

**On Becoming a Liquid Church:
Singing the Niuean '*Fetuiaga Kerisiano*' on a Distant Shore**

A thesis

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By

Matagi Jessop Don Vilitama 11393581

Faculty of Arts

Department of Theology

Charles Sturt University

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Abstract

The purpose of this thesis is to construct an ecclesiology for the Niuean church in diaspora. It will do so replacing the traditional image of the church as *Ekalesia* with the Niuean term *fetuiaga*. That exchange represents a linguistic and cultural shift. There was no word for church in Niuean, so the hybridized neologism *Ekalesia* was invented. *Fetuiaga* refers to a gathering, assembly, fellowship, relationship, interconnections, etc. In this instance, the gathering becomes the *Fetuiaga Kerisiano* - that is, the gathering of Christ.

The purpose of this thesis is to explore how the traditional and received experience of the Niuean *Fetuiaga* can be transported to a distant shore, in this case - Australia. Such a study is not peculiar to the Niuean diaspora. It mirrors in many ways what has happened in many larger island communities and their churches. This study will be mindful of comparable experiences from Oceania and the migrant other. This study will not just be about the practice of what is involved in being the church. It will explore this practice in the light of received models and what it means to be the church in a new liquid *vahaloto* (space). It is thus an exercise in contextual and diasporic ecclesiology - but with a difference. The distinctive images that characterize this *Fetuiaga Kerisiano* will be explored through a lens of liquidity and by means of an *umu* hermeneutic with special attention to the inner geography, synaesthetic effects and ethnomusicology.

Certificate of Authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person nor material which to a substantial extent has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma at Charles Sturt University or any other educational institution, except where due acknowledgment is made in the thesis. Any contribution made to the research by colleagues with whom I have worked at Charles Sturt University or elsewhere during my candidature is fully acknowledged.

I agree that this thesis be accessible for the purpose of study and research in accordance with the normal conditions established by the Executive Director, Library Services or nominee, for the care, loan and reproduction of the theses.

Signed:..... Date:.....

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In Oceania, no work of value is achieved alone. It takes many coconuts to make a *miti* (coconut cream); it takes many hands to build a community. This work bears the fingerprints of many individuals - a community.

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All glory and honour belong to God, now and always. Amen.

Glossary - Niuean Words

Aho - Day

Faiagahau - celebration

Faihala - sin, sinning (making roads)

Faiumu - making of the (*umu*) earth oven, convergence for *umu* making

Fakafaahiua - double sided

Fakafeilo - reconciliation

Fakafetuiaga - a fellowship, gathering, assembly

Fakaholomuia - communal sharing of stories in a humorous manner (often exaggerated)

Fakaholo - drive

Fakalataha - together

Fakaalofa - love

Fakalilifu - respect

Fakamaopopo - a gathering, home preparation

Fakamatala - speech, reflection

Fakamaama - to explain, interpret

Fakamafana - to encourage, inspire, theological reflection

Fakamanaia - to decorate, ornamentation

Fakamatalaaga - reflection, speech

Fakamua - to put first, to prioritize

Fakamokoi - to be generous

Fakamotu - historical, traditional, the way of the land, island way

Fakapotopotoaga - a congregation, a gathering of people

Fakatokatoka - planning and preparation

Fakatali - wait

Fakatokolalo - humility

Fakataufata - one on top of the other

Fakatapulu - to dress

Fakatufono - Government, Commandments

Fakauka - to persist, perseverance

Faouho - middle paddler

Fatuaia - bind twice over

Fenoga - travel, journey

Fekau - errand, task, work

Fekafekau - to serve, service, church Minister

Fekapitigaaki - to befriend, to be in friendly terms

Felagomataiaki - reciprocity, helping or assisting one another

Feofanaki - love, hospitality

Fatufatufaaki - sharing, reciprocity

Fetuiaga - neologism for Church, act of uniting, *koinonia*, communion

Fetui - Plaiting, stringing or binding together

Fetuiaki - to relate, to join together

Fiafia - joyful, happy

Foaki - giving

Foaki fakalofa - generous giving

Fono - meeting

Fonomotu - Church Assembly or conference

Fonu - turtle

Fonua - land, womb, placenta

Fonuagalo - unknown land, mysterious place, lost land

Fuhiulu - to cooperate, to unite, to work together, to be in solidarity

Gahua - work, job, occupation

Gahuahua - to be active

Gutu - mouth, entrance

Hakohako - to be perfect, to be just, to be upright

Hala laupapa - bridge

Halavaka - path, route (usually refers to sea routes)

Hiapo - cloth traditionally made from tree bark

Hina - pale

lihi - cut or slice open

Iki - Lord

iki - chief, leader of clan

Kahoa - necklace

Kelekele - land, soil, below, under

Kerisiano - Christian

Koli - dance

Kupu - word

Kumete - container, traditional wooden bowl

Lagi - sky, heaven

Lagomatai - to help, helper, to assist

Lalaga - weave

Laukaka - coconut web fibre

Lauga - sermon

Laulahi - extended, wide

Le - *macaranga harveyana*, a native tree with large round leaves

Liligi - to pour

Lima - hand, five

Loga - plentiful

Lologo - sing, song

Lotouho - center, middle

Maaga - village, community

Mafiti - quick, fast

Magafaoa - family (includes the extended)

Mago - shark

Mahani - conduct, behaviour, attitude, habit, manners

Mahiva - creeping plant used for tying and fastening objects

Makona - full, satisfied, sustenance

Male fono - village green, meeting place

Malie - semen, to be beautiful (often used in exclamation to show appreciation)

Mana - miracle, integrity (one with respect)

Manava - stomach, womb, breath

Mapualagi - horizon

Matahefonua - eye or head of the land (ancient name of Mutalau village)

Mate - die, death, deceased

Mitaki - good

Moana - ocean, sea

Mohe - sleep

Moho - cooked

Momoi - to give or share food (often reciprocated)

Monuina - blessing, providence

Moumou - to violated, to destroy

Muifonua - end or tail of the land (ancient name for Avatele village)

Mutalau - village in Niue

Muivaka - stern of canoe, one who steer the canoe

Palagi – of anglo descent, caucasian, white person

Pipi - to tie, to bind

Pito - naval, umbilical cord

Polapola - traditional serving plates woven from coconut leaves

Pona - to knot

Ponataki - binding, knotting

Potu - mat

Potu tanini - fine mat (of high value)

Pu - entrance, hole, ancient name of turtle

Puhala - the way, transport

Pule - authority, control, power, those of status

Pulega - proposal, to suggest

Pulotu - wisdom, skilful, knowledgable

Tagaloa - rainbow, traditional god of Polynesia

Tagata - person, human

Taha - one

Takina - to be drawn to, to follow suit

Tala - story, talk, speak, converse

Talahaua - famous, renown

Tala Mitaki - good news, gospel

Talanoa - gossip, informal talk

Talatala - talking, chatting

Tala tu fakaholo - historical account

Tala tupu fakahaga - historical account

Talumelie - fertile

Tao - to bake

Taoga - treasure, heritage, assets

Taonaga - feasting, banquet, celebration

Tatanaki - to gather food for a celebration (planting, fishing, hunting)

Teletele - to creep or crawl

Taue - traditional fort

Timotua - person as object of pity, underclass, the marginalised

Tino - body

Tokamotu - traditional god of Niue

Tolo - to gather, scatter

Totonu - kind, gentle, peaceful

Totou - to read, to count

Totouaga - readings, estimation

Tu - stand

Tua - faith, to believe, behind, back

Tufuga - talented, expert, creator

Tufugatia - creation, nature

Tufatufa - to share, to distribute

Tugi - to burn, to light a fire

Tui - to thread, pierce, fold (of arms or legs), to wear or put on (of garments)

Tui lima - to hold hands

Tupu - to growth, sprout, progress, develop

Tupuna - ancestors

Tupufetui - to grow wild, grow densely

Tutala - to talk, converse, chat

Tutu - to stand (plural of *tu*)

Tututonu - righteous

Umu - earth oven

Uta - take, load, inland or shore

Uta vagahau - engagement (to be married)

Vagahau - to speak, to talk

Vahaloto - space, between (time or space)

Vaka - canoe, root, vein, vessel

Vaka akau - tree root

Vakatoto - blood vein/artery/cardiovascular system

Vetevete - untie, undo, to open up, clarify, exegete, hermeneutics

Chapter 1

On the Need for a *Niu-e* (New) Way of Thinking

1. The Task: *Ko e Fekau*

It is now time to construct an ecclesiology for the Niuean church in diaspora. The needs for such are due to the migration of islanders as well as to the core role the church plays in Niuean culture. The two belong together. In terms of beliefs, belonging and identity the church is a core institution. It is a vehicle, a vessel, a *vaka*, of both gospel and culture. The dilemma before us has to do with what happens to a number of inter-related issues to do with identity and practice when the host culture is disrupted. In this instance the disruption is brought about by mass migration across the *moana laulahi* (the great ocean; the Pacific). There are now far more Niueans living in diaspora than on the island itself. How, then, is this coming together of ethnicity and discipleship, culture and *ekalesia* to be expressed in new lands? Where is a sense of personal and communal identity to be found? Or, will a second and subsequent generations increasingly lose touch with the *taoga* (treasures) and wisdom of the *tupuna* (ancestors)?

That reference to ecclesiology may seem odd, at first glance. It is not a word which is indigenous to the Niuean language. It is an English word made up out of two Greek words. The first is *ekklesia*, which refers to an assembly and which in the New Testament came to be applied to the church. The second is *logos* which can refer to the word, a reason, understanding and, in this instance, the study. It is an alien word, then, but it lies at the heart of the problem to be explored.

The traditional Niuean way of life is communal: it is not one of a western style individualism. In the course of this thesis the practice of the *umu* (the feasting and celebration around an earth oven) will come to serve as a metaphor which explains life lived in community. There is an attraction in the idea of the *ekklesia*

being an assembly or a gathering. That is just the first step. The second concerns the way in which the Niueans talk about the church. It is the *ekalesia*. That is both the village church and the island church which is the *ekalesia Niue*. There is a tightly bound connection between culture, being a community and being the church. It is not the Niuean practice to talk so much about personal discipleship; it is more customary to talk about the church, the *ekalesia*. The purpose of this dissertation is to be respectful of this tradition; at the same time, the intention is to explore whether there might be a more flexible, more liquid way, of being once a community has crossed the *moana*. Is it time for those who live in diaspora to think less in terms of being *ekalesia Niue* which is more formal, settled, and stable? Is it time for them to reconsider who they are in the light of an indigenous term, *fakafetuiaga*, - a fellowship, assembly or congregation of people? Here we have a word which is taken from Niue's own cultural store. It is one which preserves the idea of communal living and being a social being; it is, nevertheless, a way of expressing being a community which can be more informal and which can embrace a sense of coming and going, a sense of ebbing and flowing. The purpose of this dissertation is to make the case for 'the body of Christ' to put into a practice its being a *fetuiaga kerisiano* for those Niueans who have crossed the *moana* and now live to a different rhythm and pattern. That reference to *kerisiano* is a reference to Christ.

Those references to practice, rhythm and pattern are no accident. They are deliberate. The life of faith is not just a confessional moment; it is not just an intellectual or mental acknowledgement of who Christ is. It is an act. Being the church is also an act. It assumes a range of practices from those to be found in a service of worship through to the provision of care and an advocacy of what is right and deemed to be consistent with Christ's call to 'follow me'. In this case being the church is woven into the cultural life of being Niuean which abounds in performance. It is a culture of celebration, dance and music. There are songs, actions, and proverbial sayings which express the heart of what it means to be Niuean and which convey the vitality of that way of being. Whereas theology in the west may give priority to the Word, in Niue the metaphor of song may well be more appropriate.

Hovering very close to the heart of living in diaspora is the Psalmist's question: how shall we sing the Lord's song in such a strange land? It can sound like a simple and innocent enough question. The Psalms are regularly invoked in Christian worship; they need not attract any special significance, but in this case, Psalm 137 does. 'How shall we sing the Lord's song in such a strange land'? In such new contexts, what voice can one give to the experience of dislocation? In the words of the hymn, 'O sacred head sore wounded', the question arises 'What language shall we borrow?' For the *ekalesia Niue* hymn singing matters. It is arguably the case that many people get their understanding of faith less from the Bible and more from what they sing. In the case of Niuean culture, in general, songs bind and help form a communal way of life and a line of connection to the past. What hymns, what songs will help a Niuean congregation in diaspora express its faith and maintenance of cultural identity in ways which are meaningful to the experience of living in a new society? 'How shall we sing the Lord's song in such a strange land?'

Is it time to follow again the Psalmist who cries out, 'sing a new song'? This study will pay attention to what is sung in the *Ekalesia Niue* as well as to what might be meaningful in the *fetuiaga kerisiano*. What is sung, what is performed, what is expressed in words for a culture which has prized oratory, are vehicles, vessels, a *vaka*, of identity and belonging? Might it be that these new songs help preserve a culture under threat through depopulation of the homeland and the gradual assimilation of its younger generations into the diverse cultures to which they have migrated.

2. Method: Moving into the Future through the Past

In order to navigate these deep waters there is first a need to outline the method to be followed. This is new territory because the nature of Niuean culture is one of oratory, songs, liquidity; the pattern is repetitive but it is making a point in a spiralling way. It seeks to represent the ebbing and flowing of ways. It reflects

the waves, ripples and tides rather than a solid way. In a Niuean context, oratory has a strong association with remembrance. For instance, *Liu momoui mai e tau tupuna he haau a vagahau* (your words brought back our ancestors to life) refers to special wisdom sayings or proverbs that literally triggers the memories of those or events of ages past. Repeating traditional proverbs or stories, then, becomes a retrieving exercise remembering the past with the purpose of inspiring for the future. Remembrance in this sense feeds a spiral movement, an ebbing and flowing between the past and the present, the process that is much more intensive as they move into a new land, and the challenges of doing things differently.

In a new liquid context, there is a tendency to forget the repetitive movement of ebbing and flowing between the past, present and future. But, as Jung Young Lee reminds us, embracing one's Christian theology, habit of thinking, methodology, ministry, personal commitment and all of who we are, have to be based on a new "marginality" of self-affirmation through suffering love.¹ The cultural habit of retrieving and repeating the *taoga* (treasures/wisdom/lessons) and the received traditions from the island homes is imperative in diaspora, even if it is done from the margins.

In order to proceed further, there are two reference points which should be consulted before our theological *vaka* sets forth and navigates the spiraling rhythms of liquidity and orality. The first is the coming of the Christian faith to Niue and the consequent evolution of the *Ekalesia Niue*. The second is the level and nature of the diaspora. Where is it to be found? How does it compare with other island cultures? How does it seek to hand on that faith, which was once

¹ As an Asian-American theologian, Jung Young Lee proposed a "both/and" and "in-beyond" approach that leads to an affirmation that he is both an American and an Asian. This approach would move him beyond "in-between" and "in-both" (Asian and American), transcending the current time and space, forming a new identity ("in-between" and "in-both" worlds). This "in-beyond" understanding should ultimately lead to a community to live up to "the harmony of difference" in a plurally diverse world. He believes that this is the heart of Christian theology and, indeed, Christian praxis. See Lee, Jung Young, *Marginality: The Key to Multicultural Theology*, Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 1995, pp.45-46,52,58-63

grounded in an island home, from one generation to the next? The case for a *fetuiaga kerisiano* requires us to come to terms with both these landmark events in the history of Niue – the coming of Christianity and the late twentieth century diaspora and relative depopulation of the island.

The cultural life of island communities abounds in proverbial sayings. Such is the way of a culture which was based on oratory rather than literary works of scholarship and artistry. One particular saying which captures an essence of the concern for the future and what might be is also bound to the past, '*ko fakamui ha ko fakamua*' (what comes after can only be understood in light of what proceeded it). In other words, tomorrow only makes sense because of yesterday. For many in the west the future lies ahead: the past can be disposable and quickly out of date. The wisdom of the *tupuna* would argue a contrary case. For them one moves into the future backwards. Paradoxically, the future is navigated through the past. This understanding is analogous to Nasili Vaka'uta's metaphor of a paddling *vaka* whereby a canoe can only move forward by rowing backward and vice versa.² The canoe can only move in a forward direction when it is propelled by the motion of a backward moving paddle in the water. The wisdom of our *tupuna* dictates that we can only find our routes for the future by remembering and being informed by our past. By revisiting the past and [re]reading the narratives they [re]live the events and learn the life-ways of the *tupuna* charting the routes for the future. They hold the past and future simultaneously; islanders ebb and flow between the past and future and it is the most natural state of being in the liquid continent.

This present interest in the diaspora and the case which will be made for the *fetuiaga kerisiano* only makes sense in the light of what has passed. The coming of the Christian faith which is represented through that term, *kerisiano*,

² Nasili Vaka'uta in "Fonua-e-Moana: Re-[en]vis[ion]ing an Oceanic Hermeneutics," in *Pacific Journal of Theology*, Series II, No.38, 2007, p.5

would not have otherwise existed. It refers to 'Christ', the messiah, the anointed one, Jesus of Nazareth who was otherwise unknown to the people of Niue. The way in which the Niueans became Christian, and how they structured their lives around that confession and the role of the church, has been carried across the *moana* to their new homes on distant shores. There is a story to be told; it is one which needs to be told with a balance of gratitude and critical judgement.

Why the story should be told in this manner is implied by Jione Havea's description of how the Bible came to Oceania. The "talking book"³ came to the islands with its expositors bringing a colonial spirit to: "save, to teach, to heal, to civilize, to convert, to control, et cetera, the local people." Havea asserts that the Bible came with a colonial agenda to convert and control the natives; it was, in effect, a vehicle for an imperial influence that continues to hold the locals subservient: "Then and now, there is a strong tendency to read the Bible as if "talks" only in the language and interests of the missionary drive."⁴ While the majority in Oceania celebrates the redeeming news of the Bible, there are also dissenting views to its arrival. Sia Figiel's character in her novel *Where We Once Belong*, gives voice for the opposing "natives" in this way:

We are not living in Lightness," she would say. "We are not. Lightness is dead. Lightness died that first day in 1830 when the breakers of the sky⁵ entered these shores, forcing us all to forget...to forget...to bury our gods...to kill our gods...to re-define everything, recording history in reverse.⁶

³ "The Talking Book" is a term used by Allen Dwight Callahan quoted by Jione Havea in "Engaging Scriptures From Oceania", *Bible, Borders, Belonging(s): Engaging Readings From Oceania*, Jione Havea, David J. Neville, and Elaine M. Wainwright (eds.), Society of Biblical Literature, Atlanta, 2014, p.3

⁴ Ibid., p.4

⁵ *papalagi* is a reference to white people.

⁶ Sia Figiel quoted by Jione Havea in "Engaging Scriptures From Oceania" in *Bible, Borders, Belonging(s): Engaging Readings From Oceania*, Jione Havea, David Neville and Elaine Wainwright (eds.), Atlanta, Society of Biblical Literature, 2014, p.5

Similar lament was expressed by Jon Butler when he espoused the notion of the "spiritual holocaust"⁷ to explain how the African religious and cultural system was destroyed at the hands of slavers. Such views are not common but highlight the fact that Christianity was not greatly received by all. It had its critics and many will mourn the loss of their indigenous or Oceanic Scriptures⁸ in place of the Bible.

There is not as yet a full and thorough critical history of the coming of the missionaries and the Christian faith to Niue. We do know that the Niuean people were first converted to the Christian faith through the work begun by Nukai Peniamina. It was he who introduced the gospel to the island in October, 1846.⁹ Notwithstanding the fierce opposition of the Niueans to foreigners or returnees, the process of conversion was relatively quick. The process may have been different from its much larger neighbours who had much more challenging conversion issues like wars and competing tribes. Niue is smaller than neighbouring islands and it took very little time from the moment of arrival for the Christian faith to be established on the whole island. How that happened differed from those island cultures which had paramount chiefs, a *matai* system as in Samoa, or a monarchy. The Niuean *iki* (chief) had some but not excessive influence over their families. For a single isolated small island it took nearly fifteen years before the whole island community was converted. The resistance of some

⁷ Jon Butler cited by David N. Power (O.M.I.), "Communion Within Pluralism in the Local Church: Maintaining Unity in the Process of Inculturation" in *The Multicultural Church: A New Landscape in U.S. Theologies*, William Cenkner (ed.), New York / Mahwah, N.J., Paulist Press, 1995, p.85

⁸ Havea defines a (non)traditional understanding of what passes as Scripture: "scriptures are texts honored by members of a community because those reveal something that helps them/others understand what the community is about and how it may endure and thrive. It is in this sense that the Hebrew Bible, Apocrypha, New Testament, Qur'an, and Bhagavad Gita are scriptures." Ibid., p.13

⁹ The initial attempt to land the gospel on Niue was met with fierce opposition. The incumbent law at the time was that no foreign visitors were allowed to make a landing lest they bring foreign disease. The death penalty was sanctioned upon any immigrant including returning Niueans. The policing of this law was so effective that Captain James Cook in his visit in 1774 following a harrowing encounter with the islanders named Niue 'Savage Island.' It took three attempts in 14 years (1832-1846) to successfully land a missionary. The Niuean missionary Nukai Peniamina was only allowed to land when a local Mutalau *toa* (warrior) Toimata Fakafitifonua - who accompanied him on the trip - negotiated the way for him to introduce the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

staunch opposition was soon quelled by sheer numbers of converts in their families and the weak disorganised shamanism did not offer much competition.¹⁰

Following some initial suspicion,¹¹ the local communities accepted the gospel and consequently the Christian faith has lain at the heart of the Niuean people's religious self-understanding. Through the course of modern history the great majority of Niueans believe that being Niuean and being Christian are basically one and the same thing. Because of the way villages are organized, the Christian religion became the centre and heart of the community.

Let me explain that point further. Prior to the coming of the Gospel tribal existence had not been confined to a permanent place because families and familial/tribal groups would move from place to place in a nomadic fashion depending on sources of food, albeit within their districts. This form of communal existence was fluid and flexible, particularly in times of relative peace.¹² In times of warfare there were natural *taue* (strongholds or forts) whereby tribes could find refuge and security.¹³ The Christian village arrangement was a natural progression from the hunter-gatherer nomadic set up. Not only was there now a permanent village, the Church building was strategically situated at the centre of the village

¹⁰ Ibid 117. Apart from pre-battle rituals of the *taula-atua* (shaman or traditional priest) their influence were not fanatical to offer threatening resistance to the new religion.

¹¹ There was suspicion and derision by many and none more bold than the warrior Tukumulia who composed a chant '*Mutalau fiafia teao, ooe! Tala ke he Atua ne hifo mai he lagi, ti ko fe e Atua ia, ooe!* (Mutalau, you celebrate in vain, ooe! You speak of the God who ascended from the heavens, where is that God? Ooe!). Interesting also to note that following this person's conversion, a counter-perspective was composed into a chant: '*Mitaki tuhi e mafola, mitaki ti to fakafaahia*' (Blessed be the light of peace, may it fall on both sides).

¹² Regardless of accounts that there were constant battles between the Motu and Tafiti moieties (that dominate the Niuean historical discourse), Niueans were a people who fellowship in relative peace. There were less popular stories that should have been told of communities from Tafiti and Motu who frequented each other exchanging gifts and ideas. Friendships were forged between families and communities. The story about Muatoga of Tafiti Lalo who visited friends at Matahefonua fishing hooks; instead, he received the Gospel and in turn introduced it to his community at Oneonepata. Unlike some accounts it was a friendly intercourse that resulted in sharing the Gospel.

¹³ The two moieties Tafiti and Motu had several *taue* forts, well shielded and protected for their women, elderly and children. Fupiu is renowned in the north (Motu) and Talagi in the south (Tafiti).

with the manse and village *male* green next to it. The way in which this space became organized and accepted has come to symbolize the place of the Christian faith in the Niuean community. Christianity by this time had become the organizing agent in the island communities, particularly the denominational influence of the Congregational Church.

Fifita Talagi noted that the ecclesial structure of the Congregational Church which oversaw the work of the London Missionary Society during introduction of Christianity to Niue was similar to the Polynesian form of governing. It was republican and egalitarian, consistent with the Niuean way of life.¹⁴ Although a hierarchical structure was introduced later by the resident London missionaries, the Niueans enjoyed having the authority vested in the local congregation and using a consensus method for decision making.

How much of Congregationalism influenced the Niuean Christian *fakafetuiaga* is uncertain given the acephalous nature of their daily reality. The Congregational Church government is ruled by the local congregation and avoids the hierarchical powers other churches possess. The uniqueness of this system is apparent in its order of checks and balances that basically constrain the authority of the pastor, its church officers and any particular members. The local church has the right to seek the mind of Christ and is thus seen to be answerable directly to the Lord. The establishment of the Gospel, the establishment of the church and the village structure are thus closely interwoven.

This socio-political arrangement of the village and the church is similar to the Samoan communal structure – but with one significant difference. There is no hierarchical stratification within Niuean society similar to that of the Samoan *matatua* system. The Samoan missionaries, who succeeded the first missionary to

¹⁴ Fifita Talagi in *Niue: A History of the Island*, Institute of Pacific Studies, USP and Government of Niue, Suva Printing, 1982, p.118

Niue, established the centralised village model. Under their influence the *akoako* (minister - teacher) or *fekafekau* (minister - servant) assumed the role of *iki*, or chief, working together with the heads of the family. The indigenous *fa-kafetuiaga*, under the leadership of the *iki* or heads of families, became Christian communities.¹⁵

How was this processed and who influenced whom? Despite the natural dynamics and process of conversion there were deep undercurrents at work. Some commentators believed that the missionary influence did not drastically interfere with the Niuean customs and culture.¹⁶ Instead, the introduced principles of governance fitted right in with the Niuean nature of organized community. Samoan pastors were accredited with the centralized form of governance but when the traditional socio-political structures are examined, the concept was not so foreign. Niuean, Samoan and other Polynesian cultures are not so distant as to differ greatly in their social and cultural understandings, generally. The majority of the Polynesian societies shares close affinity with the *moana* (ocean) and the *fonua* (land) and much of their value systems is founded upon their environment. Their socio-religious structures are based on a *theonomous* understanding. The one distinctive difference between the Samoan and the Niuean social structures is the lack of strict hierarchical strata in the Niuean model. The *matai* (chiefly system) that undergirds the hierarchy in Samoan society is absent in Niuean tradition. Niuean egalitarian social paradigm is closer to the biblical model of the 'priesthood of all believers'; it tends to be more fluid than stratified. Be that as it may, the cultural and spiritual values they share are very similar. In fact, Niuean mythology testifies to their differences and parallelism: they learn from one another as they exchange gifts and ideas.

¹⁵ Ibid., p.115

¹⁶ Ibid., p.118-119

The *fakafetuiaga* communal aspect of the *pule fakatufono* (political structure) was demonstrated in the meeting between the visiting half-caste Niuean-Tongan prince Mutalau Hakemaitoga and the ruling warrior chief Tihamaui sometime in the seventeenth century.¹⁷ When the migrant Mutalau asked how the island was ruled, Tihamaui answered by placing five *kafika* sticks on each side of the longer one representing ten chiefs and the king in the middle. Mutalau then suggested a better model by gathering all the sticks together - the longer one at the centre - and proceeded to bind them with a *mahiva* (tropical vine). It appeared that this model was practised as evidenced by the circle of stone seats at the traditional meeting site in Uhomotu.¹⁸ When the Samoan pastors introduced a head of villages, *fono*, in their districts and eventually the *Fono Motu* (Island Council), it already had its basis in the Niuean tradition. So, there were a mix of polity models used by Niueans at different levels and at different times depending on their political situation at the time.¹⁹ It is evident that the Niuean life - in its acephalous nature - was influenced by its indigenous and liquid environment as was by the gospel over time.

3. Crossing the *Moana*

It is arguably the case that the issue of migration and settlement in a new land is as much a formative influence in the life of Niue as the coming of the Christian faith and the island's conversion. Niueans are inherently fluid, socially and in terms of migration. Despite the isolation of the island, the Niuean people had a long tradition of setting out across the *moana*. What is different now is the

¹⁷ There were three recorded migrations to Niue: the first is estimated to have taken place around 700AD; second took place around 1525; third migration was estimated to have taken place towards the end of the seventeenth century by Mutalau Hakemaitoga who also introduced the system of kingship, an imitation of a Tongan *tui-tonga* model. See Loeb, M. Edwin. *History and Traditions of Niue*, 1926, p.24

¹⁸ See Hafe Vilitama, Terry Chapman, Fifita Talagi, Ikinepule Etuata, et al. *Niue: A History of the Island*, Institute of Pacific Studies, USP and Government of Niue, Suva Printing, 1982, p.118

¹⁹ In times of kings and times of war, chiefs from their districts would gather to find solutions or decide on courses of action. Different methods would be proposed.

purpose and means. The canoe has been replaced by the aeroplane. The *moana* is much more swiftly crossed. Instead of returning home to the island the crossing is now often associated with residency or long term settlement on the other side of the *moana*. The tide has been largely one way which can be seen very easily through the benefit of statistics.

The latest statistical release revealed that there are now only 1,487 people living on the island.²⁰ It is reckoned that the local population reached its greatest in 1965 with over 5,000 residents. The present population of 1,487 compares with 23,380 Niueans living in New Zealand²¹, primarily in Auckland. It is estimated that there are approximately over 3,000 Niueans living in Australia.²² This Niuean diaspora is unlike the diaspora of other larger Pacific island nations like Fiji, Samoa and Tonga where there are substantial populations in other countries – mainly the United States – as well. The Niuean diaspora is confined to New Zealand and then Australia.

The act of migration is always an act of dislocation. Considering the changing demography of Australia David Tracy and Amanda Dowd have referred to immigration as an ongoing trauma for those who embark upon this quest for a new life.²³ For a small and vulnerable island like Niue the loss of inhabitants through migration weakens the fabric of its communal life and its likely viability. One of the consequences of this state of affairs is that what happens in diaspora is of

²⁰ From the statistical release for Niuean residential population for the period between July and December 2014. Source: Government of Niue, Statistics & Immigration Division, Treasury Department. Report released in January 2015. Website: <http://www.spc.int/prism/niue>

²¹ In 2013, Niueans were the fourth largest Pacific ethnic group in New Zealand, making up 23,880 or 8 percent of New Zealand's Pacific population (265,974). Source: www.stats.govt.nz/

²² The actual Niuean population in Australia is difficult to estimate because they are counted under New Zealand as immigrants (all Niueans are New Zealand citizens). Australia has been known to be the new frontier of Niuean migration, from Niue Island itself as well as from New Zealand. In the 2009 census there is over 529,200 New Zealanders living in Australia. Source: www.abs.gov.au/

²³ See, Amanda Dowd (ed.), *Placing Psyche: Exploring Cultural Complexes in Australia*, New Orleans, Spring Journal Books, 2011

critical importance to the home island. There is no saying whether the population will continue to decline and leave Niue without the human resources to be viable. Will the island become progressively more marginal? And, if that is so, then how are its cultural customs to be preserved other than through the waves of those living in diaspora? This issue is a critical concern.

This level of vulnerability adds urgency to the task at hand. The issues of identity and belonging, of gospel and culture, are not just issues which the migrant Niuean must negotiate. These are matters of concern for the island also. Sometimes the seeds of future problems make themselves visible even before the problem is fully grown. In terms of the transmission of faith, how is the established practice, the life and witness of *Ekalesia Niue*, going to maintain itself? The number of ministers now is insufficient to serve the villages; furthermore, those who have been educated for ministry have been trained off-shore and now they themselves weave into this Niuean mix of gospel and culture something which they have received from elsewhere.

The threat to the *ekalesia* way of life is also potentially at risk from some of the side-effects of life in diaspora. The practice through the twentieth century had been for all Niueans to declare themselves to be Christian. It would have been inconceivable for an islander to say he or she was agnostic, atheistic, or publicly indifferent. That is no longer the case. In the course of the last census or two, a number have now defined themselves as having 'no religion'. The ties back to faith and the community practice of island life have been broken.²⁴ Effects of secularization by the outside world is certainly taking place on the island.

²⁴ It is not unusual for all Niuean residents in the last century to believe themselves to be Christians. However, in the last few census many have chosen not to identify themselves with any religion, though all have directly or indirectly come under the influence of the Christian religion. In 2011, with 67 per cent or 980 persons affiliated to the Ekalesia Kerisiano Niue church, it remains the most dominant religious denomination of the resident population. The next highest groups are the Latter Day Saints Church and Roman Catholic Church with 10 per cent each or 143 and 141 members respectively, followed by the Jehovah's Witness with 2 per cent (38). Presbyterian, Methodists and Seventh Day Adventist each have 1 per cent or 14, 11 and 9 members respectively. Religious denominations combined into an "Others" category (6%)

The comparison can be made with Niuean diaspora in Auckland. The first Niueans to New Zealand were settled under the understanding that Niueans were politically cared for by the New Zealand Government; all Niueans are New Zealand citizens. Niue has been a self-governing state in free association with New Zealand since 1974. It had previously been a territory administered by the New Zealand Government since 1901. Attaining self-governing status means that Niue is now a sovereign nation with political freedom to determine her own affairs and have free access to New Zealand and all the benefits of being New Zealand citizens. The benefits include free primary and secondary education and healthcare services for all its citizens.²⁵ Those who wish to pursue tertiary education have to migrate and study in New Zealand and other institutions within the Pacific Rim.²⁶ Naturally, families send their children to New Zealand for school and tertiary education where most of their families now reside and who also provide financial, social and spiritual support during their time of study. The majority of them have become members of the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa, New Zealand (PCANZ).²⁷ Out of that affiliation with the PCANZ came a Church to Church Partnership Agreement in October, 2001. But this relationship had been in place long before this agreement was made because the majority of the members of the *Ekalesia Niue* who migrated to New Zealand had already transferred into the PCANZ. The informal relationship prior to the 2001 Agree-

includes, Apostolic, Church of God of Jerusalem, Baha'i, Pentecostal, Sikh, Hindu and Christian Fellowship. Two per cent or 34 of the resident population stated they had no religion. No one chose not to state their religion nor any person refused to respond although it is not a compulsory question. Source: <http://www.spc.int/prism/niue>

²⁵ Interestingly, almost 100% of school-age children in Niue are enrolled in school and very few claim to have had no formal education (2.6%). However, a significant number lack formal educational qualifications. Of those who have, 11% have Form 5 or 6 certificates, or university entrance certificates. A further 20% have certificates that were not further defined, and hence could cover a broad range of documents, from university foundation level to secretarial qualifications. People with trade certificates made up just 1%, meaning a trade shortage on the island. University level qualifications account for 19%, with women slightly ahead of men in degree and post-graduate qualifications. Source: <http://www.spc.int/prism/niue>

²⁶ Other than New Zealand tertiary institutions Aus-Aid sponsored students study at the University of the South Pacific (USP) in Fiji or other faculties in other island states, as well as in Australia.

