ON A BRIGHT JULY DAY IN 2001, the unusual workshop on which this book is based convened in Vanuatu, a chain of eighty-three islands in the Southwest Pacific. The History of House-Girls Workshop was part of a collaborative anthropological research project that brought together Western and indigenous anthropologists, as well as indigenous women who had worked as “house-girls” in the colonial era, prior to 1980. The focus was on what house-girls remember of their unique cross-cultural experiences working for expatriate employers. Anthropological fieldworkers’ reports on their interviews with older women in their home islands provided many of the narratives in the workshop; most fieldworkers also brought with them someone who had worked as a house-girl to recount her personal experience.

“House-girl” is the English translation of “haosgel,” the word for female domestic servants in the lingua franca, Bislama. We chose to retain this translation in conducting the workshop and in publications because it is the term that women workers use for themselves. As with “house-girl,” we have translated the Bislama word “masta” to the English “master.” We have, however, chosen to retain the Bislama word “misis,” meaning female expatriate and/or employer, which would translate as “mistress.” The Bislama word does not have the sexual connotations of “mistress” and conveys the status and power differences. We follow anthropologists Adams and Dickey (2000) in refusing to sidestep a local term with all its connotations. “House-girl” and “misis” convey nuances of colonialism lacking in more politically correct words such as “domestic worker.” It calls attention to power inequalities in the status quo that women’s stories explore in this book.¹

As the workshop began, walls of louvered windows allowed a light breeze to cross our classroom at a former agricultural college on the outskirts of the capital, Port Vila. The sounds of birdsong, children playing, and roosters crowing mingled with the roar of small planes taking off and landing at the nearby airport. Interis-
Map of Vanuatu.
land planes brought some of the rural participants to our five-day workshop. The population of Port Vila is only thirty thousand, but it is by far the largest town in the country and intimidating for some of the participants who were visiting it for the first time. They were glad to be meeting on the outskirts of town, where surrounding gardens and the relative absence of people and cars evoked a more familiar rural setting.

Just as our meeting site was at the interface between rural and urban lifestyles, so this book is at the border between conventional anthropological research and more collaborative, reflexive ways of knowing and sharing knowledge. Our experience suggests that ethnographic fieldwork can be much more satisfying if it is a collaboration among study participants. In this way, everyone becomes a researcher. This approach is fundamental to many action-oriented methodologies, such as participatory action research, which attempt to connect research with positive change. As well as hoping to apply lessons from the past to contemporary and future working conditions for house-girls (see chapters 11 and 12), our collaborative project retrieves evidence of women’s participation in the colonial engagement and draws attention to that involvement in a way that detaches colonial history from a purely male focus.

Despite its collaborative and historical structure, our project follows many anthropological traditions; our focus is sociocultural and our methodological tools are field notes, interviews, and reports. As organizers, and eventually as editors, our intent was to produce a book that (1) shows how unwritten histories of women’s experiences can be documented in Pacific island contexts; (2) demonstrates ways in which indigenous women can write their own histories of gendered experience in colonial contexts; and (3) suggests what collaborative roles indigenous and expatriate anthropologists can play in this process.

Much discussion among Pacific anthropologists in the Association for Social Anthropology in Oceania (ASAO) has focused on ways of making research results accessible to the communities that have hosted ethnographic research. This concern has generated the volume Sjoerd Jaarsma edited, *Handle with Care* (2002), in the ASAO Monograph Series. The ASAO Board mandated that a special session titled “Publishing for Pacific Communities” be held at the 2005 annual meeting. Debates centered on how to make research results available. Returning a dissertation or scholarly book to national libraries is the minimum required by many host countries, including Vanuatu, but few rural islanders have the opportunity to visit such facilities, and only the elite have the skills or interest to read academic publications.

Our book offers an example of one way to meet the moral and educational obligations that researchers incur in the course of their fieldwork. Not only do we
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>THE QUESTIONS</strong></th>
<th><strong>OL KWESTIN</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What year did the house-girl start working? How old was she?</td>
<td>Haosg gel i stat wok long wanem yia? Mo i bin kat haumas yia?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Where was she born?</td>
<td>Bon long wea?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Where did she work (include all locations)?</td>
<td>Ples we yu bin wok long hem (o ol ples)?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is the name of her employer?</td>
<td>Nem blong Masta?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Where did each employer work (e.g., plantation, missionary, government)?</td>
<td>Masta i wok olsem wanem – plantesin, misi, gavman?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is each employer’s marital status? Did they have children?</td>
<td>Masta i gat misis blong hem? Tufala i gat pikinini?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Where did the house-girl sleep?</td>
<td>Haosg gel i slip wea?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Where did you eat? What did you eat?</td>
<td>Yu kaekae wea? Mo kaekae wanem?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What kind of housework did you do?</td>
<td>Wanem kaen wok yu mekim long haos?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did you and your employer go to church?</td>
<td>Yu mo Masta/Missis i bin go long jioj?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What language did you speak with the employer?</td>
<td>Yu toktok wanem langwis wetem Masta?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How much money did you earn from your work?</td>
<td>Yu winim haumas mani long wok?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did you wear special clothes (including a uniform) for work?</td>
<td>Yu bin puttim spesel klos blong work?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If you wore special clothes, was there a special style or special cloth?</td>
<td>Sipos yu bin puttim spesel klos i bin gat spesel stael o spesel kaliko?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who sewed these clothes?</td>
<td>Hu i bin soemap klos ia?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Were you married when you worked as a house-girl?</td>
<td>Yu yu bin mared taem yu wok olsem haosg?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did you have any children?</td>
<td>Yu bin gat pikinini?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who looked after your children (while you worked)?</td>
<td>Hu i bin lukaotem pikinini blong yu?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Was your employer good?</td>
<td>Masta hemi gud?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Was your employer like a family member to you?</td>
<td>Masta hemi sem mak famili wetem yu?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are you still in contact with your employer?</td>
<td>Yu stap kontak wetem Masta iet?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Translated from Bislama. The Bislama text switches from third-person singular to second-person singular at this point.*
return results to islanders, but we also highlight anthropological research done by Pacific islanders and foreground research collaborations between expatriates and indigenous people.

The seminar tables in our workshop were arranged in a rectangle, open in the center. The table on the short side of the rectangle nearest the blackboard was equipped with a microphone for recording each ni-Vanuatu fieldworker and former house-girl who sat there to present their reports. A list of questions on the blackboard, distributed months earlier, had guided the fieldworkers’ research. Questions included: Who did you work for? What kind of work did you do? Where did you sleep? Where and what did you eat? What language(s) did you speak with the employer? How much money did you earn from your work?

