'. For most Pacific Islands cultures 'equality' does not automatically mean 'the same as' men, encompassing instead 'different but complementary' gender relations (see Jolly, "Chimera" 28; Coomaraswamy 47; Ilumoka 317). Being viewed as the same as men in some cultural contexts may, in fact, undermine women's potential empowerment precisely because it is realised in separate female-exclusive spheres. For Molisa, whose key cultural term is 'equilibrium', difference in itself is not the culprit, but *discrimination* based upon difference.

Many Pacific women, like Molisa, thus find themselves in a 'catch 22' situation. If under the U.N mandate, or the CEDAW declaration, a legal stand for equal rights, women's rights or even human rights is argued, one is vulnerable to the accusation that one's local culture is being devalued – this, despite the hypocrisy that other Western influences are widely embraced (Jolly). On the other hand if equal rights and human rights are dismissed as foreign discourses, one becomes susceptible to exploitation and manipulation in the name of tradition (Jolly, "Woman" 4; Irwin). Molisa explores the dilemma in one of her most best known and most powerful poems, "Custom".

Redressing Imbalance: Custom and *Kastom*

One formal avenue officially promoted to aid in the realisation of independence is custom or, in Bislama, "*kastom*". Though existing prior to contact in principle and practice, the term *kastom* evokes specifically selected practises used to designate difference between the indigenous and colonial people. As such it rapidly became a reactionary form of culture, what Jolly observes as an "antithesis to the way of life of Europeans" ("Birds" 341; "Custom"; Jolly and Thomas). *Kastom* was thus used for nationalist and independence

purposes. The male-only Council of Jifs (Chiefs) (Jolly, "Woman" 26) was primarily responsible for safeguarding (and selecting) the culture of Vanuatu. The Vanuatu Cultural Centre (primarily male-oriented in its outlook as well) was also largely responsible for promoting the practises presented as *kastom*. Revived, recreated, and reintroduced as a weapon to combat European colonialism, *kastom* ironically became a colonial weapon itself as it created other power hierarchies and other forms of oppression within the indigenous community.

Part of this oppression entailed what the Māori feminist Kathie Irwin described as a "petrification" of culture, especially where women were concerned. The selective freezing of certain aspects of tradition reinforced patriarchy, as indigenous and non-indigenous men capitalised on existing (male-oriented, colonially inherited) power structures. In Aotearoa/New Zealand, Irwin argues, Māori culture

> can and is being changed daily, and…many of these changes accommodate the needs of men and the links that they have with each other, across cultural boundaries. The role and status of women remains petrified, like a slab of rock, unchanging, immobile, inflexible, whilst everything around us in our culture is rapidly changing (17).

In Vanuatu also, Jolly notes, the effects on women from selective practises of custom and selective definitions of tradition by males in contemporary society have been crippling:

> Whereas many other values of tradition may be sacrificed to, or at least compromised by, development, globalisation or Christianity, the value to tradition signalled by women's relation to men is often adjudged to be sacrosanct ("Woman-nation-state", 19).

As a result many Ni-Vanuatu women (and men) believe that the only way women's rights can be realised is at the expense of customary rights. The reverse is also the case; indeed, throughout Melanesian literature the feminist, liberal (i.e., educated) Melanesian woman is represented as modern, disrespectful, scornful of traditional norms, and often cast in the mould of licentious prostitute, like Makini's "Civilized Girl". It is clear from Ni-Vanuatu women's voices in poetry that to realise one discourse at the expense of the other is unacceptable. Women have a right to be treated as human *and* to practise and celebrate their traditions. Discourses such as *kastom*, need to be critically appraised, redefined and adapted for Pacific cultures like Vanuatu.

The hypocritical manipulation of custom as a vehicle to keep the powerless subjugated is a central theme of Molisa's poem "Custom":

> Custom
> is an English word
> English
> a confluence
> of streams of words
> is a reservoir
> of every shade
> nuance and hue
> sharply
> contrasting
> Melanesia's
> limited vocabulary
> supplementing
> non-verbal
> communication.
>
> Inadvertently
> misappropriating
> "Custom"
> misapplied
> bastardised
> murdered
> a frankenstein
> corpse
> conveniently
> recalled
> to intimidate
> women
> the timid
> the ignorant
> the weak.
>
> "Custom"
> oft neglected
> by non-conforming
> advocates
> the loudest
> proponents
> empty vessels…
>
> Theoretical
> "Custom"
> more honoured
> in omission
> than commission.

A word
sandwiched
between multifariously varied
traditional vernacular
and accidentally
occidental
franco-britannic
life and lingo
perplexed
by pandemonic
condominium
complex
Custom is
as custom does !(24)

Despite first impressions, "Custom" is not a poem that denigrates 'custom' itself. On the contrary it highlights (and condemns) political and social manipulations of the "multifariously varied" word by the powerful and influential who, according to the last stanza, can be either Ni-Vanuatu or "franco-britannic" colonisers. Father Walter Lini himself noted the susceptibility of custom – what "can not be written down" – to manipulation, in particular its use by foreign-backed secessionist groups to oppose democracy and nationalism in the push for Independence (41, 42). Molisa's poem asserts that the customs used to oppress people are not the time-honoured customs passed down through generational wisdom and practise but, like the poem's powerful image of Frankenstein's terrifying composite monster, man-made and foreign-influenced. Her personification of custom as a 'bastard' in a culture where lineage is of significant social importance, emphasises its illegitimacy in Ni-Vanuatu lives, its travesty when imposed under the banner of 'culture'.

That Molisa deliberately uses the term "Custom" ("an English word") as opposed to the more common Bislama transliteration '*kastom*', is significant. From the beginning of the poem Molisa foregrounds linguistic issues, differentiating between English and Melanesian and comparing the different, unique ways of communication and their underlying epistemologies. In the second stanza it is the *English* word "custom" (highlighted by inverted commas) which signals the oppression carried out under its name. By avoiding the term *kastom* Molisa avoids the criticism that her stance is hostile to culture and also avoids succumbing to the insidious dichotomy that links men with the preservation of custom and women's freedom with its destruction ("Woman" 16). "Custom" subtly argues that the issue is not one of cultural celebration or identification, but one of oppressive control, in which –

as the poem's bitterly ironic final two lines indicate – "Custom is / as custom does!", the word endlessly able to proliferate meanings justifying discriminatory practises.

As both Molisa and Irwin point out, the danger of hasty and uncritical resurrections of 'traditional' practises is that they are most commonly male biased and subject to colonial influence. Under colonialism, some customs were ignored, rejected, transformed, or belittled. Those that remained reinforced and sanctioned violence against women, and a patriarchal bonding between indigenous and foreign men in positions of power at the expense of indigenous women. Irwin uses the speaking rights of women on *marae* in Aotearoa/New Zealand as an illustration:

> New Māori tikanga are emerging everywhere and being incorrectly labelled as 'traditional Māori culture'. At one level there is no problem with this. All cultures are dynamic and continually changing. However, it is clear than many of the 'newly traditional' Māori cultural practises that are emerging serve the interests of Pākehā men whilst disempowering Māori women, in the name of 'Māori cultural practises'.... It is a strange culture that legitimises the rights of male outsiders over and above the rights of its own women. These new 'tikanga' seem to many Māori women to be new practises of male bonding, not Māori culture, and they should be recognised as such (16).