²⁷ Sixty-seven percent (13,797) of Niueans with a religious affiliation said they belong to a Christian religion. The most common Christian denomination was Presbyterian making up 48 percent (6,774) of those affiliated to a Christian religion, followed by Catholic at 13 percent (1,866), and Latter Day Saints at 11 percent (1,599). Source: <http://www.spc.int/prism/niue>

ment though had many of the Niuean Ministers from Niue trained and formed by the PCANZ at Knox Theological College in Dunedin. The Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand trained Ministers had become familiar with the Presbyterian systems and the role it played in the life of the diasporic Niuean community. During their time of training, they were pastorally adopted and supported by the Niue Pacific Island Presbyterian Churches (PIPC). With nearly 24,000 Niueans now in New Zealand, there is a sense that those ministers would eventually minister to the population in New Zealand; especially given the nature of Niuean migration. With the ebb and flow of members between Niue and New Zealand, ministers are able to offer their services in both countries. It is noticeable also in the work within the church that the bulk of the senior population are away from the island, those who provides the link to the past. So, the traditional knowledge and wisdom of Niue is now residing on the shores of New Zealand, most worship and minister in the PCANZ. One of the consequences of this pattern of migration is that the Niuean community in Auckland is able to hold more closely and easily to received traditions. The *ekklesia* for Niueans in New Zealand is quite different from that for those in Australia.

The first Niuean settlers in Sydney were seekers of new career and lifestyle opportunities. Australia, being a new frontier attracted the young, ambitious and those who possess a risk-taking disposition. They were the ones who broke away from the monotony of their parents' lifestyle that was centered on church and community. Coming to Australia meant a new beginning for many. Their focus in life is mainly economic and, in a sense, sensually based. The social life in Sydney was a strong attraction and it interfered with their religious observance. Sundays became their recovery day after a week of hard work and a weekend of socializing. In nearly thirty years since the arrival of the first Niueans to Australia, the demographics are beginning to change. Those with young families are beginning to migrate and find a home in Australia.

4. Experiencing Diaspora

This thesis is not happening in a vacuum. Its timing means that the Niuean church in diaspora is able to draw upon work which has already been done in other similar communities. The experience of migration has put pressure upon that relationship between ethnicity and discipleship. Statistics have revealed that - like other ethnic migrants - a growing number of Niueans have taken leave of their faith because of pluralism of religions and world-views encountered in a new place.²⁸ It is also now evident that through the experience of living in diaspora the cultural apprehension of the Christian faith can change. Aeryun Lee, a first generation migrant from Korea, gives an example of an experience of coming from an ethnic home where they were centered to be marginalized in a new place. She writes:

We have moved from having status to no status, living in the familiarity of our own land to living in a strange land, wearing a golden crown to a crown of thorns, from bearing a beautiful cross to bearing a rugged cross, from speaking our own heartfelt language to speaking a limited, functional, foreign language.²⁹

The experience is that of a migrant whose faith is challenged while living in a new location. Many would lose faith and assimilate to the secular mainstream. But others continue to seek Christ in their new home with questions: Where is Christ to be found in this strange environment? Who is Jesus Christ for us to-

²⁸ Twenty-four percent (5,025) of the Niuean population in New Zealand reported no religious affiliation, while 8 percent (1,749) objected to answering the religion question. A higher proportion of New Zealand-born Niueans were in both categories than overseas-born Niueans. Sourced from: <http://www.stats.govt.nz/~media/Statistics/Census/2006-reports/Pacific%20Profiles/Niuean-Profile-updated-May2008.pdf>. There is a clear religious rift here between the first generation Niuean migrants and the new and subsequent generations. Note that the majority of those who migrate to Australia comes from this group (New Zealand born); although there is no anecdotal evidence to confirm the assertion.

²⁹ Lee, Aeryun, "In Search of a Christ of the Heart" in *Faith in a Hyphen: Cross-Cultural Theologies Down Under*, Clive Pearson (ed.), Openbook Publishers, UTC, 2004, pp.89-90

day? For migrants like Aeryun Lee, Jesus Christ is an emigrant; a political refugee as an infant (Matthew 2:13), a vagabond "who never lived in his birthplace,"³⁰ a marginal person who lived and shared his life with the outcasts, poor, sick, despised, foreigners, including women. Jesus' life at the margins gives hope to the dislocated migrants. For such the church can become a refuge or shelter.

It is now known that the way in which a church performs its vocation in diaspora is not the same as it is in the home or sending society. Writing in an anthology on the multicultural church, edited, William Cenkner, David Power identified how a migrant church begins to fulfill a number of roles - supporting the community, nurturing language skills, mediating between cultural members and the regulatory establishment of the new land around issues to do with visas, employment, banking and the like.³¹ The needed assistance helps the new immigrants negotiate a dual commitment to being in a new country and remaining faithful to the old.

The comparison can be made with Myong Duk Yang's description of the Korean church in Australia written in *Crossing Borders*. From the establishment of the first Korean church in Australia in 1973, there are now over 200 in Sydney alone. The exponential explosion of the Korean church moved Gordon Dicker to write: "Koreans are of a religious disposition and when they join a church they attend regularly."³² The attraction may not only be spiritual alone. The church offers the migrants more. Myong Duk Yang described the migrant church as a

³⁰ K. B. Hong cited by Aeryun Lee in "In Search of a Christ of the Heart", *Faith in a Hyphen*, p.90

³¹ David N. Power, O.M.I., "Communion Within Pluralism in the Local Church: Maintaining Unity in the Process of Inculturation" in William Cenkner, ed., *The Multicultural Church: A New Landscape in U.S. Theologies*, Paulist Press, New York/Mahwah, N.J, 1995, p.98

³² Gordon Dicker Quoted by Myong Duk Yang, "'Seouls on a Journey': Korean Diaspora in Australia" in *Crossing Borders: Shaping Faith, Ministry and Identity in Multicultural Australia*, Helen Richmond and Myong Duk Yang (eds.), UCA Assembly & NSW Board of Mission, 2006, p.153

socio-cultural hub for the Korean community - Christian or not - providing not only spiritual support but offering a

sense of fellowship for lonely immigrants and freedom from the pressure of speaking English. The Korean ministers often acted as counsellor, mediator, welfare worker, interpreter, guardian, friend, and even pick-up driver.³³

There is a risk, of course, in shaping a church which can become an "escape" from dealing with the reality of everyday life. The risk is accentuated if that church proclaims what Daniel Migliore calls a "Gnostic message".³⁴ The focus is on the "Jesus to come" instead of "Jesus our contemporary" - the one who is present in the struggles of migrants and those at the margins.

Given the experience of the Korean migrants, it is now known that migration presents the cultural community and its church with a number of settlement issues. That term "settlement" is used by Gary Bouma in his *Many Religions, All Australian*. Bouma believed that Australia is a success story of religious settlement because of an Australian institution of giving others a "fair go". What he has in mind initially is the country's experiences in the 19th century with religious sectarianism, the prevalent ecumenism spirit of the 20th century, the pattern of funding primary and secondary education, and a successful history of conflict resolution by reference to courts of law.³⁵ Moreover, the social and moral framework provided by a Judeo-Christian based values of tolerance, equality, and freedom of speech and religion (foundational in the democratic form of government) have worked together to enable this transition. Churches are often been found at the forefront connecting migrants and social welfare services.

³³ Ibid., p.153

³⁴ Migliore, D., "Christology in Context", *Interpretation*, July, 1995, p.245

³⁵ Gary D. Bouma (ed.) *Many Religions, All Australian: Religious Settlement, Identity and Cultural Diversity*, Christian Research Association, Monash University, Melbourne Vic Australia, 1997.

Building about Bouma's work Clive Pearson has described what seems to be the pattern of settlement within migrant churches in the Uniting Church in Australia.³⁶ The issues initially are ones of needing to find a space in which to gather for worship and someone to lead. In terms of theology the tendency is first to focus upon the telling of stories. The migrant, who tells their story becomes a living document. They are able to describe what it was like to be dislocated and what it might have been like to have addressed some of those foundational tasks of setting up a household church or negotiating with an existing church for time and space. That stage is often followed by a biblical study which helps interpret the experience of much change and living in diaspora. There is a desire to correlate biblical passages and themes with what is presently being experienced. One example of such is the invocation of psalm 137, "How shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?" The emergence of themes – usually to do with who is Jesus Christ for us now, what does it mean to be a person made in the image of God, and what is the purpose and work of the church – comes later. There is a settlement process which is concerned with both infrastructure and with a theology of being in a new land to negotiate.

5. The Focus of this Research: *Tu Kupega*³⁷

The focus of this thesis will necessarily fall upon the Niuean community in Australia. There are now a number of Niuean churches in Sydney which are yet to be fully established. There are now emerging ones in Queensland and Melbourne. In Sydney, the Niuean congregations are to be found in Mascot, Rams-

³⁶ Clive Pearson, 'Face to Face for Christ's Sake', in Myong Duk Yang (ed), *Tale of Two Churches: Australia and Korea*, Seoul: Publishing House, Presbyterian Church of Korea, 2012; pp. 134-173

³⁷ *Tu Kupega* (visionary) is one who is at the head of a three-man fly-fishing canoe directing the *faouho* (middle paddler) and the *muivaka* (steerer) towards the catch. The *tu-kupega* needs a keen eye for spotting fish in a distance at the same time guiding the canoe through surges and waves, away from potential danger. He needs good balance and vision to guide the team for a successful catch and safe journey. I employ the metaphor in this context for one who is to chart the journey ahead.

gate and Holroyd. Writing on "The Niuean Experience in the Uniting Church"³⁸, Rev. Liva Tukutama chronicled the beginnings of the Niuean church in Sydney starting at Mascot in 1994 with the Presbyterian Church led by Mohelagi Tuto-ka. That church later moved and became part of the Mascot Uniting Church though still holding their own language worship services. Two other Niuean groups started their own worship services under the Uniting Church: Ramsgate was started in 1996 by a retired New Zealand Presbyterian Minister Rev. Evan Lagaluga, and Guildford in 2001 by Kenny Nelisi. The Ramsgate Niuean community is now being cared for by Rev. Matagi Vilitama since 2009 as part of Carlton-Ramsgate Uniting Church. These worship groups work under the Uniting Church in Australia (UCA) as part of the local congregation, sharing the same premises and facilities.

According to Tukutama, there were initial challenges for the groups in engaging with the hosting traditional members. In one case, the hosts were few in numbers but held the power of authority through their being hosts and their greater knowledge of church policies. The new arrivals were made to feel like a guest and were often reminded of the need to conform to the polity and policies of the UCA, as well as being dictated to by the politics of the host church community. Contentious issues - typical in multicultural contexts - were to do with property sharing, resources, difference in culture, language, misunderstanding, failures in communication, and beneficial ownership of the church.³⁹

Similar struggles were experienced by the emerging churches in Brisbane. *Ekalesia* Logan was established in January 2005 by Pastor Elisi Sionetali with Joe Tapatuetoa, three years later, Rev. Steve Havilitama began a Niuean wor-

³⁸ Liva Tukutama "The Niuean Experience in the Uniting Church" in *Crossing Borders: Shaping Faith, Ministry and Identity in Multicultural Australia*, Helen Richmond & Myong Duk Yang (eds.) UCA Assembly & NSW Board of Mission, 2006, p.294-300

³⁹ Helen Richmond & Myong Duk Yang (eds.) *Crossing Borders: Shaping Faith, Ministry and Identity in Multicultural Australia*, UCA Assembly & NSW Board of Mission, 2006, p.294-300

ship group in the Acacia Ridge Uniting Church. The latest emerging Niuean church in Brisbane started in the beginning of 2014 with a few families in the Ipswich Uniting Church led by Pastor Jamieson Taupiasi. Whilst working as a Director of Multicultural Ministry (Victoria Synod) a Niuean Minister Rev. Don Ikitoelagi established a spiritual home for the Niuean community in the St. George Uniting Church in Melbourne in 2006. Rev. Molesi Tamate from Niue who migrated to Melbourne in 2011 is currently leading and nurturing this congregation. The ongoing challenge for this lone Niuean congregation is its location where Niueans are well spread far and wide in a sprawling city. Getting to church on Sundays is always a challenge. Currently the Niuean community in Perth are seeking to establish a faith community for Niuean families. At the present time there are four ordained Niuean ministers serving in the Uniting Church: Rev. Liva Tukutama (Blacktown UC), Rev. Hawea Jackson (Deniliquin UC), Rev. Molesi Tamate (St. George UC Niuean Worship Group, Melbourne) and Rev. Matagi Vilitama (Carlton-Ramsgate UC & Hurstville City UC). Both Tukutama and Jackson are in placements working in non-Niuean parishes but are involved in the Niuean affairs through the Niue National Conference under the auspices of the UCA. Tukutama has worked extensively at Presbytery and at Synod level promoting multi/cross-cultural ministry.

It is clear that the Niuean congregations are confined to three capital cities. The greatest concentration is in Sydney. The way in which these scattered congregations can discuss common concerns is via the Niuean National Conference. This gathering was initiated following a meeting of leaders, elders and supporters from the Sydney based Niuean churches on 25th February 2006. The meeting was attended by the then Director of the National Multi-cultural Ministry, Rev. Helen Richmond, facilitated by Rev. Liva Tukutama.

The aim of the meeting was to look at the various ministries of Niueans in Sydney and also asking the question

whether it's time to form a National Conference for the Niueans in Australia.⁴⁰

The interesting outcome, however, was the issues raised in this meeting and recommendations that followed. The meeting,

Unanimously agreed that a Niuean National Conference should be formed in the Uniting Church in Australia. The national conference will encourage others whether they are in the Uniting Church or not to join the conference. It's a good opportunity to dialogue with the Niueans in Melbourne, Brisbane and Perth and encourage them to join.⁴¹

The meeting deemed it best to create a National Conference as an organising body to unite the Niuean community. It sought to facilitate the churches in dealing with issues concerning matters of ministry. These have to do with: (i) property sharing (issues of access and space for Niuean worship and culture); (ii) leadership (seeking recognition and procedural matters for training like the Period of Discernment); (iii) exploring models for ministry among Niueans (intentionally looking at best models for migrant Niueans). There were other resolutions to do with matters of cultural retention. These included: (i) the survival of cultural identity and oral history (ensuring the survival of the Niuean language and culture); (ii) youth and intergenerational sharing (how to address the generational disparity - particularly the increasing challenges youth are facing in a secular society). During the 2009 conference held in Guildford, a verbal reminder was given as to why the Niue National Conference was formed; this time the second and subsequent generations are highlighted:

This was started 26/2/06 – where meeting was called for Niueans to come together and give ideas on how to bring

⁴⁰ Electronic minutes, *Meeting with Niuean Church Leaders*, 25 February 2006, p.1. Emailed by Liva Tukutama, 18th March 2015.

⁴¹ Ibid., p.3

Niuean people in Australia together and how we reach out to the Youth of Niue, to prevent them from being statistics in the correctional departments in this country.⁴²

Since 2006 the Niue National Conference has met annually attempting to address these fundamental issues that are typical of migrant churches. Over the years the attendance of the Niue Conference has slowly declined particularly among the young people. Those who were there at the beginning have grown up and found interests elsewhere. The Conference would normally run from a Friday evening with an opening worship service led by the youth; followed by an all day conference on a Saturday ending the day with feasting and cultural performances in the evening; the gathering finishes with a worship service with Holy Communion on a Sunday with feasting and celebration to end. The highlight of the conference has always been the Saturday night feasting and cultural celebration where members of the community would join despite not attending the conference itself. It is obvious that "meeting" in a rigid and formal classroom environment is not appealing to Niueans despite the pertinent issues and compelling presentations offered in the agenda. Issues selected for these conferences are deliberate, they are chosen to articulate, engage and speak to the social contexts where migrants find themselves. Social and health issues have also been explored in the conference; Pacific Islander experts from the health sector, for instance, were invited to address the conference.

Some of the recurring issues included: models of ministry; the need to retain and revive the Niuean language and cultural values; encouraging unity among Niuean churches in Sydney, interstate, and conversations between the NNC, *Ekalesia Kerisiano* and the Niueans in the PCANZ; property use and ownership; training of new ministers and lay leaders including the issue surrounding ordination (of the two leaders in Sydney and one in Brisbane whose ordination is ambiguous); and, issues to do with children and women's ministries.

⁴² Source: *Niue National Conference Minutes*, 2-4 October 2009, p.1

In Gary Bouma's terms, most of these themes are "settlement issues". They pertain to issues of fitting into a new place and dealing with identity and religious challenges. They are shared issues with all the migrant communities that make up a plural and diverse Australia. In dealing with a new place and missing the rhythm and practice of the home church, Niuean churches in the conference have tried to pattern their church calendar on the *Ekalesia Niue* annual celebrations: these include the Midnight-New Year's Service, Prayer Week (first full week of the year), an Easter Rally, Combined Youth Services, *Aho Me* (Choir Festival), Women's Fellowship Services, White Sunday (Children's Sunday), *Fono Motu* (National Conference), Peniamina Day (Constitution Celebration), and recently an Anzac Service.⁴³ These celebrations have been instrumental in bringing the community together.

The conference minutes and reports that although goals and objectives of the Conference are noble (uniting the Niuean community, sustaining the Niuean cultural and spiritual identity, helping Niueans to successfully integrate to Australian life), it remains powerless to effect major concrete change or to bring much of these aims to bear. Issues that continue to impede progress boil down to leadership, lack of resources and the ability to engage meaningfully with the young community. For instance, in the first few conferences the issue of leadership surfaced repetitively.⁴⁴ This matter often presents itself in the form of the proper training and ordination of ministers or pastors by recognized and credible institutions. The community had lost confidence in community leadership and it is reflected in the diminishing numbers of church attendees. Another recurring issue has to do with youth and children; in all the conferences the youth and children's forum had always voiced their need for resources (personnel and ma-

⁴³ Summary from *Niue National Conference Executive Committee Minutes*, 21st February 2008, p.1

⁴⁴ From the inaugural meeting in February 2006 the question of training and ordination was raised. It was again highlighted in the conferences 2008, 2010 and 2011. Source: email copies of *Niue National Conference Minutes*. The training and ordination of two of the church leaders in Sydney has been questioned by some in the community. There are others working in the Pentecostal denominations who also have been questioned by the community. Niueans are very critical when it comes to leadership and they are insistent on the authenticity of their leaders.

terial) and programs that are relevant to their needs. It appeared that every year programs had been patterned after a traditional Niuean liturgy with a cultural focus that youth and children had to fit in. In 2008, they reported back to the conference the need for:

- More English to be used in services and things to do with youth
- More singing (newer songs)
- More youth activities: pizza nights, bible study groups, sports days – Niuean youth and others
- Movie Nights – accompany by adults
- Beach Picnic days
- Camp – overnight/weekend
- Niuean Classes
- Sunday school
- More combined Youth Services (currently only 3)
- More Music instruments
- Niuean Culture Day
- Cooking Classes...⁴⁵

There was an air of frustration in their report. The conference response to the proposals from the young people was to appoint a specialized youth worker with a Niuean background, Pastor David Harris, to lead the children's ministry. He worked for only a year with the conference and the young people were once again left to manage on their own. Likewise, women felt that they had also been ignored. In the last two conferences, women complained that there was never enough time afforded to them for their own discussions.

On reflection, the conference tended to focus heavily on the Uniting Church and its role as facilitator for multiculturalism without an enabling capacity. Much of conference time were given to personnel from synod explaining their roles and what the conference should do without properly resourcing the local congregations in their struggles and ministry. Similarly, a lot of effort was given to building bridges across states and inter-church relationships - important as they are - than focusing on children-youth and women ministries. Some of the struggles

⁴⁵ 2008 Niue National Conference Report, p. 4-5

here reveal that the Niuean National Conference is still finding its feet attending to settlement and pastoral issues of its community.

Where the conference is excelling is in its vision to work nationally and abroad; it has been to the fore in inviting dialogue across states, and building *hala laupapa* (bridges) across the Tasman (New Zealand) and back to the home island, Niue. Invitations were extended to both Niue and the Niuean churches in New Zealand to attend the conferences. Representatives from interstate, Auckland and Niue had accepted and participated in some of the conferences. Their participation is important because the invitations and *hala laupapa* constructions have culminated in an inter-church Agreement between Uniting Church through UnitingWorld⁴⁶ and the *Ekalesia Kerisiano* Niue which was signed on the 26th October 2009.⁴⁷ The Agreement contains mutual working arrangements:

Sharing together with the faith in Christ
Recognising the ordination
Sharing a commitment to mission
Committing to learn from one another
Committing to pray and act in solidarity with each other
Committing to share in theological studies
Committing to grow spiritually
This partnership will be reviewed every 5 yrs⁴⁸

The agreement is one of the highlights of work the conference had done. The "bridge" has now been made and future dialogue and resource sharing between churches will be made easier because of it.

⁴⁶ UnitingWorld is the international agency of the Assembly of the Uniting Church in Australia with a charter to stand in solidarity with her global Church Partners in Africa, Asia, and the Pacific.

⁴⁷ The aim of the partnership agreement is to continue and support the partner churches with the ministering of God's work; offer assistance in whatever partners need also to help deal with any problems they may have according to Bruce Mullen from UnitingWorld who facilitated in the drafting of the Agreement. Source: *Niue National Conference Minutes*, 2-4 October 2009, p.1

⁴⁸ Ibid., p.1

The forming of a National Conference had coincided with the vision of the Uniting Church which has described itself as multicultural (4th Assembly of the UCA, 1985).⁴⁹ The multicultural Declaration set out a number of expectations about what the declaration means in the reality of everyday life, and how it should be reflected in the structures and process of the Uniting Church. But it has not been successful as it had hoped to be. In fact, a sentence in the introduction in the latest statement (One Body, many members – Living faith and life cross-culturally) lamented that:

These (expectations of the "Multicultural" Declaration) have not yet been taken up in a comprehensive way across the local, regional and national life of the UCA.⁵⁰

Reflecting on this multicultural Declaration, a Samoan Minister Samata Elia was openly critical of the way members of the wider church had interpreted and lived out the notion of "multiculturalism", especially in the light of the migrant other. He likened the application of the Uniting Church's multicultural vision to a "hibiscus flower", fitting only for "decoration" and nothing else, because it has no scent. He yearned for a noble vision of the UCA to be embodied in "the pursuit of common goals such as unity, justice and (mutual) respect."⁵¹

In 2012, the 13th Assembly held in Adelaide, the statement "One Body, Many Members – Living Faith and Life Cross-Culturally" was adopted by the Uniting Church. It aims to hold the church to its nature as a church that contains many cultures. These declarations are statements of faith, the ideals that help shape

⁴⁹ See paragraphs 5-9 in the Declaration.

assembly.uca.org.au/mcm/resources/item/download/541_42f419bb02d1d4ca912b530dd7a40af0

⁵⁰ From the "One Body, many members – Living faith and life cross-culturally" document adopted by the 13th Assembly, 2012 in Adelaide, p.1. <https://assembly.uca.org.au/mcm/resources/item/1554-one-body-many-members-living-faith-and-life-cross-culturally>

⁵¹ Ibid., p.189-203. The bracketed "mutual" is my addition to his quote.

a church to truly reflect its calling in a multicultural world and so to live its faith and life cross-culturally. How this statement translates into life in the margins will depend on how the local church understands and answers the question, "Who is Jesus Christ for us today?" and "Where is Jesus Christ today?"

The context in which this research takes place is to consider what it means to be a Niuean church in a much larger, highly pluralistic society. The fact of the matter is that the Niuean congregations have arrived on a distant shore in large cities. The *Ekalesia Niue* here is no longer to be found in small villages where everyone knows everyone else. It is no longer the case that the neighbor is Niuean and that language and cultural expectations are held in common. The comparison can easily be seen by way of a contrast. The Niuean population in Sydney, for instance, is scattered and dispersed. The membership of the congregation at Ramsgate is drawn from five different post codes. Even the Auckland community is much more homogeneous in comparison. Although there has not been any comparative studies done between Sydney and Auckland the obvious is quite clear. Niuean settlement commenced in Auckland towards the middle of the last century and they have now settled, found their rhythm as a diasporic community, fully participating in the largest Polynesian city in the world. The Church has played a pivotal role offering spiritual support, especially in being a custodian of the Niuean culture outside the island home. It plays the role Myong Duk Yang described in *Crossing Borders* providing not only faith support but also ethnic identity and community welfare. The Australian case is very different with many migrants inexperienced in building church communities.

6. Moving *Fakafetuiaga*

Now it could be argued that it is too soon to compose a Niuean ecclesiology for the Niuean diaspora in this distant Australian shore. The standard practice of migrant churches has been to address a range of what Gary Bouma has called "settlement issues". He points out that religion helps a group of immigrants to settle by influencing the patterns of settlement of certain groups. In Chapter five in his book, *Mosques and Muslim Settlement in Australia*, Bouma considers ar-

rival, housing, securing employment, the use of English language, and educating children, as key benefits of religious influence in migrant transitioning. It generally helps sustain and motivate the migrant in the process of settlement.⁵²

Pearson had also designed a Bible study on how to understand the move from one country to another and from there emerged some theological ideas that aid their understanding in settling in a new land. Both Bouma and Pearson recognize the imperative of easing the process of settling into Australian society. It was evident from past experiences that it is extremely difficult to overcome a sense of dislocation and settle into a new environment.

The Niuean example of mass migration is a case in point. Reflected on Bouma's assessment is the Niuean experience in the latter half of the 20th century. One of the obvious outcomes of mass family migration during this period is that migrants are inclined to find comfort in each other. Previous migrants had already established themselves into faith communities that were essentially 'cultural centres'. They were *fakafetuiaga* (gatherings) of individuals and families pooled together in familiar context of worship, affirming and re-affirming their identities and making a 'home' away from home. These churches were the centres from which emanated the ideals and principles of *fakafetuiaga* they knew so well from the island; gathering places where gifts, experiences, resources and skills were pooled and shared to promote the common good within their own community as well as those around them. In these churches they were able to actively maintain and translate cultural practices to help define their 'Niueanness' in diaspora.

It should nevertheless be noted that cultural processes are, as Bottomley has suggested, always historically specific.⁵³ The analogy of a stream might prove

⁵² Bouma, Gary D. *Mosques and Muslim Settlement in Australia*, Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 1994, see chapter 5.

helpful. Sometimes separate but somewhat similar streams flow alongside each other and then pool together in certain areas. It is evident that an Oceanic people cannot exist in isolation: they cannot do that in the remoteness of their islands and especially not in metropolitan cities like Auckland back then and, more so, not now in Sydney. Existing in certain pockets, like Grey Lynn or Māngere in Auckland, they have often seeped and overflow into other streams and pools and inevitably trickled into larger streams of cultures like those of the Samoans, Tongans and Maori who are of the same ethnic oceanic family. At a more alarming level the Niuean and other minor cultures become overwhelmed and absorbed into an ocean of mainstream cultures, particularly the western secular culture. This is a reality that is more apparent in Australia today, the new frontier of Niuean migration.

In such a fluid and mixed context it is difficult to maintain cultural particularity and uniqueness they brought with them from the islands. Anthropologist Eric Wolf explains that:

Once we locate the reality of society in historically changing, imperfectly bounded, multiple and branching social alignments...the concept of a boxed, unitary and bounded culture must give way to a sense of the fluidity and permeability of cultural sets.⁵⁴

Being in a new habitus old forms are challenged, others are borrowed and even new ones emerge. This is a reality with cultural forms as it is with personal identities that lead to formation of new sub-cultures and identities. Many second and third generation migrants today have multiple identities as they have become multi-ethnic; they begin to re-configure and create new forms of [sub]cultures.

⁵³ Bottomley, Gillian. *From Another Place: Migration and the Politics of Culture*, Cambridge, UK.: Cambridge University Press, 1992, p.21

⁵⁴ Wolf, Eric. *Europe and the People Without History*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982, p.11

Whilst it must be confusing for the 'hyphen' generation to comprehend their identity, the *fakafetuiaga* must play an integral role in not only facilitating but also be able to define Niueanness in such testing contexts. Moreover, and most importantly, the *fakafetuiaga* assumes its role as a Church - like an oceanic *vaka* (canoe) - with navigational tools (spiritual and socio-political resources) to steer them across and over often turbulent post-modern currents. In this permeable situation some of the *fakafetuiaga* cultural values and systems central in oceanic villages must become adaptable, translated and even reconfigured as they engage with the western contemporary contexts if they wish to remain relevant. It will be argued that the *fetuiaga kerisiano* (gathering in Christ) should become a spiritual center for worship, a cultural hub, a social and health clinic, a migrant advisory office, a quasi-law firm. In other words it assumes the role of custodian to their ethnic and Christian identity. The church becomes the teacher-facilitator-social worker as it tries to faithfully live out its calling to be 'as Christ' to the other.

For the sake of this thesis, the focus is on developing an ecclesiology that honors its received traditions and yet relevant to the new liquid context in distant shores where Niueans now find themselves. As Gary Bouma and Pearson have pointed out, there is often a delay in addressing the settlement issues and coming to terms with fresh expressions of theological ideas. For the Niuean diaspora in Australia the matter of timing is actually fortunate. It is possible to see what other migrant ethnic churches have needed to do. There are now examples and patterns emerging of what a diasporic theology in this country might look like. The work which has been done on a cross-cultural theology invites the Niuean church to contribute, find its voice and give an account of what it means for its members to be a church in this country. That advice concerning whether it is too early should be seen in the light of what Fumitaka Matsuoka called to "come out

of silence."⁵⁵ He was saying that for too long the diasporic Asians in American churches has been silent. The lesson should be learnt.

7. Coming Out of Silence

The theological task before the Niuean community is daunting. The standard research project for a western student is to enquire critically into some aspect of a well-researched tradition. There is a literature which provides guides, clues, a method, a way of embarking. The same is not the case for a theologian seeking to make sense of the *ekalesia Niue* in diaspora. It is a new venture. The 'problem' is partly a lack of literature to do with the Niuean experience of living in Australia. That difficulty is only further enhanced through the relative lack of any critical inquiry on Niue's history and culture which is published. It is almost as if it is a theological case of breaking silence.

As of today, there has not been much published work done in Niue, let alone those living in diaspora. Much of Niuean literature was published in the first half of the last century and their content were anthropological. Percy Smith and Edwin Loeb⁵⁶ respectively wrote comprehensive ethnological studies on the Niuean history and traditions that became text books for enthusiasts and research students. Smith's comprehensive recording of Niuean ethnology was penned in 1901 with the help of his renowned Niuean informants that included King Fataaiki, local Church Minister Pulekula and Rev. Frank Lawes. What is enlightening about Smith's account is a raft of traditional songs and chants that are religious in nature pointing to pre-Christian theology and an indigenous worldview. An example of such chants or prayers before a mighty deed is done is:

⁵⁵ Matsuoka, F. *Out of Silence: Emerging Themes in Asian American Churches*, Cleveland, Ohio, United Church Press, 1995

⁵⁶ Thompson, B. *'Savage Island'*, 1901 R. McMillan Publisher, New Zealand, 1901

Tagaloa, tilitili, (O Tagaloa! with smoothness, with ease)
 Tagaloa teletele (O Tagaloa! with speed, and ease)
 Takina hala Mata-fonua (Bring by the way of the North end)
 Takina hala Mui-fonua (Bring by the way of the South end)
 Tutu malie Tagaloa ō—ō, (Preside with effect, O Tagaloa!)
 Tagaloa ē—ē (O Tagaloa!)⁵⁷

Smith, together with his contemporary Edward Tregear, also compiled the first known Niuean dictionary to be published. In the process he tried to re-write the lexicon using the Cook Island linguistic structures by introducing "r" into the alphabet and "ng" in place of "g" for writing.⁵⁸ Smith's dictionary was never fully accepted by Niueans and had never been an officially accepted text in Niue. Hitherto, there was only a small handbook of limited Niuean vocabulary, only available mostly to *palagi* expatriates working on the island. A contemporary of Smith was Basil Thompson who authored *Savage Island: An Account of a Sojourn in Niue and Tonga*. Thompson wrote about Niue from an historical angle. His depiction on Niuean and Tongan histories is interesting in that he described events, customs, religion, sociality by way of comparison to other Polynesian and Melanesian neighbours. Niuean singing, for instance, was compared to that of Samoans and Tongans. Thompson observed:

It must be confessed that both in voice and melody they fell far behind the Samoans and the Tongans, but a people who in a single night can compose and teach to a chorus of fifty persons words and music, with the accompanying gestures, is not lightly to be called unmusical.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ The chant/prayer is offered to the indigenous God Tagaloa before huge rocks were placed at a seaside entrance in order to obstruct the landing of Tongan invasions. This prayer was sung as the rocks were placed. See Smith, Percy. *Niue Island and its people*, Volume 11, No. 4, 1902 p 195-218

⁵⁸ Percy Smith & Edward Tregear. *A Vocabulary And Grammar of the Niuean Dialect of the Polynesian Language*, John Mackay, Government Printer, Wellington, New Zealand, 1907

⁵⁹ Thompson, B. '*Savage Island*', 1901 R. McMillan Publisher, New Zealand, 1901, p.118

This observation is made by a *palagi* who had no concept of Niuean musicology but was surprised by the creativity, innovation and spontaneity of the Niuean. If anything, it appeared that Thompson read widely citing Captain James Cook's journals. Thompson's history is one of the earliest examples of Niuean history from informants who were a generation after the gospel was first received.