Eleven participants were anthropological fieldworkers trained in Vanuatu. Another ten were women with experience as house-girls who had come with the fieldworker from their area. Jean Tarisesei was there as the coordinator of the Women’s Culture Project at Vanuatu’s national museum, the Vanuatu Cultural Centre (VCC). Lissant Bolton, who facilitated the workshop, is an Australian anthropologist and curator of the Pacific and Australian collections at the British Museum. Both women had trained the fieldworkers who participated in the workshop. Margaret Rodman initiated and obtained funding for the project as part of a larger study of issues of gender and race in settlers’ spaces. Also present at the workshop was Jean Mitchell, who earned her doctorate at York University based on extensive fieldwork (1996–1999) in Blacksands, a settlement on the edge of Port Vila where many house-girls live. She had returned to Vanuatu in 2001 to conduct research on the history of Vietnamese plantation labor (chapter 10). A York University MA student under Margaret’s supervision, Daniela Kraemer, participated in the workshop just days after arriving in Vanuatu for the first time. Daniela rapidly began learning about Vanuatu life and experienced linguistic immersion in Bislama. She videotaped the workshop and then went on to do her MA thesis research on contemporary house-girls’ working conditions (chapter 11).

Jean and Lissant selected experienced fieldworkers for the History of House-Girls Workshop from among those who attended a regular fieldworkers’ training workshop in November 2000. In particular, they chose fieldworkers who had some experience of being house-girls themselves, or who knew of former house-girls living in their area. Eleven women fieldworkers attended our workshop in July 2001:

- Numaline Mahana (Tanna)
- Mailie Michael (Tanna)
- Lena Kalmat (Pango)
- Leisara Kalotiti (North Efate)
- Lesaruru Tamearu (North Efate)
- Sinlemas Kalo (North Efate)
INTRODUCTION

Lewia Charlie (Tongoa)  Siaban Denison (Pentecost)
Lucy Moses (Ambrym)  Kate Ruth (Banks)
Tanni Frazer (Malakula)

Where possible, these fieldworkers, in turn, recruited other women who had worked as house-girls and who were available to come to Port Vila for the special workshop. Ten were in attendance:

Edna Albert (Pango)  Rachel (Ambrym)
Eva Kaltapan (Pango)  Estelle (Malakula)
Netty Joseph (North Efate)  Robin Ken (Malakula)
Lonnette Tasale (North Efate)  Françoise Molwai (Pentecost)
Lepakoa Dick (Tongoa)  Jocelyn Kibi (Banks)

The goal of our workshop was to record the recollections of indigenous women who had lived and worked as house-girls during the Anglo-French Condominium of the New Hebrides, before Vanuatu gained independence in 1980. Joint Anglo-French administration of the islands began with a naval commission in 1887, followed by a convention in 1906; colonialism, in other senses, began much earlier than the condominium. By the mid-1820s, indigenous people interacted frequently with sandalwood traders in the southern part of the group. Presbyterian, Anglican, and Catholic missionaries were established throughout the islands by the mid-1850s, though pockets of resistance to conversion still remain (especially on Tanna; see chapter 1). Missionaries began documenting the languages—there are 113 languages currently spoken in Vanuatu (Tryon 1999, 10)—and other expatriates began trying to understand the diverse forms of kinship and social organization they found within and among the eighty-three islands.

Despite such cultural diversity, expatriates tended to see gender differences as paramount, and the status of women in Vanuatu as uniformly low. They tended to locate oppression quite singularly in the relationship between men and women; the male domain was “public,” while the women were seen as occupying domestic or private realms (Bolton 2003, 55). This distinction was crucial for missionaries. They concluded that women led hard lives in Vanuatu because they did heavy physical labor in gardens and forests outside the home. Bolton argues that “for all the rhetoric criticizing the status of women in indigenous practice, it was expatriates who established a formal inequality between all women and all men, on the basis of a public/private distinction they introduced into colonial structures” (56). The goal was to create a female, domestic sphere centered on the house (Jolly 1991; Rodman 1985).
Ethnographic research has explored gender relations in particular locations in Vanuatu, notably Ambae (Bolton 2003), Pentecost (Jolly 1994; Walter 1996), Ambrym (Patterson 1976), and Tongoa (Kelly 1999). These studies paint a more complex picture of gender relations, in which the public/domestic distinction crumbles. Marilyn Strathern’s innovative work on personhood in Melanesia (1972) showed that Western notions of society and the individual are inappropriate; in places such as Vanuatu, personhood is a product of social relationships. Society, in this view, shifts from a set of controls on the individual to the sum of networks of relationships. As Bolton puts it (2003, 55), “in each relationship, a person has different responsibilities and obligations and different access to authority or power.” Ni-Vanuatu women and men share aspects of childcare, gardening, gift-giving, animal husbandry, and decision making in sometimes symmetrical and sometimes asymmetrical relationships.

A gendered division of labor is clearest in the work that ni-Vanuatu do for expatriates. Ni-Vanuatu woman were the focus of our workshop because they, not men, have constituted virtually all of the paid domestic workforce since World War II. This was not always the case, as Jean Mitchell illustrates in chapter 10. An agreement among the French colonies of New Caledonia and Indochina led to the expansion of French plantations in the New Hebrides thanks to the importation of some six thousand Vietnamese indentured laborers in the 1920s. Although most worked in plantations, some were house servants. When indentures ended in 1945, the Vietnamese started small businesses (for example, taxis and market gardening) that contributed to the urbanization of Port Vila and Luganville. Few continued to work as plantation laborers or house servants. Nearly two thousand were repatriated in 1963, but descendants of the approximately three hundred remaining Vietnamese are politically and economically important in postcolonial Vanuatu.

From 1863 onward, ni-Vanuatu men and to a lesser extent women participated in what became known as the labor trade. Young people went abroad to labor from most of the islands in the New Hebrides: “In the year 1882, for example, there were about 14,000 New Hebrideans working abroad out of a population of 100,000 or so... About 7,000 of these were in Queensland, about 3,000 in Fiji, 2,800 in New Caledonia, 1,000 or so in Samoa and Hawai‘i, plus an unknown number working as sailors or boat crews on European ships” (Shineberg 1999, 5). Women made up about 10 percent of the recruits to New Caledonia and 6 or 8 percent of the recruits to Queensland and Fiji. Most worked as domestic servants in Noumea. In rural areas, they also worked as field laborers, and some worked in the New Caledonian mines. The degree of sexual exploitation by male recruits and employers is impossible to document, but from 1875 at least, Melanesian women
were recruited to New Caledonia explicitly to serve as sexual partners for male recruits and quite probably for the overwhelmingly male expatriate population (109).