Hilda Lini asserts that the colonial system was deliberately set up to discriminate against women by linking the role of patriarchal missionisation with the disempowerment of indigenous women:

> Because of the new decision-making institutions that are foreign to the Pacific, women are just starting to enter the political arena. But I do not agree with the ideas that men can handle it better than women because I feel that the ideas are foreign to all of us. When the missionaries came in, they took the men to be the ministers and church workers. It prepared them to be ahead of the women who remained in the background-all the time. Today you will find that not many women are prepared to speak up in public. So this again reflects on the fact that today you do not find women in these decision-making bodies because they have to speak out. I think it is the training the missionaries gave to the men that they are farther ahead than the women (qtd. in Johnson 64).

Such colonial bonding is not just limited to the privileging of white men, but also applies to white women. Irwin argues that because indigenous men were taking over essentially foreign patriarchal systems, only the customs that supported this introduced form of patriarchy were revived.

"Custom" thus provides an extraordinarily revealing example of imperial and patriarchal discourses in action. Jolly argues that women's oppression

> can only be challenged by women insisting that human rights are not necessarily inconsistent with *kastom*, by appropriating and indigenising notions of the 'human' to suit their local context, and by insisting...that tradition is not a static burden of the past but something created for the present ("Woman" 16).

Indigenising the discourse of rights and subjecting previously sacrosanct principles to public criticism are central aims of Molisa's poetry, and the anthology Who Will Carry The Bag? has been influential on younger women writers. For example, Ishmael's poem "Girls" asserts that as women "We are capable in any work" (18), making specific mention of the traditionally male professions of "Carpentry, Engineering, Driving". She then asserts, as Molisa does in her poem "Integration of Women" (Black Stone II 14-15), that women "can teach tradition and custom". By teaching *kastom*, women may be able to redress gender imbalanced interpretations and undertake some selective choosing of their own, feminising what has become an increasingly paternalistic culture. As in Molisa's poetry also, equality in Ishmael's poem is not defined in Western terms as individual and autonomous, but from an inter-relational and communal base founded on a Melanesian aesthetics of balance, in which both men and women are integrally involved in 'building up' the Nation.

Reclaiming Christianity

In addition to her reclamation of custom and the language of rights, Molisa attempts a reclamation of Christianity, as a potential tool for women's empowerment. As with 'custom', Christianity was often used by indigenous men as a justification for domestic violence, citing particular passages in the Bible out of context (Jolly, "Woman"). Subjecting Christianity to the same kind of critiquing she had applied to custom, Molisa argues for belief in a God who embodies freedom and equality, whose nature is just and merciful. As the Bible and its contents became increasingly available, women began embracing the spirit of Christianity and its rhetoric of freedom, using it to justify their own independence and their own right to equality. Part of this rhetoric involved that of individual accountability – not to man but to a higher spiritual power. Avin's poem, "Woman", in Who Will Carry The Bag? concludes:

Yu stampas blong laef long wol
Sista
Stanap
Yu no blong wan man
Be
Yu blong God

You are the source of the life of the world
Sister
Stand up
You don't belong to one man
But to God (36)

The indigenising of Christianity (Jolly, "Woman"; Meleisea and Meleisea) and the equalising message of the New Testament recognises the value of every person as an inherently worthy child of God for whom personal salvation is possible. For many Ni-Vanuatu women, Jolly observes, Christianity provided a way to attain "fairness and equality" ("Woman-nation-state" 11).

Christianity is important in Molisa's life, and she draws regularly on the rhetoric of religion in her poetry to justify a radical transformation of life for Ni-Vanuatu women. In the introduction to Colonised People, she includes Christianity in her call for Ni-Vanuatu men and women "to work together to redress the injustice existing in our society and to strive to create and build a truly egalitarian, democratic, just, peace-loving and Christian Vanuatu" (8). Her closing poem in Who Will Carry The Bag?, "That Force Within", is a kind of personal testament to a God who is:

My driving force and strength
My backbone and sustenance
My Guide and protector
That Force Within…

…TRUSTING - IN - GOD…
THE CREATOR
who enables me and strengthens me
to continue to survive
to sail through
This Life of Crisis
In this Wonderful World
The Giver of ALL GOOD GIFTS
has entrusted to You and Me (51).

This personal invocation counter-acts the litany of "detractors / self-appointed / enemies, critics" listed in earlier stanzas, whose attempts to disparage her have all the fervour of a crusade. Their criticisms, "character assassinations", and "death-threats" are thus seen as "blasphemies". Such persecution merely drives Molisa onwards and upwards towards her higher purpose.

Conclusion

Like many Pacific Islanders who by necessity are employed in nation-building vocations other than "writing", Molisa openly acknowledged the limitations of writing in island communities where rates of literacy are low, book culture is limited, and the expense of books high: "Literacy is a luxury so Writers mean nothing..." (Molisa, Local 31). But if imaginative writing is so unimportant in the larger scheme of things in post-colonial societies why engage in it? Why did Molisa, already heavily involved in the politics of Vanuatu, pursue it with so fervent a passion? One reason is because it is a powerful, emotive, creative vehicle for the expression of personal and/or political consciousness-raising, and subsequently a proven medium for personal and/or political empowerment. Even more fundamentally, it is a vehicle for voice, and as such it was subject to fewer controls than her other activities. It made possible for her a certain freedom of expression, a medium in which she could, quite simply, *be herself.*

As a reader primarily trained in literature, I was interested in the literary strategies Molisa used to argue for cultural equilibrium based upon women's equality. In the context of a relatively new post-colonial Vanuatu, there were several major obstacles she immediately had to face. The more closely I analysed the poetry, the more I was able to read through its didacticism, polemical instruction, political rhetoric and its seemingly obvious messages. As a result I was able to uncover a subtle beauty through nuanced metaphors and images that provided powerful literary allies in Molisa's struggle to raise public consciousness of women's inequality.

Molisa's use of language as a strategic poetic device to familiarise and win over support for women's equality in what is essentially a conservative patriarchal culture is evidenced in how she legitimates the language of equal rights by giving it "local resonance" (Jolly 1997, 23). She packages her work in indigenous imagery and leans heavily upon the rhetoric of

emancipation and the discourse of human rights.

The most primary of these literary strategies was found in Molisa's incorporation, indeed, her strategically poetic and professional identification with Black Stone – the volcano. In order to address criticism that any talk of women's equality was essentially a white foreign feminist discourse that ran counter to indigenous thought and ways of life, Molisa needed to establish from the beginning that equality was inherently a Melanesian concept. For societies renowned for their egalitarianism (Keesing) one would have thought that this would have been an easy task – but cultural egalitarianism between men seemed to survive colonialism far better than egalitarianism between genders. Essentially, Molisa needed to wrap the discourse of equality in a distinctly Melanesian package. She did this by extending the notion of equality to that of maintaining equilibrium and balance, and representing that equilibrium as deeply embedded in pre-colonial Melanesian life – culturally, politically, and socially. By drawing upon the volcano, an image embedded in the Melanesian psyche as well as in the physical world, she established the connection between the nature and physicality of the volcano and a core Ni-Vanuatu identity, evolving over time and into the future. Unlike foreign newcomers, both emanated from the land – both possess rightful inheritance.