Edwin Loeb, writing over twenty years after Thompson, was a renowned ethnologist. He also gave a comprehensive detailed account of Niuean history and an anthropological study. His is a helpful volume given that most aspects of traditional life in Niue are expounded in some detail. Stories of historical characters, events, religion and cultural practices are also a helpful resource for reflection. Especially useful for this research are descriptions of religious and social dynamics that help inform current social and theological theories.⁶⁰

A local administrator cum socio-political scholar Terry Magaoa Chapman completed a research paper in August 1974 on the decolonization of Niue. This work was a well-informed piece of literature that articulated the defining period of the Niuean history; this was an era when just as Niue was beginning to realize its self-determination the majority of its population emigrated to New Zealand. Chapman captured the nuance of the political spirit of the time when decolonization was effected and thus considered impact of such on the future of a nation. It was a time of change. Chapman wrote:

Niue as a modern society has today arrived at a point between and betwixt. Ethnically, the people still belong to the small Niuean branch of the Polynesian race. Culturally, they are neither wholly Niuean nor wholly New Zealanders

⁶⁰ Loeb, Edwin M. *History and Traditions of Niue*, 1926

but both, with no way of determining which side is stronger.⁶¹

Writing in 1982, he concluded that the evolution of Niuean society has reached a point of no return.

Most of the Niuean people have become alienated from their indigenous environment for most of them now live in New Zealand and will eventually become assimilated.⁶²

One of the outcomes of this political transition was the beginning of a "culture of migration". The culture of Niuean migration spurred several articles and post-graduate theses from academia, outside of Niue (Trlia, Walsh, Connell, *et al*).⁶³ Many other reports and articles were written between the 1950s and 1970s which documented the systems of administration applied by the New Zealand Island Territories Department who ran Niue's administration at the time. A handful of locals were able to write accounts of Niuean history from their indigenous perspectives. One book is called *Niue: A History of the Island*, a seminal publication, the first Niuean anthology by local authors initiated by the Niuean Government with the assistance by the University of the South Pacific (USP). It is a bi-lingual volume looking at Niue's history from the eyes of Niueans. It covered the origin of a people, pre-history, traditional politics, wisdom, initial contacts with the *palagi*, and development of their modern history and how history will shape the future.⁶⁴ None of these authors deal specifically with Niuean theology

⁶¹ Terry Chapman, "Modern Times" in *Niue: A History of the Island*. Institute of Pacific Studies, USP and Government of Niue, Institute of Pacific Studies, USP and Government of Niue, Suva Printing, 1982, p.138

⁶² Ibid., p.138

⁶³ Walsh, A. C and A. D. Trlin. "Niuean Migration: Niue socio-economic background, characteristics of migrants, and settlement in Auckland," *Journal of the Polynesian Society*, Auckland: University of Auckland, 82: 47-85

⁶⁴ Hafe Vilitama, Terry Chapman, Fifita Talagi, Ikinepule Etuata, *et al*. *Niue: A History of the Island*, Institute of Pacific Studies, USP and Government of Niue, Suva Printing, 1982, p.138.

nor that of ecclesial matters apart from references from a religio-cultural and political angle. Some had sketched the history of the arrival of Christianity. But apart from the theological theses (and none at a doctoral level) by Niuean students from Niue and Niueans in diaspora very little work has been done. There has been no work at all done on the theology of the church, on its ecclesiology.

For the purpose of this diasporic study, the point of entry is through a study of ecclesiology. In recent years Neil Darragh⁶⁵ highlighted the logic for the islander theologies to engage more with ecclesiology. The reason for such is because this area of theology sits well with their island predisposition of being communal and relational. This emphasis and focus point of this thesis is to consider the idea of the church as the *fetuiaga*. This word needs to set initially alongside the more usual and conventional word for the church *ekalesia*.

8. The Importance of Words in an Oral Culture

One of the customary practices of the Oceanic theology is to focus on the words and their etymology. This practice is in keeping in orality or oral culture. It means that words are not read but heard and associations spring to mind through the act of hearing. This is evident in the works of the traditional Oceanic theologians like Amanaki Havea⁶⁶ and Sewati Tuwere⁶⁷ who used *fonua* and *vanua* respectively for "land" in their theological treatise. It is now prevalent in recent scholarship in the likes of Cliff Bird from Solomon Islands who used *pepesa* (all living creatures), and Ama'alele Tofaeono from Samoa with *aiga*

⁶⁵ See Darragh, Neil. *Doing Theology Ourselves*, Auckland, Accent Publishings Ltd, 1995

⁶⁶ Amanaki Havea, "Christianity in the Pacific Context" in *South Pacific Theology*, World Vision International South Pacific/Regnum Books, A. Wheaton & Co., Ltd., Exeter, 1987. Implicit in the theological rhetoric of Amanaki Havea is the interconnectedness of living plants and creatures to the *fonua*.

⁶⁷ Tuwere, I. S. *Vanua: Towards a Fijian Theology of Place*, Suva, Institute of Pacific Studies / University of the South Pacific, 2002

(extended family); they both espoused a deeper meaning to their terms as "the household of life". Sioeli Vaipulu from Tonga coined a neologism '*otualogy*'; marriage of a Tongan word '*otua* (God) and the Greek *logy* (word/study) to mean "theology" but a term that means more to him and his work than a strange term that does not fully capture his Tongan worldview.⁶⁸ Here the emphasis on words and their roots are important.

It is a distinctive methodological trait for Oceania; it is related also to the need to consider the strengths and weaknesses, the risks inherent, in the act of translation. Lamin Sanneh points to the impact of translation to indigenous cultures. He argued that the Christian translations into indigenous cultures had not only to transmit the gospel message into the world of receivers but to impact change to their vernacular, idioms, and most importantly, their cultural systems. This is because

in most cultures, language is the intimate, articulate expression of culture, and so close are the two that language can be said to be commensurate with culture, which it suffuses and embodies.⁶⁹

It goes without saying that to translate from a foreign language, introduce new words and idioms - particularly from an empirical language of the missionary to the poetic of the receiver - can result in a loss of aspects of the receiving culture and beginning of new cultural systems.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Tofaeono, Ama'amalele, *Eco-Theology: Aiga - The Household of Life: A Perspective from Living Myths and Traditions of Samoa*, World Mission Script 7, Freimund-Druckerei, Neuendettelsau, 2000. Bird, Cliff. *A Theological and Ethical Exploration of Pepesa (Land) as Community in the Marovo Context, Solomon Islands*, unpublished Master of Theology Thesis, PTC, Suva, 2001. Vaipulu, S. *Towards an 'otualogy*, unpublished PhD thesis, Charles Sturt University, 2013.

⁶⁹ Sanneh, L. *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture*, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York, 2009, p.3

⁷⁰ More in chapter 4 and 5 in Sanneh's *Translating the Message*. Jione Havea also alluded to the impact of foreign translations and interpretations on indigenous cultures in *Bible, Borders, Belonging(s): Engaging*

The issues of translation highlights the questions of how we translate and from which standpoint do we translate. There may be linguistic issues involved but the theological implications are critical also especially when double or triple translations are involved. Take, for instance, Scripture and the Christian catechism in the early stage of introduction to Niue: some of the earliest material was translated from the Samoan language which was itself a translation from English; the English was a translation from Hebrew or Greek.

Many words come with cultural assumptions which are difficult to find matching. The Pacific way is more one of suggestion, inference and is so often more pictorial than conceptual; it is a more poetic than scientific and empirical use of language. It is much easier to translate a technical book than one which is a written form of oratory. The difficulty of translating a poetic language is also due to the fact that one word can attract a whole lot of associative words and clusters. Therefore, the question must be asked: did the missionaries translate the gospel with a relevant awareness of the nature of Niuean language? The same question must be asked in every translation, particularly the case of poetic languages like Niuean. This translation challenge asks questions of the relationship between language and culture. In a field of linguistics and translations, *transpoieses* is necessary: as Guy Bennet puts it,

one must recreate a work in the target language using the same constraint. 'One does not translate the words composing the original poem, one translates (in the sense of carrying over from one language/literary tradition/culture) the creative act from which the original poem is sprung.'⁷¹

Readings from Oceania, Jione Havea, David Neville and Elaine Wainwright (eds), Society of Biblical Literature, Atlanta, 2014, pp.3-17.

⁷¹ Guy Bennett, "Translation of Poetry | Poetry of Translation: Some Thoughts on Transpoiesis" in *mind-madebooks.com/bennett.translation_of_poetry.pdf*

It is a necessary exercise for much of the original meaning is lost in translation. This is evident in much of the early translation work on ethnology and I suspect in the Niuean hymnody.

However, this is still not a simple task. It seems that much of Niue's poetic language became lost during the christianizing period. The ancient performing language used by the *tufuga* (composers) of song and chants disappeared when Samoan and *palagi* missionaries introduced a new religion and foreign ideas. In a detailed study by Edwin Loeb, published in 1926, he recorded some chants and songs that few elders today can understand. He also noted the struggle of translation constraints; here is a case in point: Uea of Alofi translated a traditional song of welcome of which Loeb noted in the footnote that the previous translation did not conform to the views of the old men of Niue.⁷² This is to be expected, and when caution is not taken in the process, then the substance of the translated content is altered to a degree. Moreover, the sudden loss of what I call the ancient performing language of Niue is due to the religious transformation; the missionaries deemed proper to retain and focus only on relevant words and introduced new ones needed to express the spirituality of the new religion. Words that pertain to the old religion were preserved only in the traditional chants and songs.

It is uncertain whether the Niuean biblical language was purely indigenous, predominantly introduced, or some marriage between the Niuean and Samoan. It would seem as if there were some introduced neologisms and Niueanized words. Loeb alleged that there was no Niuean word for prisoner, for example, because there was not a custom of taking prisoners in Niuean warfare - thus *faihala* was coined which literally means "road maker". This was the penalty rendered to a prisoner under the rule of *palagi* during the late 19th century.⁷³

⁷² Loeb, Edwin. *History and Traditions of Niue*, 1926, p.224

⁷³ Ibid., p.46

Today *faihala* is unheard of and *pagota* seemed to be its replacement. The complexity in the translation processes does challenge the etymological exercise especially in the metamorphosis of the poetic language. In the welcome song sung by local elders in the 19th century, using the traditional language provides a window, not only to the ancient beliefs and metaphors, but also into how language has changed over a period of sixty years.⁷⁴

It must be noted, just the same, that even the written records and translations from both the sender and receiver languages can make monumental mistakes; this affects both linguistic and theological problems that alter the meaning and hermeneutical renderings. Songs recomposed by contemporary artists based on traditional chants found in a historical document contained a one letter typographical mistake altered the mood of the song. One example of such is found in a modern rendition of the traditional chant '*Mitaki tugi e mafola, mitaki to fakafaahiu*' where the letter 'n' had been mistakenly typed in place of 'u', thus rendering the word *fakafaahina* meaningless. In recent years the song had become popular but the misspelling is yet to be corrected.⁷⁵

The point needs to be made. Niue has an oral culture. Words have power in expressing, communicating and perpetuating ideas and narratives. Words are very important according to the Word of God. The following verses tell us that one of the duties of all followers of Christ is to diligently look at the words to describe his Body. Matthew 4:4,

⁷⁴ Examples are found for instance in that same song where names of the two sacred fishes of the sea *Pu* turtle and the *Fonu* shark; today, the turtle is known as *Fonu* and the shark as *Mago*. Ibid., p.224

⁷⁵ Hakupu youth song '*mitaki tugi e mafola, mitaki to fakafaahina*', the correct word is *fakahaaiua* meaning 'both sides'. *Fakafahina* has no meaning except *hina* as a root means *pale* or *grey*. Similarly, Loeb and Smith's accounts are littered with typographical errors that some mistakes completely change the meaning of songs or stories.

It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." Matthew 12:36-37, "But I say unto you, that every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned." Proverbs 6:2, "Thou art snared with the words of thy mouth, thou art taken with the words of thy mouth." Proverbs 30:5-6, "Every word of God is pure: he is a shield unto them that put their trust in him. Add thou not unto his words, lest he reprove thee, and thou be found a liar."

They are given a special place in a culture based upon orality because they lead to a social and theological pattern of behavior. To make mistakes in translation, by interpretation or by typographical errors, only compounds the problem. The use of theological language in the Niuean culture since the inception of Christianity – whether it be in translations or neologisms - has transformed an island culture.

9. *Fakafetuiaga* Etymology

Given the complex linguistic issues to do with words and translation processes, it is useful to reflect critically on the Niuean *fakafetuiaga* as an operating term in this research. This etymological study will attempt to unveil in detail the root word *tui* and its derivatives in order to support the thesis that *fakafetuiaga* is a right term, with liquid connotations, as a point of entry to the study; the indigenous term is consistent with the ecclesiological definitions we find in Scripture and the Christian tradition.

The *Vagahau Niue Language Dictionary* translates *fakafetuiaga* as *faka* prefix, *fetui* meaning 'friendly' and *aga* suffix or nominalization. The dictionary spells out two meanings: assembly or gathering; relationship. However, to take the general meaning at face value would not do justice to the syntax and semantic significance of *fakafetuiaga* as a term. The etymological foundation for the so-

cio-spiritual notion of *fakafetuiaga* is built upon the intransitive verb *fetui* which generally means "to be on friendly terms".⁷⁶ The etymon of a homonym *fetui* conjures a number of derivatives of which the term *fakafetuiaga* is one (others include *fakafetui*, *fetuiaki*, *galofetui* and *tupufetui*). *Fetui* can be broken down further to identify its principle verb and noun *tui*. In this case *fe* becomes a prefix and *tui* is a transitive and intransitive verb or noun. To use an Oceanic coconut as metaphor, if the prefix and suffix are the husk, *fetui* the shell then *tui* is the living and life giving flesh. *Tui* is the root word - the substance or 'true thing' of *fakafetuiaga* as this study shall reveal.

As a transitive verb *tui* means to: thread, pierce, sew, join, connect, hook, and put on. As an intransitive verb *tui* means to: represent, substitute, replace, and in place of or on behalf of. Therefore, the root word *tui* of *fakafetuiaga* holds the key to unearth the theological implications of the term.

The verb *fetui* entails the action of two or more entities becoming one. Grammatically in the Niuean language verbs that are prefixed usually require a suffix like *aki*, *naki*, *taki*, *ina* or *aga*. However, for *fetui* as an action word *fe* becomes a prefix indicating or implying a 'plural' agreement between parties. Adding a suffix *aki* to *fetui*, for instance, forms the Niuean word *fetuiaki*, which means the action of threading or connecting together two or many by mutual agreement. By using the prefix *fe* before verbs like *kapitiga* friend or *tufatufa* for instance we have *fe-kapitiga-aki* meaning befriend one another and *fe-tufatufa-aki* - sharing with one another. Invariably the verb *fetuiaki* refers to actions with the ultimate objective of connecting or binding separate objects, articles or people together into one; they refer to the process of togetherness and interconnectedness.

⁷⁶ *Tohi Vagahau Niue Language Niue Language Dictionary*, p.75

Fetui is sometimes used as a morpheme intensifier for compound words such as *galo-fetui* completely lost and *tupu-fetui* densely grown. As such, it becomes an adverb, meaning: very, completely, abundantly, intensely and densely. Placing these meaning alongside the action of coming together especially in the context of community then we have an intensified process that creates the hyphen moment of suturing; this is a moment when the fellowship becomes so dense and intimate that the many spiritually dissolve into one.

The root word *tui* is also a noun: it is an affectionate or an endearing title used by a wife when referring to her husband. It is also used in a similar manner to address dignitaries and chiefs. Understanding *tui* as a person or leader adds to the social and theological dimension in this study. *Tui* as a representative of a community carries the identity and *mana* of the community; that is the person who is chosen for his ability, wisdom and the traits that capture the essence of that community. The *tui*, being the chosen individual who ideally manifests the aspirations and hopes of the *fakafetuiaga*, becomes the point of a needle whereby the community's *kupu pulega* is threaded and sewn in to the fabric of a communal quilt. In other words, a *tui* becomes a mouthpiece in leadership meetings and deliberations; the *tui* is the one upon whom the community's aspirations are vested upon to speak and contribute on their behalf. Ideally, therefore, a *tui* ceases being an individual in his function and mysteriously manifests the persona of a whole community he represents. Thus, in the *tui's* self-understanding, his words are not his own but those of whom he represents. Understanding where he stands, a *tui* therefore yields a lot of power. The power he holds is one that emanates from the tangible experience of communal solidarity, and from the organic interconnection with their immediate environment. However, the onus on the *tui* to utilize this power with sensitivity and responsibility must be taken seriously because the power can be abused once he severs that connection or relationship with the community. In this case, it is an anomaly to refer to someone as *tui* if the power afforded to his title is abused because such a person had detached himself from the community and acted outside its bless-

ing. By itself the *tui* does not possess mana because he is cut off from his source of power. Similarly, the husband as *tui*⁷⁷ represents not himself but his immediate and extended family - a microcosm of a wider community. He carries the ideals of what it means to be family and community that include compassion, generosity, selflessness, long suffering and even sacrifice which reflects and resonates with Jesus Christ the ultimate *Tui* in whom we have our being.

Tui can also be used morphemically to form phrases like *tui-lima* 'holding hands' and *fetuiaki e tau lima*⁷⁸ (binding arm in arm) which resonated with the chorus, 'Bind us together Lord with chords that cannot be broken'. It is often associated with the traditional activity of *tui kahoa* or making a flower *lei* necklace using a needle and string which can be seen as a metaphor for community building as well as a theological methodology which I will discuss in the ensuing chapters. In the context of *tui kahoa* and community celebration the *fakafetuiaga* provides a sense of interconnectedness which can be fluid and elegant. This understanding of a *tui* conjures an image of a flower cluster strung together and ready to be threaded into a larger garland.

It is important to explore the other aspect of *tui* that is less desirable. *Tui* as a means of forming relationships and community also carries connotations of pain intrusion and violation⁷⁹. *Tui* in its primary meaning 'to pierce' implies pain. In the activity of *tui kahoa*, there is a requirement of sacrifice on the part of the flower that is to be pierced and threaded into a *kahoa*. It is an invasion on one's

⁷⁷ The other meaning of *tui* refers to the tail-end batter in the Niuean cricket game where in a tight finish game all the team's and community's hopes are pinned upon this player. Winning and losing is often dependent upon the *tui*'s ability and composure. Theologically speaking, Jesus as our *Tui*, the last batter, our ultimate hope, won for us the game on the cross.

⁷⁸ This is best demonstrated in a story of three friends who went fishing and were caught in a high tide rip but they were saved by binding themselves arm in arm as they crossed the most dangerous part of the reef. The act of *tuilima* saved them from being swept out to the deadly surf.

⁷⁹ *Tui* is also loosely used as a slang to mean tackle in a game of rugby or to penetrate as in the act of sexual intercourse.

individuality for the flowers have no choice but to be plucked, pierced and threaded into a whole. In human terms this becomes problematic as individuals have choices; especially in an egalitarian society like Niue and the absence of a strict hierarchical order where a tribe is obliged by order of a high chief. In the context of a Christian *fakafetuiaga* though, the appeal is to take heed of the calling of the *Kahoa* Maker (Creator God) who out of his love allowed himself to be pierced and died for the glory of many (Isaiah 53:5; John 19:34). In this respect then the act of *fetui* is voluntary, by means of faith, in response to the sacrifice done on our behalf.

10. *Fetuiaga Kerisiano*

Given the etymological background of *fakafetuiaga* I now propose a neologism that suits the context of the Niuean ecclesiology, namely *fetuiaga kerisiano*. It makes linguistic sense to subtract the prefix *faka* and contend with *fetuiaga* as both a noun and verb meaning Church. It is a noun – it is a body of believers - as well as a verb insofar as it is an active process of uniting: binding, weaving and growing. It is analogous to the usage of 'Uniting' as oppose to 'United' in the official name of the Uniting Church in Australia. In the *Basis of Union* it stated that:

The Uniting Church affirms that it belongs to the people of God on the way to the promised end. The Uniting Church prays that, through the gift of the Spirit, God will constantly correct that which is erroneous in its life, will bring it into deeper unity with other Churches, and will use its worship, witness and service to God's eternal glory through Jesus Christ the Lord.⁸⁰

⁸⁰ The Basis of Union of the Uniting Church in Australia, no. 16

In the same spirit *fetuiaga* speaks about *the people on the way*. In other words, the Church is an open-ended *kahoa* which will continue to receive into its strand flowers of all kinds: sizes, shapes, colors, hues, smells and aromas.

The normalizing suffix *aga* can also mean behavior, habit or way of acting. It is helpful to take focus on another derivative *aga-ia* (*agaia*) which means 'still' or 'becoming'. In the context and usage of the neologism for Church, *Fetuiaga Kerisiano* becomes a Christian community uniting and growing on the way. This *Fetuiaga Kerisiano* is an open-ended spiritual garland of flowers that has begun since time immemorial connecting us with the past and it will continue grow until the end of time.

It is apparent that the word and etymology of *fakafetuiaga* performs many functions and there are diverse threads to it. The issues become what might be a theological rendering of *fakafetuiaga*. How do we weave these diverse threads into a theological mat on which talk about Niuean diasporic ecclesiology can work?

The comparison needs to be made with how the other word *Ekalesia* functions. It is, of course, a transliteration of the Greek *ecclesia*; there are no etymological roots in Niuean. It is a word without an etymological history in Niue. It is an orphan. The written records would seem to suggest that the word *ecclesia* was used early in the introduction of the Christian faith to the island perhaps in a *katekhoumenos* or in teaching classes explaining what church means to the first receivers. Or, perhaps, right from the beginning there was a presumption that the word church is always *ecclesia*, a made-up word. From Samoa where it was probably first used, *ekalesia* was accepted and used in Niue without proper interrogation or consultation with the indigenous vernacular for an appropriate

name.⁸¹ It is difficult because *fetuiaga* has its cultural root and *ecclesia* is an imposition, it is part and parcel of a transformative gospel culture.

The invention of a neologism '*Fetuiaga*' followed by '*Kerisiano*' (Christian) is to contextualize the notion the Christian *ecclesia* implies. *Ecclesia* in Greek is generally taken to mean 'assembly' or a gathering of people: a football gathering, community meeting, gathering in theatre. Throughout church history *ecclesia* is generally understood to mean 'Church' or a 'called out' people of God. However, it is imperative that the word *ecclesia* is afforded the same etymological treatment as the Niuean *fetuiaga*.

Ecclesia is translated 'church'; and, like *fakafetuiaga*, the word church has a history. It was already in existence before it became an English translation for *ecclesia*. The word *ecclesia* does not carry any definition of being 'called out' as some have suggested and nor does the Niuean *fetuiaga* necessarily intend to imply. It does not specify a place, time or purpose as the modern understanding speciously suggest. It is why the word *kerisiano* is added to at least identify the fellowship or the body as one that belongs to Christ. *The World English Dictionary* defines *ecclesia* to mean i) in formal Church usage - a congregation; ii) the assembly of citizens of an ancient Greek state.⁸² *The Oxford Universal English Dictionary* again echoes the same meaning 'ecclesia'.⁸³ It is the regularly convoked assembly, that refers to the general assembly of Athenians that later becomes the regular word for church. So, the etymon of *ecclesia* refers to being 'called out' or 'duly summoned' as in government representatives called forth

⁸¹ The Samoan Church since then had introduced an indigenous name into its title to identify it as a Samoan Christian assembly namely *Ekalesia Fa'apotopotoaga Kerisiano i Samoa*; *fa'apotopooaga* or *fakapotopotoaga* in Niuean means assembly or gathering.

⁸² *Ecclesia* is from medieval Latin, from Greek *ekklēsia* meaning "assembly"; from *ekklētos* "called"; *ekkalēin* to "call out", and from *kalein* to "call".

⁸³ *Ecclesia* in mediaeval Latin and Greek means "summoned". We find the word in this meaning in ancient Greece with reference, for example, to the '*ekklesia*' of a municipality, a gathering of the citizens to discuss various concerns which they had as a community.

into a meeting. Thus 'Church' - as translated from *ecclesia* - means a gathering of people, a congregation.

Interestingly and quite correctly, Roy Bowen Ward reckoned that in ordinary usage, *ekklesia* meant the assembly, and not the body of people involved, for he believed that

the Boule (Boule is a senate in ancient Greece) existed even when it was not actually in session, but there was a new *ekklesia* every time they assembled. The demos (people) assembled in an *ekklesia*, but when they acted, it was said to be the action of the demos, not the *ekklesia*.⁸⁴

Now this is vitally important. When does the *ekklesia* transcend its original definition of just a gathering of the *called out* at a particular place and time and take on the 'Body' (of believers) in service at all times and in all places as its definition? Roy Ward reminds us that *ekklesia* is not an exclusive term. It has been developed and understood in its history of usage beginning from the New Testament interpretations and translations, connecting its etymological meaning with Christians who are "called out of the world by God."

In comparison to *ecclesia* or *ekklesia* the *fetuiaga* is not so much an 'assembly duly summoned'; it is a group of people who organically exist as community. It is a natural state of being. There may be such a time to be specifically called to assemble as to use the *logo telie* or a wooden drum whenever there is a specific need or cause as implied by the etymon of *ecclesia*. Today, the European bell has taken the place of the *logo telie* calling people to worship.

⁸⁴ Roy Bowen Ward, "Ekklesia: A Word Study" in *Restoration Quarterly*, Vol. 2 No. 4, 1958, 164-179

The usage of *ecclesia* in the New Testament, particularly in the Pauline epistles, changed the dynamics of the term *ecclesia* to emphasize the gathered or assembled 'body' of the followers of Christ, or even, Christ himself. *Ekklesia* is used sixty two times in the Pauline epistles. In most of the Pauline references *ecclesia* was always taken to mean 'assembly' and as an institution rather than the actual gathering (1 Corinthians 11:18; 14:19,28,35) as it became a technical term for the institution of Christ. A typical example is found in Apostle Paul's letter to the Ephesians: "And he put all things under his feet, and gave him to be head over all things to the Church, which is his Body, the fullness of him who fills all in all" (Ephesians 1:22-23). This is an important development of the borrowed word because essentially it now connotes Christ or at least the presence of Christ. The notion of *fetuiaga* resonates with this understanding though the term *kerisiano* needs to be added to qualify the gathering of people as a Christian gathering unless it assumes the place of the word *ecclesia* in the New Testament and understood it in a Christian context which could also mean the corporate 'Body of Christ.' Further, it is highly relevant when considering the *fetuiaga* of a husband and wife suggested in Ephesians 5:21-33. The intrinsic *fetuiaga* of Jesus Christ (husband) and his church (wife) becomes part of one another - share in the same body. This is real *fetuiaga* when the 'two shall become one flesh' (Ephesians 5:31).

It is known that a church reformer William Tyndale preferred to use the word 'congregation' rather than church in reference to the New Testament assemblies and *fakafetuiaga* would be the correct Niuean translation. There is a communal pattern laid down in the New Testament believers, holding all things in common under the name of Jesus who continue to exist in and through the members.

The purpose of this thesis is to 'come out of silence' and find one's voice. It is in some ways a form of oratory at times written down and seeking to observe the conventions of the academy. It emerges out of the dislocation of a small island – in this case, into a large cosmopolitan city. It is also the story of an indigenous

culture at risk and threatened in a world of global flows and the depopulation of an island home. It is wanting to explore these things in terms which preserve but re-interpret some traditional ideas and customs. It will also address the need to create a self-understanding, a sense of identity, for such a people whose experience of Christ and culture is undergoing much change through the crossing of the *moana* – the ocean – and ending up on the ‘other side’. The world they now inhabit is much more mobile, flexible, ‘liquid’.

11. *Talahauaga Faka-Atua* Talking Matters About God

It should now be clear that the type of method to be explored here differs from the more conventional style of a systematic theology. That should come as no surprise. The fact of the matter is, there is no word – not even a neologism – for theology or systematic theology in the Niuean language. It is a discipline which is alien to the Niuean way of life. The nearest equivalent that can be imagined is *talahauga faka-atua*. Translated into English this phrase means ‘talking matters about God’. It is a term which has been invented for the purpose of this thesis. Its invention is important because of the necessary desire to establish a link between this contextual expression of the Christian faith and the theological discourse which has been expressed over time and in every geographical location. It is especially critical because this way of talking about the Niuean diasporic faith will further enable conversations with the particular denomination under whose umbrella it meets in a new country.

The risk which always faces a contextual theology is an inability to speak into other contexts. Stephen Bevans has sought to overcome this risk by way of invoking a set of principles by which to determine the merits and advocacy of a local theology. Writing in his *Models of Contextual Theology*, Bevans argues

that a contextual theology is genuine if it meets at least these two key criteria.⁸⁵ The first is that a contextual theology must be able to be converted into authentic worship. The reason for that claim lies in the complex way in which theology and worship permeate each other. In the setting of this thesis, that capacity to be expressed in worship is revealed through song and dance. The second criterion is that a local theology must be able to be understood in another context and also be able to address the way in which faith is being shaped in that other context. The significance of this claim lies within the scope of the church being catholic and universal. The Ekalesia Niue – and the *fetuiaga kerisiano* – are not islands or enclaves unto themselves: they are part of the whole church which confesses that Jesus Christ is Lord.

That this kind of theology is necessary for the Niuean diaspora should not come as a surprise. Writing on contextual imperative, the Princeton-based systematic theologian, Daniel Migliore, has argued that such theologies arise for one of a number of reasons. Their emergence can be a consequence of the relative failure of a classical theology's ability to address satisfactorily the human situation of those for whom this fresh expression of faith is intended. Migliore reckoned that contextual understandings of faith come about because of suffering, silence, or a lack of representation – in others words, an invisibility of ethnicity, gender or status.⁸⁶ Writing again some years later Migliore referred to external and internal factors which prompt "the development of contextual theologies". This thesis relies a great deal on a principle of orality and careful attention being paid to words, their etymology and how they form the wisdom of the ancestors. These words describe a different worldview from that which is found in the standard western theological academy. This difference should be understood in the light of one of those external factors. Migliore here had in mind the context

⁸⁵ Stephen Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2002), pp.141-144.

⁸⁶ Daniel Migliore's article "Christology in Context: The Doctrinal and Contextual Tasks of Christology Today" in *Interpretation*, July 1995, pp.242-254.

of the “many Christians in Asia, Africa, and Latin America [who] are convinced that their theological reflection must attend to their own distinctive non-Western cultures and forms of thought.”⁸⁷ Migliore captured their bewilderment: “why faith in Jesus Christ can be expressed with the help of Western philosophical conceptualities but not with the aid of Asian or African forms of thought.”⁸⁸ Migliore is writing as an acknowledged authority worldwide on the Reformed understanding of a systematic theology.

This thesis raises the following question: why limit the cultural worldviews to those of Africa and Asia? Ama'amalele Tofaeono explores this question from an oceanic perspective. His particular cultural setting is Samoan. The purpose for which he is writing is a contextual ecotheology which draws upon what he calls the “life-ways” of *fa'a Samoa*.⁸⁹ Tofaeono makes a distinction between two kinds of approach to theology. The first is the one in which Migliore is most at home: it is done on the basis of faith seeking understanding. Tofaeono observes that: “Here, one attempts to do theology objectively, by collecting data, developing theories of knowledge, and finding a language of discourse to express it”.⁹⁰ Tofaeono assumes that such a theology will then be organized around the conventional *loci* of a systematic theology – that is the various doctrines to do with God, creation, Christ, the Spirit, humanity, the church, the Christian life and what do Christians hope for. The second approach to the doing of theology can be “construct[ed]... by immersing oneself in the religio-cultural ethos of a society, engaging in dialogue with the community and participating in ordinary living

⁸⁷ Migliore, D. *Faith Seeking Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Theology*, Grand Rapids, MI, William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 3rd Edition, 2014, p.206.

⁸⁸ Ibid., p.206

⁸⁹ *Fa'a Samoa* is known to be the “Samoan way” or the “Samoan culture.”

⁹⁰ Tofaeono, Ama'amalele *Eco-Theology: Aiga - The Household of Life: A Perspective from Living Myths and Traditions of Samoa*, Freimund-Druckerei, Neuendettelsau, World Mission Script 7, 2000, p.21.

conditions.”⁹¹ In his ensuing theology Tofaeono draws upon specific cultural myths, stories and concepts and does so in a way which is analogous to the method followed in this thesis. For Tofaeono there is an explicit desire to “revitalize” ways of looking at life which the missionary-inspired Christian faith had compromised. Tofaeono is working on the basis that these life-ways can inform the core Christian beliefs in a way which is more relevant to *fa’a Samoa*; whereas the overarching metaphor for this thesis is the Niuean *umu*, in his case it is the *aiga*, or household.

Tofaeono thus provides an example of a theology which is carried out from an island or Oceanic perspective. Furthermore, he describes his method as being one of a subjective-participatory method. Tofaeono writes:

It is a theology constructed out of the stories of the people, whether in the forms of myths, legends and oral traditions, or in the sharing of their ordinary experiences, be they sacred or profane, past or present, exciting or sorrowful. By taking the Samoan religio-cultural heritage as a point of departure, an understanding of the living content of faith takes priority. Such an understanding of faith is deeply rooted in a cultural context and is the lens through which one views the Gospel as part of one’s own life and identity.⁹²

Tofaeono is doing theology in a context which is similar (but different) to that of Niue. It is a theology which comes from what he calls “minority communities”.⁹³ Where this thesis differs in method is two-fold. The first is its emphasis on the performative actions of song and dance for which island cultures are well-known. Through this mode the thesis is seeking to respect the principles of orality and community which have always been treasured by the *tupuna* (ancestors) of the island. Such an emphasis might seem strange to those who are accus-

⁹¹ Ibid., p.21

⁹² Ibid., p.21

⁹³ Ibid., p.21

tomed only to a rational western way of encountering the mystery that is the Gospel – and yet it is not as odd as one might first think. It has long been known that there is a close inter-connection between music and how people understand their faith. Karl Barth, the most towering theologian of the twentieth-century, interestingly wrote on Mozart as did Hans Küng.⁹⁴ In the course of this thesis the model of the songmaker will be employed to describe the task of the theologian mediating a theology of community for the Niuean diaspora. Such a naming of the model stands in good company with those who have written on “the theologian as poet”.⁹⁵ One of the most noteworthy of theologians who make use of this poetic description is the current President of Princeton Theological Seminary – Craig Barnes.⁹⁶ The cultural difference is, of course, that these examples are western and do not come from the non-western world or indigenous communities. The comparison can then be made instead with what are sometimes called subaltern communities.

