

Ol Woman Naoia

Tri blong hanred plis

[Women of Today: Three shells of kava please]

A theatre play created by women living in Port Vila, Vanuatu

Writers are listed below in alphabetical order by first name. Actresses and other production roles will be listed accordingly in the program, women who have come to our meetings but have not committed to more involvement will be included in the “Thank you” section of the program.

Alison Donley
Anna Naupa
Anthea Toka
Charlotte Pitts
Cristina A. Bejan
Ellenson Taurakoto
Geraldine Tavoia
Hanna Lindley-Jones
Jani Moon
Josiana Jackson
Milena Stefanova
Olivia Johnson
Rebecca Olul
Sally Carter
Tracey Martin

OL WOMAN NAOIA

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*Dedicated to our families: past, present and future.
In honour of the 30th Anniversary of Independence.*

*Vanuatu achieved independence from
Great Britain and France in 1980.*

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SETTING: One day in the life of three women in Port Vila, May 2010

CAST: Approximately 20 Women

The three main ladies are young professionals in Vila who are colleagues working in an NGO office together. All roles should be played by Black women-identifying actors, except for the “expat” characters who are white women.

LEIPAKOA. ni-Vanuatu, experiences domestic violence.
ANA ni-Vanuatu, Getting off the Rock.
D From USA, “out of her element,” self-judgment, needs to transcend the b.s. of “society” and return to nature and not in a superficial “hippie” way. Finding friendship. “expat”

Other Characters: FISHBOWL EXTRAS, MARIE, HILARY (expat from Australia), WAITER, FACILITATOR, NAKAMAL EXTRAS, NAKAMAL WORKER, MAMA 1, MAMA 2, MAMA 3, OTHER PEOPLE AT THE NAKAMAL, FRIEND, JENNY (expat from UK), SARA, LEIPAKOA’S KIDS, MARTHA, ANA’S DAUGHTER, LITTLE ANA

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION: Productions are encouraged to showcase local women and poets at the performances and in the printed program, as well as collaborate with local women’s rights organizations. For help with South Pacific history, culture, and languages please first consult Melanesian Pacific Islanders and scholars of the Pacific in your community. A post-show talk-back discussion between the creative team and the audience about women’s rights is highly recommended after each performance.

PRODUCTION HISTORY: The script was developed and written by a group of women (local and international) who would meet weekly over lunch in VANGO, the central hub of NGOs in Vanuatu. The play was produced and performed by the playwrights in Port Vila, Vanuatu May 2010 at Club Vanuatu and VATS (Vanuatu Amateur Theatrical Society). An abbreviated version of the script was produced for the ICWP (International Centre for Women Playwrights) Black History Month online showcase 2021 featuring Tresha Farris as Ana, Amber Irish as Dawn and Carey Hart as Leipakoa. (Production available on YouTube.)

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SCENE 1: SUNRISE

The sun rises over Port Vila, Vanuatu in the South Pacific. Pink light, clarity, the chirping of birds and other sounds of animals (horses, roosters, cows, pigs, etc.) After the sounds of nature, we hear women's voices asking the following questions from offstage, or in the audience, but we cannot see the women on stage. The stage is bare.

LEIPAKOA. I am so tired of keeping up this brave face.

ANA. I just want to get off this damned rock!

DAWN. My family are all on the other side of the world.

ALL THREE IN UNISON. It's driving me insane.

THE CHORUS. *(Actors alternate these lines.)* Why did I never have children?

Am I sad?

Why did she tell me that?

The police were talking of another woman being attacked -

Why is he beating me up?

Where can I go? Who can I turn to?

Why don't women live together in a group?

Should I go back?

Will I always be on my own/alone?

When do I move on?

Where will I end up?

Am I good mother?

How do we support each other?

How often do we see each other?

Do I really want to be in a relationship?

Do I need a guy in my life?

Am I doing the right thing?

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Where will I be in three years time?
What will my job be?
How will my daughter feel about her father?
Should I let him take her away on holiday after she turns 1?
Maybe when she's old enough.
Is there going to be enough food and resources for everybody?
Am I powerless against bureaucracy (government)?
Will I ever see my friends again?
Escape to an Island
Escape to the mainland.

SCENE 2: INTRODUCTORY MONOLOGUES

The stage is broken into three homes reflecting the different situations of the ni-Vanuatu and expat women respectively. You only see one home at a time. Lights focus on one woman at a time in her house.