After establishing proud indigeneity through the land in concepts like '*man ples*', Molisa was able to draw important parallels between 'man' and 'place', psyche and environment. Initially, this was done by targeting the most urgent issues with her typical poetic fury and force. The imbalance of power between indigenous people and foreigners throughout colonialism and the transition to Independence provided the focus of her first collection, Black Stone. Firstly, a parallel was made between the volatile nature of the volcano and Vanuatu's transition to Independence. Primarily both had counteracting forces at work; molten hot lava against cold air and rock; French and British colonial forces and foreign-aided secessionist movements against the formation of one indigenous governing body. Both needed to form a state of equilibrium, defined as a balance of counteracting forces: one, in order to further form its volcanic foundation upon which land and life exist; the other, in order to form a sovereign and indigenous-led post-colonial nation-state. Molisa's poetry insists that balance and the maintenance of equilibrium constitute a natural state reflected in the same land that Ni-Vanuatu people are so intimately connected with. By extension, differences amongst indigenous groups who have conflicting loyalties, definitions and realisations of *kastom*, must also be balanced; they too must reach a state of equilibrium and

steadfastness in order for the foundation of an indigenous nation to be laid.

Molisa's next target for her particular brand of poetic justice was the imbalance of power between Ni-Vanuatu men and women. She had previously laid out an indigenous paradigm for the argument of balance and, by extension, equality between two (oppositional) entities in her first collection of poetry. Few would argue that the desire for indigenous independence from (and equality with) foreigners and the necessary formation of a nation-state derived from imported theory. Neither was Molisa's call for the realisation of Christianity or democracy in the achievement of nationhood ever under serious threat of criticism or attack from the majority of Ni-Vanuatu. Indeed, Molisa merely reiterated the principles of the Vanuaaku Pati. However, switching the terms of negotiation from indigenous/foreign to women/men meant being vulnerable to attack, and Molisa needed to be strategically (and poetically) prepared.

Colonised People was published a mere seven years after Independence was gained. The violence and confusion of the 74 year reign of Joint colonialism was still fresh in the memory of the nation and Molisa used this recent history to draw parallels between colonialism and sexism in order to increase empathy with and facilitate understanding of the situation of indigenous women. Colonialism was another metaphor for imbalance, specifically, the imbalance of power relations.

Furthermore, Molisa turned what were used as weapons against her argument for women's equality as tools to 'build up' her cause. When notions of *kastom* and Christianity were used against her she critiqued their use and manipulation, challenged their authenticity and problematised their relative application. Such creative critiquing also opened up the potential for the reappropriation of custom and the realisation of *kastom,* an aim supported by the frequent endorsements by *kastom* chiefs of both her poetic and political publications. A most powerful example of Molisa's strategic injection of *kastom* in arguing for the recognition of women's equality with men is seen in Woman Ikat Raet. Molisa uses the words of Jif Wili Bongmatur Maldo, the then President of the Malvatumauri, Vanuatu Nasonal Kaonsel Blong Ol Jif, in closing, as a legitimising stamp of approval:

> Woman hemi Mama blong Man, Woman hemi sista blong Man.
> Woman hemi Waef blong Man, Woman hemi pikinini blong Man
> Woman ikat *kastom* mo kalja. Olsem Man ikat *Kastom* mo Kalja.

> Woman I nidim man, mo man I nidim woman. Woman ino save laef wetaot man, mo man tu ino save laef wetaot woman.
>
> [Women are the Mothers of Men, Women are the sisters of Men.
> Women are the Wives of Men, Women are the children of Men.
> Women have custom and culture. Also Men have Custom and Culture
> Women need men. Men need women. Women will neither know nor understand nor have knowledge nor awareness of life and living without men. Also men as well, will neither know nor understand nor have knowledge nor awareness of life and living without women. (My translation)]

While the use of "blong" may still be seen as placing the emphasis on male possession, the emphasis on women throughout the passage prioritises women as active instigators and shapers of the world. Women have identities in their own right in addition to the other significant roles they embrace. The *kastom* chief's words emphasise mutual complementarity: the necessary interdependence of women and men; a gendered equilibrium necessary in life.

APPENDIX A: Vanuatu: A Brief History

Vanuatu, known as the New Hebrides/Nouvelle Hebrides until as recently as 1980, consists of a total land mass of approximately 12,930 square kilometers spread over eighty islands stretching from the Torres Islands in the north to Hunter Island in the south. On the basis of size and population, twelve of these are considered main islands. Recognition of the archipelago as a single place/state was the result of foreign incursion.

The size of the population prior to European contact has been estimated at just over half a million (Huffman 1995), but European contact brought disease and 'blackbirding' (slavery, indentured labour), and decimated the indigenous peoples.

Most prime coastal areas with easy access and relatively easy cultivation potential have been claimed (both legally and illegally) by foreigners. As occurred elsewhere in the Pacific after the 1960s there has been increased migration from interior "bush" lands to urban areas. Lured by the often illusory promise of paid employment, in 1980 approximately 20% of the population were congregated in the main towns, Port Vila, Vanafo and Luganville (Lini 44).

Vanuatu is a kaleidoscope of cultural and linguistic diversity. Estimations of the number of distinct indigenous languages range from 100 to 110 (Huffman 1995). Vanuatu's linguistic, cultural, and sub-cultural diversity makes any other than the broadest generalisations erroneous. Most 'traditional' cultures placed great value upon land, pigs, and the spirits of their ancestors. Spiritual power manifested itself in healthy fertile people, good crops, and pigs whose tusks were highly valued. Huffman contends that more 'traditionally' oriented tribes were isolated, having little or no contact with tribes beyond nearby ridges. Each tribe was the centre of its own universe.

The pre-contact economy was based on subsistence agriculture of mainly root crop horticulture, pig breeding and exchange. Colonial contact introduced cash-crop production dominated by copra and supplemented by coffee and cocoa. Cattle is a steadily growing industry (Lini 44).

Rank or status are either achieved or inherited. In most areas men and women were often segregated and embodied different, at times antithetical, sacred powers. Vanuatu has both patrilineal and matrilineal descent lines. Although there were hereditary chiefs in some of the central and southern islands, unlike those found in eastern Fiji, Tonga, or Hawai`i, expansionist chiefly politics were absent. While generalisations are popularly made comparing 'egalitarian' mobility in Melanesia with more hierarchical primogeniture ranking systems in Polynesia (Crocombe 37-38), Jolly problematises this argument, pointing out that the type of egalitarianism first promoted by Marshall Sahlins only existed among the men. Women were less mobile, more restricted in what they actually could achieve (see Jolly, "Chimera").

Colonial Contact

The Spanish first sighted Vanuatu in the sixteenth century (De Quiros in 1606), with little consequence. Later, the French explorers Bougainville (1768), La Perouse (1788), d'Urville and d'Entrecasteaux (1789) came across the islands and in 1774 Cook voyaged throughout the islands and charted them (Lini 17). In standard 'explorer-discoverer' fashion, Cook named the islands the New Hebrides in nostalgic recollection of the British Isles.

Owing to labour shortages for the sugar plantations of Queensland, Fiji and New Caledonia, and the relentless greed of traders in sandalwood and beche de mer, the nineteenth century saw the subjection of islanders to enforced labour recruitment methods otherwise known as 'blackbirding'. Because there was no formal colonial power in operation, foreign investors and businessmen viewed the islands as 'open territory', a 'natural' resource from which to stock and re-supply their labour requirements (Lini 17).