Sathiananathan Clarke is now Professor of World Christianity at the prestigious Wesley Theological Seminary in Washington DC. Immediately prior to the taking up of that appointment he wrote on the cultural and theological importance of drumming for the Dalit peoples in India. Clarke refers to the drum as a “dominant aniconic symbol of the text of resistance and emancipatory theography of the Paraiyar religion”.⁹⁷ The importance of the drum as a religious symbol for the Dalit community depicts the core of subaltern religious subjectivity. It is de-

⁹⁴ Barth, Karl. *Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart*, Grand Rapids, Michigan, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1986; Küng, Hans. *Mozart: Traces of Transcendence*. Grand Rapids, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1993.

⁹⁵ The reverse is also true – the poet as theologian – according to Sherwood E. Wirt. He points to the multiplicity of published hymnbooks and literary creativity abounds in them. While many may not cluster under Christian or religious category, themes are people-oriented and earth-oriented which makes for useful theological resource. See Sherwood E. Wirt in “The Poet as Theologian”. Source: <http://www.etsjets.org>.

⁹⁶ M. Craig Barnes, *The Pastor as Poet: Texts and Subtexts in the Ministerial Life*, Grand Rapids and Cambridge, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009.

⁹⁷ Clarke, Sathiananathan. *Dalits and Christianity: Subaltern Religion and Liberation Theology in India*, Oxford, University Press, 1999, p.109.

liberately utilized not just as a form of mediating with the divine but also in the resistance of the dominant and sometimes oppressive cultural patterns of the Hindu caste systems. The drum – like the songs and music of the *umu fetuiaga* in this thesis – became a symbol for Clarke by which a theological method is framed for comprehending and interpreting the religion of the Paraiyar.⁹⁸ There is an analogy here with the Niuean *takalo* (war dance), *koli me* (celebration dance), chants and songs. The method of using media of music and dance as a lens for theology enables the theologian to reach back to the *taoga* (treasure/heritage) in order to inform the present and shape the future.

Similarly, the “Dreaming” of the Aboriginal peoples speaks of the mode of experiencing and communicating the human-divine and creation relationship. That organic interconnectedness according to the Australian Catholic priest Frank Fletcher moves individuals and human communities to sense the rhythms of the land and the created order. He observed that “Ceremony – the clicking of sticks, chanting, ritual dances – plays a key role in celebrating the connection between land and consciousness.”⁹⁹ The rhythm of the created order is also captured by the Elders in their corpus of works found in printed and published form under the heading of *Rainbow Theology: Towards an Australian Aboriginal Theology*.¹⁰⁰ These traditional stories and rituals are reckoned to be a way of doing theology. It is a theological method that resonates with other indigenous theological endeavors from other continents. George E. “Tink” Tinker *et al* likewise sought to articulate a comprehensive Native American theology espousing similar methodology by integrating categories of systematic theology and Native

⁹⁸ Ibid., p.111

⁹⁹ Fletcher, Frank. *Jesus and the Dreaming: Discovering an Australian Spirituality Through Aboriginal-Christian Dialogue*, Strathfield, NSW, St Pauls Publications, 2013, p.304.

¹⁰⁰ Habel, N, and Rainbow Spirit Elders. *Rainbow Spirit Theology*, Hindmarsh, South Australia 5007, ATF Press, 1997.

American experience, values, and worldview.¹⁰¹ All these approaches come under the heading of a contextual theology which Migliore deemed to be necessary.

This thesis binds together religion and culture – Tofaeono's life ways – in the service of theology. Paulo Koria explains how this coming together works in an Oceanic setting:

(I)inguistic idioms, proverbial sayings, imagery, symbolism, metaphors and the like, are all viable means for communicating the substance of the Gospel message...[and] there are local stories, parables, Island folk tales, legends, myths, narratives both oral and literary which our Pacific people have accumulated and treasured as communal source of knowledge. All these, together with customs, social etiquette, traditions, philosophies, religious beliefs, concepts, etc, have provided Pacific people with the means of understanding the world and reality. Taken together, they form a system of meaning by which life in the Pacific is lived. Because theology has to do with the totality of human life, all these resources are important for the expression and articulation of the Christian faith.¹⁰²

In light of alternative methodologies this thesis will naturally employ what the diasporic theologian Jung Young Lee called the autobiographical dimension.¹⁰³ This approach makes sense here given the pioneering work this thesis sets for the Niuean *fetuiaga kerisiano*, particularly in the area of musicology. It is proposed to grapple with the liquid nature of a mobile personal life; it is seeking to do so on the assumption that this autobiographical witness can reflect the

¹⁰¹ Kidwell, Clara S, Noley, H, and Tinker, George E. "Tink". *A Native American Theology*, Maryknoll, New York, Orbis Books, 2001.

¹⁰² Koria, Paulo. "Moving Toward a Pacific Theology: Theologising with Concepts" in *Pacific Journal of Theology*, Series II, No.22, 1999, p.4.

¹⁰³ Lee, Jung Young and Phan, Peter C. (eds). *Journeys at the Margin: Toward an Autobiographical Theology in American-Asian Perspective*, Collegeville, Minnesota, The Liturgical Press, 1999. See also Lee, Jung Young. *Marginality: The Key to Multicultural Theology*, Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 1995.

rhythm and flows in the life of a diasporic community. Employing ethnomusicology in the course of this thesis is deliberate. The “synaesthetic effect” of songs and dance will not be limited to occasions of celebrations – its rhythm reverberates throughout all aspects of life.

The second area of difference between the method employed in this thesis by way of comparison with Tofaeono is the use of the metaphor of the *umu*. It is, of course, a metaphor which immediately places it within the ever-increasing level of work surrounding theology and hospitality, feasting and food in general.¹⁰⁴ One of the most popular series of theological commentaries on the gospels, edited by Cynthia Jarvis and Elizabeth Johnson, is actually called “Feasting on the Gospels”.¹⁰⁵

For sake of a Niuean *talahauaga faka-atua* the *umu* is like an umbrella metaphor. It creates a space which allows for a convergence of the various methodological strands that are subjective, interpretive and creative. These strands are woven in and through key disciplinary areas of a systematic theology – in this case, ecclesiology and Christology. This exercise in weaving is consistent with Migliore’s belief that the classical and the contextual must inform and address each other.

The synthesis of approaches will help place the chapters into a corpus in much the same way as the verses and stanzas are to a song. The theologian not only makes theological use of music and songs; the theologian becomes a

¹⁰⁴ For example, Norman Wirzba, *Food and Faith: A Theology of Eating*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 2011; Angel E. Mendez-Montoya, *The Theology of Food: Eating and the Eucharist*, Oxford and Malden, Blackwell, 2012; Jennifer Ayres, *Good Food: Grounded Practical Theology*, Waco, Baylor University Press, 2013; Simon Carey Holt, *Eating Heaven: Spirituality at the Table*, Brunswick East, Acorn Press, 2013.

¹⁰⁵ The seven-volume series is published by Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville; Westminster John Knox Press also publish a similar series on following the lectionary called ‘Feasting on the Word’. The volumes in both series seek to provide theological, exegetical, pastoral and liturgical perspectives. The volumes and their diverse perspectives are held together under the umbrella reference to “feasting”.

songmaker in the Niuean context. The chapters may appear less logical as the stages of the *umu*-making is to a Western-minded reader but such metaphor resonates with the indigenous community which here also becomes the church – the “Body” of Christ.

The following argument in this thesis relies upon a metaphor – the *umu* – and a method – that of a songmaker. It is a way of seeking to do theology which is consistent with one of the tasks Migliore believes is critical for the doing of theology. It is important to keep in mind for whom is this theological work being done. It may be housed, in a sense, within the western academy, but at another level, it has in mind an altogether different audience. For Migliore that other audience was the believing, confessing community – the church – which generates the need for a theology in the first place. In the case of a *talahauaga faka-atua* the audience is the church which also happens to be an indigenous community at the same time.

It is nevertheless a far from straightforward audience. It is not adequate simply to call Niuean culture as one of being indigenous – or even Oceanic at this point. The audience is these things – but it is also one which has been dislocated through migration and depopulation. It is indigenous and diasporic. The method which best suits such an experience is one which is liquid. It is one of ebbs and flows, spirals. Such a way of approach is suggested by the work of the Tongan theologian, Winston Halapua, whose *Waves of Embrace*,¹⁰⁶ has been published by a leading English theological publishing company.

Since this theological endeavor is traversing new waters, the Niuean *fetuiaga kerisiano* will attempt to offer new approaches in contextual methodology, par-

¹⁰⁶ Halapua, Winston. *Waves of God's Embrace: Sacred Perspectives from the Ocean*, Norwich, London, Canterbury Press, 2008.

ticularly in the area of musicology. The approach of the “Songmaker” and the notion of “synaesthetic effect” links the theoretical and practice. The decisive step for any critical theology begins in taking action rather than remaining in the lecture theatres of the academy. There has to be some kind of authentic “stepping out”, responding and being in solidarity, not just with the human neighbour, but connecting also with “*pepesa*” or the wider “household of life”.¹⁰⁷ This way, the ebbing and flow, swirling and spiralling of the *fetuiaga kerisiano* reverberates and finds its connection with God, *tupuna*, *anoiha* (future), and the whole of God’s creation.

¹⁰⁷ Bird, Cliff. “A Theological and Ethical Exploration of *Pepesa (Land)* as a Community in the Marovo Context, Solomon Islands,” unpublished Master of Theology thesis, PTC, Suva, 2001, p.19.

Chapter 2

Living in a Liquid World

1. Living in Another World

The reason why this lexical work has been necessary is due to the trauma of migration. That reference to radical dislocation and its psychological consequences comes from Tracy.¹⁰⁸ It is his conviction that migration is an ongoing disruption; it is not a one-off, single event of simply getting off the plane or boat in a new land. It has ongoing consequences for the rest of one's life and for the communities to which one belongs. It is within this changing location that familiar words require a fresh interpretation. What was obvious and taken for granted in the place of origins is not so in the new land. The web of meaning – and the way in which words play themselves out in the act of daily living – has altered. The practice of life has become more fluid. The fluid environment Niuean migrants now encounter which they now need to navigate is not the liquid *moana* they swim back in the islands: it is a liquid milieu of a different kind.

The task of finding again one's identity and the place of culture within an embodiment of faith are not incidental matters. They transcend the business of finding somewhere to live, to worship and securing a job in order to sustain a new way of being. The pressures from the dominant society are never-ending. The Psalmist's song of how shall we sing the Lord's song takes on a fresh relevance. The line taken from the Psalm easily comes to mind and seems to capture in an easily accessible way the dilemma. In the case of the Niuean diaspora that calling to sing a new song for the sake of recreating an appropriate language might seem a rather natural calling. The Niuean life is permeated with music and its villages have displayed a capacity to sing songs by way of com-

¹⁰⁸ Tracy, David. *Edge of the Sacred: Jung, Psyche, Earth*, Einsiedeln, Switzerland: Daimon Publishers, 2009

munal practice as a matter of course. Except – except being in diaspora this need is shrouded in confusion, an emergent individualism, and a scattered and fragmented population where inter-generational ties and the continued existence of the Niuean *taoga* (heritage assets/treasures) is threatened.

Nor is the task at hand simply one of finding identity and becoming integrated or assimilated into a stable existing society. It is not like being a piece of a jigsaw puzzle and being placed in the right vacant space. By way of comparison, the diaspora which has made its way to Auckland has been able to establish a much more solid framework of existence. That is not the case in Sydney. Both lands to which this diaspora have settled are themselves caught up in a sea of change. The relative size of the community in Auckland has made the task of finding a place and maintaining some level of cultural identity that little bit easier. Across the *moana* in Sydney the Niuean diaspora is like a smaller *vaka* negotiating fast paced change and an often impersonal larger society.

2. From Solidity to Liquidity

This shift to a new form of 'liquidity' is in keeping with the highly regarded sociological work of Zygmunt Bauman.¹⁰⁹ It is his core conviction that we now all inhabit a late-modern social environment which he believes is liquid.¹¹⁰ That reference to liquidity features in one title after another in his collection of writings: there is liquid modernity in 2000, liquid love in 2003, liquid life in 2005, liquid

¹⁰⁹ There are many examples like, *Culture, Modernity, and Revolution: Essays in Honour of Zygmunt Bauman*, Richard Kilminster; Ian Varcoe. Routledge, 1995; "From Solid Modern Utopia to Liquid Modern Anti-Utopia? Tracing the Utopian Strand in the Sociology of Zygmunt Bauman," Jacobsen, Michael Hviid. *Utopian Studies*, Vol. 15, No. 1, Winter 2004.

¹¹⁰ Bauman, Zygmunt. *Liquid Modernity*. Cambridge: Polity, 2000. He has also written extensively on this liquid theme in other books. Other titles include: *Liquid love*, *Liquid life*, *Liquid Fear* and *Liquid Times*. Refer to the bibliography. *Liquid Modernity*, 2000, *Liquid Love: On the Frailty of Human Bonds*, 2003, *Liquid Life*, 2005; *Liquid Times: Living in an Age of Uncertainty*, *Culture in a Liquid Modern World*, 2011, *Moral Blindness: The Loss of Sensitivity in Liquid Modernity*, 2013.

times in 2008, culture in a liquid world in 2011 and the loss of sensitivity in liquid modernity 2013. In between these volumes and permeating his whole corpus are related themes of the quest for community, seeking safety in an insecure world, the frailty of human bonds, the art of life, uncertainty, a waste of lives, and identity. There is a coherence to his body of writing which revolves around his belief that we live in this liquid world.¹¹¹ This theme reflects something of his own personal journey in the course of which, Madeline Bunting writes, he needed to negotiate 'the terror of war and trauma of exile' in service of the art of life. One of the consequences is his overweening passion for "ordinary people struggling to be human".¹¹²

Bauman's liquid reality is a new reality where there is no sense of permanence. It is the new milieu with which the world had to contend. This liquidity is a consequence of a shift in reality away from what was known as 'modernity.' Bauman is reluctant to embrace the idea of postmodernity – as if we are now 'after' modernity. He is one of the sociologists who have held back a little and prefer to think of these liquid times and spaces as being ones of late modernity. This liquidity is in tension with a modernity from which it is being emancipated, while at the same still being constrained by it.

Bauman argues that this modernity should be defined as 'heavy' or 'solid'. It is characterized by a hierarchical bureaucracy, categorization, rules and regulations that are supposed to hold together individuals in a community. Bauman

¹¹¹ Bauman has compared the writing of sociology to poetry. He has argued that the task of sociology is to explore 'self-interpretation' in the kind of liquid world we now inhabit. 'On Writing Sociology', *Liquid Modernity*,

¹¹² Bauman writes helpfully about the liquidity of contemporary living. He himself - born in Poland to Jewish parents - engaged in a mobile life. His life, family and personal narrative is reflected in much of his work. From a young age to the present he experienced a life of constant movement from one university to another, from one country to another, one social environment to another. Bauman's personal life played a significant role in his sociology. He was a victim of totalitarianism throughout his life. Being a Jew he was often subject to anti-Semitism that played a part in his constant movement. Refer to, Bauman, Z. *Modernity and the Holocaust*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 2001. Also see, Madeline Bunting, 'Passion and Pessimism', *The Guardian*, 5 April, 2003.

believes that modernity had always been marked by a certain ambivalence, however. It is marked by a particular kind of dualism: at one end, modern society desperately needed to live in a world that is controllable, predictable, and understandable - hence, order and rationality become the driving force behind this modernization. However, at the other end, the reality is that modernity is also characterized by radical change of everything away from traditional forms of culture, relationships and economy. What was once 'solid' had now become 'fluid'.

Writing in *Liquid Modernity* Bauman made a comparison between this sense of solidity and fluidity.

Fluids travel easily. They 'flow', 'spill', 'run out', 'splash', 'pour over', 'leak', 'flood', 'spray', 'drip', 'seep', 'ooze'; unlike solids they are not easily stopped – they pass around some obstacles, dissolve some others, or bore or soak their way through some others still. From their meeting with solids they emerge unscathed – while the solids they have met, if they stay solid are changed – get moist or drenched. The extraordinary mobility of fluids is what associates them with the idea of 'lightness'.¹¹³

Bauman has converted this language of solids and liquids into metaphors to help describe the changing nature of our world. The liquids, the fluids are 'melting away' those things in our cultural and political world which once seemed so solid. This liquid world is 'light'. It is seductive for it creates an illusion of emancipation. It thrives on consuming and gives the individual a sense of its own freedom of autonomy over and against the responsibilities of being a citizen. It leads to a globalized world in which strangers are meeting strangers. It is a world which requires interpretation and making sense of things in a new way.

¹¹³ Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 2000, p. 2

3. Liquidity and Global Flows

Now it is not likely that Bauman has been to Niue, let alone heard of Niue. He is by background a Pole, an eastern European and by residence English. And yet there is a resonance between his theories of liquidity and life on Niue. This solid rock of an island is surrounded and subjected to the daily encounter of the fluid and flexible ocean with all its powers of seeping, surging, soaking. This solid rock has also been the beloved home of an island people now caught up within the winds and waves of globalization and late/post-modernity. This language of liquidity can thus be applied to a culture which was not 'modern' in a western sense. Its solidarity was based in traditional customary practice.

Looking back with the benefit of hindsight, it can now be seen that there were portals and openings where what was seemingly solid was vulnerable to other flows. It is known, for example, that Niueans had developed and embraced the culture of migration and that had become an intrinsic part of life, long before the current waves began. The Niueans were, it seems, a little different from their ocean dwelling neighbors. Writing in 1901 – and this still in a time of modernity - Basil Thompson described the Niueans in these terms:

Polynesian race as a picturesque, easy-going, and leisure-loving people, too fond of home to travel, and too indolent to do a steady days work. A dash of some alien blood, as yet unrecognized, has played strange freaks with the men of Niue. Alone among Polynesian races they opposed the landings of Europeans; alone they love to engage as labourers far from home, and show, both at home and abroad, a liking for hard work; no other island race has the commercial instinct so keenly developed.¹¹⁴

¹¹⁴ Thompson, Basil. *Savage Island: An Account of a Sojourn in Niue and Tonga*, Albemarle Steet, London, John Murray, 1902, p.141. It was true in Oceania, from earliest accounts of *vakas* traversing the

This observation early in Niue's modern history is not unusual. Migration for Niueans has always been near at hand. They are essentially a liquid population who had earlier on in their modern history embraced migration and the spirit of adventure. They were enticed by stories of a new world beyond the *mapualagi* (horizon) with material wealth. These stories led many to embark on journeys across Oceania, following the trail of shifting 'blessings' as Niueans would say, *tutuli he tau monuina* (go after the blessings).

The means of larger vessels that serviced the islands granted Niueans frequent opportunities to travel abroad to acquire those 'blessings' – some of which were contrary to the evolving cultural pattern of life back on the island. They were being exposed to the 'acids of modernity'. Thompson observed that this economic migration had indeed become detrimental to the early missionary's work.

It seems that the influence of the Mission is waning from a variety of causes. Chief among these is the passion for foreign travel...¹¹⁵

Bauman refers to ideas of 'emancipation' and 'personal freedom' as being iconic traits of a liquid modernity. It seems as if the seeds of such were beginning to be seen in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century world. The cost of these emerging traits was also beginning to show. Thompson noted that:

Every year numbers of young men return from abroad and disturb the still waters of the island with fascinating tales of

moana from island to island. The historical records noted the Niuean earliest migration was spurred by wealth unknown to the island up until then. Many young men left Niue by droves to work at mines and plantations abroad; it was in pursuit of wealth that led many Niuean men to be lured into Bully Haye's slave ships. pp.3-4.

¹¹⁵ Ibid. p 81-83.

the emancipation of foreign lands, where men get drunk and swear and break the Sabbath with impunity.¹¹⁶

The returnees found the outside life appealing compared with the restrictive polity of their church ruled villages. Thompson had neatly captured the early movement of Niueans that provides us with a glimpse to the liquid nature of the Niuean carefree spirit who loved traveling. Even today, as John Connell puts it,

Practices of mobility are deeply entrenched in islanders' lives, even those who have stayed in Niue, where dualities of hope and despair, and fluidity and fixity, govern conceptualizations of population change. Migration constitutes no rupture with island life but an extension of it.¹¹⁷

The very idea of liquidity seems to be an integral part of Niuean life. Notwithstanding the permeating fluidity of the Niuean community, there were a sense of stability and security in the traditional culture. These features are one of the characteristics of an integrated concept of culture. Robert J. Schreiter has described an integrated concept of culture as one which is traditional in its ordering of authority. You are born into such a culture; you grow up within it and you learn what is expected of you and how you should conduct yourself. Your identity comes with your birth. Those around you belong to the same culture. The comparison Schreiter makes is with a globalized culture which is one in which you need to discover your identity. Those around you may not share your culture or language. Here identity needs to be invented and the structures of authority have become fluid.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 141. Sir Basil Thompson (1861-1939) was a colonial administrator who served in Fiji, Tonga (where he became Prime Minister) and New Guinea.

¹¹⁷ Although the Niue Government development policy has been to stem the population flow, the current balance continues to experience an outward flow and it has destined Niueans to a life in a liquid culture of New Zealand and Australia. Connell, John. *Niue: Embracing a Culture of Migration*, Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies, Vol. 34, No. 6, August 2008, p.1021.

Schreiter depicts culture as 'patterned systems' and

The patterned nature provides a sense of recurrence and sameness that gives to those who participate in the culture a certain identity.... [and furthermore] The familiarity of the patterns offers a sense of security and of "being at home."¹¹⁸

The Niuean *fakafetuiaga* being small and contained in the village is a secured and homely place where islanders make sense of their relationships and inter-connections with their natural environment. These organic patterns in the *fakafetuiaga* are analogous to the integrative practice of culture.

This integrated concept of culture defines the way Niueans have organized themselves into their village. It is a way of being which is under threat by what Schreiter has called a 'global flow'. That language of flow has, of course, a feel of liquidity about it. For Schreiter it represents a seemingly universal value – like feminism, ecological consciousness, human rights, equality – which traverses the globe and settles in particular cultures in different ways. It is a part and parcel of the globalization process which is full of tensions and pressures.¹¹⁹ The globalization process may be resisted – as indeed it seems to have been for a while in Niue – but such is the nature of liquid modernity.

This process is compounded by two facts: the first is the acephalous-republican nature of the social order which means that there is not a strong enough structure to offer much resistance; secondly, travel had become so ingrained in the Niuean psyche that, in a sense, they had embraced the globalized way of being. Obviously Schreiter's 'globalized concept of culture' is equivalent to what Bau-

¹¹⁸ Schreiter, R.J. *The New Catholicity*, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York, 2004. pp.47,48-53

¹¹⁹ Ibid., p.53-60

man had described as liquid culture. The movement from an integrated concepts of culture to that of the globalized flows of culture has affected both resident and diasporic Niueans at many levels. What we now find in most countries that are being affected by the process of globalization is a hybridized sense of culture - Schreiter refers to a "glocal" context.¹²⁰

This context is a meeting place of the global and the local, where we find the "cultural flows" between the two forces. Migration no longer requires changing geographic locations, and clinging to the same place is not in itself evidence of belonging.¹²¹ Schreiter and Connell's idea of migration, where Niueans do not really need to travel to be affected by globalization, is parallel. The world now comes to meet Niueans where they are in the islands through modern technology. Social media has enabled families to share in what it has been created as a virtual *fakafetuiaga* or community. A 'glocal' context is created when the global meets and interacts with the local thus people learn to live in tension between the two.

4. Liquid Lives

For the majority of Niueans who are now in diaspora, some seem to have adapted quite comfortably to the rapid flows while most have struggled. According to Bauman, this shift has brought profound change to all aspects of the human condition. The constant and continual flux makes life difficult to anticipate and rationalize: this social condition has impacted the migrant's life in myriad of ways. It has confronted individuals with challenges that lead them into isolation and insecurity, a journey into the unfamiliar. The transition to this liquid moderni-

¹²⁰ "Glocalization" is a term Schreiter borrowed from Roland Robertson to describe the interaction between the globalized forces and local resistance. Ibid. p.12.

¹²¹ Bauman & Leonidas Donskis, *Moral blindness*. p.68.

ty was swift – it was an acceleration made possible by new technology and means of instant communication.¹²² The instant change has also resulted in an altered perception of values and a moral system. Niuean Islanders have moved from a simple belief in God's providence and sustenance through creation - from the *moana* (ocean) and *fonua* or *kelekele* (land) - to total dependence on consumer goods. The introduction to a consumer based culture conjured up a new series of challenges never before encountered. Niueans who grew up in subsistence agriculture have become consumers in a world bombarded by product advertising, lost in a myriad of product choices, stressed and addicted to browsing and shopping.

This world is a far cry from the simple life in the taro plantation and on the reef, fishing for food; it is far removed from the island life where what they grew or caught is shared with the extended family and neighbors in a practice of *momoi* (sharing and giving of food, sometimes reciprocated). The values lying behind this liquid consumerism are far removed from the *fetuiaga* teachings on giving, hospitality, friendliness, respect, honor, even stewardship and conservation, are foundational to the community value system. Acknowledging the place of God through the role of the pastor and elders is part of the *fetuiaga* teaching. The pastor is looked after just as the widows and seniors of the community are rendered special care.

These communal values and morals are understood and learnt within a church and family involving a whole community. The religious catechism through Sunday School, Boys and Girls Brigade, youth group activities is reinforced by the family and community. The morals taught and learnt become ingrained in the life of Niueans, supported by the cultural values taught and lived out in the life of

¹²² Technology has dramatically changed Niue's idea of *fakafetuiaga*, particularly between those who are resident and their kin overseas. It would take at least three weeks for a letter from Niue to reach New Zealand in the early seventies; today, Skype on internet allows instant face to face communication anywhere around the globe, even in the most remote of places as long as there is sufficient coverage.

a community. These morals and values then are nurtured and reinforced in special ceremonies and occasions like *Aho Tapu Fanau* Children's (White Sunday). On these kind of occasions, children are expected to recite their sermonette, memorize scripture verses with values attached to them like, '*Fiafia e Atua ke he tau tama omaoma...*' (God is pleased with obedient children) and '*Fakalilifu ke he tau mamatua mo e tau patu he maaga...*' (Always respect your parents and elders of the village). The synthesis of spiritual and socio-cultural values is expected to be passed down through generations. As children grow older, their learning and recitals of Christian morals and principles are expected to expand and deepen. These moral virtues may also be performed and reinforced through group activities and in community functions. That is so especially through rites of passage ceremonies, for instance like hair-cutting for boys and ear-piercing for girls. The social and cultural protocols that hold the community together are observed. These are the values that guide their social existence in the village context.

The question arises: what becomes of this cultural knowledge and learning when many Niueans find themselves in New Zealand and Australia? Here their residential location is no longer within the edges of the village green in the proximity to the church building which lies at the hub of family and community life. Planting taro and catching fish on a reef and *momoi* (sharing or reciprocity) is not a normal practice anymore. Their residence is now in a cosmopolitan city in a block of units that could hold an entire village yet a stranger to them all; or, they may live in a three bedroom house in a suburb with unfamiliar faces as neighbors and the closest Niuean neighbor could well be a few post-codes away. They have found themselves in the midst of neighbors who are of different ethnic backgrounds: Anglos, Asians, Africans, Indian, Middle-Eastern and Europeans. Niueans now find themselves having to contend with social forms and institutions that are no longer relevant as frames of reference for their actions and long-term life plans. Like many other migrants, Niueans have to find other ways to organize their lives.

Lives have become changed and fragmented with multiple new beginnings unlike the predictable and laid-back stability of a village life. They are now in a locality where the constant shifts and rapid movements put people on edge, requiring them to be vigilant and under constant pressure. They are forced into career changes, diversifying life-style choices, new addresses and in a constant flow. It is not difficult to see that the relational dynamics in this liquid culture have consequently resulted in an ailing culture.

5. Identity

One of the greatest impacts faced by diasporic Niueans in this liquid modernity is the threat of permanent loss of their indigenous identity. For Bauman, the result of being in liquid modernity can most easily be seen in contemporary approaches to self-identity. In an ever shifting social environment, Niueans are finding it increasingly impossible to retain a durable ethnic and socio-cultural identity.

In this new modernity there is a real sense of isolation and insecurity one hardly experiences in a Niuean village. And, though one finds oneself in a sea of people, the experience is that of being at the margins, detached and lonely. This is a status migrants often find themselves in as they attempt to settle in a new country. This experience is described more poignantly by Asian migrant theologians in their autobiographical theologies recorded in *Journeys at the Margins*: these stories are stories of lives lived at the margins of mainline America and in-between their ethnic Asian origins and American culture.¹²³ In a similar vein is the experience of Middle Eastern migrants like Maryam Jamarani, an Iranian woman, whose struggle is recorded in her *Identity, Language and Culture in Di-*

¹²³ Peter C. Phan and Jung Young Lee (eds). *Journeys at the Margin: Toward an Autobiographical Theology in American-Asian Perspective*. Collegeville, Minnesota, The Liturgical Press, 1999.

aspora.¹²⁴ It is also to be found in the subjective reflections of the second generation migrant Pacific young people in Australia, New Zealand and America who struggle to come to terms with their identity¹²⁵ in their new environment.

It is not just about the loss of a corporate identity of ethnic migrants. This loss is accompanied by a confusion that centers around personal identity. It is a shift which has been taking place even without the conscious awareness of individuals and their church or ethnic leaders. The trauma of dislocation and pressure of being accepted into a new place has added to the settlement hurdles. The focus has now changed from belonging in a *fakafetuiaga* to that of personal space and reconfiguration. The task is to reposition oneself in a society where one can either go with the flow or sink.

Part of this repositioning is the call to reinvent oneself in a liquid culture. Bauman argues that this task is necessary because globalization has quickly eroded the ability of the state and local communities to provide genuine stability and security for individuals. The social institutions, like family, school, church and governments, that had provided a sense of community and security in western countries like Australia, have quickly dissipated over the past few decades. Families are transient, fractured and dislocated. Consequently, what we now experience is what Bauman calls "existential tremors"; what we have here is a situation where the inhabitants of liquid modernity do not have a stable sense of who they are or where they belong and for what they exist. This results in an increased feelings of fear, uncertainty and a sense of hopelessness. So individuals begin to reinvent themselves by reconstructing new identities to fit in. Their sense of who they are is being collapsed into a larger and more dominant identities. There is danger, then, that the particularities and uniqueness of their in-

¹²⁴ Jamarani, Maryam. *Identity, Language and Culture in Disapora*. Melbourne, Monash University Publishing, 2012.

¹²⁵ *Identity Crisis! Issues Facing Pacific Migrant Youth*, Report by PCC, WCC, Nuku'alofa, Tongan National Council of Churches, 2005.

indigenous identity can be eradicated by the process of assimilation. This shift in being can be inadvertent, and simply a natural consequence of globalization. Nevertheless, there are suspicions among migrants that specific strategies have been deployed by authorities or governments in order to incorporate them to the whole, particularly to the dominant culture (Muslims often voice these concerns).

Against this flow towards a sea of "sameness" is the "politics of difference". That is the claim of Miroslav Volf. In his introduction to a compendium of *Essays on Identity and Belonging*, Volf cited Taylor:

What we are asked to recognize is the unique identity of this individual or group, their distinctiveness from everyone else. The idea is that it is precisely this distinctness that has been ignored, glossed over, assimilated to a dominant or majority identity. And this assimilation is the cardinal sin against the ideal of authenticity.¹²⁶

Bauman had wrestled with the same kind of questions that Volf has asked about domineering cultural currents of globalization that swept much of the world into a multicultural sea and shaped what it means to be a contemporary society. The question was asked,

Will the global exchange of ideas, goods and services lead to the formation of a single homogenous global culture shaped largely by Western values, or will indigenous cultures be powerful enough to preserve their own vitality?¹²⁷

¹²⁶ Volf, Miroslav & Judith M. Gundry-Volf (eds). *A Spacious Heart: Essays on Identity and Belonging*, London, Trinity Press International, 1990, pp.6,7.

¹²⁷ Ibid., p.8.

The larger cultures may have the numbers and structures to sustain the erosion of their traditional identity but the conclusion is imminent, especially for smaller island nations. For Niue and her Oceanic neighbors,¹²⁸ there is a sense of inevitability: already, stark evidence is apparent in the diasporic Niuean community that the socio-cultural and ethnic identity is hybridizing fast. This transition is particularly evident in New Zealand where the second and third generation Niueans share a hybridized sense of self. The Niue-Zealander¹²⁹ generation often reluctantly identify themselves as Niueans; the fact that many have intermarried and come from a small minority anyway means that cultural designation and identity can easily be compromised. The fluidity in the Polynesian social environment has enabled islanders to flow between each other's community; contemporary cultural performances are borrowed from larger more dominant cultures as seen in the New Zealand *Polyfest*¹³⁰ competition. New Zealand-born tutors take the Niuean base actions and adapt them with a mix of Samoan-Tongan-Maori ornamentations. This cultural change is also evident in contemporary Niuean tattoos where there is a mix of many Polynesian motifs. The finished work is a reflection of a shared Polynesian heritage which accommodates a dual or multiple ethnic make-up. But there is a disadvantage for the minority Niuean; they are expected to fold under the influence of larger, more dominant cultures. For instance, young persons who are half Niuean and half Samoan would regard themselves as Samoan-Niuean rather than Niuean-Samoan or Maori-Niuean or Tongan-Niuean. There is a stigma that goes with 'smallness' and 'remoteness'; they tend to get pushed to the periphery and left behind. As with benefits that come with identifying with oceanic cousins, there is a genuine need to re-focus on the issue of identity.

