Listening, in all the wrong places

Women and the Art of Pacific Policy Making

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The beauty of the voice lies in its intimacy...

Tulaga tutusa (Equality)

It matters not
that I am
woman or man
It matters not
that you are
she or he
it matters only
that in life
there is we

A voice can belong to only one, but can speak to and for many...

I remember
how men would wear out the night
clamouring to be heard
while you the silhouette
waited silently
to play your part
the lever to the mountain
moving decisions
I remember
seeing you rise to lead and guide
while the world cried for equality
I remember that
In the global awakening of womanhood
development for you was already
a passing tune.

A voice unheard remains a voice, even when known only to the speaker...

I cannot free myself from the clutches of poverty firmly grasped in the skeletal touch of my malnourished children
I cannot escape the inescapable trappings of my husband’s dominance and cultural bindings
I cannot understand why I cannot.

In the Pacific region, where women make up less than five percent of democratic parliamentary representation, their voices can be quieted.

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

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

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


Image – ©Cate Morriss Tonga TNWC meeting 2009.
my research brings to the fore Pacific women’s opinions and perceptions that are often left outside the dialogue of policy planning

Tonga Women National Congress – the Constitutional Reform workshops 2009: participants were happy to have their voice heard. (field work files – where I facilitated a gender & policy workshop)
I am a woman. Born in a village
Destined to spend my life in a never ending vicious circle
Gardening, child-bearing, house-keeping
Seen and not heard.

I am a woman, born in a town
Educated, dedicated to a career
Making a name for myself in government
Seen and not heard

I am the echo heard in the jungle
The conch shell heralding a bonito catch
The reporter writing articles in the Star
The announcer in Radio Happy Isles
At long last! Heard but not seen!
poetry has unveiled women’s experiences of gender subjugation and social exclusion. But it also reveals women’s strength and resilience.
It reveals that women are present, engaged and passionate about policy but that policy makers are sometimes

listening in all the wrong places.

Fieldwork – Vanuatu 2007 – ‘listening’ to women and families on Tanna Island