Within the Condominium of the New Hebrides, ni-Vanuatu men and women provided the only source of labor on the plantations of Anglophone settlers who, unlike their French counterparts, were legally restricted from importing foreign laborers. In the early days of colonial influence in Vanuatu, indigenous women rarely were allowed by their families to work for expatriates. Further, ni-Vanuatu men were more experienced in dealing with whites and some learned such skills as cooking through time spent on plantations in the islands and in Australia, or through working on ships. Until World War II, house-boys were more common than house-girls, but since then paid domestic employment has been women's work. Ni-Vanuatu house-boys were a rarity after 1942 when American troops came to Vanuatu and indigenous men were recruited to help with the war effort.

Employers of house-girls discussed in our workshop included English or French government officials, missionaries, and settlers (planters, traders, and small businessmen). Most of the employers were considered to be white (mainly English- or French-speaking), but the women identified some employers in Bislama as Sinwa, which literally means “Chinese” (from the French “chinois”) but includes Vietnamese and other Southeast Asians. The cost of labor was low enough that virtually every expatriate had the option of hiring a house-girl in the colonial period. Some chose not to, particularly as independence approached, because they felt uncomfortable having a servant, among other reasons. Generally, however, even settlers who were struggling to feed their families during the global depression of the 1930s had house-girls, though they might be paid a pittance. For many expatriate employers, having a domestic worker was unthinkable in their home countries but perfectly ordinary in the islands. Missionaries, lower-ranking colonial officers, and settlers were not wealthy nor did they come from the kind of class backgrounds in which servants were common at home. But in the colonial New Hebrides, house-girls were readily available and affordable, though some had little or no training and, as workshop participants described, needed a lot of on-the-job learning. In any case, training girls and women in Western housekeeping practices was part of the colonial civilizing agenda, which we will discuss later.

Domestic workers were essential to maintaining even a fairly simple expatriate lifestyle. The climate, the kind of housing employers lived in, and the lifestyle to which they aspired required constant defense—waged with brooms and buckets—against ants, rats, cockroaches, mosquitoes, spider webs, and mud. The exotic needs of employers who wanted their babies in clean diapers, who wore uniforms or vestments that required elaborate ironing, and who liked a hot supper cooked
on a stove and served to the family on dishes at a table all created plenty of work for house-girls.

A few house-girls worked for ni-Vanuatu women who lived with white men, and one in our workshop worked for a white woman married to a ni-Vanuatu man, but all had Western lifestyles. Today, many house-girls work for ni-Vanuatu couples (see chapter 11), but before independence this was rare. The workshop recorded one such experience from the early days of the independence movement in 1970 (see chapter 3). In ni-Vanuatu families today and in the past, a young girl is often in charge of laundry and child care—the kind of work a paid house-girl would do—as part of her family obligations rather than as a wage-earning job. As more ni-Vanuatu husbands and wives in urban areas work outside the home and more of their relatives come to town from rural areas in search of scarce jobs, paying a family member to be a full-time house-girl is becoming more common. While being paid compensates a house-girl for her work, it also changes familial relationships by commodifying them; the power dynamics between relatives change, for better and worse, when they become employers and employees.

House-girls’ tasks routinely include sweeping, cleaning, doing laundry, taking care of children, and cooking. The first few days of our workshop focused on the responsibilities of house-girls and on new technologies, such as ironing, washing floors, and cooking strange cuisines. By midweek, the women were comfortable enough to discuss the sexual behavior of white men with ni-Vanuatu women, some of whom were house-girls. Many house-girls working for single or married men rejected their employers’ sexual advances; others took on additional roles as lover, wife, concubine, and/or mother of their employer’s children. As a house-girl’s status changed, she might employ a house-girl of her own. Lucy Moses, a fieldworker from Ambrym, tells a dramatic story in chapter 5 about the confrontation between a ni-Vanuatu woman and a white woman both married to the same man. Stories such as hers not only make intriguing reading in this book, but they shed light on how employers and house-girls mutually construct differences of culture, race, and gender as well.

Theoretical contribution

One theoretical contribution of this History of House-Girls project is to find new entry points into understanding colonialism. Narratives of domestic workers reveal colonial processes through the particulars of lived experience. By paying attention to the gendered and racialized content of house-girls’ stories about past experiences and places, we can see the interplay between colonial and indigenous constructions of gender, space, work, and race. Anne Stoler’s work has been foundational
in this area. She points out that “who could be intimate with whom—and in what way—[was] a primary concern in colonial policy” (2002, 2). She regards colonial domesticity as a highly contested site. Her work focuses on colonial policy and archival material, with some interviews of ex-colonial house servants (Stoler 2002; Stoler and Strassler 2000).

The workshop that resulted in this book goes further, publishing the findings of indigenous fieldworkers and the stories told by former house-girls themselves in an exploration of meanings of domestic space. Anne McClintock has argued that “imperialism cannot be understood without a theory of domestic space” (1995, 17). Contestations over domesticity and domestic work were brought to the forefront of workshop conversations that included twenty-one indigenous and four expatriate women with diverse backgrounds and experiences. Discussions about the sexual practices of white male employers explored colonial practices that have been the subject of academic as well as popular books. How and why could white men be intimate with their house-girls and other ni-Vanuatu women while their wives turned a blind eye or were simply oblivious? The women who contributed to our workshop explored the reactions of ni-Vanuatu, both men and women, to such sexuality and discussed links between white men’s inappropriate sexual behavior and kastom, or traditional knowledge and practice.

In our History of House-Girls Workshop, we focused on the particulars of human experience as social constructions, as well as on the diversity and common themes that such an approach generates. In this book, we have let all the women’s stories stand on their own, although they have been edited for readability. With articulate reflexivity, ni-Vanuatu women recounted their experiences, thoughts, beliefs, and attitudes, either directly or through the reportage of an anthropological fieldworker. Their experiences were highly diverse. Workshop participants varied in age from their mid-thirties to very old. They came from diverse locations in Vanuatu and worked for many kinds of employers. Their level of education, religious affiliation, and political opinions were also varied. They were encouraged to verbalize their differences in attitudes, opinions, and experiences; this book reflects that range.