¹²⁸ There are more islanders from smaller island states like Niue, Cook Is, Tokelau, and American Samoa living overseas than in their own countries. The threat of losing their traditional culture is more real than in larger island states. Refer to John Connell's 'Paradise Left?' in *Pacific Diaspora*, Honolulu, University of Hawai'i, pp.85-86.

¹²⁹ *Niue-Zealander* is a neologism I have invented for Niueans who are permanently residing in New Zealand and have assimilated to the New Zealand way of life.

¹³⁰ *Polyfest* is an annual secondary school cultural festival that takes place in Auckland, New Zealand. It has become an important cultural gathering of all Pacific ethnic students in the largest Polynesian city in the world.

The experience of the New Zealand-born Pacific Islanders is articulated by Melani Anae in her 1990's doctoral thesis, "*Papalagi* Redefined: Toward a New Zealand-Born Samoan"¹³¹ about the ambiguities of being a dual-identity holder and practitioner determining to define an identity as "bridges" and "intermediaries" between the world of their Samoan parents and the wider world. Anae's research is essential here because it was based on the Samoan identity among the English Speaking Group (ESG) of Newton Pacific Island Church in Auckland.¹³² Although it comes from a Samoan perspective, it reflects the general approach, attitude and dynamics of the Niueans and Cook Islanders within the group. In their shared habitus, a created sound, socio-cultural and spiritual grounding space for diaspora Islanders in New Zealand, the majority well-educated, qualified professionals, upwardly mobile islanders find within this time-space a place where they could develop and affirm their faith and identity as Niuean, Samoan or Cook Island Christians. It appears from Anae's experience that the Samoan speaking congregation seems to be more grounded in their identity and religio-cultural practices whilst their English Speaking Group is more fluid: they ebb and flow between their *fa'aSamoa* and the Kiwi western culture. This ebbing between a traditional culture and a postmodern liquidity has led to a confusion surrounding the second generation migrant identity. Anae writes:

I AM-A Samoan...but not a Samoan
To my 'aiga in Samoa...I am a "Palagi"
I AM-New Zealander...but not a New Zealander
To New Zealanders... I am a "bloody coconut," at worst,
or a "Pacific Islander," at best

¹³¹ Anae's thesis was summarized in her article of the same name in 2002. Refer to Anae, Melani. "*Papalagi* Redefined: Toward a New Zealand-born Samoan Identity." in *Pacific Diaspora: Island Peoples in the United States and Across the Pacific*. Edited by Paul Spickard, Joanne L. Rondilla, and Debbie Hippolite Wright, Honolulu, University of Hawaii Press, 2002, pp.150-16

¹³² The Newton Pacific Island Church is a congregation under the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand. It is accredited as the first Pacific Island church to have a specific English speaking group. It was established to cater for the needs of the second and third generation island members whose first language was English and had limited island experience. It caters also for the remnant *palagi* members and non-Pacific Island spouses of the members. Refer to Nokise, U. "History of the P.I.P.C.," in *Religions of New Zealanders*, Ed. P. Donovan, Palmerston North: Dunmore, 1990.

I AM-To my Samoan parents...their child.¹³³

Despite their ethnic identity struggles, their faith had contributed to their strength living within this fluid space. Anae saw her New Zealand-born identity in a positive light "there is no crisis here,"¹³⁴ she wrote. In fact, they have moved above the dichotomy of their cultural existence and derision of their critics and found their place as 'bridges' and 'intermediaries' for those who are floating in liquid modernity. There is also a potential for double vision and being able to respond to issues from the perspective of more than one culture.

Such a condition is a natural reaction to what Bauman calls "existential tremors", where individuals experience an increase in feelings of instability and uncertainty in a world that is in continual flux. The natural reaction is to withdraw back to what one knows best and hold on tight to what feels safe and secure as long as possible. Whilst this strategy is the reaction of some diasporic community leaders and elders, their young who are much more immersed in the "global" sense of culture, begin to dissent and fall by the wayside. Their fractured identities have moved them to experience alternative cultures and ways of being. They begin to adapt and exist quite satisfactorily in a mobile world. Whilst some churches today remain strong in their culturally infused way, it only a matter of time until necessary changes are forced upon them.

6. Living In-Between

The question then is asked, "What is a traditional Niuean culture today for those in diaspora? What is a Tongan, Samoan, Cook Islander, Fijian or Maori culture

¹³³ Anae, Melani. "Papalagi Redefined: Toward a New Zealand-born Samoan Identity" in *Pacific Diaspora*, Honolulu, University of Hawai'i, p.150.

¹³⁴ Ibid., p.159.

in diaspora?" As Helen M. Lee succinctly puts it: *Anga fakatonga is fluid, manipulable, yet powerful concept*.¹³⁵ For Niueans, culture is inherently liquid.

Once again the church serves as a portal for her study of migration and identity. In Lee's research of Tongans in Melbourne, she found that though their population was highly dispersed, the church seemed to be the primary institution through which a sense of community was retained for migrants.¹³⁶ What is clear in the comparative study with the Samoan and Tongan diasporic communities is that the church as a socio-cultural institution remains highly important among the island migrant communities: identity reconstruction is a necessary exercise for the diasporic communities.

The autobiographical sharing of individuals like Sisilia Tupou-Thomas who likened herself to a "drifting seed" is important. Like many Tongans and islanders she migrated to other locations, even though she found some anchorage in Australia, her inner being continues to ebb back and forth to 'where' her identity began its formation and the 'in-betweenness' where she is finding herself in. She needed to re-identify herself once again in a "hyphenated" context - a place Clive Pearson described as a "criss-crossing" of multiple cultures.¹³⁷

The challenge for Niueans and recent migrants is in the "drifting" and the inability to settle long enough to take root. Perhaps that is precisely what Bauman meant by liquid identities built on a premise of individual freedom and identities associated with beauty and pleasure, based on fashion and music. In the end, building these identities becomes futile because they are essentially floating

¹³⁵ Ibid., 139. *Anga fakatonga* is translated "the Tongan way of life". The Niuean equivalent is *aga fakaniue* and *fa'a Samoa* for Samoans.

¹³⁶ Lee, Helen Morton. "Creating Their Own Culture: Diasporic Tongans," in *Pacific Diaspora*, Honolulu, University of Hawai'i, p.137

¹³⁷ Pearson, 'Faith in a Hyphen', pp.5ff

and transient. Moreover, it demands energy and becomes costly when the reinventing of the self becomes a continuing practice.

This practice of inventing an identity is evident among the youth in the social media. It is evident that their accounts and profiles are constantly updated. Whether real or fake, images projected on the social media reveal their evolving identity and mark their social status. This digitally literate generation is constantly reinventing itself in an attempt to escape a world over which they have no control. Living lives in a continual flux can then ultimately result in psychological problems for many. Unable to cope with the speed and constant change in this context has reduced many to depression and anxiety related diseases; many migrant youths turn to alcohol and drugs as means of escape and a way of relieving pressure.

What the young people have lost are portals to their ethnic and cultural identity. Unfortunately, for most second and third generation migrant Niueans, it is not by choice that they could not speak their mother tongue but by circumstance. Their parents who were brought up in New Zealand could not speak fluent Niuean. They themselves were raised up by their parents to succeed in the *palagi* (Anglo-Saxon or Caucasian) world in terms of education and professional careers. The attitude towards favoring the English language above the indigenous was not foreign even for the grandparents. They likewise were banned from speaking Niuean in class or within the school surrounding. They were taught that a command of good English would result in a great career as well as a perceived status. Although those language and value systems have now been replaced in New Zealand, it is hardly a priority here in Australia because of the demographical difference. The churches that are cultural custodians are well established in New Zealand and even though there is a diminishing membership, the resources are available. On the other hand, Australian-Niuean's priorities are economically and sensually based.

The first wave of Niuean migrants to New Zealand can be identified as mostly 'pilgrims' – they were those who moved whole families looking for better life opportunities. These first Niuean pilgrims to New Zealand sent remittances flowing back to their kin in Niue. The second and successive waves can be classed as mostly 'tourists', to use Bauman's terms. This attitude is captured in a statement made by an individual who migrated to Australia from New Zealand a few years ago, *Ko e o mai a mautolu ki hinai ke kumi monuina nakai ke taute Lotu?* (We have come here to seek economic blessings, not to build churches) is a statement that has been bounced around in the islander communities in the recent past. These tourists focus on careers and an independent and free lifestyle. They are a reflection of what Bauman has referred to as "bond free living". For some such islanders church has become a means of entrapment whereby communal responsibility becomes restrictive and there is a loss of personal freedom. Another telling statement from a church-burdened islander,

Ko e fehola mai ka mautolu i Niu Silani he uka e tau ga-hua Ekalesia, o mai a mua ke fakatu Lotu.

We have come here (to Australia) to avoid the burden of church work (in New Zealand) yet you have come to start a church.¹³⁸

These comments are not typical because not all island migrants from New Zealand are church communicants. Most of the initial Niuean migrants to Australia are familiar with church life in New Zealand but are, nevertheless, a more social and economically focused group of individuals. They tend to be more adventurous; they prefer a more western approach to life than their parents or grandparents do. They live in tension between personal freedom and personal security.

¹³⁸ From a personal conversation in 2008 with a retired Minister's wife who established a Niuean speaking congregation in Sydney.

Being in the liquid environment means one can have one and not the other; 'personal security' can be found in community but at the expense of 'personal freedom' and vice-versa.¹³⁹ Some islanders, who have migrated from New Zealand, find Australia an opportunity to escape the arduous church lifestyle their parents had involved them in New Zealand. Yet, what they have found instead, is a sense of drifting without a secure sense of belonging and meaning. This constant 'shifting' of circumstances in liquid modernity moves individuals to avoid being tied down into solid institutions, including marital relationships. They prefer a constant flowing into new encounters, new discoveries, new experiences and new noncommittal relationships. Here is embodied what it means to live in a liquid culture according to Zygmunt Bauman.

7. The Liquid Church

The issue now becomes one of how this talk of liquidity can be woven into an ecclesiology for the Niuean diaspora in Australia. Here the work of Pete Ward on the liquid church¹⁴⁰ can serve as a foil. Ward was seeking to address the question of how do young people find a place and a sense of belonging inside the contemporary English church. His calling for a liquid church is driven largely by dissatisfaction with the declining state of the western mainline churches and its inability to adapt to a new cultural and intellectual terrain. The challenge for the church is to learn to operate in this set of non-permanent realities.

Pete Ward calls for a Church to be the embodiment of Jesus Christ by creating the environment that stimulate the desire within the congregants. This means

¹³⁹ The dichotomy of 'security' and 'personal freedom' is pervasive in Bauman's writing, especially in introductions and conclusion remarks in most of his books. This central concept is well summarized in the Afterword of his book, *Community: Seeking Safety in an Insecure World*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 2001, pp. 44-50.

¹⁴⁰ Ward, Pete. *Liquid Church*. Carlisle, Cumbria Paternoster Press Peabody, Hendrickson Publishers, 2002.

embracing the liquid culture as it is and learning to find its place within it. This approach is well suited for the European liquid cultural context where shopping centers and coffee clubs are meeting places of consumer driven¹⁴¹ individuals but the case is rather different for a diasporic people from the liquid continent caught in the currents of a different kind of liquidity.

There is, once again, an obvious geographical and cultural remove from this experience and this call for *fetuiaga*. Nevertheless, the way in which Ward links liquidity and ecclesiology is helpful because it allows us to explore ecclesiology from a totally different perspective. It is precisely in this floating environment that the study of Niue *fetuiaga* looks to operate from. This *locus* allow us to see things from a place where a Niuean understanding of liquidity could also be considered. It aims to state Oceania's notions of liquidity alongside those that Bauman and Ward espouses.

For Oceania to respond to the fluid and shifting culture, it needs to look beyond and become more than being a custodian of the ethnic cultures of its members. There is a need to adapt to the liquid nature of its milieu. From the perspective of a fluid Niuean *fetuiaga*, the currents of late- or post-modernity are far too unpredictable, turbulent. In this highly individualized and transient context there is a real need and a place for community; there is a need for a context where there is a point of orientation and direction, a friendly place that offer space to pause and reflect. The liquidity that ordinary people have to grapple with is challenging not just to their identity but also to their faith and spirituality. How can Niueans in diaspora navigate and adjust their beings to a new kind of liquidity? How can they make sense of their faith in a milieu that centers outside the *fetuiaga*?

¹⁴¹ Ibid., p.59-62

The natural place for Niueans to re-create the new sense of identity would be within a spiritual or social context - a *fetuiaga*. It can offer a milieu where a community's Christian identity is affirmed and traditional ones reconstructed to something that is durable. Without that proper grounding place identities can never coagulate into something meaningful.

8. The Art of Living with Difference

We live in a world besotted with the self. Despite the uncertainty and the ambiguous future, Bauman himself did not identify any one particular approach to the problem of disorientation and insecurity. There is no one simple solution. There is a sense in which society will evolve and somehow work itself out to whatever end. In the meantime humanity will have to learn to live in tension between community and isolation, or as Bauman puts it, the "art of living with a difference."¹⁴²

Bauman identifies two tasks. The first is to "enlighten the people" (those who swept away from their familiar monotonous communal life) with

axiological gyroscopes and cognitive frames that allow each one of them to navigate the unfamiliar and turbulent waters.....with new life skills ... to put into place new orientation points, new life purposes and new loyalties and new standards of conformity instead of those that used to be provided by the communities in which human lives.... which came to be defunct, were no longer accessible or fell fast out of use.¹⁴³

¹⁴² Bauman, Zygmunt. *Migration and Identities in the Globalized World*, www.resetdoc.org. Monday, 13 May 2013

¹⁴³ Ibid., p.125-126

The second task is

...to assist the job undertaken by the legislators: to design and built new well-structured and mapped settings that would make such navigation possible and effective, and so give shape to the temporarily shapeless 'mass'; to bring about 'social order', or more exactly an 'ordered society'.¹⁴⁴

To these two tasks the church in diaspora is called to take seriously a third requirement. The issue has to do with how can an understanding of faith which has itself been dislocated through migration engage with the diasporic culture. The gospel needs to be mediated through culture – and, in the case of Niue, the church is the one institution most likely in this sea of changes to provide much opportunity for preserving the threatened *taoga* (heritage assets/treasures) of the home island. How is this to be done?

The challenge that the liquid-moderns are facing is to balance the yearning for individual freedom that comes with a sense of ambivalence, uncertainty, contradictions and fear, with the equally strong desire for security that a Christian *fetuiaga* can offer. The difficulty is how can a Christian community be that place of security without stifling the sense of personal freedom dual citizens of liquid modernity believe to be their right. That is a core ethical concern of the thesis.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., p.126.

Chapter 3

The Legacy of the Received *Fakafetuiaga*

1. Introduction

The call for a liquid *fetuiaga* does not exist in a vacuum. It emerges out of a received legacy of what it means to be the church and an established practice of being *ekalesia*. That legacy was inclined to understand the church in terms of *ekalesia* and a selection of images, models and marks. The work of theologians like Daniel Migliore, Avery C. Dulles and Paul Minear¹⁴⁵ is very helpful here. Their work enables us to catch a grasp of the surprisingly wide range of images and metaphors which were employed in the New Testament to describe the church. Dulles, in particular, is noted for the way in which he then arranged clusters, or families, of images into models of what it means to be the church. All the while this discussion on images and models is taking place against the background of the classical marks of the church which declared it to be ‘one, holy, catholic, and apostolic’. We might say that these images, models and marks are like building blocks for an understanding of what the church is called to be. They can also serve as foils and signs as to how well Oceanic metaphors can perform the function of providing authentic resources for the exploration and development of new diasporic ecclesiologies.

Writing in his *Faith Seeking Understanding* Migliore has made the case for how a contextual understanding of the person and work of Christ must engage with the classical inheritance. The intention lying behind this claim is not designed to silence again a cultural and non-western perspective. It is rather seeking to in-

¹⁴⁵ Migliore, D. *Faith Seeking Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Theology*, Grand Rapids, MI, William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2nd Edition, 2004. Dulles, Avery C. *Models of the Church*. New York, Doubleday, 2002. Minear, Paul S. *Images of the Church in the New Testament*. Westminster John Knox Press, 1960

clude the local and the particular within the universal or ecumenical church. The New Testament images are, in a sense, given for each and every culture to appropriate for the sake of their life together as they belong to Christ. The classical marks testify to Christ's calling into being the church. The Christian *koinonia*, *ekalesia*, or church is not one, holy, catholic or apostolic through its own efforts. It is these things in and through Christ. Whatever model might be more to the fore in a particular church, which images are privileged, and what contemporary and local ideas may serve that church, then it is still the same Christ who calls us into partnership with others though time and in other places.

The state of the modern church has been relegated by society to the periphery, particularly the western part of the church. What Migliore has found is that the discussion around the topic of church had moved people to ignore it out of anger and frustration. The modern church has found itself at the margin, fallible and flawed. Migliore has identified several widespread and deep seated problems that people have with church today: individualism, privatism, bureaucracy, and the discrepancy between the church's expressed faith and its actual practice.¹⁴⁶ It would seem as if the sense of being a church has been affected by a creeping sense of individualism and individual preference.

The Niuean church is thus not an island unto itself. Its members may know little or nothing of the Greek words and the practices of the ancient world which lie behind various images. They may be unclear about what the classical marks are, let alone mean. The idea that the *Ekalesia Niue* may embody one or two models of being the church, and not others, may come as a surprise. Nevertheless, these things are part of the Christian tradition in which it stands and which it has received. Furthermore, contrary to the popular belief that the Pacific Islands are divided by the Pacific Ocean, thus isolated, the great *moana* should be seen as an agent of oceanic interconnectedness (Halapua). The argument

¹⁴⁶ See Migliore, D. *Faith Seeking Understanding*, p.186-188

should indeed be made. The *moana* can, itself, serve as a metaphor which speaks to the solidarity between the church as the Body of Christ. That level of partnership is highlighted to the Corinthians when Paul wrote, "...if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; if one member is honoured, all the members rejoice with it." (1 Corinthians 12:26).

2. Overcoming some Obstacles

The case has already been made for a Niuean theology in diaspora to have its beginning point in the doctrine of the church. This is not an obvious choice.

The question of ecclesiology is not popular in the global south, let alone in the liquid continent; this fact is proven by the fact that the number of books or articles on the church or ecclesiology is hardly visible in Oceanic theological radar.

Why? Firstly, ecclesiology is said to be the least interesting topic of Christian theology. Migliore notes the common feeling: "Jesus yes, Church no". There is a dissatisfaction with how well the church has embodied the teaching of Jesus. This less than ideal performance is particularly apparent of the church in the West as negatively portrayed in the media. It often surrounds the mishandling of case of sexual misconduct.

The dissatisfaction with the Oceanic churches stems from a rather different problem. It is one which is more cultural and socio-political. Islanders complain about what the Samoans call the *fa'alavelave* or socio-cultural responsibilities of the members: that responsibility is frequently associated with the expectations of members and their obligations to meet the standard requirements of the community – that is, the birthday or funeral obligations, fundraising, rituals. Those obligations involve significant amount of time and financial expenses. There is also often disillusionment brought about by church politics. In his exploration of the practice of *fa'a Samoa* among migrants in Sydney, Australia, Leulu

Va'a concluded that the *fa'alavelave* among Samoan migrants in diaspora is less extensive but involves heavier expenditure. An important part of island social obligations involves remittances. Va'a observed that "*fa'alavelave* and remittances are interconnected as different aspects of the same reality."¹⁴⁷ It is no different for most diaspora communities who migrate primarily from less fortunate countries for economic reasons.

The practical effect of this reserve towards the church is that there has been little theological work done on ecclesiology in the Pacific. The comparison can be made with Christology which has been privileged. Why has an ecclesiology been marginalized?

Was there a pressing need for construction of new models of Oceanic ecclesiology? Had the received missionary model intrinsically woven into the natural way of being that over time it had become entrenched way of life? Is there a need to talk about it when it had become the norm of everyday existence? In other words, 'why talk, we're doing it!' Perhaps this has been a perception of Oceanic theologians – the church takes place in everyday life and it is in harmony with the natural rhythms of the *moana* and *fonua* so why talk about it? But times have changed. The islands are now permeated by western secular ideals even without their people leaving their shores. Traditional Christian values expressed by indigenous means have now been challenged as homes are saturated with western images of materialism. Television, internet, social media, international travel have become *vaka* (vessels) for a new kind of western imperialism. It is time for a *tutala* (talk-conversation) about new ways of being church in Oceania and most pressing for those in diaspora. New contexts demand new ways of being and the church plays a role as "hyphen" and "*vaka*". There is a demand for change.

¹⁴⁷ Va'a, Leulu F. *Saili Matagi: Samoan Migrants in Australia*, USP, National University of Samoa, 2001, p.179.

3. New Beginning with Church

The diasporic community finds some solace in the familiar *fetuiaga* of a Church but the fracture lines are more visible. Here is where we find a new beginning. The reasons for such have much to do with the communal nature of life intrinsic to the culture and the way in which that intersects with the way in which the church expresses a Christian sociality. The follower of Jesus, the Christian disciple, is not called to live alone. The appeal of this doctrinal area also lies in the sense of dislocation, of being ‘all at sea’ in a life lived in diaspora, and the need to belong and recover a sense of identity. For these reasons ecclesiology is a rather apt area for a Niuean theology to emphasize – but this attention to the doctrine of the church should not be taken for granted. As pointed to earlier, it is often looked upon as one of the least interesting areas of the core systematic agenda. It is also an area of believing and belonging which has come under much recent pressure in the lands to which the Niueans have emigrated.

This thesis looks to identify Niuean traditional metaphors and understandings to engage the development of a contextual ecclesiology that honors its received legacy. That received legacy comprises both the apostolic tradition and its Niuean ecclesial practices which encompass its socio-cultural identity.

In the mid-nineties Miroslav Volf asked:

Will the global exchange of ideas, goods, and services lead to a formation of a single homogeneous global culture shaped largely by Western values, or will indigenous cultures be powerful enough to preserve their own vitality?¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁸ Volf, Miroslav & Judith M. Gundry-Volf (eds). *A Spacious Heart: Essays on Identity and Belonging*, London, Trinity Press International, 1990, p.8.

In asking the question, Volf expected there to be "a clash between indigenous cultures and the global technological monoculture."¹⁴⁹ The vitality of the Niuean mode of being is severely challenged in this modern state of play as in the care for all minority cultures. This is particularly so for the *fetuiaga* living on different shores as they began to assimilate to the dominant culture. It is not helpful when their host churches have inadvertently adopted the philosophical attitude of its surrounding culture. From the perspective of a diasporic margin the western church has seemingly moved away from the communal sense implicit in the understanding of God as Trinitarian communion (*fetuiaga he Atua e Matua, Tama mo e Agaaga Tapu*). Volf was of the opinion that suggested that relationships within the local church must be lived out in correspondence to the Trinity.

Volf argued that the one God is a community of divine persons. This confessional claim should be the point of departure for conceiving what the church is theologically called to be. The Trinity provides an overriding theological model of what the church ought to be. Volf's Trinitarian analogy is one of "*perichoretic*" personhood. *Perichoresis* has been understood in theological circles since the early church Fathers as a "dance" of love between three persons or more. It is employed to describe the relationship of the persons within the trinity in which there is mutual giving and receiving (*koinonia*). Here, Volf defines *perichoresis* as "the reciprocal interiority of the Trinitarian persons."¹⁵⁰

The language of dance sits well with the notion of island *fetuiaga*; it is within a communal disposition of Oceania. The analogy refers to a relational dance between the triune God and the community who "gather in the name of Jesus." (Matthew 18:20).

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., p.8

¹⁵⁰ The *perichoretic* analogy applies only to the relationship between Christians and God, not between individual Christians. The dance within the Trinity is extended to include the community called out by the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, it is the in-dwelling of the Holy Spirit that makes the church a communion corresponding to the Trinity. Volf, Miroslav. *After our Likeness: The Church as Being the Image of the Trinity*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998, pp.11-44.

The *fetuiaga* communal approach to being church in the oceanic context is now challenged as a sense of community begins to feel the effects of erosion. The assertion of the independent 'self' (*tu tokotaha*) naturally challenges 'interdependence' (*fetuiaga/felagomataiaki*) embedded in the oceanic communal reality. The insistence of selfish individualism violates the ideals of Christian *fetuiaga* because one cannot have a private relationship with a God that is in essence a community. According to the former Roman Catholic pontiff Ratzinger:

Fellowship with the triune God is ... at once also fellowship with all other human beings who in faith have surrendered their existence to the same God.¹⁵¹

Volf added:

The one God is a communion of three persons in that each dwells in the others and is indwelled by them. Because the Godhead is a perfect communion of love, divine persons exchange gifts - the gifts of themselves and the gift of the others' glorification. ... When God turns towards the world, the circle of exchanges within the divine communion begins its outward bound flow.¹⁵²

To surrender oneself to God leads to communion with all those "who are in Christ." (Galatians 2:20). This communion or *koinonia* serves the church's self-understanding and what it is called to be. The Church is a gathered community called together by the Spirit of God possessing the ministries necessary to fulfill the tasks given to it by its Head, Jesus Christ. This is the essence of the Pauline image of the church as the Body of Christ.

¹⁵¹ Ratzinger quoted by Volf in *After our Likeness*, p.33.

¹⁵² Miroslav Volf and Michael Welker (eds). *M. God's Life in Trinity*, Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 2006, p.11.

However, in liquid modernity there appears to be a tendency for the church to neglect the gospel message and the *missio Dei* and for these things to be skewed towards serving the needs of private individuals and small homogenous groups.¹⁵³ As the church finds itself in an increasingly secular and indifferent environment, it becomes easy to imitate the surrounding organizations with their bureaucratic systems. It becomes easy for the call to become the Body of Christ to find itself subjected to pressure to conform to monolithic and business-like structures. One problem compounds upon another. The most disturbing picture the public has of the church is the "discrepancy between the expressed faith...and its actual practice."¹⁵⁴ Nietzsche captured this dilemma best in the late nineteenth century when he wrote, "They would have to sing better songs to make me believe in their Redeemer: his disciples would have to look more redeemed!"¹⁵⁵ In a similar vein Mahatma Gandhi claimed, "I like your Christ. I do not like your Christians. Your Christians are so unlike your Christ." And even among the moderate believers who are suspicious and frustrated with the state and behavior of the modern church; the familiar refrain is "Jesus yes, church no!"¹⁵⁶

4. Imaging

It is evident that the western church in the lands in which the Niuean diaspora finds itself are in a state of crisis. There is a concern that the membership is aging and it is difficult to imagine how the gospel will be handed over now from one generation to the next. The practical consequences of ageing are increasingly felt as one congregation after another becomes less viable. There are

¹⁵³ Migliore, D. *Faith Seeking Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Theology*. Grand Rapids, MI, William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2004, p.187.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., p.187.

¹⁵⁵ Nietzsche quoted by Migliore, *ibid.*, p.187.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., p.185.

fewer financial resources available; the pool of people available to maintain the church as it once was is no longer there. Those are serious issues in and of themselves. In 1992 Gary Bouma alluded to the dramatic decline in church membership and attendance.¹⁵⁷ Even before Bouma's statement, others had predicted the decline going forward.¹⁵⁸ In the 2006 National Church Life Survey (NCLS), Australian Bureau of Statistics National Census 2006, it is revealed that there are differences between the demographics of those attending church and of the Australian population at large: church attenders are older than the general population and men are under-represented; a higher proportion of church attenders is born overseas; and, surprisingly, church attenders are highly educated.¹⁵⁹ The presence of these challenges compromises the plausibility structure of the church. Can it live out the claims which it makes on behalf of itself – or not?

The failure for practice and belief to match is arguably a much more serious threat to the plausibility of the church as an institution. The stories of sexual misconduct by clergy cannot be ignored; nor can the incidence of misconduct in church schools. These blows to the credibility of the church are no longer secreted away: the news media now follows such with an avid interest in real time and with a seemingly accusing finger at the ready. The cumulative effect of this troubling public presence is that it creates an image problem for the church. In the circumstances the task of composing an authentic and appropriate ecclesiology is of critical importance. There is a need to dig deep and once again recover the way in which the purpose of images, models and marks fit into the

¹⁵⁷ Bouma, G. *Religion: Meaning, Transcendence and Community in Australia*, Melbourne, Longman Cheshire, 1992, pp.161-163.

¹⁵⁸ McCallum, John. "Secularization in Australia Between 1966 and 1985: A Research Note." *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 23, No. 3, November 1987, pp.407-422.

¹⁵⁹ On the whole, there has been an aging trend across the churches. From 1996 to 2006, the proportion of people in churches aged under 40 had decreased from 29% to 25%, and the proportion of people aged 60 and over increased from 34% to 42%. Overall, younger generations are significantly underrepresented in Australian churches, and an ongoing challenge is for churches to respond to the distinctive approaches to life and faith of different age groups. Source: www.mccrindle.com.au/the-mccrindle-blog/church_attendance_in_australia_infographic

theological architecture of what it means to be the church. The way we picture or image the church, the way in which we seek to model its life, and reveals the marks of what it is called to be in Christ, is critical.

The task of nurturing a *Fetuiaga Kerisiano* in diaspora cannot be isolated from what might be needed for the church as a whole to reform or re-imagine itself. The risk which faces a migrant-ethnic community is becoming self-absorbed. It retreats into itself and becomes more sectarian than a church. The building blocks of a theology of the church ought to help counter this pull: the *Fetuiaga Kerisiano* is an integral part of the 'one, holy, catholic and apostolic' church. It is called into being in Christ and it shares its life with other parts of the body of Christ. For the prospective *fetuiaga* image matters because of the very nature of the style of language and because of islanders' reverence for oratory. Even if the church was not in trouble, image and imagery matters a great deal for those from an Oceanic background.

Oceanic languages are essentially poetic; thus, metaphor, images and symbols are major portals. Great orators are renowned not just for their eloquence but for their skill in conveying meanings in metaphoric language, images and stories. The 'chiefly' language¹⁶⁰ was used by heads of families - often the designated elder *tupuna* of the family - or those who hold leadership roles in the community. This language is often reserved for community functions and rituals where words are carefully considered, honorific terms, respective words are eloquently spoken with courtesy and dignity. Skillful orators would eloquently weave their speech in metaphors and symbolism, keeping the listeners attentive, stimulating their intellect whilst stirring the collective soul of the community with stories. The use of metaphor, images, proverbial sayings and parables

¹⁶⁰ A 'chiefly' language is not a separate language or style altogether but a specialized vocabulary deemed befitting the status of the occasion. It is a language and an art of oratory endangered today by negligence and an adoption of foreign words in the Niuean vocabulary. More on the use and effect of language in forming and sustaining *fetuiaga* further in this chapter.

would often take time for the average listener to decipher and thus further social discussion thereafter to follow. In the formal setting of the ritual, the subject of the narrative would normally include an inter-relationship between the transcendent Other, the guests-host, the wider community, and the whole created order. Contemporary Niuean gatherings would have the mystery of the Christian God spoken of in symbols/images and principles of Christian living in metaphors and parables. It is common today to feature biblical metaphors in public speeches. If images, and how we see church are important, then it seems obvious that we should spend some time reflecting on the nature of images and metaphors. Metaphor, in its popular meaning, is "the application of a word or phrase to something that it does not apply to literally, in order to indicate a comparison with the literal usage..."¹⁶¹ Theologians like Janet M. Soskice believe that metaphor is not mere adornment of language. It is not "a sort of happy trick with words" or "a grace or ornament added to the power of language."¹⁶² Instead, it is "the omnipresent principle of language" since language itself is metaphoric and metaphor simply illustrates the workings of human language and thought as a whole.¹⁶³ The meaning of these images and metaphors cannot be adequately paraphrased, especially poetic metaphor, because it is fairly impossible to spell out explicitly the meanings and nuances that underlie them.

The biblical metaphors are much more durable than any explanation we can ever offer as McFague explained:

the two subjects, ordinary life and the transcendent, are so intertwined that there is no way of separating them and, in fact, what we learn is not primarily something about God but a new way to live ordinary life.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶¹ Definition from the *Oxford Paperback Dictionary*, Third Edition, Oxford University Press, 1998

¹⁶² Soskice, Janet. M. *Metaphor and Religious Language*, Oxford: Clarendon, 1985, p.70.

¹⁶³ Richards, A. *The Philosophy of Rhetoric*, London: Oxford University Press, 1936, pp.90, 92.

¹⁶⁴ McFague, Sally. *Speaking in Parables: A study in metaphor and theology*, London: SCM Press, p.35.

Soskice suggested that the communicative impact of metaphor should always be appreciated; "to say that a statement is metaphorical is a comment on its manner of expression and not necessarily on the truth of that which is expressed."¹⁶⁵ If we were to warn someone, "Watch out! That's a live wire!" we would not be inclined to add, "Of course, that is only metaphorically true." It is both true and expressed with metaphor.¹⁶⁶ Therefore, images and models are imperative for describing something that is a mystery.

When we deal with the idea of the church, we are confronted with a mystery. Dulles believes that mysteries cannot be spoken about definitively but only analogically, and analogies create models.¹⁶⁷ Antonio Lambino further asserts that,

a model is a conceptual and symbolic representation or system by which we try to grasp and express reality in whole or in part.¹⁶⁸

Just as the mystery of the Holy Other read, sensed and experienced in Scripture is often explained or described in metaphor, so too church is also best described and understood in images and metaphors. The nature and issues of being church are complicated matters; McFague puts it simply, "We use metaphors all the time in order to say something about things we know little about."¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁵ Soskice, Janet. M. *Metaphor and Religious Language*, Oxford: Clarendon, 1985, p.70.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., p.70.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., pp.1-2, 9-25, 39-54.