LEIPAKOA. *(Praying.)* Dia Papa
Wan niu dei i stat
Ples i kwaet
I kwaet gud we long eali moning ia
Be ino hed blong mi
Tingting blong mi i stap wok we
Tedei bae man blong mi i mekem wanem bakeken?
Oh Papa plis helpem mi
Givem mi 'strength'
'Strength' blong facem em bakegen
Strength, Papa! Mi harem mi taet papa,
blong pretend everitaem se evisamting ioraet.
Mi wantem strength blong yu papa,
Helpem mi blong stanap strong blong mi mo
tufala gel blong mi.
Mi pray from peace blong you mo comfort
blong you blong i stap wetem mifala oltaem.
Tankyu long sapot
Sapot we ol sister oli givem
I gud tumas blong kat ol sister

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Oh Lord, taem mi talem olgeta,
Mi harem gud,
Mi kat HOPE. Thank yu long peace blong yu oltaem papa!
Long nem blong Jesus, mi stap prey. (*Attention shifts and focuses on ANA.*)

ANA. Ana, Ana, get it together girl. You have to pull yourself out of this place that you're in. If you want to get off the rock then you have to get off the fence! Make a decision already! (*Big sigh.*) What am I so afraid of? What if I leave and something happens to Isabelle? I want to be a good mother. She's everything to me. I wouldn't be able to function without her. She's my world. She needs her mother. I can't leave her behind. But if I take her with me, how will I get my studies done. How's that gonna work? Who's gonna look after her? I won't have anytime. I can't do both...not alone. Why is this happening to me? How can something that so clearly is meant to be a blessing and a gift be so laden with conflict? I'm confused. I feel like I am being forced to choose myself over my child. I wish I could see into the future and know what the best thing is for her and what it is for us. (*Ana hangs her head and then looks up to heaven.*) Daddy, what do I do? What would you want me to do? Plis bae yu gaedem mi long rod we hemi stret mo hemi gud. Mi nomo save se bambae mi mekem wanem. Mi save se hemi wan janis we i no gat tumas man oli pas tru long hem. Mi save tu se sipos mi go, bambae fulap door bae i open foret long mi. Mi stap tinkabaot hao we yu stap talem long mi ol taem se edukesen hemi wan samting we i leftemap ol woman mo man. Mi save toktok blong yu i tru se sipos mi faithful long studis blong mi, bambae mi save gat wan gudfala fuja. Be dadi, mi harem se mi fraet. Mi fraet se sipos mi go, hemi minim se mi stap ronawe nomo. Mo mi stap lego ol responsibilitis blong mi long plesia. Dadi, mi mi gat pikinini finis. How nao bae mi save aot long hem? Sipos mi karem hemi go wetem mi, hu bae i lukaotem? Mo mi shud stap giv han long mama lo plesia... Dadi, olsem wanem sipos mi go? Sipos mi go nomo be mi no winim? Sipos mi no winim, be mi bin lego small girl blong mi? Bae hemi luk mi mi olsem wanem? Dadi, what's the right thing to do? Mi luksave se janisia hemi gat wan praes we mi no sure se mi save pem. I don't want to make the wrong choice. Oh God, what am I going to do? (*Spotlight now on DAWN. She opens a hand-written letter and re-reads it aloud.*)

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DAWN. Dear Mom and Dad, Greetings from somewhere east of down under. Just felt like writing you a real letter. Remember letters? Who knows when you'll actually get it, as you both know the mail service from this side of the world is so slow. I'd email, but I never have the time at work and anyway I thought you might get a kick outta getting some of my random free-flow thoughts on paper. Perhaps it will bring you back to the good-ole days!

So it's all going pretty well. I mean, I'm adjusting. Work at the NGO keeps me outta trouble. And it's good work. I mean I think it is. I don't actually know if I'm "making a difference" like they say we're going to. You know how I feel about that marketing bullshit, "make a difference, save the people," blah, blah, barf! But the programmes are real and they're helping real people achieve what THEY want to achieve, so it's nice to be a part of something that is important at a grassroots level...yes My Soapbox!

Anyways, I miss you guys so much. I miss home and my friends. It's funny, I never expected to be so homesick. I guess I thought I'd be so busy with my new job and my new life in this totally NEW world. I thought I'd be making all kinds of friends. I imagined an amazing satisfaction with work, helping people and being connected to people here. My job's great, don't get me wrong. I guess I just expected it all to feel more meaningful.

Bottom line: All work and no play makes your little Dawn just another bored expat living in paradise. Expat life: I don't wanna even get into how totally bizarre that scene is. I have tried making friends with some other expats, but I just can't relate to them, the self-imposed life of domesticity, tennis lessons and gossip "catch-ups" is more foreign to me than the pantomimed sign language that the ni-Vanuatu use to communicate their plans for the rest of the day. What I do all day doesn't fit into conversations about who bought what property, how the housegirl is hopeless, or if Mrs. X is ever going to figure out that her husband is the town slut. Sometimes I think, "Is this place for real?" I mean you couldn't write some of the characters here.