Foreign planters, settlers, and Protestant and Catholic missionaries started settling the archipelago from the mid nineteenth century onwards. The late 1860s saw European settlers acquiring land and planting cash crops of cotton, cocoa, coffee, maize, bananas, vanilla, and coconuts. French and British business interests competed with each other while indigenous peoples were used as a 'polite' form of slave labour (Jolly, "Custom" 54). 'Blackbirding', the development of European plantations of copra, cotton, and other cash crops, and the arrival of missionaries in the 1840s drastically affected indigenous people's lives and pre-colonial practices. In particular, the workload of indigenous women was increased.

During the latter half of the nineteenth century, both British and French colonial powers became interested in Vanuatu. British interests came both from London and from the Australian colonies and French interests were similarly derived from strategic interests in colonies in neighbouring Polynesia and New Caledonia, as well as the imperial goals of Paris. In 1887 a Joint Naval Commission was established by both powers to ensure the safety of British and French lives and property. In 1906, without consultation with the indigenous people, Britain and France took joint colonial control, co-sovereign over indivisible territory through an Anglo-French Condominium - the only one of its kind in the world (Jolly, "Woman" 3-7). Molisa gives further accounts of the "horror / of a Condominium / Colonialism / for seventy years" in "Victim of Foreign Abuse" (Black Stone 12, 13). What was set in motion was to become one of the most complex and confusing political situations in the Pacific, unique in its complexity.

Although the archipelago remained intact, it produced a system of government which created further divisions in the already diverse and distinct "cultural kaleidoscope" (Lini) of Vanuatu, with its underlying multiple indigenous geographical, linguistic, social and cultural identities. There were not only two separate and opposing administrative colonial systems, but also competing Anglophone and Francophone education systems, religious systems (French Catholicism and English Protestantism) which played on intra-village rivalries (Jupp and Sawer 553), and policing and health systems creating "disunity and polarization". This made the creation of a unified indigenous movement for Independence an incredibly difficult task (Lini 39).

Independence

Vanuatu is one of the world's newest nations (Lini 26). Independence was obtained in 1980 after 73 years of colonisation (or 'attempted' colonisation) by opposing French and British powers. The Condominium was subversively dubbed by many Ni-Vanuatu and nationalist sympathisers as the 'Pandemonium' government. While the indigenous people of Vanuatu were not totally passive agents during colonisation, the double yoke of Anglo-French colonialism was a disaster. Much of the prime land had already been 'legitimately' seized by foreign interests, often without the *kastom* owner's knowledge (Jolly, "Custom"), and the continual international rivalry between Britain and France produced a highly divisive society

in constant tension and opposition.[9] Such disunity was often taken advantage of by both colonial powers to thwart any indigenous political moves to regain control (Sokomanu 50).

Unlike other Independence movements in the Pacific, Vanuatu's fight for self-determination was violent, contentious, full of political intrigue and continually thwarted by French colonists, American speculators, and foreign-aided indigenous secessionist movements (Jolly, "Custom" 319). The French government reluctantly conceded Independence a mere 10 days prior to the officially agreed date in 1980. Privately they continued to support rebellion against the nationalist government, as seen in the violence that erupted in 1980 on Santo and Tanna (Jolly, "Woman" 5).

1971 saw the formation of the New Hebrides Cultural Association in Espiritu Santo which later became the New Hebrides National Party and eventually the Vanua`aku Pati (Plant, Lini) – the only genuine nationalist party to emerge (Jupp and Sawer 552). Molisa was an active party member rising to the position of Second Secretary to the Prime Minister. This party was predominantly Anglophone, aligned with the British Co-Operative Federation and identified with the Protestant church (Jupp and Sawer 555). Opposition parties included the Union de la Population des Nouvelles-Hebrides (UPNH), which was formed in December 1971, and sought to maintain the status quo under the Condominium with moderate reforms (hence, known as the 'moderates'). While leadership roles were occupied by French colonists, approximately three-quarters of party membership (200 members) was Melanesian (small businessmen benefiting from the current system). Three years later a core group of colonists, discontented with the party's increasing Melanesian orientation, formed a breakaway party – the Union des Communates des Nouvelles-Hebrides (UCNH). Their primary interests lay with local and foreign British communities, and in ensuring that any political or economic rights of Melanesians were ignored. Even more eurocentric and assimilationist in its aims was the Movement Automomiste des Nouvelles-Hebrides (MANH), also formed in 1974. This party sought to reproduce the oppressive colonial political system in operation in New Caledonia and French Polynesia (Matas-Kele-Kele 28). Along with the Tan Union (1977) and the Federal Party (1979) all these parties aligned themselves with non-Melanesian commercial interests and with the small, ethnically diverse urban community. Realising that these parties posed little threat to the dominant Vanuaaku Pati, French residents turned their focus on various custom movements, realising the potential they held to disrupt the nationalist movement. The French wooed previous foes like Jimmy Stevens with financial and material aid (Jupp and Sawer 555). Other secessionist groups were at one time or another foreign aided (Jupp and Sawer 549).

All these parties lacked the broad Melanesian support held by the Vanuaaku Pati. Even the first nationalist organisation, the Na-Griamel in the early 1960s, was quickly co-opted by French powers and used towards anti-Independence ends.

The case for the Independence of Vanuatu was put before the United Nations Committee of 24 in August 1976. Father Walter Lini, President of the New Hebrides National Party then petitioned the Committee for Independence in 1977 (Lini 35), in the light of the lack of co-operation of French and British colonial forces in assisting the Committee to assess the candidacy of the New Hebrides for Independence. The party's 1977 congress in January resolved to rename the country "Vanua`aku" meaning "Our land". Subsequently the party's own name changed to the Vanua`aku Pati (Plant 115).

[9] For example, at borders, roads would often be partly built or only finished on one side, much to the detriment of locals for whom such cultural and political distinctions held little relevance.

On the 14 November 1979, the second national election took place after the introduction of Universal suffrage in 1975. More than 90% of registered voters took part. The Vanua`aku Pati captured a substantial majority of the votes, with 62%, overwhelming the nine other parties (often referred to as the Moderates) who collectively managed to receive only 34% of the votes, while two Independent parties gained 4%. Two weeks later on the 29 November 1979 the then President of the Vanua`aku Pati was elected Chief Minister of the New Hebrides Government and given the mandate of ending 73 years of English-French colonial domination under the Protocol of 1914, and leading the New Hebrides into the era of Independence (Matas-Kele-Kele 29).

On the eve of Independence in July 1980 secessionist movements again threatened the processes. Despite public support of Independence by the French government, it covertly supported attempts to undermine the Vanua`aku Pati, aiming to protect and strengthen its control of New Caledonia and to maintain its prerogative to test nuclear weapons in French Polynesia. In Black Stone Molisa evoked one of these events in a poem entitled "Insurgent Rebellion". Here she described the French-supported 28 May 1980 armed terrorist attack, the looting and kidnapping of Government officials at the British Paddock in Luganville on the island of Santo, the residence of all government officials and the Vanuatu Government police force:

> In May 1980
> extremist political factions
> by sleight of tongue misnamed
> Union of Moderet Parties
> led by unthinking
> and explosively high spirited
> hot blooded pig headed
> youngsters bullied
> and egged on by cunning
> Self-interested foreigners
> exploiting the naiveté
> and gullibility of minds
> closed to the treachery
> of intellectual domination
> and cultural colonialism...(20)

This event made it clear that the various secessionist movements were mere puppets of French powers who did not wish to relinquish colonial control of Vanuatu:

> Clockworked and synchronised
> the systematic plan to sabotage
> impending Independence
> saw the unholy union of Moderates
> beleagured with Nagriamel
> invade the British Paddock
> unceremoniously ransacking
> and looting property attacking
> innocent civilians women and children
> `a la francàise imperiale... (21)

Ultimately they were defeated by political and military counter-measures. Troops were

brought in from Papua New Guinea to impede secessionist movements on Santo in August 1980, while the leader of the Na-Griamel, Jimmy Stevens, surrendered after his son was killed (Molisa, Vurobaravu, Van Trease 57).