¹⁶⁸ Fuellenbach, John. *Church: Community for the Kingdom*, Maryknoll, New York, Orbis Books, 2002, p.109.

¹⁶⁹ McFague, Sally. *Speaking in Parables*. p.43.

5. Imaging the Church

For the sake of imaging the *Fetuiaga Kerisiano* we must take seriously the work of Paul Minear. At face value that may seem like an odd claim. Minear's name is not known among the Niueans. It is highly unlikely he has ever heard of this small island in the Pacific. The reason why Minear must be consulted is because of his seminal work on *Images of the Church in the New Testament* first published in 1960. The rather exegetical nature of this work has allowed it to stand the test of time – besides which it is the practice of the Niuean way to look backwards in order to move into the future and consult with those who are deemed to be wise. In this instance Minear's wisdom is very practical: he has made a study of the plethora of images that are applied to the church in the New Testament corpus. They come to ninety-six in total. Minear has set aside thirty-two which he calls the minor images or analogies. They include images which are today seldom used like "The Altar", "Pillar and Buttress", "The Elect Lady", "Wearers of White Robes", and "The Choice of Clothing." Once identified, Minear then arranges these ninety six images into four main clusters. They are then known by the following umbrella titles: the People of God ("Israel", "A Chosen Race", "The Holy City"); the New Creation ("First Fruits", "the new humanity", "The Last Adam", "The Son of Man"); The Fellowship in Faith includes "Friends", "Servants", "Household of God" (the social or communal dimension); and the Body of Christ.¹⁷⁰ "The People of God", like some of the others images are clustered under "The Body of Christ" such as "The Body of Life", "Members of Christ", "Spiritual Body", and "The Growth of the Body"

After Minear identified 96 ways of looking at the Church, he points out, that every image has its merit but they are never mutually exclusive. Both Minear and Dulles' work function to re-examine the nature of the Church in a world where

¹⁷⁰ Minear, Paul S. *Images of the Church in the New Testament*, Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960; re-printed. Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox, 2004. A comprehensive list of the 96 images is tabulated on pages 268-269.

every aspect of Christ's church is held up to scrutiny. Minear's division of the biblical models into two categories is helpful because many of the minor models that were ignored hitherto are highlighted and given value. Seeing the church using some of the minor images is useful to some who seek fresh ways to understand and reframe themselves in light of the changing world.

Now Minear has no desire to diminish the significance of every image, even the minor ones. The important consequence of his comprehensive analysis lies in the way this list of images reminds the church of the range of such images and how they came into being. These images are tied to the life of faith – some more obviously than others, like being a fellowship of the Spirit or the body of Christ. It is also true that many of the other images are taken from everyday life and cultural custom. This collection of images possess the energy and power to renew the life of corporate life. They furnish a way of the New Testament being in conversation with the contemporary church as to how it understands itself and maybe can serve, if necessary, as a corrective.

From the perspective of the Niuean experience Dulles and Minear's work creates a necessary template to consider. Which images, which clusters have been to the fore in *ekalesia Niue*? How have they been expressed in prayers, in sermons, in self-understandings of the church – and, most especially, in the lyrics of hymns? Which images have informed the *ekalesia Niue*? Which ones have not been visible or heard? And, in what ways have those dominant images been able to be translated into the setting of an island far removed in time and place from the churches of the New Testament? Here we have a way of identifying the way of being for the *ekalesia Niue*. For those living in diaspora it is part of the received legacy. The issue will then become how well have those images (which have come to have meaning in another context) crossed the *moana* to a distant shore? Are there other images and metaphors which might now need to come to the fore? Which of those images are to be found in the New Testament and which images taken from culture might be necessary for people in a new land?

Appealing to a *Fetuiaga Kerisiano*, for example, are minor images that resonate with island life. These images would include "The Salt of the Earth", "Fish and Fish Net", "The Boat" and "The Ark"; they could be found under one island metaphor of the *moana*. Similarly, images that are grown out of *fonua* are equally appealing: "Unleavened Bread", "One Loaf", "The Table of the Lord", "The Cup of the Lord", "Wine", "Branches of the Vine", "Vineyard", "The Fig Tree", "The Olive Tree", "God's Planting", "Wedding Feast", and "Hosts and Guests". These images by the mere pictures they project conjure up emotions in islanders who have an intimate physical and spiritual connection to the *moana* and *fonua*. Even images like "Citizens", "Exiles", "The Dispersion" and "Ambassadors" speak to the experience of movement and migration. Each image contributes to aspects of the *Fetuiaga Kerisiano* self-understanding.

6. Modeling the Church

Of potential equal assistance in shaping an understanding of the *ekalesia* and its relationship to the *fetuiaga* is the work of Avery Dulles. Although the minor images of Minear help define the church models in detailed brushstrokes, it is the major metaphors that have been most prominently featured at various times in the ecclesiologies of the church throughout history. These models are best delineated by Avery Dulles' writing in his foundational book *Models of the Church*. The various images were grouped under five main metaphors: church as "institution", "mystical communion", "sacrament", "herald", and church as "servant".¹⁷¹

¹⁷¹ Dulles, Avery C. *Models of the Church*. New York, Image: Doubleday, 2002. Migliore's study of the images followed the tradition laid down by Minear and Dulles and identified four main clusters: the people of God, the servant people, the body of Christ, and the community of the Spirit. See Migliore, D. *Faith Seeking Understanding*, pp.190-192.

Dulles initially proposed a set of five models of the church. Later, he would revise this set and add a sixth – the church as a "community of disciples". Dulles describes the strengths and weaknesses of each model in turn. He insists that the ordering of the models is no indication as to the superiority of one over the others. Indeed, Dulles argued that "a balanced theology of the Church must find a way of incorporating the major affirmations of each basic ecclesiological type."¹⁷² In other words, each model needs the other for one approach cannot adequately describe and define the reality of the church by itself. Each highlights important features of the church and of Christian discipleship. Yet no one image ever exhausts the richness of Christian life.¹⁷³ That this should be the case does not mean that different churches enact or live out these models in the same way. That is simply not the case – particular expressions of the church put their emphasis in differing places. A Niuean church may find resonance with aspects of each model but it is highly probable that the *Fetuiaga Kerisiano* is much more likely to see itself in categories pertaining to be a "mystical communion", "servant community" and a "community of disciples" by the simple act of being located in diaspora. The institutional model is much more likely to be to the fore in the *Ekalesia Niue*. The task before us will require us to consider how the various models have been embodied in both expressions of the Niuean way of being church.

7. Where is Christ?

There is a necessarily close link between how we understand the church and who Christ is. This assembly, whether *ekalesia* or *fetuiaga*, comes into being because of Christ.¹⁷⁴ That is most obviously reflected in the image of the church

¹⁷² Ibid., p.9.

¹⁷³ Miniear, Paul, *Images of the Church in the New Testament*, p.222. Also refer to Dulles, Avery C. *Models of the Church*. Image: Doubleday, 2002, p.181.

¹⁷⁴ In the midst of models and metaphor rhetoric, Migliore pointed back to Christ and his place within the ecclesiological conversation. He alluded to the intersection between Christology and ecclesiology (com-

as the Body of Christ. It will matter in due course then as to what kind of Christ is confessed and how that can be tied back to the way in which various images, models and marks are understood and put into practice.

Migliore explores further this close liaison between the church and how we understand Christ. For the sake of an ecclesiology he varies Bonhoeffer's christological question away from "who" is Christ to "Where is Christ?" This form of the question points to the location and presence of Christ because "where Christ is, there is the Church."¹⁷⁵ For thinking on the *fetuiaga* to be plausible it will thus not be sufficient simply to posit some cultural metaphors and models alongside the existing New Testament ones. The church is not just another expression of Niuean culture. Its reason for being has to do with the Christ-event and its place in the ongoing purposes of God which, it so happens, are acted out in a specific community. Migliore's concern for where is Christ to be found is particularly apposite in a liquid and mobile environment. To answer the defining question of the nature of the church he pointed to the ecclesiological axiom that the sign of the true church is where the gospel is rightly preached and heard and where the sacraments are enacted for the faithful to see and experience. These signals are, of course, those which Luther and the Reformers specified. How they are observed in diaspora will be a critical concern for the *fetuiaga*. Of equal importance will be how the heart of the *fetuiaga* bears witness to the diaconal or servant model of the church – for it is this model which seeks to imitate the humanity of Jesus and his ministry. Migliore reckons that the Christ must not only be reflected in the being of the church: the confessing community, the body of Christ, must be "the church of the outstretched, helping hand."¹⁷⁶ In other

munion of saints and the place of Christ in ecclesiology). This kind of talk moves the conversation from models of church to encompass what it means to be as Christ to others. The Niuean notion of *fetuiaga* finds resonance with this focus on communion; a church who seeks to pattern its community on the being of Christ thus realizing his presence in an empirical sense. See Migliore, D. *Faith Seeking Understanding*, pp. 204-205.

¹⁷⁵ Bonhoeffer's christological questions quoted by Migliore., Ibid., p.204.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., p.205.

words, the worship and praxis of the church must be intertwined with the model it adopts. The *fetuiaga* must keep in mind Migliore's lament:

Why has the church neglected the clear answer of Matthew 25:31ff. to the questions: Where is Christ? and How shall we recognize the true church? Christ is among the poor, and the church is the people of God free enough to enter into solidarity with the poor. Let the church be the church!¹⁷⁷

It is likely that this kind of lament, this concern for the location of Christ and the capacity for the church to be the body of Christ in his way, will be more to the forefront in the *fetuiaga*. It will need to be because of the dispersed, scattered and vulnerable nature of the Niuean diaspora itself.

The importance of asking the right questions with regards to the church is evident in Migliore's work. That same line of thought is pursued by Cheryl M. Peterson. The one she asks is deceptively simple: Who is the Church? Peterson is concerned with what we might call the grammar of being a community. It is her core conviction that an ecclesiology should begin with asking the right questions. She argues that the traditional methodological questions to do with the church have not produced the best ecclesial outcomes in terms of approach and models. It is her opinion that the questions we are usually asking are not really the priority ones.¹⁷⁸ Peterson is insistent: the contemporary church is facing an identity crisis. The irrelevancy and inauthenticity of the current practice of

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., p.205.

¹⁷⁸ The common questions asked like 'What can the church do to solve the membership problem?' or 'What is the church for?', etc. But the pivotal question she believed is 'What does the church stand for?' It is a question to do with its theological identity. Peterson, Cheryl, M. *Who is the Church?: An Ecclesiology for the Twenty-First Century*, Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 2013, p.4.

doing church are symptoms of an underlying issue which is really revealing that "we don't know who we are as church".¹⁷⁹

This focus on the raising of the right questions leads to some reflection: what are the kind of questions which present themselves in the Niuean context? At face value that is a rather unusual question to ask. The close interrelationship which is to be found between being Niuean and being a member of the *Ekalesia Niue* is a given into which one is born and raised. The grammar of Niuean life is not designed to ask questions about received structures. In the matter of ordinary, everyday living and believing, the church – the *ekalesia* – just 'is'. The types of questions which are much more likely to receive an airing in the island context have to do with who will be our minister, where will they been trained, what will be done with the church manse? These are functional questions rather than theological ones which deal with the ontology of the church.

The dislocation which comes from migration is likely to raise a very different set of questions. They are still likely to be of a more functional nature: will we get access to the church facility for singing practice? Are we allowed to sing our Niuean songs in a combined worship service? Should we hold a fundraiser for our home church in Niue? Who is providing the sausages for the youth barbecue on Friday night?

Peterson is less interested in these more obviously practical questions. For the operative question *is* 'Who is the Church?'¹⁸⁰ Peterson wanted a refocus on Christ in a time when the church is obsessed with the peripheral issues of the institutional church, busying itself with planning and executing social programs trying to keep the interest of the remnant few. Peterson reckon that, even in the

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., p.4.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., p.4.

work that makes them relevant to the community, oftentimes distracts them from the central question Peterson asks. It is the kind of question that requires attention to be given to the context or "ecclesiological context,"¹⁸¹ as Nicholas Healy puts it. Healy is referring to the ecclesial context in which the church finds itself, as well as the historical background of that context. As previously mentioned, many contemporary congregations are preoccupied with the declining membership, they naturally focus on strategy and purpose - what churches "do." This focus has produced business-like approaches that appear appropriate for the consumer environment. Peterson observes that churches today are trying to market themselves in the face of a shifting postmodern culture. This tactic seems to be the "church-growth" strategy of the day as each responds to the declining church membership. It is the kind of approach which the church consultant Reggie McNeal calls "attractional evangelism". It is an approach that has emerged from a reading of contemporary culture and what the church needs to do in order to attract the public with programs and strategies relevant to meet people's needs.

McNeal found that this approach is limited because ultimately it does not emphasize the heart of the church which is spirituality; it focuses too much on the sociality rather than spirituality: "The problem is that when people come to church, expecting to find God, they often encounter a religious club holding a meeting where God is conspicuously absent."¹⁸² McNeal duly proposed an "incarnational" model of outreach to share and embody the gospel and address the big "spiritual" questions that people ask.¹⁸³

¹⁸¹ Nicholas Healy as quoted by Cheryl Peterson. Ibid., p.4.

¹⁸² McNeal, Reggie. *The Present Future: Six Tough Questions for the Church*, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2003, p.59.

¹⁸³ Ibid., p.3.

This work by McNeal has helped Peterson clarify her argument. The purpose of her "who is the church?" question is designed to focus on the church's identity. She hoped that the proposed question would lead the church to steer away from the current preoccupation to do with function and purpose; she argues that the focus instead should be on a theological reading of who they are as the Body of Christ, Community of the Spirit, and church as the Word-Event and communion. The images conjured up by church as Word-Event and as Communion bring focus back on to the Christological aspects of being church.¹⁸⁴

8. The Need for a Third-Order Reflection

Now it goes without saying that this work on the images, models and marks of the church and asking the right questions is not indigenous to Niue. There is little in the way of reflecting along these lines in the *Ekalesia Niue*. There is an obvious risk. This mode of thinking about the church is mediated in and through a western academic culture. These categories might be imposed on the Niuean church – at home and in diaspora – but they would only be an intellectual abstraction. Their purpose here is to provide a frame of reference in order to map what is happening in the diasporic move from an *Ekalesia Niue* to a *Fetuiaga Kerisiano*. It is a way of placing a Niuean understanding of the church inside a conversation with the wider church. It is essentially a third order reflection, the theology of the church being the second. The first step is the experience of being church; the third order is the contextual understanding of such.

¹⁸⁴ To answer these pressing questions: "Where is Jesus Christ?" and "Who is the Church?" require attention to the context in which the church finds itself and the historical background of that context. Migliore and Peterson pull both Christ and his disciples together, the Head and the Body, thus point to the theological idea of a mysterious *fetuiaga* - an intersection of christology and ecclesiology. Refer to Migliore, D. *Faith Seeking Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Theology*. Grand Rapids, MI, William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2004, p. 204.

In the course of time it will arguably be important for a Niuean diaspora to consider what it means to be the 'church' – and thus address Peterson's question, "Who is the church?" That will need to be thought about by a level of critical distancing from culture which is currently not easy to do. The church is the body of those who are called to follow Christ, not necessarily those who happen to be born into a particular culture. It will be important, then, to be able to hold this idea of "who is the church" both apart from and together with its being realized in the life of the Niuean cultural community. For the present it is worth considering which of these images are most used to describe the church in a Niuean setting. That task will need to be followed by one which considers how the Niuean church acts out in practice each of these models. The ever-present question is whether the images and models put to use are the same in the diasporic *fetuiaga* – and, if they are not, then what is the difference and why has that difference emerged?

The dominant images or metaphors that identify the Niuean church as belonging to Christ are mostly associated with clusters surrounding the communal aspect of the church which corresponds with the "Body of Christ" and the "Community of the Spirit," the "Fellowship in Faith" or the "Mystical Communion" as Dulles puts it. The development of the Niuean ecclesiology was influenced by the three determining factors: the effects of the European western influence, the Samoan missionaries and the embedded *aga fakaniue* (Niuean way or traditional culture). The three bodies collaborated, inadvertently or otherwise, to grow a church that closely resembled images found in the New Testament, most labeled under the major models to do with church as "institution", and "body" *ko e tino* or "Community/Fellowship" *ko e fetuiaga*.

The missionary teachings of an institutional church were often associated with a colonial Christ. This impression led Amanaki Havea and the likes of Sevati Tuwere to develop a "Pacific Christ" for a postcolonial era. However, it is apparent that there is a disparity between the Pacific theology and its ecclesiology. The Diocese of Polynesia, the Methodist, Presbyterian and the Catholic

Churches still exercise an ecclesial liturgy that was perpetuated from the missionary era. Oceanic churches had accepted those missionary liturgies as their own traditions. What happened to biblical models of Jesus?

The early church could be described as home-based given the first followers of Jesus' gathered in each other's houses or homes. Their first church experiences were fluid; they focused more on fellowship and worship as they moved from house to house convenient to their extended families and small communities. Edward Foley noted that the emphasis on homes of the more affluent members and borrowed spaces rather than international organization with centrally-governed and centrally-controlled monolith was because the infant church tended to be pluriform rather than uniform in structure, belief and liturgy.¹⁸⁵ The sense of liquidity found in the early church is evident in the variety of theologies there were of the church.

The church as a "Mystical Communion" resonates with the Niuean church. The Jesuit Emile Mersch's work on "the Mystical Body" whereby the community is more intimate and personal is characteristic of this approach. The etymological study of the term *fakafetuiaga* in the previous chapter revealed the mystical and spiritual connection in the intimacy of individuals in assembly that could be outwardly expressed and embodied through communal events and celebrations. The members of the church, village or extended families outwardly realize their spiritual communion by worship and service they render for the common good. The *Fetuiaga Kerisiano* relates to this model of being church in its horizontal and vertical dimensions.

The Church, from this point of view, is not in the first instance an institution or a visibly organized society. Rather

¹⁸⁵ Foley, Edward. *From Age to Age: How Christians Have Celebrated the Eucharist*. Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1991, pp.27,29.

it is a communion of men, primarily interior but also expressed by external bonds of creed, worship, and ecclesiastical fellowship.¹⁸⁶

In its horizontal dimension, the Church is a *vaka-he-moana* (that is, a canoe of the ocean); it represents the calling and practice of a crossing over of persons or communities in the name of Christ offering one another the love of God through the Spirit. This is communion in the sense of a sociological group. In this view, the church consists of people of faith who are united by their common participation in God's Spirit through Christ. What is distinctive to this model is its vertical dimension – the divine being revealed in the incarnate Christ and communicated to the community through his Spirit. The *Vaka-he-moana* model symbolizes the reality of the church's outward and visible bonds of a human society, but the community rests upon a deeper spiritual communion of grace. In Niuean terms, the vertical dimension is known as the *vaka-he-fonua* (roots/artries of the land). It is an image of roots growing "down" deep into the *fonua* (land) retrieving the life-giving nutrients feeding the plant and helping it growing "upwards" towards the heavens. This image represents the vertical relationship between Christ who came "down", being a *vaka* (root/artry) through whom we have *koinonia* (*fetuiaga* or communion) with God and with one another. The strength of this model lies in its emphasis on "shared life" and "mutual fellowship". The mystical communion is an appropriate metaphor for "travelers on the same journey".¹⁸⁷ In this respect, it reflects the Niuean diaspora which also exposes its weakness. The weakness of the model parallels the flaws of the *Fetuiaga Kerisiano* in diaspora where it proposes to offer a perfect heavenly community and/or a replica community of the home island. It can be ambiguous or illusory insofar as it gives false hope for members who will expect a level of intimacy with all other church members that is not possible or sustainable.

¹⁸⁶ Dulles, Avery C. *Models of the Church*, New York, Doubleday, pp.47-49.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p.53.

Another model that resonates with the *fetuiaga kerisiano* is "church as sacrament" - that is, a sign of God's grace in the world. In brief, sacrament is "a visible sign of an invisible grace." As such, it is an efficacious sign, meaning that "the sign itself produces or intensifies that of which it is a sign."¹⁸⁸ Dulles asserts that sacraments are communal realities and not individual transactions because ordinations, baptisms and the Eucharist are not to be celebrated in solitude. "Sacrament has an event character; it is dynamic."¹⁸⁹ The *fetuiaga* that gathers around the *umu* (earth oven) working and serving together presents a church that is a sacrament. By the gathering of "two or three who gather in his name" Christ is present in their midst and by virtue of his presence the *fetuiaga* becomes "sacred". The culmination with an "open table" banquet with singing and dancing is a sign of the *perichoresis* dance. It reflects the communion of a *fetuiaga* and God. The weakness of this model, according to Dulles, lies in that it "could lead to a sterile aestheticism and to an almost narcissistic self-contemplation."¹⁹⁰ In the same way, the banquet of the *taonaga* (celebration) is a common meal and not an Eucharist proper. The migrant *fetuiaga* in church halls may conjure a sense of sacredness but the context of pubs, clubs and function centers may struggle to provide the environment conducive to a sense of sacramentality.

Dulles' model of the church as servant "asserts that the Church should consider itself as part of the total human family, sharing the same concerns as the rest of men."¹⁹¹ Jesus' work as the suffering servant of God who was certainly "a man for others," provides the template for this model: "just as Christ came into the world not to be served but to serve, so the Church, carrying on the mission of Christ, seeks to serve the world by fostering the brotherhood of all men". As "the

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., pp. 58-59.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 61.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 186.

¹⁹¹ Ibid., p. 84.

Lord was the 'man for others,' so must the Church be 'the community for others.'"¹⁹² The Niuean leadership is characterized by being a "servant for others". In the social structure, a *Tui* is a chief of a community or an intimate title for a husband. The title implies servanthood. Similarly, the *fetuiaga* of Christ assumes the role of servant prescribed and modeled by Christ himself. Its nature lies not in its institutional authority but in its function as a serving community. This attribute is clearly displayed in the traditional function of the *umu* where the community gather to offer support and service to the hosting family. In the context of being a *fetuiaga kerisiano* the community displays its Christian virtues. The principles of *fakaalofa* (love), *fakaalofa hofihofi* (compassion), *foaki* (giving), *felagomataiaki* (helping/serving open another), *femomoikiaki* (sharing of food, reciprocity) come under the model of servant church. This servant community is a community for others. The weakness of this model is being lost in its service thus losing focus on its *kerygma*,¹⁹³ Christ's word to the world. In a diasporic setting, the challenge lies in the opposing and prevailing selfish attitude of the secular subject that it loses the sense of servanthood.

Avery Dulles later added the sixth model to his list of five: the idea of church as "community of disciples". He writes:

This concept can be seen as a variant of the communion model. It precludes the impression that the ecclesial communion exists merely for the sake of mutual gratification and support. It calls attention to the ongoing relationship of the Church to Christ, its Lord, who continues to direct it through his Spirit.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹² Ibid., p.85.

¹⁹³ Ibid., p.102.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., p.198.

Dulles built this model to "build bridges to the other five models..."¹⁹⁵ He believed that it is the most comprehensive model - yet all other models are still essential. From these broad dominant models delineated by Dulles to minor images by Minear, the *fetuiaga kerisiano* finds positive insights in constructing its ecclesiology and its being in diaspora.

9. *Magafaoa* Family: The Body of Christ

While the metaphor of the Body of Christ is clustered under a particular model(s), it is important to be treated here on its own. The church as the Body of Christ is called to participate with Christ in the continuation of the work of reconciliation in the world (2 Corinthians 5:18). The image of the Body of Christ corresponds with the Niuean all-encompassing notion of *fetuiaga* (communion, *koinonia*, community, assembly, fellowship, relationship, interconnection, etc). The "body" in the English language means and implies many things but the first literal meaning is: "the physical structure, including the bones, flesh, and organs, of a person or an animal".¹⁹⁶ Helen Jamieson in her doctoral thesis expounded in detail the theological definition of the "body" metaphor and implications in developing an Australian ecclesiology based on the metaphor "Embodying Christ." The emphasis here lies in the use of ordinary human bodies - individual and corporeal - to speak realistically and participate with Christ in revealing God's reign in the world. Her thesis made embodying a process, making sense of the connection between Jesus (incarnate body), Christ (divine body) and his church (corporate body) in a real way. Jamieson employed a represented metaphor of the body of Christ as "embodying Christ" to explain

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., p.198.

¹⁹⁶ From The Online Dictionary, *Dictionary.com*. <http://dictionary.reference.com/>

the organic nature of the church and depicts it, not as perfect, but on a journey following a marginalized Jesus Christ and working for the well-being of society.¹⁹⁷

She argues for a "body image" that can encompass the essence of Christ in relationship with the life of real bodies in Australia. The metaphor is employed recognizing the Australian preoccupation with bodies. And despite the imperfection of bodies which is reflected in the flawed and guilty past and present of the church, embodying Christ in Australian society acknowledges this fact but takes seriously the call to live out Christ at the margins of society.

The Niuean notion of the *tino* (body), *maaga* (village), and *magafaoa* (family) find resonance with her concepts, particularly the intersection between christology, ecclesiology and contextual theology. It takes note of how she focused on literal "bodies" - personal and corporate. The *Fetuiaga Kerisiano* explores the "body" in the category of community and extended family.

The Niuean *fetuiaga* is foremost communal by nature. It has an emphasis on community as a "body" held together by the practice of fellowship, interdependence, reciprocity and hospitality. These values are beginning to fracture and are under threat by western individualism. This alien way of being is saturating the remnant community on the island of Niue itself; it is even more explicit for those living in diaspora and needing to come to terms in a *modus vivendi* with the mainstream western cultures. Migration and the promotion of a self-made independent individual¹⁹⁸ in western culture has put pressure on the "Body." The practice of privatization and compartmentalization in modernity has exacerbated the problem: unlike Niue and island communities in Oceania, western society

¹⁹⁷ Jamieson, Helen. *Embodying Christ: The Call to be Church in an Australian Context*, unpublished PhD thesis, Charles Sturt University, 2013, p.7.

¹⁹⁸ See Migliore, D. *Faith Seeking Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Theology*. Grand Rapids, MI, William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2004, pp.186-188.

has seemingly limited the role of the church to the needs of individuals and small homogeneous groups. Even more serious is how the division of the Body into independent individuals translates into "a self-centered piety in which the church is deemed secondary and unnecessary."¹⁹⁹ The westernization of cultures has divided the Body into single independent parts, superficially connected by "voluntary societies," groups one chooses to join and which one remains a member for as long as they meet one's needs and serve one's purposes. They can even be artificially connected by technology through mediums like the social media.

The construction of a vibrant and flexible *fetuiaga* cannot be built, though, simply through a practice of reaction and a sense of cultural shock. The way of the *fetuiaga* requires creativity and energy and a recognition of some affinity. The 'body' metaphor does that. It is, of course, a core New Testament image and model for being the church. The body is also not a strange concept to an indigenous society like Niue. The corporate image that corresponds most appropriately with the 'Body of Christ' metaphor is that of the *magafaoa*²⁰⁰ (extended family) and the *fakafetuiaga* (communal fellowship).

Now the word *magafaoa* is not usually used with reference to the church but it comes under the image of "the household of God". This image is based on 1Peter 4:17 which, in Niuean, reads *fale he Atua* and *tau magafaoa oti he lalolagi* (all the families of the earth).²⁰¹ And, although biblical translation of ecclesial images are actually transliterations (*Ko e tino a Keriso a mutolu* - you are the body of Christ), hymns and songs speak of church as *faoa* family. Family in a Niuean context is an extended one that includes distant relatives. *Magafaoa*

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., p.286.

²⁰⁰ The *magafaoa* is not just an immediate or nuclear family but a descendant group that traces their linkage several generations, even to ancestral deities (Fao, Huanaki, etc).

²⁰¹ Images translated into the Niuean language is also found in Genesis 28:14, Zechariah 14:17ff

or *faoa* often transcends the boundary of blood relative. For instance, children in church would address the Minister's wife as mother, nana or auntie. Likewise, elders and women are addressed as uncles and aunties.

The image's theological potential needs to be teased out. The idea and lived reality of *magafaoa* (family - nuclear but especially the extended) lies at the heart of Niuean culture. The Niuean theologian and cultural commentator, Pahe Faitala, wrote that "...to be identified as Niuean without an appeal to the *magafaoa* would be meaningless."²⁰² Faitala bound the *magafaoa* to a 'family tree' that is intrinsically linked to the *ohi* or *mataohi* (genealogical lineage).²⁰³ The pride of the *magafaoa* (family) would ensure that dignity and respect must be observed at all times lest shame be brought not just to the family but to the *maaga* (village). This expectation has ramifications, positive or otherwise, for how the family and community exist as a social entity because the same standard is expected of every family. The name and reputation of the *maaga* rests upon the performance of its members and families.

The functional purpose of the *magafaoa* (family) has to do with understanding and performance of the role, service, and responsibility that will link to and result in communal cohesion and pride. The performance and achievements of the *magafaoa* body is directly connected and thus affects the status and being of the *maaga* (village).

²⁰² Faitala, Pahetogia. *Christianity in Niue Context*, Pacific Theological College, unpublished Bachelor of Divinity thesis, 1986.

²⁰³ Vilitama defines *Ohi* or *Mataohi* in relation to the genealogical lineage. Family status could be classified not necessarily according to their inheritance, rather according to the merit of their generosity and ability to serve the family and community. Thus families are then identified as *mataohi iki* - ancestral source of chiefs; *mataohi toa* - ancestral source of heroes/warriors; *mataohi talahaua* - ancestral source of famous men; *mataohi teva* - ancestral source of lazy people; *mataohi kaiha* - ancestral source of thieves. Vilitama, Hafe, in *Niue: A History of the Island*, 1982. p.91.

In the Niuean social system every person is respected as precious but one can be recognized and highly respected by his or her *mana*. As a Niuean proverb goes, '*Ko e tagata e tagata*,' meaning, one becomes an honorable person by how he or she behaves or performs in the social and political environment of the community. The church is charged with the moral upbringing of individuals and families. There is a natural synthesis of cultural and religious values in a Niuean *fetuiaga*. An individual's personhood is intrinsically linked to the *magafaoa* and *maaga*. A Niuean proverb '*Lilifu e tagata ka pakafa e moui*' translates, 'A four-sided life is one deserves honor.' In other words, 'one's personhood is complete if he or she performs well in one's social and religious responsibility.'

The body is for service according to the Niuean understanding. "*Ko e Takitaki, ko e toloaga veve*" in its literal meaning, "Leaders are treated like rubbish dump". In other words, leaders are bodies to serve. The image emerging parallels the way of the cross. Jesus Christ came as a suffering servant (Philippians 2:1-11) who came not to be served but to serve and to give his life as ransom for many (Mark 10:45). Christ's followers are called into costly service, to live as Christ did, as 'a man for others' (Matthew 20:25-26; 2 Corinthians 4:5, etc). As Dulles states, "...just as Christ came into the world not to be served but to serve, so the Church, carrying on the mission of Christ, seeks to serve the world by fostering the brotherhood of all men."²⁰⁴ As "...the Lord was the 'man for others,' so must the Church be 'the community for others.'"²⁰⁵ A Niuean leader, or a person of highest regard, is not determined by inheritance or by caste but by merit and performance. As revealed by Hafe Vilitama, "Class in Niue was based on performance of activities. The more famous their activities made them, the higher their status became."²⁰⁶ It is known that Niueans determine their leadership by how one serves the family and community. The community is also de-

²⁰⁴ Dulles, Avery C. *Models of the Church*, New York, Doubleday, 2002, pp.91-92.

²⁰⁵ Ibid., p.93.

²⁰⁶ Hafe Vilitama, Terry Chapman, Fifita Talagi, Ikinepule Etuata, et al. *Niue: A History of the Island*, Institute of Pacific Studies, USP and Government of Niue, Suva Printing, 1982, p.91.

terminated by the well-being of their weakest members: the children, elderly, disabled, widows are to be well cared for.

Former Premier the Hon. Young Vivian often quoted the proverb, *"Ko e talo e aga fakamotu a Niue"* (Niue's culture is a taro culture) which has multiple meanings: taro is a symbol of socio-political, spiritual and economic commodity - it is power. A person's power is determined by how much taro one has because it feeds the family and community and contributes greatly to the social functions of the community. This high regard comes only when one is seen to perform with compassion and generosity - in other words, giving to the less fortunate and good cause, a 'man for others.' Furthermore, the abundance of taro points not only to the ability for hard work but as a sign of special favour by God; it is a sign of blessing. The more one serves and gives, the more one is blessed: *"foaki ma kefu, to liuaki mai fakafatualoga"* (keep giving my son it will come back manifold) parallels the biblical principle of giving (Luke 6:38). Politically, however, taro culture can become a factor in negotiating power which can lead to abuse like in any society. A body who works hard, is helpful, becomes a witness and ambassador. That body becomes an exemplary model for the community. A family and a village who are renowned in their elaborate and selfless service are given an honorable reputation. The image of a serving body then alludes to a servant Christ who was with God, who is God; the one who "though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross." (John 1:1; Phil 2:6-8).

Servanthood lies at the heart of Christology. The 'People of God' is called to serve the Lord in the world by serving the poor and less fortunate with Christ-like humility and obedience. The images that centre around the church as the 'People of God' have their roots in the Old Testament concept of God's covenantal relationship with his appointed people of Israel (Leviticus 26:12). The

church as the people of God suggests a special relationship as those who have been called out and set aside by God just as Israel was: it ties the church historically to the roots of its origin founded in the Old Testament. Therefore, the image of God's people as a chosen race, the elect and the remnant gives special significance to a people called the church.

Once again Niueans can relate to these images with their traditional understanding of their island's relationship with God as '*Ko e Atua a Niue*' (The Lord is Niue's God) or '*Tata e Atua ki Niue*' (God is closest/dearest to Niue). It is as if Niue and its people can lay claim to God's special favor because, as they unashamedly believe, God has favoured Niue and her people with his providential blessings. According to Niueans, this favour is not unusual even if other communities can make similar claims.

