state (neplanta) of writers moving into a new identity, which Anzaldúa considers as a form of birthing the self. These analogies, and the emphasis on fluid identities throughout, privilege the mestiza subject, and position her as the embodiment of cultural bridging and translation. If entry into English is essential to pan-Oceanian literary belonging (translation might be less important to dance, music, or visual culture exchange), it is the mobile figure of the translator of Mā‘ohi writing who must at least initially play the facilitating role.

However, Mateata-Allain makes clear at all points that the Mā‘ohi literary/social movement is at heart grounded in the struggles of Mā‘ohi people for self-determination and stewardship of Mā‘ohi lands, and that it moves in alliance with more rooted commitments to language and culture. This point is emphatically made in chapter 5, “Colonial Abom(b)inations and Bombing Nations,” which tracks the historical connection between the emergence of Mā‘ohi literature and activist struggles, particularly against nuclear testing. For many—as Mateata-Allain shows through readings of works by Chantal Spitz, Rai a Mai, and Titaua Peu—nuclear testing at Moruroa epitomized the French authority’s disregard for Mā‘ohi well-being and worldview, along with the desecration of their environment. In showing how a growing consciousness of this fired the desire for self-representation through literary forms—and in showing how literary movements and metaphors are paralleled and literalized in the political vision of leaders like Oscar Temaru—Mateata-Allain brings her book full circle.

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The experience of domestic workers in Vanuatu and across the Pacific has been little explored to date, and so this...
book is very welcome. *House-Girls Remember* combines oral histories by women who have been haosgels (house-girls), with reflections by eleven women who are filwokas (fieldworkers) with the Vanuatu Cultural Centre and several foreign anthropologists. It is an exemplary product of the research collaboration vigorously promoted by the center. The voices of ni-Vanuatu women are amplified here by a lightness of editorial touch in transforming their words into text and in situating the volume in the broader comparative literature. The main sources are women’s narratives and participant observations, primarily by haosgels themselves. The experiences of ni-Vanuatu and migrant Tonkinese women recorded and analyzed in this volume span over a hundred years—from the period of conjoint British and French colonialism in the New Hebrides/Nouvelles-Hébrides, through independence in 1980, to the twenty-first century. The domestic work considered includes both indentured and wage labor. Despite being referred to as “family” by their employers, throughout the book the unequal relations between masta, misis, and haosgeli are palpable.

Perhaps the most poignant story is that of a Tonkinese child servant, Uwan (108–120). This is told not in Uwan’s words but through the recollections of an elderly woman, Celestine, the daughter of a French planter family with whom Uwan lived in the 1930s and 1940s on South Efate, Vanuatu. Uwan was the orphaned daughter of a Tonkinese couple who had relocated to the New Hebrides as indentured laborers but did not survive the harsh conditions. At age seven Uwan joined the household as a companion for Celestine and as caretaker for her younger brother. Celestine stressed their childhood identity as young girls (in Bislama, “emi olsem mi” [she was just like me], 109). For author/anthropologist/filwoka Jean Mitchell, this heartfelt claim occludes the profound differences of power and privilege that existed between Uwan and Celestine. Uwan’s arrival, along with forty other indentured workers, facilitated the growth of Celestine’s father’s plantation of coffee, cocoa, cotton, and coconuts, and enabled the family to lead a genteel domestic life, while Celestine’s mother worked for the Condominium government. Uwan was both “intimate insider and perpetual outsider” (115), reinscribing the colonial inequalities of race, class, and gender in the “inner recesses of bourgeois life” (114). Her female servitude slipped into sexual service for other French planters. At eighteen Uwan became pregnant; says Celestine, “we married her to a Tonkinese” (115). Both Celestine and her brother were devastated by Uwan’s sudden departure; her brother, who “loved her like a mother” (116), wept for a week. Uwan was repatriated to North Vietnam with her husband in the 1940s; there they had six more children. Mitchell perceives the nostalgic recollections of the elderly Celestine, still living in the independent state of Vanuatu, as evincing both “the power of loss and the loss of power” (119).