Unlike other states in the Southwest Pacific, where Independence was conferred relatively peacefully by foreign powers, here the struggle for Independence was painful and erupted in violence (Jolly, "Woman"). The Vanua`aku Pati and its supporters were constantly under threat, and asassination attempts, looting, kidnapping, bomb threats, and slanderous attacks became common events. It was a heated, volatile, political climate.

After Independence

The Vanua`aku Pati remained in power until 1991. The constitution of the Republic of Vanuatu which it established is based upon the Westminster model, and provides for executive, judicial and legislative powers in the organisation of the government, as well as pledging to uphold the rights of every individual. The Preamble to the Constitution is as follows:

> We, the people of Vanuatu,
> Proud of our struggle for
> freedom
> Determined to safeguard
> the achievements of this
> struggle
> Cherishing our ethnic,
> linguistic and cultural
> diversity
> Mindful at the same time of
> our common destiny
> Hereby proclaim the
> establishment
> of the united and free
> Republic of Vanuatu
> founded on traditional
> Melanesian values, faith
> in God and Christian
> principles
> And for this purpose give
> ourselves this
> Constitution (Vanuatu 65).

The European-derived institutions of Prime Minister, Council of Ministers, Judiciary, Supreme Court, and other official government agencies are balanced by a traditional council known as the National Council of Chiefs. Although this body does not have any formal legislative or executive powers, it is a highly influential body of traditional leaders elected by their peers in the District councils of chiefs. Consisting of 22 *kastom* chiefs representing chiefs from the 11 local government council regions, it possesses "a general competence to discuss all matters relating to custom and tradition and may make recommendations for the preservation and promotion of Vanuatu culture and languages" (Vanuatu 69). Because women cannot be *kastom* chiefs there are no women on the Council of Chiefs.

As stipulated in the Constitution, the fruits of independence were to be realised in two main ways. The first involved the restoration (and re-invention) of *kastom*, 'traditional' Melanesian values and practices. Significantly, this involved the restoration of traditional lands to their indigenous *kastom* owners. The second was the promotion of Christianity as an indigenous and desired value system to follow and uphold in the new Vanuatu. For obvious reasons this is problematic. The national motto "Long God Yumi Stanap" ("In God We Stand Independent") and the national logo integrate the strong Christian influence with that of traditional *kastom*. Both are officially explained as being the two influences that serve as the binding cords of the nation (Vanuatu). Thus, Christianity's colonial links (its use as a recruiting tool for the 'empire' and as a way to control the natives) were selectively severed, and it came to be seen as intrinsic to sovereign statehood. As Jolly observes ("Woman" 7) both the values of *kastom* and Christianity were used in mainstream nationalist rhetoric. The marriage of these values climaxed in the symbolism of the national flag.

A notable split in the Vanua`aku Pati occurred between Lini and Barak Sope. In late 1991, a new coalition government was formed between Francophone Maxime Carlot and Walter Lini (who had since been ousted from the Vanua`aku pati and now represented a new party NUP).

Vanuatu is now a republic within the British Commonwealth of Nations and has its parliamentary democracy based on the Westminster System. Its legal basis is derived from the written constitution produced prior to independence in 1980. The guardian of the constitution and titular head of government is the President who is elected by an electoral college comprising members of parliament, local councils and chiefs.

APPENDIX B: Molisa's Biography

In communal based Pacific societies, one is a product of one's family. Recognition of wider kinship networks is of central importance to one's self-perception and to how one is perceived in the community. It is therefore important to explore briefly Molisa's family background.

The are several notable, influential figures in Molisa's family. Her maternal great-uncle Gagaru (Tanarovene) was a revered hunter and known as the last, if not the only Ambae man to kill a lovotolutolu (a triple-circle tusked pig). Such a conquest was particularly prestigious since most pigs killed are single-circle tusked pigs. Such a conquest adds to the status and wealth of Molisa's family. Molisa's maternal grandfather was well known for his traditional wealth but wishing to avoid any adverse reactions that may have resulted in his premature death, he avoided accumulating wealth personally. He did, however, successfully aid others in attaining chiefly rank and increased social status. For this he was famous. Molisa's maternal grandmother, Fanny Mertari began taking rank prior to their marriage. One of the first Aomba men to be ordained as a deacon in the Anglican church was Basil Meramalto Merakali, Molisa's father. He went on to establish independent district schools (Anglican) on Aomba, in which he taught and was the first to teach the English language and use it as a medium of instruction. Basil became an undisputed leader in Ambae, and according to Antfalo "Many leaders are now struggling to achieve what he was then able to achieve alone - singleness of mind and purpose among Aombans" (Antfalo 79).

Molisa was born in 1946 at Lowainasasa in East Ambae, Vanuatu, an area based on Clan Origin myths that are matrilineal in nature (Molisa, "Tahi" 93). It is also an area renowned for producing powerful women (Jolly, "Woman" 13). Molisa was no exception. Soon after Molisa was born, her father died. While Molisa's mother, May Woiaru, returned to her own family, Molisa was raised, on her father's behalf, by Basil's eldest half-sister Eleanor Woiviretagaro and her husband Stephen Lolomera. These two strong figures provided Molisa with mental, emotional and physical strength and compassion (Antfalo 77-79).

Molisa began her schooling after being cautioned by missionaries that if she did not start attending school she would not be allowed access to formal education at all after her tenth birthday. Missionaries were continually pressuring Ni-Vanuatu firstly to convert, and secondly, to receive an education. In response to the eurocentric curriculum that was, in many aspects, irrelevant for skills needed to cope with daily life, Ni-Vanuatu came up with the rebuttal that "schooling makes you stupid". This common adage seems to have some support in contemporary education theories (Thaman "Ako"). To address the imbalance, '*kastom*' schools were established. However, these were limited to boys (Huffman). Despite the warnings and pressure from missionaries to send Molisa to school, her guardians and grandparents insisted that she first became knowledgeable in Ambae[10] ways (able to read and write in the dialect) – a factor which arguably contributed to her success as a grounded Ni-Vanuatu and her continued success in western higher education systems (Huffman). Molisa initially attended Lotahimamavi Boys' Boarding School (as the only girl) before attending St. Anne's School (a mission school in Torgil, Ambae) in 1956 when she was 10 years old. Molisa was thus exposed early to both Ambae tradition and a monastic Anglo-Christian culture.

Having won a scholarship, Molisa attended Queen Victoria School in Auckland, New

[10] This area is referred to as Aomba in Antfalo (78, 79).

Zealand, a reputable Māori Girls' school. Evidence of her need for expressive outlet can be seen in an early journal Molisa kept of her impressions of the school. Five years of attending Queen Victoria had given Molisa some knowledge of Māori culture and instilled the importance of keeping and nurturing a strong cultural identity – something which many of her Māori peers had lost (Letter).