It's sort of a cross between stepping back in time to the 50's and going way back to colonialism. Ya've got the whole good 1950's man/woman roles where the housewife looks after the kids and not the house cause she's got a maid to do that. The weird part about that is that most of

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these women have professions. I've met nurses, lawyers, marketing executives, economists. You'd be surprised how many of these women have Master's degrees and PhDs. And then there's the all important husband who is the breadwinner who has to unwind with the "boys" (that's what grown men are called here!) Twice a week or more at the pub. It's totally a good ole boys kind of environment in the business sphere. I find it ironic how most expat women are pretty much regulated to their proverbial kitchens. I guess there just aren't enough jobs to go around to keep all the White Missuses occupied.

Now that I think about it, there aren't enough jobs at all. Vanuatu's population is growing so fast and there's this huge set of development/cultural questions that faces its people, "Do we educate our kids in our traditional ways or do we subscribe to the western way of educating our society? Once kids finish school, where will they work? How do we negotiate our way between custom and cash economies? How do we keep what we value from our culture and still borrow/absorb/adapt aspects of other cultures?" Dad, when I think about this stuff it reminds me of our discussions about how culture doesn't exist in a vacuum...Speaking of which, that leads me to how nothing exists in a vacuum here. Everybody knows everyone else's business. Port Vila is the capital, but really it's just a glorified village. Anonymity does not exist here. Not in either community, ni-Vanuatu or expat. I really haven't broken the ice in the ni-van community. And I can't figure out why. I'm approachable; I hang out; I drink kava. (*Sigh.*) Still, on the outside lookin' in. I really like the women I work with, but there seems to be this barrier between us. Maybe the barrier is our cultures. Or maybe they think that I'm just like the other white ladies here. Maybe it's my own hang ups but there seems to be this racial divide. I don't know. I just feel perpetually uncomfortable. The expat scene is warped and weird and I just want to breathe easy. Gossip runs like wildfire here. I feel like the ni-Vanuatu all smile on the outside but don't really let you in and the expats are into playing this game where they're seen and want to see everything that's going on in other people's lives but they're not interested in cultivating real friendships. Why is it so hard to find real friends. Relationships seem so superficial and fleeting here.

I guess I just feel like I don't fit in anywhere, really. I'm lonely and I

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just miss being able to connect with people. Luckily paradise is gorgeous otherwise I'd probably be boarding the plane home now. Stop praying for it Dad! *(Smile.)* Before I accidentally get your hopes up that I'm coming home early or totally freak you out that I'm depressed, I should tell you guys that it's not all bad...I have been enjoying sitting by the water, reading, thinking and daydreaming about the people I love and my future. I know that my time here is limited and passing moment by moment, so I remind myself how fortunate I am to have this experience and try to get back to the now. 'Cause soon it will be time for me to come home and hopefully by then I will have made some lifelong friends that I won't want to leave behind. That's what I want, to want my time here not to end.

I love you guys! Kiss little Max for me and say hi to Krista! Look for my next rant by snail mail.

Lots of kisses and hugs,

Dawn

P.S. Dad, how long did it take you to feel settled in Yap? Does anybody ever figure this stuff out?

SCENE 3: GUD MORNING

Lights come up and you see Leipakoa, Ana and Dawn all wake up in their respective homes. A song is sung as they get up and on with their day. This scene demonstrates the different conditions experienced by the ni-Vanuatu and expat communities. They each get ready for work and do what they have to do in their own time and space (smaller living space for local women and larger for expat). An idea is that Leipakoa and Ana have to tend to children and take good care to look like a million bucks in town, and Dawn is more relaxed (perhaps hungover from a night of too much socializing?) and indifferent about her appearance, focusing rather on just getting her things together and herself to work.

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SCENE 4: VILA THE FISHBOWL!

Into the City. The traffic picks up. The chaos of the workday begins – go go go. A movement piece demonstrating downtown “vibe” and how tiny Vila is. You hear “Hello Hello!” “Olsom wanem?” The market, purchase something to bring to work to eat, a coffee on the way, buy the Daily Post, etc. We will choreograph this with words and movements together.

SCENE 5: THE OFFICE

Sit down, having a coffee to start the day and chatting. Dawn and Leipakoa onstage already. Ana arrives.

DAWN. Gud morning. I oraet?

LEIPAKOA. Ah gudmorning Ana, yes! Kam sitdown. Mitufala i stap mekem kofi. *(Ana sits down.)*

ANA. I ask whether to cry or not. I don’t know what it is ... I feel completely overwhelmed . . .

LEIPAKOA. From wanem?

DAWN. Why? What’s going on?

ANA. It’s tomorrow. I’ve got to decide by tomorrow whether to take this scholarship to go and study in NZ. Everyone keeps saying it’s a good thing, hemi wan gudfala something . . . hemi gud ia. I thought it was good too – I thought I’m getting off this rock, this bloody rock ... this one rock where everyone thinks they know you, but really they don’t. But now ... I don’t know, I just don’t know I don’t know the place, I’ve never been there before. I’ve never even been off this rock before. My family ... my work ... my friends .. Is getting off the rock really worth it?