This understanding of God is reminiscent, of course, of their traditional relationship with pre-Christian gods whereby they invoke blessings for specific occasions.²⁰⁷ God becomes accessible in this understanding and grants special favours because of the special *fakafetuiaga* (relationship). This understanding of course is false in the eyes of outsiders, particularly those who see God in an impersonal light. However, it make sense to Niueans to claim their *fakafetuiaga* with the God whom their ancestors referred to previously as *Tagaloa*. Moreover, inherent in Niueans is a belief in a divine link genealogically (*mataohi*) and supernaturally. Niueans can trace their genealogy to divine ancestors, thereby making Niueans special.²⁰⁸ Thus, the notion of a church as a 'new Israel' with a connection to the Old Testament 'covenant' people is not a strange idea to the

²⁰⁷ Thompson, Basil. *Savage Island: An Account of a Sojourn in Niue and Tonga*, Albemarle Steet, London, John Murray, 1902, p.84-102. Also refer to Hafe Vilitama, Terry Chapman, Fifita Talagi, Ikinpule Etuata, et al. *Niue: A History of the Island*, Institute of Pacific Studies, USP and Government of Niue, Suva Printing, 1982, pp.17-23.

²⁰⁸ Refer to genealogical history of Niueans that lead back to the gods Fao, Huanaki, etc. Mythology explained that the original settlers hailed from '*Fonuagalo*' (land of the unknown). Loeb, E.M. *History and Traditions of Niue*. Honolulu, Hawaii, Bernice Pauahi Bishop Museum, Bulletin 32, 1926, pp.140-162.

Niuean. The belief that Niueans have become Christian makes their claim stronger; they understand that they are loved by God and so much so that he gave his begotten Son as sacrifice for their redemption.

The image of a church as the "people of God" also makes connection to the historical Israelite community in exodus, a pilgrim community, tasked with a call to invite others to be part of a people on a way to a new promised land. Again, the idea of a *fetuiaga* community links not just to history and those now gone, but those who will come after. It has an eschatological dimension. The *fetuiaga* weaves towards the future. *Fetuiaga* as the people of God assumes the interconnectedness and interflow between past present and future through the cross of Christ. As the people of God proclaim the mighty acts of the Creator in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ, it accepts into its body new members as it moves towards the promised end.

This understanding is to be shared by every nation, community and individual. It is the special *fetuiaga* relationship/connection that enables the church and all creation to experience the Lord as their God. This forms a basis for a Niuean "corporate Christology."

Chapter 4

Creating a New Inner Geography

1. ‘By the waters of Babylon ...’

The standard practice of an ecclesiology is well set. The typical approach is to consider, as we have done, the range of New Testament images, the cluster of models and then the present understanding of the classical marks of the church and how they may now be embodied. It is also a common practice to examine the relationships between the church, on the one hand, and mission and the kingdom of God, on the other. Migliore’s writing on the church then leads into its sacramental life, its understanding of worship and how it is served. How many sacraments are observed within this tradition? What is their *habitus* and how does the Eucharist and the baptism, for instance, flow from the ministry of Jesus and establish a relationship between the church and the Christian life of discipleship? What is the place and purpose of the liturgy and preaching as well as offices of ministry, especially the relationship between the lay and the ordained?

It has also become increasingly clear that a contemporary ecclesiology must take into account the context in which the particular denomination or *ekalesia* is set. For those of us who are Niuean we are now dealing with our Christian communities being in a double context – that of home and living in diaspora. The latter is made up of micro-contexts due to the difference in ecclesial setting for those living in Australia and those in New Zealand. That interest in context can also have the effect of highlighting the difference between a phenomenological and an ontological understanding of the church. The former is concerned with ‘what happens to be’. This way of understanding of being the church can include a practical concern for the institution, buildings, weekly worship, missionary initiatives, ministry matters. The phenomenological interest is what the church is like in practice and may be closely connected with some of the misgivings and problems Migliore identified. That is just how the church ‘happens’ to

be. The ontological understanding might be better thought of in terms of 'what the church ought / should *be*'. This reading is more concerned with the theology of what it means to be the church, the body of Christ, the fellowship of the Spirit and what is the intention of God lying behind its all too human failings.

In the double context which faces Christians who are Niueans there is little explicit conversation surrounding being the church. It is frequently an assumed knowledge which is tacitly accepted. This thesis has been arguing that the present diasporic situation (and the continuing depopulation of the home island) has made it necessary to reflect upon what it means for these people to think of themselves as a community of Christ. That task is easier said than done. It calls for the construction of a new imagination, a new inner geography which takes seriously the fact of migration and the importance of coming to terms with an altered identity.

It is much more likely that Niuean members of both the *Ekalesia Niue* and *Fetu-iaga Kerisiano* are likely to get their understanding of what it means to be the church through what is sung. This is a culture in which singing, choirs and performance play a foundational role in 'who we are'. The task before those who are now resident in diaspora is made explicit through the words of Psalm 137, "By the waters of Babylon we lay down and wept as we remembered Zion..." The transition to being a liquid church is made necessary through acts of dislocation and shift in geography. It is an effect of travel and migration. This rupture of identity requires a new imaginary which will somehow provide a sense of identity and belonging. Psalm 137 'speaks' to the context of an exilic people. It is a moving statement about what it is like to be far from home, to be disoriented and dislocated, and to be faithful. Embedded in this psalm are a range of emotions: trauma, lament, rage, confusion. This psalm poses a penetrating question: "How shall we sing the Lord's song in such a strange land?"

This chapter deals with the critical role music plays in the migrant Niuean story. It helps migrants to reflect on the experience of being a stranger in a strange land: the familiarity of a known music style helps bridge the separation of family members and from the familiar environment of their upbringing. The language and practice of faith can be a very telling vehicle for people who migrate. It is often their religious belief that helps them with their sense of providence, belonging and continuity. For many migrants, the initial shock is equivalent to a song of lament found in the Psalm 137. The lyrics contained in Psalms 137 aid a soul trying to appease the sense of nostalgia and longing for their ethnic homeland. How might faith itself survive the crossing of the *moana*? What words and emotions will help carry the faith which was so closely bound to the everyday participation in life back in the home island?

Living and trying to make sense of belonging in strange lands is difficult. George Savran wrote about the disjunction between Babylon the new home for the exiled and Zion their beloved homeland, the two locations in verse one, "By the waters of Babylon, there we sat down and wept, when we remembered Zion." Babylon is where the Jews now dwell but Zion is the reason for their tears.²⁰⁹ "How shall we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land?" cried the despondent Jews. Yet, for many in diaspora, singing gives voice to the grieving hearts; it becomes a vehicle for an emotional release that is often accompanied by weeping.

For many the initial shock of moving into a new and foreign place is equivalent to those spoken about in Psalm 137. The Dinka Christians from southern Sudan, who suffered atrocities for many years and were displaced by civil war (1983-2005), took to song as a means of alleviating the weight of emotional and psychological devastation. From refugee camps came a collection of new

²⁰⁹ Savran, George. "How Can we Sing a Song of the Lord?: The Strategy of Lament in Psalm 137 in AT-LA Religion Database with ATLAS Serials, 112, No. 1, 2000, pp.43-48.

hymns chronicled into a new hymnary reflecting the themes of war and faith; the Dinka making sense of their suffering and turning their cries into prayer.²¹⁰

For the Niuean migrants and many in diaspora who experience a different sense of displacement, song also becomes an instrument of organizing a new *fetuiaga* and a sense of belonging. In contrast to the overwhelming sense of loss that is associated with migration there can also a new sense of freedom for those who flee persecution and oppression. Song can be an expression of joy, gratitude, hope and celebration for those who experience political asylum and economic freedom for the first time. It can become a doxological exclamation following a tumultuous shift and a way of telling stories of their journey and faith. It is surely no accident that the psalmist also invites a people of faith to sing a new song. (Psalms 33:3, 40:3; 96:1; 98:1; 144:9; 149:1). Walter Brueggemann argues that the world of the book of Psalm so often presents a 'counter world'. These psalms of new songs herald in a new reality: they are full of joy. They mediate a "hermeneutic of representation" which celebrates what God has done in the past and has done again now. They represent a heart that now runs in another direction away from lament and suspicion.²¹¹

2. The Synaesthetic Effect

It is indeed a stock practice of migrant churches around the globe to sing songs and hymns from their ancestral homelands to the glory of God. These songs in their indigenous tongues carry deep theological and cultural images often describing the socio-spiritual contexts out of which they came. For many migrants, songs and hymns conjure up images that stir strong emotions and sentiments.

²¹⁰ Zink, Jesse. "Dinka Christians in Southern Sudan: Songs of Exile and Faith" in *Christian Century*, January 8, 2014, p.24.

²¹¹ Brueggemann, Walter. *From Whom No Secrets Are Hid: Introducing the Psalms*, Louisville, Westminster John Knox Press, 2014, p.166.

The Dinka Christians are but one example of the extremely confronting emotions that songs represent and invoke.

Songs and hymns, particularly Psalms, have a way of voicing the migrants' inner struggles. Martin Tel, in his article "Necessary Songs", wrote of his father's experience and memories captured and expressed through singing the Psalms of lamentations while living in the Netherlands during the Nazi regime. His people had to resort to the Psalms as they refrained from singing hymns that may have a hint of patriotism; they sang the Psalms only to the Genevan tunes that had been handed down by Calvin. But within the psalms were a rich repertoire of images that resonated with and expressed their feelings. Tel writes, "The text (Psalms) drips with fear, doubt, anger and even wishes for revenge."²¹²

What is of particular interest in Tel's story is the difference in use and selection of hymns when his father migrated to the United States. The perception was that the Christian assembly to which he belonged in the new location had a fixation on a "cult of joy and happiness". It was said that they had been "shamed into shelving the psalms that had given voice to their deepest sorrows, fears and anger."²¹³ The psalms of lament, the rhetoric of violence and retaliation had been cleansed out.

There is always a natural gravitation among those in diaspora towards the local church for the purposes of finding a place to belong. The church becomes a home away from home. However, in some cases, there is a tendency among the host assembly for the guest to sing and to dance as by way of a 'cultural item' or 'performance'. Or, they may be asked to sing to the tune of the local anthems, thereby starving them of the liberty to find their own voice and sing a

²¹² Tel, Martin. "Necessary Songs", in *Christian Century*, 1/8/2014, Vol. 131, Issue 1, pp.20-33.

²¹³ Ibid., p.20.

song that helps them deal with a disordered orientation and a confused identity. Such a nudge towards doxological assimilation often creates tension in the lives of the guests, especially when forced social and cultural assimilation is a daily expectation/reality outside the church premises. The hosts may need to accept that for migrants' hymns, songs, chants and dance are their companions on the way.

Those who seek asylum are a category of those who find themselves in diaspora. Their reason for being in a new land is due to external pressures and forces; it is not a choice in the sense that many migrants make in order to seek out a better future for themselves and their children. The reason for being in diaspora may be different – and significantly so – but the asylum-seeking experience can furnish insight into what life in any sort of diaspora is like.

Susanna Snyder has made the case for an 'ecology of faith' rather than an 'ecology of fear' when it comes to dealing with 'refugees' and 'foreigners'.²¹⁴ In her book *Asylum Seeking, Migration and Church*, Snyder points towards the church and her practitioners to the Christian ministry of encountering 'strangers': it is the calling of the church to be welcoming and that Christians are to operate out of faith, not fear, when confronted with the different other. Snyder also alluded to the reality that in offering the 'stranger' a Christian embrace, the 'asylum seeker' has gifts that contribute to the rich diversity of the church transforming it in its being and mission. Martin Tel's father, a migrant who encountered the 'domesticated' sense of worship with a preoccupation for hymns of joy and happiness, had to 'shelve' his Psalms of lament; Snyder declared that it is the

²¹⁴ Snyder, Susanna. *Asylum Seekers, Migration and Church*, Farnham and Burlington: Ashgate, 2012, chapters 7 & 8.

'stranger' who can bring the complacent worshipper to the edge and explore anew the liturgy and what it means to be human.²¹⁵

Hymns allow Christian migrants not only to praise in worship but to reminisce about life in the former home and remember the *taoga* bestowed as identity markings for future reference. Hymns carry emotions and deep sense of self. This is powerful when the emotions and experience are a corporate one. Songs and hymns play an important role in drawing Niueans together, in social *fakafe-tuiaga* and worship. They possess power to bring a community together and transport them not only vertically - spiritually, but across - socially, culturally and historically. They recall defining moments in one's life and indeed that of a community. For islanders memories of hymns sung in tropical homelands and at landmark occasions arouse certain feelings. Words becomes poignant as one is reminded of the spiritual and social environment the hymn evokes. Singers and listeners alike, then, are drawn to think about their history and events that give birth to their received hymns.

Steven T. Kimbrough, Jr., wrote about the contexts whence hymns derive: "There is a spiritual ethos and a cultural context out of which every Christian hymn or song is born. As the church addresses what it shall sing in the present and future, it must be attentive to the spirituality that gives birth to song."²¹⁶ For Kimbrough, hymns mean more than means of praising God. In agreement with Don Saliers, Maeve Heaney and Jeremy Begbie testify to the power of music in theology, worship, and the practice of Christian faith.²¹⁷ Music reflects not only

²¹⁵ Ibid., p.208. See also Tel, Martin. "Necessary Songs", in *Christian Century*, 1/8/2014, Vol. 131, Issue 1, p.20.

²¹⁶ Kimbrough, St. Jr. "Lyrical Theology: Theology in Hymns." in *Theology Today*, April 63, Issue 1, 2006, pp.22-37.

²¹⁷ Saliers, Don E. *Music and Theology*. Abingdon Press, 2007; Heaney, Maeve. L. *Music as Theology: What Music says about the Word*. Princeton Theological Monograph Series, Eugene, Oregon, Pickwick Publications, 2012; Begbie, Jeremy S, *Theology, Music and Time*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.

the glory of the Lord, as intended, but they are also cultural vessels for the gospel of Jesus Christ. They carry the vital pulse of the spiritual ethos and theology of the community, of their authors, and composers. Images and metaphors contained in hymns become a lens through which the past life of *fakafetuiaga* is glimpsed and thus experienced at some mysterious level.

This phenomenon is particularly true in the peculiarity of the sound and arrangement of the hymns. For the Niuean iconic sounds are linked to certain villages and districts, giving voice to their spirits dormant in the compositions of the hymns, just as singers make audible the voice of God contained in the lyrics and verses of the hymns. Again, the idea of story and sound in song connects Christians to God, the Composer of life-music as well as to those of the past and their traditions. This way of thinking is in line with Emily and Don Saliers tracing their songlines in *A Song to Sing, A Life to Live*.²¹⁸ The Saliers, father and daughter, interweave their own stories as well as those of others in songs and music as key aspects of spirituality in their lives. Similarly, in Niuean songs or hymns, there are stories or 'songlines' of people that intersect with God's epic song of life.

Therefore, traditional hymns are crucially important to those in diaspora. For many, traditional hymns are companions on the way; they are teachers and counsellors who have guided and nurtured the first generation as they grew up in their island homes and carried with them as they flowed across the *moana* to other places. These are part of the repertoire of influences that have aided in the shaping of individuals and communities; hymns are theology in their own right. They are theological statements as well as theological instruments; they are mediators.

²¹⁸ More on 'songlines' in father and daughter reflections in by Don E. & Emily Saliers, *A Song to Sing, A Life to Live*, San Francisco, CA, Jossey-Bass: A Wiley Imprint, 2005.

Saliers sees an important connection music makes between humans and the divine: "in most theistic traditions, seeing and hearing have a primary place in awakening, sustaining, and deepening awareness of the divine-human relationship".²¹⁹ What music can do is both pivotal and critical. Not only does music channel praise and adoration towards God but it is also a means whereby the Lord moves and touch people's hearts. As creation is seen as God's revelation, and the written vernacular is found to communicate his will, so too does music. In scriptures the Lord used music to mediate his love and concerns to humans. Zephaniah 3:17 "he will quiet you by his love; he (God) will exult over you with loud singing" and, that the Lord's "...heart laments for Moab like a harp." (Isaiah 16:11). If God can communicate with humanity in language and visions, how much more can he appeal to our senses through music. There is something special music does to people no other discipline or art can do. God speaks to people through many means and music plays an important role in God's relationship with his people. God's word and his love is conveyed to them through music - in all its forms and genres - whenever and wherever they go. God is heard and experienced in the listening to music, most especially when one is also participating in singing the Lord's song, particularly for one in diaspora.

There are effects music does to migrants who find themselves struggling in strange situations and how it affects their approach to life in new contexts. Words, lyrics, melody, rhythm, and harmonies in the voices really matter because God uses them all; they inform the singing public by conveying a sense of who they are, to whom they belong and where. There is then an emotive and affective nature to song. The words, the blending of music, sounds and hearing - mixed together - has the capacity to create what is called the synaesthetic effect. This special effect is further explained by Clive Pearson in his article,

²¹⁹ Sailers, Don E. *Music and Theology*, Abingdon Press: Nashville, 2007.

"Singing a Public Theology..."²²⁰ The affective nature of a song or hymn draws upon head and heart at the same time; it is a physical act while at the same time expressing the spirit. It makes use of all of the senses at the same time and has the capacity to move to heights and depths which are inexpressible, it seems, and beyond words.

3. The Role of Hymns in Communal Life

The singing of songs and hymns is a fundamental formative influence in Niuean culture. Its synaesthetic effect is not the same – for hymns here are not sung like how hymns are sung in a western tradition. The difference can be seen in a number of different settings. The first can be seen in what transpires following a death. The Liku women, for instance, will wail while singing

Ooi, ooi-ea! loi-ea! loi-ea!
I ooi te fakaalofa kia lautolu ne momoui..
'Ooi ea, loi-ea!...ooh

pity are you who are left behind
to suffer and grieve,
God will wipe away all the tears from your eyes...

The biblical allusion is to Revelation 21:14. "He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away." (Revelation 21:14). The lyrics of this funeral hymns are presenting the gospel message of hope for the bereaved; the women's wailing and singing enhances the delivery of that hope. It seeks to envelop the grieving family with sounds of the good

²²⁰ Clive Pearson here makes reference to Don Saliers' usage of the term 'synaesthetic effect'. Refer to Pearson's "Singing a Public Theology of Peace, Justice and Creation" in *Music in the Air: Exploring Spirituality in the Creative Arts*. Aotearoa, New Zealand: Summer/Autumn 2010, pp.24-32.

news of the risen. The way in which the song is sung fulfills a synaesthetic purpose. There has been deep fellowship through the observance of an *alaala* (an all night wake/vigil): there has been the singing of hymns, the reading aloud from Scriptures and constant prayer. Inspired by the natural sounds of nature, Niueans sing in community; the use of the *leo fakamotu* (island traditional singing) of men, women and children creates music that harmonizes with creation. No one voice can impact the inner soul as much as a communal chorus of the *fetuiaga*.

Singing is community building. It is created in a rhythm that is consistent with the patterns of the natural environment. The common method of teaching and learning is by listening and imitation.²²¹ The *asafo* or master composer(s) creates and arranges the song with the assistance of experienced singers before bringing the new song to the community for practice. These sessions involve experimentation of different voices, establishing more firmly the structure of the song; all this is done before any ornamentation is added.²²² The new song is then introduced for learning to the community where further tweaking and improvisation can be done as a communal exercise. The feel and final outcome of the new song may indeed be slightly different from the original version introduced by the composer. The tradition is for Niuean singers to give full vent to their voices. It is seen as a way of giving glory to God. The women are seated according to their particular voices and likewise the men: older children are seated with their parents whilst young ones play within the proximity of the practicing community. Over time, the young grow up learning by observing, listening to and humming the tunes. As they follow their parents and participate in the practices, they learn not only the traditional Niuean singing but, more important-

²²¹ Hetau Utatao, a master composer, is the surviving custodian of Mutalau traditional singing. He has taught the method ancestors used in learning new compositions. He insisted on intentional listening and imitation, following the intonation and use of voice as per tradition. The Mutalau community continues to abide by that rule of thumb.

²²² The methodology described here was relayed by another of the remaining Mutalau *asafo* master orator, author and composer Hafe Vilitama. For years, he worked closely with the late Ioane Kalike, a renowned bass and baritone, and their wives composing songs and hymns. It has always been a communal exercise.

ly, the good news of Jesus Christ and how the teachings are patterned into the reality of daily living and of being a *fetuiaga*.

4. *Tau Lologo* Songs

Images and metaphors featured in hymns and songs convey stories and deepen the understanding of the shape and nature of the Niuean church. These received hymns, their stories have had some influence in migrant churches in diaspora. This is so particularly in Aotearoa New Zealand where there is a much larger concentration of Niuean people.

In the Niuean traditional setting, music in general plays a vital role in history and education; it is to be found alongside ceremonies and stories and ancestral customs being orally passed down to new generations. Music and the arts play a pivotal role in shaping a distinct Niuean culture. Rituals are shaped by aspects of song, dance and costuming, and each aspect informs something about the composers, makers, wearers and symbols important to the village, family or individual. Epic legends and stories about cultural heroes are a part of village or tribal music traditions, and these tales are often an iconic part of traditional culture. To keep a homeward connection Niueans perform stories through song, music and dance, and the historical facts thus propagated are an integral part of Niuean beliefs in diaspora. The tunes, melodies and performances of songs and dances of the ancestors are repeated and there becomes an instant connection to their home and history; in a very real sense, they enliven the spiritual ethos of their progenitors even in a different locus. Over time, though, some traditional songs can vary slightly in diaspora from generation to generation with leaders recombining and introducing slight variations as new stories are woven into historical narratives. These (hi)stories are carried in music and songs and new generations weave and sew on their own to the main that goes back generations to their ancestors in the place of the *moana*.

The Niueans find most of their hymns in a hymnary, a repository of the *taoga* that is more than spiritual legacy. The Niuean hymnody comprises biblically based hymns that carried both the theological and cultural legacy of the people. The relationship between music and lyrics is interesting for migrants for they hold the key to part of their spiritual and cultural identity. However, apart from being the *taoga* that the hymnbook is, there are still questions that need answers not just to fully appreciate their purpose and function but also re-appropriate images and metaphors in order to make new meaning and weave new modes of being church in new contexts. The images and metaphors featured in hymns help the understanding of the shape and nature of the Niuean church and how they continue to influence churches in diaspora. Traditional images of the church that are present in the Niuean traditional hymns, for instance, become controlling metaphors in ecclesiological modeling and their peculiar styles and genre of songs, chants and hymns identify the theological and cultural background they come from.

It is time now to consider further the images which inform a Niuean hymnary and how that might assist those now resident in another country. This kind of enquiry has never been done before. There is no established pattern to follow. There is then a need to determine a line of approach. For the purpose at hand the focus falls initially upon the Niuean hymn book (*Ko e Tau Lologo Tapu Niue*).²²³

The Niuean Hymnbook is divided into two sections: the first is concerned with what are designated as *Tau Lologo Tuai* (The Traditional Hymns). The contrast is drawn with those which are regarded as *Tau Lologo Fooou* (The Modern Hymns). This is the only division there is. The comparison can be made with hymnaries like the Australian churches' *Together in Song*. Here, there is a theo-

²²³ *Ko e Tau Lologo Tapu Niue*, Ekalesia Niue, Malua Press, Samoa, reprint 2003. The original print is not known. Mentions in Percy Smith's book authored in 1901 indicated the possible period of the pre-1900's.

logical ordering: Psalms, God's Creation, Jesus Christ: Lord and Redeemer, Jesus Christ: Coming, Jesus Christ: Incarnation, Jesus Christ: Passion and Cross, Jesus Christ: Resurrection and Ascension, The Holy Spirit, Scripture, Church: Life and Witness, Church: Baptism and Confirmation, Holy Spirit, Discipleship, Chorus Chants and Canons, Communion Settings, Doxologies, Blessings, Amens.²²⁴ This order is consistent with the way in which denominational hymn books have often followed a theology derived from the pattern of the Creeds. By way of comparison the Niuean hymns are loosely placed in untitled clusters with a wide range of theological themes. The arrangement is disorderly. For instance, the funeral hymns are found all over the place. Hymns concerning Christology pervade the hymn book but are not ordered in themes or some kind of chronology.

Why this lack of order is the case is unclear. It could be attributed to either one of two things. The hymns may have been composed and collected/collated over a long period of time and the focus may not have been on category or order. Or, perhaps more likely, there was a lack of resources at the time for collation and publishing. The practical effect of this lack of separation makes the present task that little more demanding. There are no discrete sections, for instance, on various theological themes.

There is, nevertheless, some benefit in this recognition of a lack of structure. The way in which the *Ko e Tau Lologo Tapu Niue* (The Niuean Hymnbook) is organized provides a link back to the way in which the *tupuna*, the forebears, perceived and practices their faith. The hymns they sang and cherished have had a formative effect. They play an important role in forming and influencing the identities of the following generations. The metaphors in hymns and songs from this time and this collection are a key to our understanding an implicit ec-

²²⁴ *Together in Song, Australian Hymn Book II*, Harper Collins Publishers, 1999.

clesiology that is perpetuated in Niue and which will be carried forth to distant shores, like Australia.

One of the core concern will be the extent to which there is a balance between transcendence and immanence in how the work of Christ, the Spirit and the Creator God are represented. Will the focus fall too heavily upon an ‘other world’ of heaven as distinct from images and metaphors that are down to earth and intelligible in the business of everyday living?

The great majority of the hymns in the *Ko e Tau Lololo Tapu Niue* were composed well before 1903. This dating can be deduced from Percy Smith's article from his Journal in 1903 where he chronicled his research on the island in 1901.²²⁵ There have been no subsequent additions to the corpus of hymns since that time. The images and metaphors have thus become stable, or perhaps one might argue, frozen in an era which is no longer current.

The level of mystery which surrounds the origins of the *Ko e Tau Lololo Tapu Niue* raises many questions – some of which do not appear now to be able to be answered. Who wrote these hymns and when, for instance? Were some direct translations from the Samoan hymnary by Paulo and other Samoan teachers after him? And, if they are translations from the Samoan, then how accurate has been this difficult art in capturing images which were sufficiently nuanced for local Niuean reception and that synaesthetic effect? How contextualized are they? What does the title *Lololo Tuai* (Traditional Hymns) actually mean? How are they to be distinguished and recognized apart from *Lololo Fooou* (Modern Hymns)? Are those traditional hymns ones which were composed by Niueans themselves with traditional tunes? Or, were they a collection translated and used from the very beginning of the mission as distinct from a later translated

²²⁵ Smith, Percy. *Niue Fekai (or Savage) Island and its People*, Polynesian Society, vols. XI. XII, Whitcombe & Tombs Ltd, Dunedin, 1903, p.178.

body, *Ko e Tau Lologo Fooou*? And yet again, what does the title *Ko e Tau Lologo Fooou* really signify? In what ways were they new or modern? There has been a relatively short period of time between the first mission and the publication of this hymn book. The interval of time is only sixty years. With the passage of further time, how are the *Tau Lologo Fooou* to retain their value and description of being new and modern now over 100 years later?

It is highly likely that almost all the hymns were actually translations of English hymns by missionaries; that is likely to include the Samoan hymns if those were translated from the Samoan hymn book. The premise that some Niuean hymns were translated from the Samoan is that both Niuean and Samoan share a similar dialect: it would not be difficult a task. It is apparent that Paulo set about the task of translation early on in the history of the mission. It is conceivable that, though the hymn book is a reflection of the missionary period, there are ample signs of traditional compositions - as we shall see.

The *Ko e Tau Lologo Tapu Niue* established the foundational body of hymns to be sung. That foundation has remained and its capacity to inspire has not been altered by subsequent additions. Its pivotal role in the life of the *Ekalesia Niue* has been complemented by some other expressions of church music. The *Ekalesia Niue* is made up of a number local village congregations. Each local church has a handful of its own composed songs. It is not possible to say since when. Some of the Sunday School and youth songs were translations from foreign songbooks, mainly through the intermediary role of the resident missionary, the last being the Rev. Maru Check (also known as Misi Maru).

Misi Maru's (Rev. Maru Check) youth group visited in the mid-1970's; they taught a cluster of songs known at the time as being charismatic. Their focus was on the divinity of Jesus. Their songs and style of worship introduced Niueans to another form of worship and genre. The evangelism of Misi Maru brought a new genre of songs and singing to Niue and (inadvertently) created a revival

among the youth. These songs provided an alternative to an island whose repertoire of hymns had become stagnant. They were simple songs. There was a further effect arising out of this visit and its legacy.

The customary practice was for dancing not to be allowed in the church building. These songs often came with actions, however. The introduction of these simple songs by Misi Maru became a catalyst for the introduction of something which tied together a little more obviously lyric, rhythm and physical action – in effect, a version of the synaesthetic effect. A new lease of life came upon the church and Sunday school rally became a breeding ground for new songs reflective of Maru's genre and style. The 'Sunday School Songs' were born and grew in the 1970s and the youth movement was sparked into life. The way was paved for the Pentecostal movement to take foot in Niue. It became a vehicle for the introduction of new images and metaphors. The way was cleared for scholarship students studying overseas in Aotearoa-New Zealand to bring back with them a repertoire of contemporary songs that shook the former rigid church. What did the language of *Lologo Fooou* now mean? That which is modern and new was no longer to be found in the hymnary. Furthermore, the agents of change were no longer missionaries or venerated elders, but younger people. Though traditional hymns would still dominate services of worship, a new style of *Palagi* songs with a different set of instruments was now included. The charismatic songs were sung; they were sung to the accompaniment of guitars and other instruments. The introduction of such marked the decline in the appreciation of Niuean traditional hymns. The synaesthetic effect of these choruses was no longer necessarily bound to the cultural memory of Niue. There is here an implicit cutting of the ties that bind the young with the *tupuna*.

It is evident now that there was some variation in reception and implementation of hymns in the foundational *Tau Lologo Tapu Niue*. That can be revealed through the way in which verses from different hymns were put to use. Mutalau village for instance had created new music and melodies using the same hymns with their own figurations and ornamentations. They combine verses from dif-

ferent hymns in the Hymnbook, creating a new theological theme for special occasions. During the worship service for the opening of Niue's airport in 1973, Mutalau *asafo* (master composer) Hafe Vilitama, composed *Ha i nei e vakalele* ('here we have a *vakalele*' - a flying *vaka*) using verses from two hymns to reflect the spirit of the celebration.

Over time singing styles change and evolve; some were abandoned in favor of the new. The famed tunes and style of Mutalau and Liku villages, for example, had remained unchanged. They are more earthy and organic, steeped in tradition of their *tupuna*. By way of contrast, the tunes of Avatele, and Tamakautoga to some extent, are heavily influenced by Samoan pastors and by musicians sought especially for their skill in playing the piano. Many of their tunes and melodies are borrowed or influenced by foreign music especially composed using the organ. Sharing styles and compositions is not uncommon. Although each village has their own style, the sharing of styles was done by ministers and students at the island's Vailahi theological school.

There are hymns that are not published in the Niuean Hymnary. There is a marriage between the indigenous life and the Christian practice. The intersection between scriptural teachings and Niuean traditional melodies of different blends from village communities. These unpublished hymns are rarely written or documented. These are the *taoga* that are fast becoming extinct. The custodians who still sing these hymns and songs are very few; most are in their twilight years. In recent years, there have been attempts by one village community in diaspora to record their traditional hymns. But the task is made more difficult because only one or two remain within the community who remember the lyrics in their entirety, original composition and arrangement. The result is that the accuracy of the received hymns and their original sound is compromised; parts of the hymns are needed to be re-appropriated with some improvisation which often alters the impact they are supposed to have. Most critically, because only parts of these hymns are remembered, the community becomes reluctant to sing them altogether and, consequently, they are lost forever.

It is obvious that unpublished hymns tend to be more contextual, socio-historically centered than biblical in content yet they also carry theological and moral teachings. These hymns are more localized: they tell stories of faith in local struggles and provide admonition in regards to relational challenges. These endangered hymns becomes more poignant for the fracturing families and communities in diaspora. The unpublished hymns of Liku are classic examples: *Tau tama ua fa liuliu* (children, stop dissenting...) is one example of such:

Kikila e la, e la
The sun shines, the sun
maama e aho
The day has light,
pouli e po
the night is dark,
hokulo e moana
the ocean is deep.
Tokologa e tau tagata faliuliu
There are many disobedient people
i lalo he moana.
who are in the deep.
Ua fa liuliu ma tau fanau
Children, do not disobey
tokologa e tau tagata,
There are many
tokologa e tau tagata.
who are disobedient
Tokologa e tau tagata faliuliu
There are many who are disobedient.

Kia fakalilifu a mutolu
Be respectful
a, a,
a
a mutolu ke he tau patu.
to the elders.
Eke taha ke he gahua;
Persevere with good works;
kumi e tau, e tau mena tonu.
seek righteousness.
malaia e, malaia e,
Curse is, curse is,
e e e
is is...

E mahani hepehepe -
is wrong doing -
malaia, malaia e mahani hepehepe.
Curse is doing wrong

This is one of a few hymns that concerns the conduct of children. What is more fascinating is that there are not many children's songs that are equivalent to Sunday School choruses written especially to be sung by children. This absence reflects two issues: the first is the neglect of resourcing children's ministry; the second has to do with the lack of recorded local materials.

Children were brought up singing their parents hymns and participated in singing practices. This exercise led to a formation of young generation well versed and cultured in the local culture and faith. Likewise, the stories of significant moments of the church and community are told in the local hymns. They are passed down through dramatizing through hymns and songs. One example is a Liku hymn telling a story about Peniamina and Paulo, the first missionaries to Niue. It was a conversation between the early patriarchs of the Niuean Church:

Ma Paulo na e, 'Ke ha? ke ha? Ko au ha nei ma Peniamina! ma Peniamina! Hau ke o! Hau ke o! hau ke o tokoua a taua ke uta e maama ki Niue.

O Paulo! What is it? What is it? I'm here Peniamina! O Peniamina! Let us go, let us go, let us both go and take the Gospel to Niue.

It is not the simple statement of fact about the two prominent names attributed to introducing and propagating the Christian gospel in Niue island but the way it is sung; the responsive voices of men and women in a distinctive Liku genre perfectly highlights the urgency of the mission and underscores the significance of the two names of the two patriarchs of the Niuean church.