Tonkinson notes this shared realisation by other Ni-Vanuatu educated overseas and their strengthening resolve not to let their culture disintegrate under colonial rule (81). Molisa's success in this school system was demonstrated when she became Deputy Head Girl in her final year (Antfalo 79). Molisa then attended Auckland Teachers Training College for two years after which she returned as a qualified teacher to her old school in Torgil. In 1970 Molisa continued breaking boundaries and became the first Headmistress of Ambaebulu, a large, co-educational, senior boarding school. Ambaebulu, meaning "Aoba united", commemorated Basil Mera's desire to unite Ambans. Despite suffering from a severe lack of funding, the school remained open to all Ambans and was established with the aim of sustaining with the principles previously established by Molisa's father. After what she describes as three "personally challenging" years at the poorly funded school, in 1974 Molisa went to the University of the South Pacific where she majored in politics and sociology and graduated with a Bachelor of Arts. At university she met her husband, Sela Molisa, who worked as a General Manager of the Vanuatu Co-operative Federation in 1981. That same year Molisa became the Second Secretary to then Prime Minister Father Walter Lini in the Vanua`aku Pati (Antfalo 79-80), the result of many years of struggle and support for the nationalist movement. Two years later Molisa published the first collection of poetry written by a Ni-Vanuatu woman, which was also the first collection of Ni-Vanuatu poetry to be published.

A detailed and selective biography of Molisa's achievements appears in her second collection Colonised People (presumably written by Molisa herself). This comprehensive list is selected in terms of the breaking of social, political and educational boundaries as a Ni-Vanuatu woman and excerpts of it are as follows as it appears in the collection:

> * First Ambae Woman to attend secondary school, in New Zealand because there was none in New Hebrides. 1960.
>
> * First Melanesian Woman to be presented to Auckland Anglican New Zealand society as a Debutante. 1965.
>
> * First Ni-Vanuatu Woman to Head a Senior Primary Co-educational Boarding School for children (Ages 10-19). 1970.
>
> * First Ni-Vanuatu Woman to be an Official Guest (invited in her own right on the merit of her own Achievements) of the British Royal Family on the Royal Yacht Britannia. 1974
>
> * Helped to organise the Ordination of the First Bishop of Vanuatu preparatory to the Independence of the Church of the Province of Melanesia and delivered the only speech from the congregation of the Anglican Churches of Vanuatu at the Festivities. 1974.
>
> * Helped to organise the First South Pacific Women's Conference in Suva, Fiji, following which she attending the UN International Year for Women Tribune

Conference in Mexico City in 1975.

* First Ni-Vanuatu Woman to obtain a University Degree. 1977.

* First Woman to address the Vanuaaku Pati Congress. 1978.

* First Woman to be appointed to a Senior Government Post. 1979.

* Was the only woman member of the National Constitution Committee and a Signatory to the Constitution of the Republic of Vanuatu. 1979.

* First and only woman, so far, to Chair a session of the Vanuaaku Pati Congress. 1982.

* First Ni-Vanuatu Woman to Publish a Book. 1983. (28-29)

Molisa's list of accomplishments finishes on a personal note, perhaps aware of being 'forward' in publicising her personal achievements, in which she insists that other Ni-Vanuatu women should be able to accomplish as much as she has, if not more. The collection notes that the various influences in her life have

> exposed her to wealth, destitution, love, hate, peace, conflict, loyalty and treachery to an extent that has sharpened her sensitivity to the Ni-Vanuatu Human Condition and what she believes to be right for the Ni-Vanuatu and Vanuatu. The same forces have conditioned her to be a Teacher, educator, facilitator, developer, and promoter of the Melanesian, Ni-Vanuatu, Manples .

Molisa remained the Private Secretary to Father Walter Lini, Prime Minister of Vanuatu from independence until 1990. Due to internal conflicts within the Vanua`aku Party, she was dismissed by Lini in October 1990, shortly after the euphoria of Vanuatu's tenth anniversary of independence. Of this period Norman Shackley of the "British Friends of Vanuatu Newsletter" notes that Lini "summarily and without a word of thanks dismissed Grace, at the time serving as his Private Secretary, on the grounds that she had delayed the implementation of orders he had unjustly given (before his departure on an overseas trip) for the immediate deportation of seven expatriates, some of them persons of substance and long standing residence in Vanuatu. The general view was that they were persons who were getting in the way of the business interests of the Dinh family. It was this arbitrary action of Lini's, followed fairly swiftly by the dismissal of Grace's husband, the Minister of Finance, and other Ministers and Political Secretaries, which led in September 1991 to the fall of Walter Lini and the split in the Vanuaaku Party which was to have such baleful future consequences. Grace Molisa commented on these events in a bitter pamphlet, soon swept off the streets, accusing Lini of acting as a totalitarian dictator and asking 'Where are we going ?'" (Shackley).

Lini was soon replaced as Vanua`aku Party leader and Prime Minister by Donald Kalpokas. However, in the 1991 national elections Kalpokas was narrowly defeated by Maxim Carlot, leader of the Union of Moderate Parties (UMP) with its support base primarily among the francophone. Lini and his newly formed National United Party (NUP) polled a distant third and a coalition was soon formed between the UMP and the NUP to hold onto the majority of power in the government (while quickly replacing about thirty senior officials regarded as too closely associated with the previous administration) (Ogden). Ogden

describes the contemporary political situation as "fluid", pointing out that despite its politics

> Vanuatu's economic policies are generally seen as "orthodox"...and considerable income is earned by selling tax haven services to international capitalist enterprises. Vanuatu's main resources are agricultural, dominated by copra, beef and cocoa while the re-export of petroleum and fish products also makes up part of its export earnings.

Throughout the 1990s Molisa continued to campaign for women's rights and formed a 'Women in Politics' party which fielded six candidates in the 1995 Election. Despite the failure of this party (in her own case she polled a mere 37 votes) Molisa continued to push women's issues in the political arena. At the time of her death she was President of the National Council of Women, a council which she had also founded.

APPENDIX C: Poems Cited

"**Who Will Carry The Bag?**" by Touran Rarua (Who Will Carry The Bag?: Samfala Poem We I Kamaot Long Nasonal Festivol Blong ol Woman Long 1990) VNCW, 1992

There is a village
in the middle of a very big island.
A man lives with his wife and his daughter
and their little pig.
They want to make some copra.
They collect many nuts.
The man splits the nuts.
They stick out the flesh of the nuts.
They dried the flesh.
Now they have a bag of copra.
They want to sell the copra
in the village by the sea.
Who will carry the bag of copra?
Not the pig! It is too tiny.
Not the girl! She is so little.
Not the man! He is too old.
Who will? The woman.
She put the bag on her back
and walked down the hill.
The man, the girl and the pig walk behind her.

"**Girls**" by Meriam Ishmael (Who Will Carry the Bag? 18)

I am educated
I have come to recognise the role of girls;
Slaves, child bearers, sex mates,
Where is our future??
Where is our freedom??
After ten years, where is our Independence?
But do not let yourself be down hearted
We have talents
We are future mothers
Who will bring up respectful children
We help develop Vanuatu.
We help build this nation.
We can build and develop respect in our
surroundings
We are capable in any work
Carpentry, Engineering, Driving
We can teach tradition and custom
As mothers, we teach the new generations.
We must prove ourselves
Among the LEADERS OF TOMORROW.

"**Who am I?**" by Dorah Obed (Who Will Carry the Bag? 23)

I was ignored by men
I was regarded as
a child bearer
a pig raiser
and a house keeper.
I stayed at home
and nursed kids,
I cleaned house
and fed the pigs,
I wanted freedom
and looked for it
but was beaten
and sent home.