DAWN. Yes! You’ve got to go. Its such an opportunity ... such a chance, it’s a better education and it’ll give you perspective. You’re always saying this rock is destroying you ... this is your chance to get away.

LEIPAKOA. Do you really think that getting off this rock everything will be better?

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ANA. Yes ... No Not everything is about this rock. It's an adventure ... It's like the animals in *Madagascar*, they just want to get out of the zoo.

DAWN. That's true. Stuck on the rock everything can become overwhelming – family, work, relationships, children. You need a break.

LEIPAKOA. But remember those animals, once they got out they found out that they weren't Gods. It was scary. Inside the zoo they were Gods. At least inside they knew who they were.

ANA. I know I'm not a God ... I can't even make this bloody decision. *(Ana stands up and starts washing up the coffee cups. Leipakoa's mobile phone rings. She answers it.)*

LEIPAKOA. *(Speaking to her husband on the phone.)* Halo . . . Mi stap lo wok . . . No-mi busi . . . No-mi nogat. Mi got smol mani todei, bae mi karem pei nexis wik nomo . . .mi talem lo yu finis yesterday kas...eeehhh Ok ... *(Speaking to Ana and Dawn.)* Man ia stap aotsaed bakagen, hemi wantem mani bakagen. *(Leipakoa leaves the stage.)*

ANA. He's always doing that.

DAWN. Do you think she'll be ok?

ANA. I hope so.

DAWN. Well, not that it is any consolation – but assholes come in all colours.

ANA. Oh, mi save...i tru nomo! *(Then they hear a loud wail and both run to the window. At the same time they both gasp. Leipakoa re-enters hassled, she lets out a big, frustrated sigh and gets back to her computer. Dawn goes back to her work and tries to keep her head down, while writing.)*

ANA. What happened?

LEIPAKOA. Yu save nomo.

ANA. Oh my god, Leipakoa, your eye! Hemi bin kilim yu long plesia nomo? *(Dawn looks up from her work in shock. Leipakoa looks down in shame. Dawn takes a breath in, closes her notebook and gets up.)*

DAWN. Leipakoa, does he do this a lot? *(Leipakoa nods.)* Does your family know?

ANA. Everyone knows when a woman gets beat. It's not like there are any secrets in this town.

DAWN. I don't understand; why did he hit you? What happened?

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LEIPAKOA. He wanted money. I told him I didn't have it and he got cross and hit me.

DAWN. That doesn't make any sense.

ANA. It doesn't have to.

DAWN. I've got some make-up in my bag. Let's fix your face up.

LEIPAKOA. Thanks, that would be great.

DAWN. Who does he think he is? How dare he ... *(Pause.)* You know it's not your fault .. that sounds really clichéd but you do know that, right?

LEIPAKOA. Yeah, I know ... He's always mad about something. He gets mad if I dress too nice or wear heels to work. He asks me, "Who are you trying to look so good for?" I say, "I dress nice for myself, to feel good."

DAWN. So, he doesn't want you to feel good about yourself? You know what? He's jealous of you. He feels powerless because you earn money, you're well-educated and could be totally independent from him and that scares him. He feels insecure and inadequate.

LEIPAKOA. I've been thinking for a long time now about divorcing him. I'm tired of him acting out. He doesn't ever tell me how he's feeling. If I ask him he gets angry. Eventually he just winds up smacking me.

DAWN. You don't need this shit in your life. You're a beautiful, intelligent, powerful woman. There are so many men who don't feel like they have to hit their women to BE a man.

LEIPAKOA. I know that and I am ready to have a good man in my life. It's hard though because I made a promise to God and to my family that I would share my life with this man. *(Looks in the mirror.)* Wow, this looks good! I should wear make-up more often ... then he'd really be jealous!

DAWN. That would serve him right! ... Leipakoa, you are so strong.

LEIPAKOA. Yes, I am. *(Smiling at Dawn.)* We're women, we have to be. *(The office phone rings. Marie is visible but off-stage, in the audience, on the phone.)*

ANA. Ah, salut Marie, ça va comme çï, comme ça, tu sais? *(Caller mentions that she's heard that Ana is earned a scholarship.)* Non! Vraiment? ...*(Caller shares some more details.)* Une bourse pour

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étudier en Nouvelle-Zélande! (*Caller rings of.*) OK, merci pour téléphoner, à tout à l'heure. Tata.

Oh that was my cousin, she just heard I got the scholarship, she was just congratulating me..

DAWN. I am simply amazed by all the languages you speak.

ANA. Kas, hemia i no wan samting. Hemi Vanuatu! Everyone speaks so many languages

DAWN. Still-

ANA. Oraet, back to work sista. (*Lights down.*)

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