Our workshop addressed what James Clifford (1997) would call “traveling culture”; it produced traveling stories. These are stories in which travel is an important theme. Stories about domestic work would not necessarily implicate travel if the project were done in another cultural setting, but the scattered population, numerous islands in Vanuatu, and isolation of settlers’ spaces from local settlements often meant that house-girls had to travel to work. Some had to paddle daily from off-shore islands; others left home for months or years at a time to work in Port Vila. A few accompanied employers on holidays to Britain, France,
Australia, or New Caledonia. These are also traveling stories in the sense that the stories themselves travel. For example, the fieldworker’s report from Pentecost Island (chapter 8) describes the experiences of a house-girl who had worked for the Whitford family in the Banks Islands in the 1930s. The house-girl was implicated in settlers’ recollections in Sydney, Australia, about the death of a child; some interesting overlaps, differences, and gaps in this story are explored elsewhere (Rodman 2004). These accounts and many others in the book are about connections between people’s lives, stories that constitute and cross-cultural boundaries of gender and race. In traveling, the stories connected multiple voices, bodies, identities, and spaces. Often, several women at the workshop could add to a story from their own experience of an employer or a place. Stories traveled around the room as women added new information, asked questions, and raised concerns.

**Literature on paid domestic work**

Until the late 1980s, paid household work was “very much under-researched” (Moore 1988, 86). Since then, extensive academic attention has turned toward housework and the politics of paid domestic labor. Historians, anthropologists, sociologists, and journalists have all written about paid domestic work, as have paid domestic workers themselves. The focus has been on migration and globalization; Filipina maids have received particular attention in this context. The South Pacific, which is neither a major supplier nor receiver of such workers, has received little attention, although the employment of house-girls there has made possible an otherwise unattainable standard of living for expatriates and middle-class islanders.

While some academics have suggested that paid domestic work is a vanishing occupation or one that is becoming obsolete, many researchers’ in-depth interviews with paid domestic workers suggest that this is not so. In fact, the number of people working in the paid domestic service industry appears to be growing (Hansen 1989, 5), and Third World women are migrating in ever-increasing numbers to work as maids and nannies in affluent countries (Ehrenreich and Hochschild 2002, 3).

While global capitalism has changed the face of paid domestic work, in some ways this work exists today much as it did centuries ago. As the accounts in this book suggest, the attitudes and assumptions embedded in this type of work, the work itself, and the relationships between worker and employer remain largely unchanged in many countries around the world (Romero 1992, 25). Power is key to these relationships. Many studies of domestic workers have considered the importance of gender, race, and class not only in oppressing workers but also in mak-
The women’s accounts in our book contribute to understanding this response to oppression, but they also explore alternative responses: refusal to categorize domestic work as degrading, insistence on respect, and resistance in varying forms to unsatisfactory work and work relationships. We seek here to situate house-girls, like the Filipina maids in Hong Kong whom Nicole Constable studied, “within the field of power, not as equal players but as participants” showing how they and their employers “wield certain forms of power even as they are dominated by others” (1997, 11).

Although notions about domesticity and housework have traditionally varied from society to society, colonialism and European expansionism spread Western patriarchal ideas about domesticity and domestic work. Comaroff and Comaroff argue that “colonialism and especially colonial evangelism played a vital part in the formation of modern domesticity . . . overseas” (1992, 39–40). They suggest that strong links existed between British colonial agendas of salvation and domesticity at home and abroad, such that ideas about domesticity were tried out in the colonies, then brought home to be applied to the local poor. The social construction of sanitation, and the importance of cleanliness as a step toward godliness, has received considerable attention in Melanesia (Jolly 1991; Thomas 1994). The implementation of these civilizing agendas created house-girls, as ni-Vanuatu women (and initially, men) were trained in Western regimens of laundry, ironing, and housecleaning. Settlers employed mostly male islanders as plantation laborers, but trained women and girls as domestics. Missionaries played leading roles, educating female islanders in domestic routines that not only prescribed tasks but also dictated how they should be performed, creating what Foucault calls “docile bodies” in the process.

While domestic skills such as washing and cooking were crucial measures of “civilization,” Westerners have tended to regard paid domestic work as a uniformly low-status occupation. Cleaning up after others, which is the basis of paid domestic service, is stigmatized as degrading and demeaning. Romero generalizes (1992, 17): “Most household chores are experienced as drudgery. There is little enthusiasm or competition to wash and iron clothes, scrub bathrooms, or vacuum and dust the living room.” Rollins (1985, 24) takes this point even further by stating that housework is manual labor; manual labor is universally denigrated and thus domestic service has, by extension, also become denigrated.

Ni-Vanuatu women hold a different view, one that values domestic work itself while taking issue with many of the conditions under which house-girls labor. In this sense, they resist their employers’ definitions of the work that house-girls do as meaningless drudgery. These are not challenges to a global system that sub-
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jugates them, but little, “immediate struggles” in which subjects (house-girls in this case) resist power in their daily lives, changing the operation of power in small ways, from within its operation (Foucault 1978). This is what Judith Butler (1997) would call a turn that subjects take against the conditions that create them. Rhacel Salazar Parreñas (2001, 30) builds on these concepts to advocate for a “subject level of analysis” that focuses on the effects of larger social processes on subjects, in her case Filipina maids, who experience and yet resist subordinate conditions of migration. The ni-Vanuatu women’s contributions in this book contribute ethno-graphically to such an approach.

Women in the workshop and in Daniela Kraemer’s subsequent MA research in Vanuatu viewed domestic work as important because it keeps people and their houses clean and in order, key values of docility and yet also of resistance that they internalize as both customary and modern. As Madelaine, a house-girl working in Port Vila in 2001, explained to Daniela, “Paid domestic work is important work because, what if I don’t clean the house? The house will be dirty and a mess, and it’s no good for people to live in a dirty, messy house.” While some ni-Vanuatu women may well feel that housework is drudgery, the overwhelming consensus seems to be that the work is meaningful and important. Many of the house-girls reported that they liked their jobs, enjoyed looking after children, and that cleaning was easy for them. Thus, women in Vanuatu challenge the idea that domestic work is demeaning. A theme that emerges in this book is that housework itself is not what house-girls find problematic; rather, their working conditions are what cause them dissatisfaction and stress.

Many of the contributors also attributed the importance of paid domestic work to the fact that they rely on the wages earned from it for their own survival and the survival of their families. Since most ni-Vanuatu women have limited education and have few jobs available to them, many can only find work as house-girls. It may be that because being a house-girl is one of the few occupations open to many ni-Vanuatu women, they generally regard it as important work.

The issues at play within the paid domestic service industry are part of a wide social story, one that speaks to race, class, and gender constructions and inequalities. Glenn (1992) and Romero (1997) both advocate the exploration of paid domestic service in terms of racial politics; avoiding racial dynamics, they claim, significantly limits our understanding of paid domestic service. As Glenn observes, “The racial division of reproductive labor has been a missing piece of the picture. . . . This piece . . . is key to the distinct exploitation of women of color and is a source of both hierarchy and interdependence among white women and women of color” (3). Our project on house-girls engages with race and racial politics. Following Romero and Glenn, the History of House-Girls Workshop produced a
discourse within which issues of race, gender, and by implication class are seen as intertwined and equal players in the power dynamics of paid domestic service.