Similar questions about the relation between domestic intimacies and inequalities in both colonial and postcolonial periods pervade most of the stories told by indigenous ni-Vanuatu women. There is a rich diversity
to these stories, but here I distill three
dominant themes. First, there is the
question of the value that women attach to the work itself: preeminently
child care, cooking, cleaning, and
laundry. Although most acknowledge
that domestic work is arduous, repeti-
tive, and constantly undone by daily
life, they also attest to its importance
(13). Rather than seeing such work as
demeaning manual labor or drudgery,
haosgels celebrate it, especially the
responsibilities and joys of child care.
Many speak lovingly of children who
had been in their care, and report that
even decades afterward, when they
had grown up, their charges kept in
touch with them, sent them letters
and presents, and came to visit them
(23). Food and cooking also loom
large in the stories, as affirmations of
both cultural difference and human
connection. There are hilarious tales
of the strange eating habits of British,
French, or Vietnamese employers, and
their repulsive or indigestible food
(47, 50). Stories of a misis who daily
inspected her freezer for theft (137)
and a masta who offered stale, moldy
bread (134) are seen as symptomatic
of the ungenerous, unequal relations
between indigenous workers and
their expatriate employers (128). In
contrast, eating and cooking together
created a sense of “family” (32, 34,

Second, although the money earned
was important, its value was intrinsi-
cally connected to the relationship
with the employer. Good employers
were generous and kind, providing
goods and services beyond cash: food
and board, transport, clothes, or sew-
ing machines. Bad employers were nig-
gardly, failed to pay well, or scolded
(87–88, 106–107). Some haosgels left
in protest and, if possible, returned
to a subsistence lifestyle (20). Such
relative economic autonomy is less
available to urban haosgels in Vanu-
atu today. Paid employment options
for uneducated women are few and
cash is needed in town. Two of the
volume’s coeditors, Daniela Kraemer
and Margaret Rodman, note in the
conclusion that contemporary haos-
gels are considered worse off than in
the past (143ff). Most are day work-
ers who pay their own expenses of
transport, accommodation, food, and
utilities. The difference in employment
conditions reverberates with a novel
sense of disconnection from their
employees. The “fictive family” of
the colonial period seems gone; most
domestic work (except for the care of
babies and young children) is done
while employers are at work and older
children are at school. Most haosgels
interviewed in 2001 felt “overworked,
underpaid, and ignored” (144). An
important shift in the post-indepen-
dence period is the emergence of an
indigenous middle class who also
employ haosgels. Such ni-Vanuatu
employers, though perceived as kinder,
are also seen as potentially the worst
bosses; poorer than expatriates, they
can afford neither to pay minimum
wages nor to buy expensive, time-sav-
ing domestic appliances. Especially
vulnerable are haosgels who are gene-
alogically related to their ni-Vanuatu
employers, who can end up trapped
in situations of exploitation or even
abuse (144–147). Perhaps, like the fic-
tive families of colonialism, domestic
arrangements that combine servitude
and kinship prove especially perilous
for contemporary haosgels.
Third, haosgels’ stories are suffused with stories of sexual pressure from male employers. Uwan’s story is not unique; there are many accounts here of colonial mastas who had sexual relations with domestic servants and other ni-Vanuatu women (60ff, 96–97). Some women reported living in fear of their colonial mastas, which would have surely increased the latter’s coercive potential. Other women acknowledged that they preferred to work in the fields rather than the house to avoid such risks. But some also reported successfully refusing sex, sometimes by quitting work (59, 68). More consensual sexual relations developed between some haosgels and mastas (80–82, 95–97) and some of these became recognized as marriages, even rivaling extant marriages with a white misis (71–73). Several women lamented how white fathers neglected their children with ni-Vanuatu mothers (62–64).

The collaborative workshop from which this book emerged was aimed not only at analyzing the situation of domestic workers in Vanuatu but also at effecting some positive changes through promoting respect and human rights. The book concludes with a “House-girl Awareness Pamphlet” where several rights are articulated: minimum wages (16,000 vatu per month in 2003), and rights to breaks, holidays, sick leave, and maternity leave, and to report a boss who “hits or touches you” (150). Hopefully both the pamphlet and this book will help improve the situation of domestic workers in Vanuatu.

This book is highly recommended. There might have been more editorial analysis of the integrating themes and more theoretical reflection in relation to questions posed by the broader literature on gender and domestic work. For example, why have domestic servants been predominantly women in Vanuatu, at least since World War II (unlike many parts of colonial Papua New Guinea and Africa)? What are the differences between indentured and waged domestic work and between concepts of value in commodity and kastom economies? How salient was Christian conversion in transforming models of families, households, and domestic work? How might the material on contemporary domestic work in this Pacific archipelago be situated in ongoing debates about contemporary transnational flows of nannies and maids? Still, perhaps posing these broader comparative and theoretical questions might have diminished the volume of the indigenous female voices herein and even the attraction of the book for Pacific audiences.

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John Frum first appeared on the Vanuatu island of Tanna in the late 1930s. Since then, successive generations of ethnographic observers have contributed to a voluminous literature dedi-