I want love and equality.
I want justice among men,
women and children.

Education has come to my country
Independence has come to my country.
Has freedom come to my country?

I am the mother of the nation
I am the producer of life.
I build Vanuatu.
Has equality come to my country?"

"**Integration of Women**" by Grace Mera Molisa (Colonised People 14-15)

We talk
as if
Women
are new-comers
to the planet,
as if Women
are new-arrivals
hanging in the wings.

Women
are mothers
of humanity.
Women
are teachers
of Society.
As such,
Women
cannot lay blame
on anyone

for their nonentity
because
Women
are party to
the maintenance
of an oppressive
macho status quo.

What needs
to occur
in the mind
consciousness
understanding
and practice
of men and women
alike
are these
prerequisites : –

To accept
women
as fellow humans
in the human society.

To accept
and recognise
the existence
of women
in the Human
Community
and Society.

To accept
recognise
and respect
the Labour
of Women
and the product
of that Labour
as a valuable
Contribution
to the Life
Growth
Development
Progress
Prosperity
Perpetuity
Posterity
of Man
the Human
Community

Human Society
and Humankind
by accepting
adopting
accounting for
quantifying
enumerating
remunerating
the product
of the Labour
of Women
as a valuable
essential
and Integral
Input by Women
into Nation Building
National Development
National Life.

"**Colonised People**" by Grace Mera Molisa (Colonised People 9-13)

Vanuatu
Supports
Liberation
Movements
for
the Liberation
of Colonised People

Clear
articulations
of support
for
freedom fighters
in East Timor
Wast Papua
French Polynesia
and Kanaky

Vanuatu
Womenfolk
half
the population
remain
colonised
by
the Free men
of Vanuatu

Womenfolk

Cook, Sew,
feed, clothe
housekeep
homemake
childbear
healthcare
passively
following
orders
instructions
commands

Women
are treated
as if
having no brain
as if
having no thought
as if
having no feeling
as if
incompetent
and incapable

Man's
colonial
domination
of Woman
is exemplified
in the submissive
subservient
obedience
to Man's rule
and authority
which takes
Woman Vanuatu
for granted
as
a beast of burden.

Nineteen eighty-six
statistics
at Vila Central
show
that Women
are treated
worse
that cats,
dogs and pigs.

When a pig

as domestic
animal
is brutalised
there is
a hue and cry
and plenty toktok.

when a Man
husband
lover
boyfriend
betrothed
intended groom
de facto husband
bashes
batters
brutalised
kills
a woman
is accepted
taken for granted
as the Man's right
therefore
hemi
bisnes
blong
tufala nomo
therefore
it becomes
confirmed
legitimised
entrenched
accepted practice
therefore
Vanuatu women
remain
Colonised People.

From 10.01.'86 —
to 3.6.'86
Seventy-three cases.
a sample reads:-
struck
on the head
lost consciousness.

Six months pregnant
kicked
in the abdomen
punched on the head
perforated eardrum

scalp lacerations
requiring suturing
kicked in the chest.
Semi conscious
scalp lacerations
severe hemorrhage
operation performed.
struck with wood
both sides of head
punched
on the mouth and nose
haematoma
deep penetrating wound,
fingers chopped off
epistaxis
orbital
haematoma.
whipped with stirrup
on back and buttocks
punched over truck
ruptured spleen
and (R) Kidney
2 major operations.
Pushed to ground
struck head
against table
haematoma
(L) eye,
ear and cheek
punched
on face and mouth
suturing
facial laceration.
bruising on hands
legs, buttocks,
laceration
back of head.
punched in face
struck
on (R) forearm
kicked abdomen
(R) shoulder
and (R) hip
struck by stone
abrasions
and haematoma
on forehead.
scratches

limbs and back
kicked in axilla

punched
(L) shoulder and arm
bruising on back
fractured ribs

At least
ten women a month
in Port Vila
alone
mostly
bashed
on the head
and kicked
in the abdomen
and thorax
while pregnant
are admitted
because
their battered bodies
require suturing
re-structuring
re-constructing
for the next
onslaught
and slaughter
because
Man is BOSS
Man I Kat Raet
therefore
in Vanuatu
IT IS RIGHT
according to
the THINKING
and PRACTICE
of Vanuatu

Leaders
Preachers
Chieves
Policymakers
custodians
of culture
and refinement
in politics
in church
in custom
according to
the Melanesian
values
or our extended
family system

according to
our Christian
principles
according to
our democracy
Man's freedom

and

These practices
typify
as well as
exemplify
Man's
attitudes
and covert
colonising
behaviour
towards
Vanuatu women.

Women
are
prevented
from
developing
their
potential
to utilise
their own
brains
exercise
their own
minds
think
their own
thoughts
express

their own
feelings
by
Man's
brute force
which
suppresses
oppresses
exploits
and dictates
Woman's
fearful
submission
to man's
insensitivity
and Inhumanity
to Ni-Vanuatu
Womenkind

Colonialism
is violence.
Colonialism
violates
the spirit
the mind
the body.
Colonialism
violates
the collective Right
all Women
Colonialism
violates
individual right
Colonialism
violates
the Human Right
of Women
to Human Dignity.

Vanuatu
preaches
and supports
the Liberation
of Colonised People
Overseas
but at home
is not prepared
to consider
that
women too
are human

women too
are people
women too
have minds
women too
think
women too
have feelings
women too
have a right
to be counted
women too
have a right
to be recognised
women too
have a right
to be respected
women too
have a right
to Human dignity
Women too
have a right
to be Free.

Free to think
Free to express
Free to choose
Free to love
And be loved
as Woman Vanuatu.

"**Black is Me**" by Albert Leomala (Some Modern Poetry from the New Hebrides 20)

black is me
possessing nothing
but me

black is me
lonely in the mountains
watching my land
being forced

to swallow
stubborn frogs
and drunken beefeaters
lecherous kiwis
and money-sucking kangaroos.

Works Cited

Antfalo, Paiaporou. "Grace Mera Molisa: Second Secretary to the Prime Minister. Yumi Stanap: . Leaders and Leadership in a New Nation." Eds. Brian MacDonald-Milne and Angela Thomas. Suva: Institute of Pacific Studies, The University of the South Pacific and Lotu Pasifika Productions, 1981. 77-80.

Avin. "Woman." Molisa ed. 7.

Beier, Ulli. "The Position of the Artist in a Changing Society." Lecture. Foundation Course of the University of Papua New Guinea.1. n.d.

Chatterjee, Partha. Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse? Delhi: Oxford University P, 1989.

Coomaraswamy, Radhika. "To Bellow Like a Cow: Women, Ethnicity, and the Discourse of Rights." Cook 39-57.

Crocombe, Ron. The New South Pacific. Wellington: Reed Education, 1973.

Dening, Greg. Islands and Beaches – Discourses on a Silent Land: Marquesas 1774-1880. Hawai'i: U of Hawai'i P, 1980.

Emberson-Bain, Atu, ed. Malignant Growth or Sustainable Development? Perspectives of Pacific Island Women. Suva, Fiji: Marama Publications, 1994.

Fawzia, Fawzia. "Women and the Revolution" in Morgan ed. 543-548.

Griffen, Arlene. "A Feminist Perspective on Pacific Literature." Paper presented at the Pacific Writers' Conference, Commonwealth Institute, London, October 27-29. 1988.