**Collaborative research**

Many convergent factors led to our involvement in collaborative fieldwork in 2001. Our personal histories are, of course, also political. Our research practices are shaped by and have helped to shape Vanuatu’s changing research climate, which now prioritizes collaboration. This section concludes by noting how changes in Canadian funding and in anthropological theory also support collaborative research.

Jean Tarisesei comes from Ambae Island, where in 1970 she and Margaret Rodman first met. In 1978, Margaret returned to Ambae to do doctoral research on customary land tenure, and in 1982, two years after Vanuatu achieved its independence, she did a project on consumption practices there.

In the 1970s and early 1980s, Vanuatu attracted many researchers, including anthropologists, as *kastom* (indigenous knowledge and practice connected to the past and to place) was emerging from colonial oppression to become a postcolonial theme that encouraged national unity. Then in 1985, the Vanuatu government imposed a moratorium on outsiders conducting anthropological field research within the country. One reason for the moratorium was that “senior members of the new Vanuatu government had been (justly or not) annoyed by the behavior of certain researchers” (Bolton 1999a, 4). In more positive terms, the training of indigenous fieldworkers became a priority in the newly independent country, and a few expatriate researchers (including Bolton) were entrusted with this training process during the moratorium.

The moratorium created a space in which the indigenous fieldworker program could grow and thrive. It also created a climate that eventually fostered collaboration between ni-Vanuatu and expatriate researchers. Lissant Bolton (1999a) has recorded the history of the fieldworker programs for men and women. All participants are volunteers; they receive no salary, but their expenses are paid when they attend annual fieldworker workshops in Port Vila. Initially, all of the fieldworkers were male. However, “under pressure from a number of influential ni-Vanuatu women . . . and with the approval of the men fieldworkers, moves were made in 1989 to set up a Women Fieldworker Network” (4).

Bolton’s doctoral research on Ambae women’s redefinition of pandanus textiles as part of women’s identity was one of the only expatriate projects allowed under the moratorium. It was permitted as part of her work with Jean Tarisesei to start the Women’s Culture Project in 1989 and then the Women Fieldworker
Network in 1991–1992. These projects focused on redefining and prioritizing indigenous knowledge and practice, or kastom.

In 1994, Lissant and Jean held the first women fieldworker workshop with ten women from around the country. Since then, women fieldworker workshops have become an annual event in Port Vila. As one workshop ends, the topic is set for the next workshop so that the women have twelve months in which to do their research. Workshop topics have included kinship terminologies, respect, basketry, marriage rituals, seasonal calendars, and gardening. Beyond recording kastom, the workshops serve to train the fieldworkers in research skills and to discuss with them what aspects of their culture they want to keep alive. The workshops also develop the women’s oral presentation skills, encouraging them to be confident in public speaking and thus, implicitly training them to be leaders in their own communities.

The moratorium was lifted in 1995 as a consequence of political and personnel changes at the national level and within the VCC. The new director, Ralph Regenvanu, could see that the mandate of the Cultural Centre—to preserve, protect, and develop kastom—was becoming more urgent as the last people who could remember pre-Christian times passed away. The inclusion of foreigners would increase the number of researchers available to achieve this mandate. The fieldworker training programs had shown that expatriates could “conduct cultural research in a manner that involved, respected and acknowledged their informants and was of benefit to the [local] people and communities.” The end of the moratorium was marked by the introduction of a national cultural research policy whose objective was that of “ensuring collaboration between foreign researchers and ni-Vanuatu to their mutual benefit” (Regenvanu 1999, 98).

It was in this climate of a renewed opening for research within the parameters of the cultural research policy that Margaret Rodman met Lissant Bolton in Port Vila in July 1995. Lissant was there for a Pacific region museum curators’ workshop. Margaret was there to begin a project on the history of British colonial space, which included working with a ni-Vanuatu counterpart on the Vanuatu Cultural and Historical Sites Survey and contributing to a historic sites register in the course of her research on colonial buildings.

Although collaborative work is required by the cultural research policy, it has taken many forms and remains highly negotiable. Margaret found it a productive, enjoyable way to work in 1995 and wanted to work collaboratively on a larger scale for her new project in 2001. There were many reasons a collaborative workshop seemed like a good idea. Collaboration between expatriate and indigenous fieldworkers shifts the power dynamics of the research relationship toward greater
equality, though it does not do away with them. While “native” anthropologists have fluid positions in their society and do not have all the answers (Narayan 1993), ni-Vanuatu interviewers are more likely than expatriates to get candid information about indigenous women’s relations with expatriate employers. Logistically, more researchers could talk to more women. The women fieldworkers have access to widely scattered rural areas throughout the group so they could reach a large number of women who once worked as house-girls and interview them in their native languages. Although Bislama is very widely used, many older rural women feel more comfortable speaking their local language. Women fieldworkers working in local languages with women they share a linguistic and cultural background with can present less mediated—or at least differently mediated—indigenous views of colonialism.

Our approach to this research and the key role in it that the house-girls workshop played reflected not only a convergence of our research interests but also the changing research climate in Vanuatu. There were also changes in the funding climate in Canada. The Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) began to encourage projects incorporating multiple researchers. SSHRC funding covered the cost of the fieldworkers and former house-girls’ transportation, accommodations, and per diem.

These institutional changes fit well with changes in anthropological theory and method. The extent to which “facts” are accepted as socially constructed, the debunking of the myth of the lone—often male—anthropologist, and an increasing interest in innovative, participatory methods all encourage a shift toward reflexivity and collaboration.

**Similarities and differences**

The house-girls workshop was a special event held in addition to the annual fieldworker training and was structured like the other sessions: (1) the topic was announced to the participants at the end of the previous year’s workshop; (2) research questions were distributed; and (3) fieldworkers were asked to interview women in their home areas and report their findings at the workshop. Like all the workshops, the entire proceedings were tape-recorded and copies of the cassette tapes were deposited in the Sound Archive of the VCC.

The house-girls workshop was also different from the other sessions. First, because funding was limited, only ten women fieldworkers were selected to participate. We sought a broad geographical coverage of the country, so Jean Tarisesei and Lissant Bolton picked women from as far north as the Banks Islands and as far south as Tanna. Second, we encouraged each fieldworker to bring at least one for-
mer house-girl with her to the workshop. Third, annual workshops are held at the VCC but, as suggested above, the former agricultural college was less intimidating to some former house-girls. The dorms at the college made it possible for us to have a co-residential experience that encouraged informal conversations. And fourth, the entire workshop was video- as well as audiotaped. The video footage has been extremely useful—far more so than the audio recordings—in preparing this book. Being able to see the speakers’ gestures and to visually identify who is asking a question, for example, greatly enhanced our transcriptions of the workshop proceedings.

Our workshop was the first to focus on colonial history rather than kastom; in fact, our workshop allowed participants to problematize the relations between the two. Annual workshops are oriented toward recording traditional knowledge and training new fieldworkers—our workshop did neither. In addressing research questions related to Margaret Rodman’s larger project on colonial history, the women found themselves enjoying their participation in research that went beyond the usual limits of their inquiry. Many anthropologists might identify with the way Numaline Mahana, a fieldworker from Tanna, expressed the pleasures and demands of field research in her comment at the beginning of chapter 1: “What interests me so much about fieldworker research is that the more research you do, the more you find that the work is without end. It goes on and on.”

Research ethics are another example of how the house-girls workshop differed from the other sessions. Though not directly addressed in the training, ethics received a lot of attention in planning and conducting our workshop. In part, this reflects the research climate in Canadian academia; how could SSHRC be sure that the fieldworkers, who would be working independently in their home islands, were actually obtaining informed consent for the material they gave us? When the ten fieldworkers were selected and given the list of research questions, they were briefed on the importance of obtaining such consent from their interviewees. (Written consent was not an option; in rural Vanuatu, signing any piece of paper is viewed with suspicion.)

As workshop organizers, we addressed issues of research ethics repeatedly, both on and off the video- and audiotapes. We explained that if there was anything said during the workshop that someone later wished to have excluded or somehow modified, she had only to let us know.

Finally, our workshop differed from annual fieldworker workshops in its commitment to publish the edited proceedings as a book. This was not part of the initial funding application to SSHRC, but it emerged as a priority by the time the workshop closed. The participants were enthusiastic about having their reports appear in print. We valued the opportunity to give voice to women who had con-
ducted anthropological fieldwork and/or volunteered to share their work experience as house-girls. Lamont Lindstrom and James Gwero had produced a number of radio programs and published in Bislama their collaborative work with multiple ni-Vanuatu contributors (1998). But no other workshops had been published, although some had been publicized on radio and in video. Lissant Bolton has written about the much greater importance of voice and performance—audiotape, radio, and video—relative to print technologies in Vanuatu (1999b). The house-girls workshop received some publicity on the radio; however, we agreed that print—the traditional medium for dissemination of anthropological research in the Western world—was an important vehicle to share the results of the ni-Vanuatu women fieldworkers’ work.

Print is also crucial if ni-Vanuatu are to have input into the educational system. We hope that this book will be suitable for classroom use, especially in secondary and postsecondary institutions in the Pacific islands. We decided to publish primarily in English rather than Bislama partly to reach this audience; we included Bislama boxes of text for ni-Vanuatu readers and others interested in the language. We also chose English because Bislama is harder for educated ni-Vanuatu as well as expatriates to read. It is an oral language. Moreover, English is one of the two primary languages of instruction.

**Daily organization of the workshop**

In terms of the day-to-day organization, our workshop followed conventions that reflected colonial ways of organizing time and space, which were familiar to the women fieldworkers. Opening and closing ceremonies complete with ecumenical hymn singing, dignitaries giving speeches, and copious refreshments for all framed the five days, as they do at the annual workshops. Fieldworkers took turns leading prayers at the beginning and end of each daily session. Morning and afternoon tea breaks punctuated each day’s work. Presenters gave their reports seated at the head table. Then Lissant Bolton opened the floor for questions. The fieldworkers were trained to ask questions, and it never failed that six or seven of them would do so after any presentation. This does not mean that everyone listened attentively to the reports; on some hot, humid afternoons the videotape recorded a few women dozing. But the question period seemed to engage everyone. Questions ranged from the factual (How much was your pay?) to the technical (How did you wash clothes?) to more emotional and open-ended topics (How did you feel when your employer yelled at you?).

After the initial shyness of the first few days passed, the questions fueled passionate discussions. These included, in various combinations, such topics as:
money, working conditions, white men, Vietnamese people, ni-Vanuatu men, white women (and differences between French and English women), children (ni-Vanuatu and the children of employers), respect, humiliation, the church, sex, violence, the causes of World War II, and whether being a house-girl was better or worse work in the colonial period than it is now.

An exchange in chapter 4 highlights how collaboration generated knowledge in the workshop. This traveling story connects a white settler’s sexual offenses and his failure to respect *kastom* with regard to killing pigs. White men’s desires for ni-Vanuatu women and for holding customary ceremonies obviously are linked in terms of “performance” and power. But the workshop participants agreed not only that such men are incompetent when it comes to correctly performing a ceremony, but also that their sexual behavior shows how they lack the moral character to be respectful of local customs, including ceremonial ones. Thus the assessment of this man shifted in the workshop from being accepted—“living like a Tongoan man”—to being hated by ni-Vanuatu. His behavior was considered to be so appalling that a fieldworker from Malakula wondered whether he is “the child of a man” (i.e., he never learned to be fully human). He was perhaps a “child of the road,” placeless, unable to fit into any culture, morally without roots. At the very least, it was as if he came from some uncivilized country, the fieldworker suggested, exhibiting behavior against which colonialism was powerless, combining natural and more lethal weapons (coconuts, knives, and guns). This particular discussion ended with the fieldworker from Ambrym bringing it full circle: when this white man travels to her island, he lives with ni-Vanuatu families just as he had on Tongoa in the beginning of the story, but he leaves unwanted babies and failed *kastom* ceremonies in his wake.

As Stoler (2002) suggests, the women’s stories crossed, recrossed, and problematized the boundaries concerning who could be intimate with whom and in what ways. The two wives in Lucy’s story (chapter 5) remain in complementary distribution in the settler’s space, at least until the eventual confrontation; but the ni-Vanuatu wife always knew about the French one, as was often said to be the case. Similarly, the ni-Vanuatu house-girls knew far more about their employers’ lives than the employers knew about their servants. Many employers never entered the house-girls’ quarters and had no idea what life was like in a village. In contrast, as the collaborative workshop revealed, house-girls were familiar with their employers’ dirty laundry in many ways. The house-girls generally lacked the power to define the boundaries of that intimacy but they could to varying degrees manipulate its terms, for example, by withdrawing their labor. The collaborative workshop gave all of us an opportunity to explore such intimate yet power-laden colonial relationships in their particulars. It provided an opportunity for indig-
enous and expatriate women to consider gendered, racialized issues in colonial history collectively, an opportunity that, while unique, can be extended through this methodology to other postcolonial contexts.