---. "Interviews: Grace Molisa, Patricia Grace, Ama Ata Aidoo." Mana. 10.1 (1993): 74-94.

---. "Women Speak Out in Literature: Pacific and Caribbean Voices." Wasafiri. 25 (1997): 22-24.

Haddock, Peter. The Concise English Dictionary. England: Blackie and Son, 1989.

Huffman, Kirk. "Cultural Complexity in the Pacific." Lecture. Bishop Museum. Honolulu, Hawai`i. August 29 1995.

Irwin, Kathie. "Towards Theories of Māori Feminism." Feminist Voices: Women's Studies Texts for Aotearoa/New Zealand. Eds. Rosemary Du Plessis, Phillida Bunkle et al., Auckland: Oxford U P. 1992. 1-21.

Jayawardena, K. Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World. London: Zed P, 1988.

Johnson, Giff. "Hilda Lini: Pacific Women's Resource Bureau." Pacific Magazine May, June. (1983): 55-65.

Jolly, Margaret. "Birds and Banyans of South Pentecost: *Kastom* in Anti-colonial Struggle."

Eds. R.M. Keesing and R. Tonkinson. Mankind: Reinventing Traditional Culture: the Politics of *Kastom* in Island Melanesia 13.4 (1982): 338-56.

---. "The Chimera of Equality in Melanesia." Mankind 17.2 (1987): 168-183.

---. "Custom and the Way of the Land: Past and Present in Vanuatu and Fiji." Eds. M. Jolly and N. Thomas. The Contemporary Pacific 4.1 (1992): 49-72.

Jolly, Margaret and Nicholas Thomas, eds. "The Politics of Tradition in the Pacific." Oceania 62.4 (1992): 241-354.

---. Woman Ikat Raet Long Human Raet o No?: Women's Rights, Human Rights and Domestic Violence in Vanuatu." Feminist Review. 52. 1996.

---. "Woman-nation-state in Vanuatu: Women as Signs and Subjects in the Discourses of *Kastom*, Modernity and Christianity." Eds. Ton Otto and Nicholas Thomas. Narratives of Nation in the South Pacific. Harwood Academic Publishers: Amsterdam, Netherlands, 1997.

Jupp, James and Marian Sawer. "Colonial and Post Independence Politics: Vanuatu." May and Nelson 549-571.

Keesing, Roger. "Traditionalist Enclaves in Melanesia." May and Nelson 39-54.

La Silencida. "Paradise Gained, Paradise Lost – The Price of "Integration." Morgan ed. 172-180.

Lini, Father Walter, ed. Beyond Pandemonium: From the New Hebrides to Vanuatu. Wellington in association with the Institute of Pacific Studies of the University of the South Pacific, Suva: Asia Pacific Books, 1980.

Matas-Kele-Kele, Kalkot: "Background to 'The Vanuatu Movement' Political Parties". Lini 8-29.

Meleisea, Malama and Penelope Schoeffel Meleisea, eds. Lagaga: A Short History of Western Samoa. Suva: U of South Pacific, 1987.

Molisa, Grace Mera. Black Stone. Port Vila, Vanuatu: Blackstone Publications, 1983.

Black Stone II: Poems. Vanuatu: Black Stone Publications and Vanuatu USP Centre, 1989.

Colonised People. Port Vila, Vanuatu: Black Stone Publications, 1987.

---. Letter to Author. 21 February 1996.

---. Local Global: Indigenous Arts Communications Networking. Port Vila, Vanuatu: Black Stone Publications, 1994.

---. Raet Blong Pipol: Wea Rod? Port Vila, Vanuatu: Blackstone Publications, 1991.

---. "Tahi Gogona, An Origin Myth from the New Hebrides: Five Interpretations." Eds. Ruth Finnegan and Raymond Pillai. Essays on Pacific Literature. Fiji Museum, Oral

Tradition Series, 2. Suva, Fiji, 1978.

---. "Vanuatu Women's Development Since Independence. Barriers and Oportunities: Women in Development in the South Pacific." Papers presented at a conference held in Vanuatu from 11-14 August 1984. Development Studies Centre, The Australian National University, Canberra, 1985. 215-217.

---, ed. Who Will Carry The Bag?: Samfala Poem We I Kamaot Long Nasonal Festivol Blong ol Woman Long 1990. Port Vila, Vanuatu: Vanuatu Nasonal Kaonsel blong ol Woman, Festivol Infomeson mo Pablikeson Komiti, 1992.

---. Woman Ikat Raet Long Human Raet o No?: Convensen Blong Stopem Evri Kaen Diskrimineisen Agensem ol Woman (Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women). Port Vila, Vanuatu: Blackstone Publications/Sun Publications, 1991.

Molisa, Grace, Nike Nike Vurobaravu and Howard Van Trease. "Background to 'The Eve of Independence': The Hidden Agenda". Lini 56-59.

Morgan, Robin, ed. Sisterhood is Global: The International Women's Movement Anthology. Great Britain: Penguin Books, 1985.

New Hebridean Viewpoints. Vila: Information Dept. of the Niu Hebredis Nasonal Pati, 1971.

Ogden, Michael R. "Republic of Vanuatu" Forthcoming in the World Encyclopedia of Political Systems. 3rd Edition, New York: Facts on File, (www2.hawaii.edu/~ogden/pir/pacific/Vanuatu.html).

Ogundipe-Leslie, 'Molara. "Nigeria: Not Spinning on the Axis of Maleness." Morgan ed. 501-507.

Ounei-Small, Susanna. "Decolonising Feminism." Tok Blong Pasifik 49.2 (1995): 20.

Plant, Chris. Ed. New Hebrides: The Road to Independence. Suva: I.P.S., USP, in association with the South Pacific Social Sciences Association, 1977.

Shackley, Norman. "Tribute." Nelson and Randell.

Sokomanu, Ati George. "Government in Vanuatu: The Place of Culture and Tradition." Culture and Democracy in the South Pacific. Suva, Fiji: Institute of Pacific Studies, University of the South Pacific, 1992.

Some Modern Poetry From Vanuatu. Suva: Mana Publications, 1975.

Sotela, Sonia Picado. Cook Foreword.

Stamford, Anne, ed. Gong: Young Voices from the New Hebrides. Suva: SPCAS, 1975.

Thaman, Konai Helu. "Ako and Faiako: Educational Concepts, Cultural Values and Teacher Role Perceptions in Tonga." Ph.D Thesis, University of the South Pacific, 1988.

Tonkinson, Robert. "Vanuatu Values: A Changing Symbiosis." May and Nelson 73-89.

Toomer, Jean. Cane \ Jean Toomer; with an Introduction by Darwin T Turner. New York: Liveright, 1923.

Vanuatu: 10 Yia Blong Independens. Rozelle, NSW: Other People Publications, for the Government of the Republic of Vanuatu, 1990.

Vizzard, Michelle. "Of Mimicry and Woman: Hysteria and Anticolonial Feminism in Tsitsi Dangarembga's Nervous Conditions" Span 36.1 (1993): 202-210.

Vurobaravu, Nikenike. "Condominium Versus Melanesian Politics in Vanuatu: A Personal Perspective from Nikenike Vurobaravu." Tok Blong Pasifik: A Quarterly of News and Views on the Pacific Islands. Victoria, B.C., Canada, 46 (February 1994).

Wendt, Albert, ed. Some Modern Poetry from the New Hebrides. Suva: Mana Publications, 1975.