**Themes**

Some of the themes that run throughout this book include:

**Work**

Fieldworkers and former house-girls talked about “work” as a colonial concept, in effect a new way of ordering space and time. The idea of working hours, starting at 7:30 a.m., breaking at midday then resuming until late afternoon was strongly associated with the world of expatriates' churches, schools, and workplaces, and was a major adjustment for women accustomed to more flexible rhythms of village life.

Washing clothes was a dominant topic in the workshop reports. Boiling, bluing, starching, and ironing were tasks described in detail. The clothes themselves were often different from what the house-girls wore at home; the fabrics, styles, and ways of washing and ironing them were of interest to the workshop participants. Food and cooking also received a lot of attention. In particular, they stood out as markers of cultural difference. The fact that one former house-girl had a collection of saucepans in her bamboo house was taken as a sign that she had worked for white families.

We noted the short periods for which women worked as house-girls. For many, working as a house-girl was a transitional occupation between school or childhood and marriage. Working for a few months or less was not uncommon. As was the case on plantations in Vanuatu (although less so when transported to Queensland), withdrawal of labor was always an option that ni-Vanuatu exercised. Shineberg (1967) has observed that even as long ago as the nineteenth-century sandalwood trade, ni-Vanuatu refused to work under conditions that were not to their liking. Some women, as fieldworker Tanni Frazer put it, refused to consider working as house-girls because they would not be any man’s slave. Many others left employment when the *misis* shouted at them, or the pay was too low, or the equipment they had to use was too baffling, or because they wanted to do something else. In the pre-independence world where subsistence agriculture remained an ever present option—something less available to current urban ni-Vanuatu—working for wages was not a necessity, and house-girls could generally go back to their village and garden.
Money

Every workshop report mentioned money. If the presenter didn’t say how much a house-girl was paid, it would be one of the first questions asked. Much discussion ensued about the relative purchasing power of money. While two pounds in the 1950s did not sound like much, and the currency has changed twice since then—from Australian pounds to dollars and again from dollars or French Pacific francs to vatu at independence—the women agreed that two pounds once bought a lot of goods. Occasionally, a woman said the money she was paid was irrelevant. For others, the lack of money in their household prevented them from continuing their education and led them to seek employment as house-girls. The “bad old days” before independence when wages were low and colonial employers could be arrogant and even racist were sometimes seen as the “good old days” because money went so much further and employers provided payment in kind (e.g., housing, food, and transport).

Communication

Some employers were fluent in Bislama and a few whites, like Olive Breusch and Oscar Newman who were born on Tongoa, were native speakers of a local language; others, notably missionaries on Malakula according to fieldworker Tanni Frazer, waited until they had learned the local language to hire house-girls. But many employers knew little Bislama when they first hired house-girls and, especially in recollections from before World War II, the house-girls themselves sometimes had limited knowledge of the language. Workshop reports included some very funny stories about miscommunication, joking behavior that played with language, and some skillful imitations of English, French, and Chinese employers’ speech and body language.

Vanuatu’s linguistic diversity as well as its geography (many islands have rugged volcanic terrain) has made communication throughout the group problematic. While this posed, and still poses, difficulties for administrators and the economy, communication gaps could work to the advantage of women who wanted to escape from an intolerable, local situation. Chapter 8, for example, notes that a woman taken away from Ambae in a settler’s ship in the early 1900s would have been difficult for her husband to trace. Moreover, white men could seem intimidating to islanders and local men might be unwilling to ask about a missing woman, even if they knew Bislama. The woman in question was unhappily married to a chief with ten wives and seemed to prefer life on the Whitford’s islet of Pakea in the Banks Islands. As the fieldworker reported, women were glad to know that when they ran away they were unlikely to be found.
**Perceptions of women**

Received wisdom in Vanuatu suggests that men were the ones who traveled and women did not move much outside their own areas. Movement to a husband’s village at marriage might be the only move a woman made. Yet the workshop showed how those who worked as house-girls moved a lot, even in the colonial period. Some paddled from one island to another to go to work, as Robin Ken did when she was still a child (chapter 6). Others moved to Santo or Vila towns. Some left their home island to follow a relocating employer (chapter 7).

Much of the house-girls’ movement was not simply from one physical location to another but into white spaces that were out of bounds for other ni-Vanuatu. Even as late as fifteen years after independence, Margaret Rodman saw a white woman chase a ni-Vanuatu gardener out of the vestibule of a Vila house shouting (in Bislama), “Out, out, you are not allowed in the house!” In their employers’ homes, house-girls had a chance to acquire their own perceptions of women, especially of the women for whom they worked. They developed notions of domesticity, of how women from other cultures (notably French, English/Australian, Chinese/Vietnamese) prepared food, cleaned house, washed clothes, sewed, and cared for infants and children. These activities provided much to talk about in the workshop, as participants explored the practices of everyday life in colonial times, some of which continue to influence the way island women live their lives today.

**Relationships**

Perhaps not surprisingly given the topic of the workshop, relationships with expatriates were central to participants’ reports. Male employers worked, that much seemed clear, but what female employers did was often mysterious to the former house-girls. In other research, Margaret Rodman recorded many stories from white women about the hard work they did on plantations, but the stories that came out in the workshop often concerned female employers who had the time to be very critical of their house-girls and who seemed less kind than male employers. Why this is so bears reflection. Possibly male employers had less to do with house-girls and being more remote, as Robin Ken’s story in chapter 6 suggests, made them seem more soft-hearted? Male employers, too, were always possible sexual partners, even if that possibility was only theoretical, and this may have colored house-girls’ assessments of them as at once more frightening and more attractive than their wives.

Even ni-Vanuatu women came off worse than men as employers. Ni-Vanuatu women who were settlers’ mistresses, as stories from Ambrym and Malakula suggest, seem to have asked more work of house-girls (e.g., vegetable gardening)
than expatriate employers, even though some of the mistresses in question started out as house-girls themselves.

In one story, a ni-Vanuatu man is reported as being angry that his wife has (forced) sex with the master, but there is little he can do about it (chapter 8). Few ni-Vanuatu men appear in these stories to defend their women or to get angry at them, though in contemporary life jealousy is a major spark for domestic violence. While some ni-Vanuatu women married or lived in long-term relationships with their employers, others found themselves on their own and pregnant. Much of the talk about sex with employers was expressed in the workshop as talk about babies, such as the many illegitimate children whom various expatriate men (including black American soldiers) were alleged to have fathered in the islands.

Several reports spoke of deep affection for the children in the house-girls’ care. Leisara Kalotiti (chapter 3) recounted a former house-girl saying, “I was fourteen years old and I looked after [the Chinese employer’s] children like they were my children. I was happy to look after them. I bathed them in the afternoon. I changed them. And they too, they liked me.” Many reported that grown children kept in touch with the house-girls who had helped to raise them, sent them letters and presents, and looked them up when they visited Vanuatu. A few house-girls had visited former employers’ children overseas.

Much of the discourse about relationships in the workshop was presented in terms of black and white. The “white” women expressed discomfort with this way of speaking. They saw it as a (neo)colonial, racialized discourse and took particular exception to differentiating “White Jean” Mitchell from “Black Jean” Tarisesei. The ni-Vanuatu women seemed quite accustomed to and comfortable with these racial oppositions as shorthand for relations of historical domination and subordination, though they acknowledged the “white” women’s discomfort, a topic we return to in the concluding chapter.

**Organization of the book**

The workshop generated twenty-three hours of audio and video recordings. When the workshop was over, Evelyn, a ni-Vanuatu assistant at the Vanuatu Cultural Centre, transcribed the audiotapes, word-processed, and spellchecked the transcripts in Bislama. Lissant, Margaret, and Jean edited the transcripts and translated them into English. In 2002, we were awarded a Rockefeller Foundation Team Residency that allowed us to meet at the Study Centre in Bellagio, Italy, for two weeks to coordinate our drafts and check them against the videotapes. Daniela Kraemer then completed much of the remaining work on the transcription, prepared her chapter, and coauthored this introduction and the conclusion. Much of the editing
was a process of condensation. While the chapters retain the feel of “raw data,” they are the small, polished gems that seemed to us as editors to gleam most brightly among all the stories we heard in the workshop.

We considered a number of ways of organizing the chapters in this book. Views from childhood link several authors’ accounts (e.g., Jean Tarisesei, Numaline Mahana, Lena Kalmat). Another way of organizing the chapters would be according to where house-girls worked, whether in town (e.g., Edna Albert, Jocelyn Kibi), on plantations (e.g., Lucy Moses and some of the Malakula stories), in a mining community (Lonnette Tasale), or for missionaries (e.g., other Malakula stories, Lewia Charlie, Françoise Molwai). Similarly, the stories varied according to the nationality or ethnicity of the employer, ranging from working for French or English white men in most presentations, to ni-Vanuatu employers in Leisara Kalotiti’s narrative, to mixed race couples in some of the Malakula and Ambrym stories, and to Chinese and Vietnamese employers in other contributions.

In the end, we felt it was best not to break up the combinations of fieldworkers and house-girls from each area and to include Jean Tarisesei’s comments on her childhood experiences with house-girls on Ambae. Consequently, the chapters from the workshop begin with Numaline reporting on Tanna in the south of Vanuatu and move northward to Efate, Tongoa, Ambrym, Malakula, Ambae, Pentecost, and finally to the Banks Islands. Each of these chapters tells a number of traveling stories that mention a variety of locations. For example, Siaban Denison’s story from Pentecost, as she says, “connects all of our islands.”

Each fieldworker, thus, is the author of a portion of a chapter, as is each former house-girl who presented at the workshop. In addition, other former house-girls tell their stories through the fieldworkers’ reports. Fieldworkers generally presented their reports in the third person; we have edited these reports into the first person to improve readability and to make these absent house-girls more present in the book.

Chapter 10 presents an elderly French woman’s recollections of the Vietnamese girl who grew up in her home and worked as a house-girl. Chapter 11 introduces responses from numerous house-girls who participated in Daniela Kraemer’s follow-up study after the workshop on contemporary working conditions. These are organized by such themes as work, relationships, and morality. The final chapter draws conclusions from both the historical and contemporary materials.

A few disclaimers. We have tried to verify spellings of names where possible, but as the workshop was an exercise in oral history, the spellings we transcribed may be incorrect. Each contributor to the volume is identified by the name she chose to use as we think she spelled it. All use a Christian name and most, but not
all, also use a *kastom* name or the surname of their husband or father. Thus, some contributors are listed by only one name (e.g., Estelle).

In editing these stories for publication, we have not been able to assess their accuracy or obtain the viewpoint of the employers. Sometimes, as in Evelyn’s story in chapter 8, we knew that her employers and other settlers had different narratives that contradicted her version of some of the events in her life (Rodman 2004). Some readers may disagree with opinions and descriptions of events that appear in this book. We do not claim that the stories published here are true, only that they are what fieldworkers and house-girls reported as truth, or as their personal opinions. We have not attempted to find a single truth; rather, we have let multiple truths surface in the telling.

**NOTES**


2. Melanesian citizens of Vanuatu are called ni-Vanuatu.

3. For historical context regarding the Anglo-French Condominium of the New Hebrides, see MacClancy (1981) and Bresnihan and Woodward (2002).

4. See Anderson (2002, 105) for an example of how Filipina maids support otherwise unattainable lifestyles for their employers in Paris.

5. Colonial desire is “a covert, insistent obsession with transgressive, interracial sex, hybridity and miscegenation—the story, in fact, of *South Pacific* and Bali-h’ai (Young 1995, xii). In archival documents and in the interviews that led to *Houses Far from Home* (2001), Rodman noted the obsession Young describes. Recent books and a British television series explore the attractions and aversions of colonial desire but have done little to critique the subject (Gill 1995). The alleged advantages of a “sleeping dictionary” (Allen 1979, 199) for developing an officer’s knowledge of the “territory” were not confined to Africa, where French officers were advised in 1902 to take a native concubine (Hyam 1990, 157). House-Girls in Vanuatu could similarly be exploited.

6. See Abu-Lughod (1991) for the theoretical underpinnings of this approach.


8. For examples of this extensive literature, see Cock (1989); Rollins (1985); and Sanjek and Colen (1990a, 1990b).

9. See also Gwendolyn Wright (1991) for discussion of similar ideas in French colonialism.


12. The results of this study are published in Bolton (2003).
13 See Rodman (2001) for results of this research on British colonial space.

14 See also White and Lindstrom (1989) for an example of how (male) Pacific islanders’ recollections articulate with conventional histories.

15 The other official language of instruction is French.

16 Margaret Rodman did hear one remarkable story in other research in Australia: A ni-Vanuatu woman was apprehended as she raised a knife to stab her white “husband” the first night that he lay in bed with the bride he had brought from Australia.