Like hymns and songs in other cultures catechisms and biblical passages are set to tunes in the Niuean style. Such musical renditions have not only en-

hanced memorization of the passages and stories, they have also enabled them to be appropriated at deeper levels of meaning. Utilizing the familiar style and sounds of the local culture, songs facilitate the penetration of the word of God into the experience of the singers and listeners alike. This practice was an important exercise early in the propagation of the gospel in an oral culture. Similar exercises have been done in indigenous communities where songs were used to carry out the gospel to the wider community. Greg Kernaghan has described, for instance, how oral learners of Mozambique listened to the sermon, discussed it amongst themselves and "then 'pack' the teaching into a song that that all will learn. Then they can sing this song as they walk the long journey home, after which they will unpack the teaching and give it to their people over the next weeks."²²⁶

Biblical themes are contextualized and woven into the local language, tunes and concepts. Adaptations into tunes and melodies of the Niuean alone helps the gospel stories becomes an organic part of Niuean life. A cluster of hymns between hymn 187 to 237 are examples of this where it contains Jesus' approach to little children (192, 194, 196 and 199); biblical heroes such as Samson, David, and Joseph (224); Daniel in the lion's den (202); resources that function as a *vaka* or a vehicle for meaning of the gospel and Christian teaching to be received in the inner life in such a fashion that it demanded continuous application of its meaning to the normality of everyday social interaction.

Hymn 206 stresses the importance of church as a focal place for spiritual formation and education.²²⁷

²²⁶ Greg Kernaghan, "Turning Sermon Notes into Song" in *Worship and Mission for the Global Church*, James R. Krabill (Gen. ed), USA, William Carey Library, 2013, p.216.

²²⁷ Until the beginning of the 20th century, reading, writing and basic arithmetic was provided by church schools in each village. After Niue was annexed to New Zealand by Britain, the centralized school was established in Alofi where some were fortunate to receive a higher level of education. It was not until 1930s when a school was built in Hakupu village followed by Mutalau a few years later and other villages thereafter.

Ko e logo ne ta, ko e logo ne ta,
 The bell is ringing, the bell is ringing,
ko e aoga ne eke.
 The school is starting;
O mai a ke o a tautolu ki ai.
 let us go there.
Homo ha talu aoga.
 Our school is great;
Ke totou tohi ai,
 there we will read,
Mo e lologo ai,
 we will sing;
Homo ha talu aoga,
 our school is great.
O mai a, o mai a ke he aoga.
 Let us go, let us go to school.

The opening verse speaks about the importance of learning to read and sing. Verses two, three and four emphasize the features of the Christian etiquette. Verse two teaches about the importance of prayer and the posture and conduct of formal prayer - *Ua falelea, ko e liogi he eke, mohe a, ua kikite fano* means 'don't make noises, close your eyes as you pray, and don't look around.' Even the reference to the sounding of the village bell takes singers back to the early days when there were no government schools and the local churches were a centre for learning. Learning was deemed a crucial activity if children are to be the future main service providers for families and wider community, and model citizens carrying Christian values to the next generation. *Mohe a, ua kikite fano* simply says 'close your eyes, don't look around,' admonishing children that prayer time or worship is to be observed as very important and thus sacred. *Ke lilika ki ai; nofo fakatekiteki, ko e lki ha i ai* 'respect the time of prayer/worship, sit still because the Lord is present.' Verse three and four follow the same pattern of encouragement, *Totou e Tohi, ti ua fefeua, lali ke moua ke matala e loto* 'Read the word and remember, try to grow/expand your knowledge'; *Homo e Tohi Tapu mo taoga* translates, 'the Word is great for wisdom; *o mai a ke he aoga* - 'Come to school.' The last verse followed the formula of admonition - *Fanogonogo, fanogonogo, kua fakamatala e kupu, ko e Galue haia* 'Listen, listen, the word is now preached, that is the banquet.' This final part of the hymn encourages both singers and listeners to focus on the reading, stillness and a

sense of respect in times of worship. It reminds them that the Word is *taoga* that provides nourishment for the soul. The practice of listening and learning the Word of God is paramount in spiritual formation. Scripture and Sunday school catechumens, etiquette and mannerism (Hymn 206) are set and expressed in a traditional tunes; this hymn and many others with key biblical texts and stories set in the traditional tunes and style aid memorization.

5. The Task of Theological Reflection

It is now time to take a step back from the corpus of hymns and songs and how different villages effectively established their own musical canon. The fact that there was no distinction in categories in the original hymnary other than between traditional and modern poses a theological question. The standard way in which a hymnary is organized provides a theological framework which can assist in the selection of hymns for a service of worship as well as tacitly helping congregants rehearse a range of theological themes – almost without knowing it. The absence of this structure is an invitation to search for some sort of principle or leading theological motif that has somehow shaped the collection. It may well be that this shaping is haphazard.

For this purpose the theme of this thesis provides a critical point of reference and way in to the task. This thesis is concerned with an ecclesiology, with an understanding of what it means to be the church, and what kind of images and models of Christian living it promotes. There is then an expectation that we will find a range of hymns that sing about the church of Christ. Here is the surprise: there are only two hymns out of a total of 317 that have any direct reference to the 'church', translated as the *ekalesia*, *per se*. Furthermore, they are hymns which come right at the end of the hymnary, and thus find themselves, for some reason or other, cast among the *Lologo Fooou*. The first is numbered 311 and the second is numbered 315. They are both titled, *Ko e Ekalesia* (The *Ecclesia*) but only hymn 311 speaks specifically about the church. Ecclesial themes in this

hymn are translated: Jesus Christ is the Church's foundation; those who are called will always know his gentle rule; they who believe experience his *koinonia*; friends he binds to himself in his crucifixion; let us give thanks constantly.

The comparison between the two reveals that only one privileges the church as its primary theme throughout. By way of comparison, the references in hymn 315, *Ko e Ekalesia*, only make what might be termed an incidental reference to the church. The surrounding lyrics are more Christological. The reference is to the church's foundation – thus its reason for being – and that is to be found in Jesus Christ. The image is one of *fakaveaga*. It is not an attribute of the church itself but is rather designed to show that any image, mark or model of the church is dependent upon the confession that *Iesu Keriso* is the Lord (*Iki*). Such a confession is appropriate insofar as the Greek word for Lord, *kyrios*, will eventually come into the German word for church, *kirche*. The etymology of the English word for church is from the same origin and thus refers to 'belonging to the Lord'. In terms of the *fakaveaga* the foundation of the church is bound to the Lordship of Christ which is seen as a 'new beginning'. That new beginning is made known through his blood and water, which presumably is a reference to the Eucharist and the sacrament of baptism. There is no reference to bread.

Ko e fakaveaga he Ekalesia
The church's foundation
Ko e Iki haana ni ko Iesu Keriso
is its Lord himself - Jesus Christ
Ko e foafoa foou taute e ia
A new beginning he initiated
ke he haana a toto
with his blood
Katoa mo e vai
and water.

This wording obviously points to its biblical root: Christ is the only foundation and cornerstone of the church (1 Corinthians 3:10-11); the second and third verses highlights Jesus' redemptive act that leads us to our everlasting home '*Kia fakaaue kia Keriso ni, kia taute pihia he tau aho oti ato fakalataha a tautolu oti ke he haana fale ma e tukulagi*' (verse 3).

The first hymn numbered 311 has a more extended ecclesial focus. The intention is much the same as hymn numbered 315. Once again the reference is to *lesu Keriso* being the church's foundation. The language which is then employed is one of fellowship, love, and Christ's lordship is conceived in terms of a 'gentle rule'. One image which emerges here is one of 'friends': that is, of course, an image which looks back to the way in which Jesus sometimes referred to himself. It is an image which provides a sense of intimate fellowship, a sense of belonging which is further expressed through a reference to their being 'united'. It is a thankful fellowship of friends. The rhetoric of the hymn may be one of foundation, lordship and rule: it is nevertheless a community whose origins lie, not in culture, but in the crucifixion and humility of Christ. The reference to humility resonates strongly of the Christological hymn in Philippians 2:5-11. The *ekalesia* here is established in a mood of humility rather than being, for instance, a fellowship of warriors being seen as 'soldiers of Christ'.

Kua fakaalofa ke he Ekalesia,
The Church is loved
ha ko Iesu Keriso kua fakave ai ni
for Jesus Christ is her foundation;

Ko lautolu oti ni kua taute ainei ke
All who purpose
iloa tumau ni haana pule totonu
to know his gentle rule;

Ha i ai, i loto ni haana fakafetui
In him, they who believe
ma lautolu oti ni kua tua kia ia
have their fellowship.

Ko e tau kapitiga kua pipi e ia ke
Friends who are united
he haana matulei mo e haana hulalo
by his crucifixion and humility.

Kia fakamonu mai a tautolu mogonei,
Let us give thanks
ti taute pihia he tau aho oti nei.
now and every day.

The impression is quickly gained that the Niuean hymnary is primarily Christological. There is an absence of hymns to do with the church. That absence simply replicates the absence of a disciplinary theological reflection on what it means to be the church. The relative scarcity of Niuean ecclesiological images also points to an understanding that contextualization was not encouraged by the missionary church at the time.

6. The Quest for a Contextual Image

In the absence of much reference to the church in the Niuean hymnary the search can shift to consider potential images that might help fill the void. For this purpose the timing is right for seeking out metaphors that are bifocal. What is meant by this suggestion is that the verbal image or metaphor is both at home in the biblical text as well as the Niuean culture. By seeking out such images the prospect of both addressing the coming together of an indigenous culture and its ongoing quest for an authentic Christian identity.

The metaphor that most immediately lays claim for service is the image of the boat, ship or canoe – in Niuean, the *vaka*. This symbol has a rich biblical history. Jesus himself is found to be on a ‘boat’ crossing from one shore to another on a number of occasions. When the crowds are pressing in upon him he teaches from a boat. Mark tells the story of Jesus being asleep on a boat while a great storm is raging: he is woken by the fearful disciples and calms the waters. (Mark 4:35-41). The story of Noah's Ark became a typological account which was applied to the saving work of Christ. (1 Peter 3:20-21). The Ark symbolizes salvation the safety of God's people from a tumultuous devastating flood. Several of the disciples were fishermen, well acquainted with boats and nets: their call to follow Christ is expressed on one occasion to become ‘fishers of men (sic)’.

The attraction of the boat as an image to represent the church is made plain in the decision of the World Council of Churches to use it as their symbol. In so doing the ecumenical body was reaching back into the early church where the boat could represent the church being tossed about on a sea of persecution and worldly beliefs. The metaphor is to be found in the patristic writings of Clement of Alexandria, *The Apostolic Constitutions*, and Tertullian. In times of persecution the boat could be used to disguise the symbol of the cross – the masthead serving in its place.

The boat imagery, of course, is a powerful concept to an Oceanic people. It represents transport; it is a way in which these people traverse the great *moana* of their liquid continent. It is also a means of food security and leisure. In terms of culture it has a daily significance very close to the heart of life and being quite apart from any biblical analogy. In the Niuean language the word for boat is *vaka*. Now some care needs to be exercised in how this word is understood. The translation of the biblical *vaka* is ambiguous. In places, a boat or ship is translated as *vaka* but it must be qualified with *toga* (ship, boat or south). *Vakatoga* is thus translated ship or boat as in the hymn 189 *ha i ai e 'toga tote' ne holo* (there is a small boat sailing). Another example, *vakalele* (flying *vaka* or aeroplane), is found in one of the Mutalau unpublished hymns. To use *vaka* by itself is simply referring to a Niuean outrigger canoe. It is natural therefore to visualize the canoe whenever *vaka* is mentioned.

There are four main types of *vaka* in Niue: a one-person, three-person, four-person and a six-manned canoe. The four or six-person *vaka* is most effective for purposes of transport. It can travel long distances.²²⁸ A three-person *vaka* is convenient for fishing, particularly flying-fish fishing. Like many things Niuean, each part of the *vaka* has a meaning and purpose yet it is a unit; it is a body.

²²⁸ Songs and legends tell stories of four-manned canoes were used to frequent nearby islands. Loeb was informed of a Niuean four-manned canoe that even drifted ashore at Aotearoa, New Zealand. See Loeb, E. *History and Traditions of Niue*, 1926, pp.91-92.

Unity and togetherness is imperative if the body succeeds in serving its purpose.

The Niuean *vaka* is actually quite small; traditionally, Niueans do not construct double-hulled canoes using sails unlike the Maoris and Samoans who used large vessels which could carry a number of people and withstand long voyages. The landing places was (and is still) not conducive for large canoes anyway. This physical fact, of course, leads to isolation and the inability to embark on long journeys across Oceania and makes people curious about what is on the other side of the *mapualagi* (horizon). Such curiosity moved a man to say, *ko e mena haia ne tokaloto ai he Niue ke tuku fenoga* (curiosity was perhaps at the heart of a Niuean that led to a culture of migration). The song book is riddled with aspirations about escaping to another place that offers freedom to wander. This opportunity first came about when whalers and traders frequent the Niuean shores in the late 19th and throughout the 20th century.

One hymn which evokes a picture of the three-man *vaka* is Hymn 180. Here the word *muivaka* is used. There is no *muivaka* in a one man outrigger canoe. The lyrics read:

Tiaki a e mahalohalo
Stop doubting
Ha kua tata mai haaku a Iki,
Because my Lord is present
To muivaka a Iesu ainei,
Jesus is the Captain (*muivaka*)
Ke hao ai e vaka mo e momoui ai.
So that the boat (*vaka*) is safe and we are saved.

The hymn is known by its title as *Ko e Mafanaaga* (The Comfort). It resonates strongly with the idea of Noah's ark representing Christ's salvific work as well as Jesus stilling the storm in the gospels and the ancient image of the church of a boat. For the Niuean it brings to mind immediately a sense of encouragement for those experiencing a rough journey while on board a *vaka* in dangerous

seas. The Niuean waters can be uncompromising at times, especially in the cyclone season (November to April). Many Niueans who have been through severe cyclones can identify with the imagery and the experience of uncertainty at times like this but find comfort in the knowledge that Jesus is at the helm and in control. The storms of life may toss and knock us around but we can ride it through by trusting in God with Christ who is in control. The Lord (*Iki*) is also represented in a form which is familiar – as captain.

The metaphor of a three-person *vaka* is a wonderful resource for deep theological discussion that has multiple themes. Firstly, it can serve as a metaphor of the church and salvation. The immediate symbol that comes to mind is that of Noah's ark in Genesis. It symbolizes the salvation and continuity of humanity and living species in creation. Paul's journeys in the perilous seas saw the ship as means of safety (Acts 27-28). Secondly, the *vaka* can become a symbol of the church engaged in mission to the nations. It symbolizes movement, travel, migration and journey (*vaka* - canoe; *vakatoga* (ship); *vakaafi* (motor vehicle); *vakalele* (aeroplane). The *vaka* imagery was adopted by the WCC as an early Christian symbol of the Church, embodying faith, unity and mission. Again, Paul's missionary journeys on ships taking short cuts in otherwise long inhospitable desert walks. The *vaka* becomes a vessel for the Good News of Christ to the world. Such interpretation of the *vaka* imagery is meaningful to Niueans who participated in the *Missio Dei* to the Pacific nations like Papua New Guinea, Tuvalu. The Niuean church, in fact, purchased a mission ship and named it *Alofi* after Niue's capital town. As expected, one of the few indigenous images of *fakafetuiaga* (assembly/gathering/fellowship) we find in the Niuean hymn book is that of the *vaka*. It is a metaphor that symbolizes mainly the church but also in some cases the gospel, salvation and mission.

The first hymn in the *Tau Lologo Tapu Niue* to make use of the imagery of the *vaka* and the liquid language suitable for this Oceanic context is Number 36: *Ka havili haku vaka, ti peaua e moana, uka lahi ni, ka e pehe - pule a koe*. The translation reads: "When my canoe is blown by the winds, and the sea becomes

rough and challenging, but I say, 'you're in control.'" Hymn 61 about prayer contained a traditional image of a *vaka* as a symbol of the church. Verse four and five goes: 'It is prayer that sails forth our *vaka*; through Him we arrive safely evading a stormy day. So, pray, by all means, request. Move closer to the Lord; pray to God. Blessed is he who prays.' Again, in verse three of hymn 93, here is reference to a *vaka* that points to a journey about to arrive and anchor safely '*Ko e Afi tupou ni ka po, ka aho ko e aolu. E Vaka kua teitei hoko; fai taula ne ke tuku*' translates, 'The pillar of fire by night, but the pillar of cloud by day. The Canoe/Journey is about to arrive and anchor safely.' The beginning of the verse makes reference to the symbols of the exodus desert story (*Afi tupou* - pillar of fire; *aolu* - pillar of cloud, Exodus 13:22), unusually followed by the metaphor of the *vaka* canoe. Here there is a strange use of a sea vessel alongside symbols of an exodus desert story. Thus, *vaka* is employed in the hymns as representative of a 'people en route' or 'Journey.' In the context of this hymn, *vaka* symbolizes a people about to arrive, and be anchored at a safe destination. This imagery, though eschatological, resonates well with current Niuean rhetoric and culture of migration. Prominent Niuean leaders in diaspora (Rev Ikimahina Iki-toelagi, Rev. Uea Tuleia and Mr. Granby Ray Siakimotu among others) argue that Niuean migration is a blessing. The lyrics of these hymns parallel the exodus passages in scriptures, demonstrating the belief that Christians were repeating the communal experience of the exiles from Egypt (John 3:14; Heb 11:23-29; 1 Cor 10:1-12). The similarity is not inconsistent with the story of God's people journeying towards the land flowing with 'milk and honey' (Heb 11:14-16). The language of exile and citizens resonates with a couple of Minear's image of the church as a citizens in exile.²²⁹ The notion of movement and pilgrim is reflected in the Niuean hymns and the themes have become very popular in the hearts of many. Although they involve 'liquid' language of *moana* and 'migration' many Niueans interpret other meanings from them. One of the renown funeral hymns '*Ha i ai ke he lagi ha talu motu*' or 'Heaven is our true home' has, in the minds of many, the destination 'heaven' to be synonymous

²²⁹ Minear, Paul S. *Images of the Church in the New Testament*, Louisville, Kentucky, Westminster John Knox Press, 2004, pp.60-62.

with New Zealand or Australia as places that resemble heaven on earth - a place on the 'other side' (*ko e faahi atu*).

It makes no sense to speak of *vaka* without also referring to *moana*. The Niuean hymnary is riddled with the imagery of our liquid environment. The people of Oceania have a deep respect for the *moana* and have harmonious relationship with it. Halapua refers to a living dynamic of interconnectedness between island peoples and the *moana*.²³⁰ The hymnary reflects more than just this relationship. The geological make-up of the island means that the surrounding sea is often very turbulent. This is the case especially on the north-eastern side of the island.²³¹ The following hymns – numbers 31, 36, 100, 150, 161, 180, 189 - all capture this geological feature and do so in a way which commands a sense of realism for those on the island as well as serving as a constant reminder for those living in diaspora. The story of Jesus sleeping in the boat while caught in the storm in the sea of Galilee (Mark 4:35-40) is retold in Hymn 189 under the heading of *Ko e Tala ke he Vaka* - The Story about the *Vaka*. Hymn 150 echoes both the Psalms and the Niuean experience wrought of its unique geology: the metaphor of the *moana* is used to describe the glory and power of God. In verse 4 the people sing: *Ko e leo haau a nei paku-u-lagi, ko e tau peau ne omai, he pule malolo haau ni, ka e nakai ko koe ia...* which translates as, 'Your voice thunders and by your power the waves are coming, though you are not in them'. Verse 4 of hymn 36 echoes the themes of storm and the Lord who is in control: *Ka havilia haaku vaka, ti uka lahi ni, ka e pehe, pule a koe* (When my canoe is blown by the winds, and the sea becomes rough and challenging, but I say, you're in control). For those who are familiar with the north and eastern coast lines of Niue the lyrics of these hymns resonate; they have a hermeneutical and synaesthetic immediacy. The image of Jesus' boat could even be pictured in the

²³⁰ Winston Halapua, *Waves of God's Embrace: Sacred Perspectives from the Ocean*, Norwich, London, Canterbury Press, 2008, p. 8.

²³¹ Niue is single upraised coral island, an inactive volcano without surrounding lagoons that protect the island from harsh weather conditions. It is a single island as its ancient name suggests '*Nukututaha*' meaning 'The Island that stands alone.'

afati (the rough coastline) and the salty taste of the sea-sprayed imagined as the boat is pounded by the Niuean unforgiving waves. That immediacy is there present in close association with the salvific purpose of Christ.

Iesu, fakaalofa mai, fakamalu mai kia au. Ko koe ni ke oki ai ka loka mo e to peau. Aua neke tu mamao, ka kua to e afa. Takitaki au kia hao ke he moana uka

Jesus, have pity and protect me. I can rest in you when the sea is rough and the waves overwhelm. Do not stand at a distance while the storms are raging. Lead and save me from the difficult sea.

The way in which the *vaka* is also a mode of transport for crossing the *moana* can be described as being ‘thick’. It can perform more than one function when it is applied to the Christian life. The *vaka* can be the vehicle which allows us to journey through life, through its hard times, for the sake of arriving at a better place. One example of such is hymn 161, verse 2:

*Kia takitaki e koe au ka loka lahi e tau peau,
ne fakaalofa mai ke he vaha kua mole,
ti manatu ai au to leveki mai e ia;
ato hao au ke he motu i luga,
to toka ki tua e moana uka,*

you lead me on when the waves are turbulent;
in the past He (God) cared for me,
therefore, he will protect me;
I will arrive safely to heaven
when the stormy *moana* is left behind.

The rough and destructive *peau* (waves) in the *moana* refer to the confronting and difficult times in one's life. They represent hardships encountered in a journey of life contrasted with the calmness that associates with the presence of Jesus. The *vaka* becomes a symbol of the church and a heavenward journey; that is its face value. But lyrics these have now acquired an extra layer of meaning. They have become multivalent. The heavenward journey can now be collapsed into the flight to another land, another ‘better place’ away from the toil and hardship of living on Niue on minimum income and at a subsistence level.

This hymn has the capacity to address the very different kind of cultural and spiritual context that arises out of being in diaspora. It becomes diachronic in the process.

7. More Than One Meaning

Let me explain by way of making use of popular songs and poems. These lyrics are not designed for worship in the *ekalesia*. In popular form they describe a range of attitudes towards life on Niue and how migration is viewed. The importance of these verses for our purposes is that these songs and poems – and others like them – create a kind of background consciousness within those who will also sing hymns about heaven, a better world; being on a journey. The lyrics of hymns are never simply sung within an enclosed world of fideism and spirit. There are filters of experience and yearning at work which help provide a way of interpreting and making connections to the balance of one's life. With regards hymns like hymn 61 'heaven' can easily become the place to which one migrates; the *moana* is crossed in order to enter into this new life. The invocation for protection may now mean a turning to the God who will care for the emigrant in the storms of life in that new land. The hymn can now be sung and understood in that spirit while at the same time it elicits a kind of nostalgia for the island and its surrounding ocean. The songs of migration are more popular in form but they also mediate opinion, emotion, and a regard for the rupture which the journey from one country to another necessarily involves.

The height of Niuean migration occurred during the 1970s. Vaguna from Tuapa Uhomotu was a popular singer-songwriter at that time. One of his songs was directed at the families that chose to migrate to New Zealand. The lyrics were accompanied by a catchy tune.

Kikila mai e tau fetu he lagi
The stars in the heavens are
tuga ne mamali fakafiufiu mai.

mockingly smiling down
He nonofo ke he lalolagi fuluola nei (fuluola nei)
As we live in this beautiful world
he mitaki a koe ha taua ma kapitiga
You're fortunate my friend
ko e fano hane fai ke evaeva
because you will be going on holiday
ka e kelea au he nofo i Niue ko e uka fano vao.
Unlike myself who is left behind in Niue to toil in the bush garden.

Manatu nakai e koe e tau matua
Will you remember your parents/elders
ne nonofo i Niue
back in Niue?
Poke galo noa ni ia koe he mitaki lahi
Or will you forget, blinded by
e tau tu i Niusilani
New Zealand money;
he fae tohi mai he tau Niue
Or, so they wrote
ne nonofo i Okalana
from those who resides in Auckland.

Ti eke a koe ma matakainaga
Be careful my friend
neke tutakina e lautolu ia
lest they lure you
He o ke ofo mo e nava
for they have been surprised
e tau motu kehe
and glorified foreign countries.

Ko e mahina kua hake mai uta
The moon is rising in the east
Ko e laa kua to ki lalo
as the sun falls in the west
Ko e haaku na manatu a ia.
my opinion is they had run away
Ko e fehola he nakai fai ate
because they lack courage/resilience
Ke nakai tuga a tikita nei
unlike this poor fella
ne nofo ni ku tupuna e motu.
who has remained to look after the land
Ati finage la koe ke eva na taua
come up and visit me
he taone ko Uhomotu
at the town of Uhomotu.

There are other songs which dream of an escape to a better life in New Zealand. Many years ago, a Niuean poem, *Fakaalofa te* (How sorry), described the frustration of hard labour in a rocky environment of the island referred to as *manunu tonaefu* (a burnt and barren land). The poem tells the story of a typical lifestyle that involves working on the land. It describes a man working to clear the burnt vegetation for a taro plantation; the burnt land had lost its vitality because it was neglected and weeds were beginning to take over. Drought had made it harder for the planter to penetrate the *fonua* for taro shoots. As the hungry, dehydrated and weary planter worked to get the job done, he saw a long white cloud floating towards the southern skies - waving, beckoning and calling him to follow - "Come, come, come..." invited the cloud.

Fakaalofa te,
How sorry,
Hane gahua ke he manunu tonaefu
As I worked on the burnt barren land
Motofu kula hane fiti mo e tega
The *motofu kula* blooms and shed its seeds
Momoho e manini humelie
The sweet *manini* berries ripened
Totolo vihi e fue he malala
The *fue* vine creeps on the charred ground.

Fakaalofa te,
How sorry,
E tua kikila huni niu
My bare back shines, as anointed by coconut oil
Gahu memege he mamiti
Gahu tree shrunk empty
Tu la e manono haana pakupaku
branches of the *manono* tree stretched dry
Kokono liu tumai e nonu he goto
The *nonu* strained to sprout in resurrection

Fakaalofa te,
How sorry,
Kavakava e Lima kolopupu
Sweaty palms blistered
Tautau vela e laa he tumuakiulu.
Scorching sun hung low above my head
Tomumu e fonua lau koho penu.
Fonua rumbled, pounded by stunted spear
Kelekele temagao fakamaga talia e fakauka
reluctant soil hardly acknowledges my sweat

Fakaalofa te,
How sorry,
Vivivivi e tokupu he hoge
Hungry belly trembled
Alelo mago fia palaia vai
Parched tongue desperate for water
Aafe, liligi hifo ho vai ke fuifui
Stop by, pour down to drench
Efu ni kia haaku tufaaga?
Are ashes my lot?

Fakaalofa te,
How sorry,
Loto konokonoi to fiu
Wearing of the heart well spent
Oi te! Aoga nakai e mahigaa?
Hey! Reward for my perseverance?
E aolu tea holo fakafiu mai i toga ki lalo!
O, a long white cloud's drifting south west!
Heketakina ke he haana aalo mai. 'Hau, hau, hau.
Lured by its wave, 'Come, come, come'
Fakaalofa te!
How sorry!

The insistence of escaping to an easier life is seen as weak by those who wish to remain and uphold the homeland. Vaguna of Tuapa used his lyrics to argue that emigrants took an easy way out. They were looked upon with disdain and were viewed as weak; they were 'running away' from hard work and *fakafetui-aga* community responsibility. In a similar vein, the husband and wife duo, Taso and Malia Tukuniu, sang of paradise, though with all due awareness that material blessings do not come easily and without cost.

Talahau mai ko Niu Silani ko e palataiso
They say that New Zealand is paradise
Palataiso ne ha ai?
How is it paradise?
Kua pule he tula e moui he tagata.
Time rules/dictates a man's life
kai ke he tupe, ti mohe ke he tupe
Need money to eat, need money to sleep
Ka ai fai tupe kua ono ke he lagi,
Without money, look to the heavens
manatu a Niue kua tuga e manu mate.
Remember Niue like a dead carcass.

Their song is also a reaction to some of the 'push' factors in migration. In one of the verses they point the finger directly to the politicians and issues of justice regarding nepotism and favoritism: *Kua ole au Kia mutolu toko fa...* (I appeal to the four of you...) referring to the cabinet ministers who decide on policy matters to take heed of the genuine needs of the people. These were not isolated protests in form of songs. Fuata Muta likewise sang from Sydney, Australia about the political dissatisfaction that provided excuses for many to migrate.

In a small country where nothing remain hidden, details of government decisions are often leaked to the public and information about corruption and nepotism becomes an impetus for migration. However, whatever the reason for migration, New Zealand has always been held by Niueans to be a 'land flowing with milk and honey.' Letters from families in New Zealand, as Vaguna pointed out, "blinded by New Zealand money...so they wrote from Auckland..." Airmail would come on a weekly flight telling of the amazing 'new' life that contrasts with the life of hard labour in Niue. Many other popular songs of the time glorified life in New Zealand that moved people like Taso and Malia to question the wisdom of abandoning their home. They pointed to the delusion that 'paradise' is outside the rugged rock that has been the home of Niueans for centuries. It appears that they were not mistaken given that many migrant Niueans today struggle in their new 'paradise.' The majority are living in rented homes and Housing New Zealand corporation accommodation contrary to their parents' dreams of better education that leads to better careers and lifestyle choices. In 2006, there were only 21% of Niueans in New Zealand who owned or partly owned a house they were residing in compared to 53% of the total New Zealand population. Of those who own or partly own their dwellings 28% are Niuean born compared to only 16% New Zealand born.²³²

²³² Statistics New Zealand www.stats.govt.nz, 2006 Census, pp.26-27.

The songs of migration composed and sang in the thick of migration to New Zealand in the 1970s may well have been justified at the time when it came to employment and lifestyle choices but the 'paradise' that most sought has not turned out to be the one they dreamt it would be. Today, the prophetic message found in Taso and Malia's song about 'paradise' has hit home for many. The pendulum has swung the other way: the true 'paradise' appeared to be the one they left years before. The song alluded to the fact that Niue is 'paradise'; that the rock formations and all its tropical vegetation has incomparable beauty. Tourists constantly remarked that there is no place like Niue with its pristine waters and unspoiled natural environment, and the most friendly people.²³³ The few who remained behind had helped build an island state that is the envy of many despite the limited choice of employment and lifestyle. They accept that the social responsibilities are part and parcel of living in paradise. The church had been the hub of building *fakafetuiaga*. Faith had played an important role in retaining the Christian and social values that is the conscience of a nation.

Conversely, Niueans in diaspora had never forgotten their place of origin. At every social gathering, songs of home are played or sung with spirit and emotion that Niue is powerfully represented in their celebration. Songs became points of conversation between first generation migrants, New Zealand and Australian-born members. Songs spark stories that inspire the young to hunger after their ethnic identity.

In the light of these popular songs words like 'heaven', crossing the *moana*, withstanding the strong waves and the like can be heard at various levels. They may evoke a traditional meaning which looks upon this world as a place to endure in preparation for a better world, heaven. They can also carry the experi-

²³³ The absolute majority of comments in the Visitor's Book in the Niue Tourism Department office voted Niue as a tourist destination with "super friendly" people incomparable with any other.

ence of migration and the effect on families left behind as well as what is required in the new land. Or, they can combine the two.

8. The Distinctive Niuean Synaesthetic Effect

The composition and styles of hymn singing are also influenced by the context out of which they come. From the use of the Niuean vocabulary, the images they describe to the sound and tunes they use, the physical context is just as influential to the formation of *fetuiaga* as its socio-cultural milieu. The local village environment informs one's being. Inspired by the natural sounds of nature, Niueans sing in community: the use of the *leo fakamotu* (traditional island sounds) of men, women and children creates music that harmonizes with creation. No one voice can impact the inner soul as much as a communal chorus of the *fetuiaga*. The communion through singing goes beyond the realm of people. Composers like Hafe Vilitama write and compose songs being very aware of the sounds, smell and visual images that surrounded him. He explained that composing new hymns or songs takes place over a period of time in deep reflection while working on the taro plantation or fishing on the reef. He felt closer to God as he worked to the rhythm of the *fonua* and the *moana*. This is not unusual according to ethnomusicologists who believed that many indigenous composers mimic natural sounds.²³⁴

The observations from the natural environment and the arrangement of the choir also affect the sound and style Niueans produce. This is apparent in the way the people of Liku and Mutalau sing, for instance, where their sounds are more earthy, rough, sharp, with almost a jagged edge to their singing analogous to the sharp and abrupt rock formation that dominates the north and eastern landscape. In contrast, the dominant style of the western villages is much calm-

²³⁴ The intimate cultural connections that the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have with the land and sea, for example, are kept alive through their music and other art forms.

er and more obviously harmonious. The villages of Avatele, Tamakautoga, Alofi, Makefu, Tuapa, Namukulu and Hikutavake are nestled at the lower terrace and enjoy easy access to the calm sea almost all year round. The sweet melodies and harmonious sounds of the hymns of western seaside communities are indigenous yet there seems to be a parallel of many hymns to the Samoan and Tongan graceful and traditional sounds. The Samoan influence became more established when Samoan musicians were brought to play the piano.²³⁵ They brought with them and introduced structured yet a much more controlled homogenous type of singing analogous to Samoan singing. Given that most of the songs in the Niuean hymnary were translated from Samoan and English, the learning of hymns in a genre of which the printed hymns were meant for was relatively straight forward.²³⁶

The comparison is made with the eastern side of the island and its villages of Toi and Mutalau, Lakepa, Liku and Hakupu down to the most south-eastern village of Vaiea. These villages are situated near rugged dangerous cliffs. The sounds of the mighty waves pounding the cliff walls makes peculiar rhythms one could almost hear in the unique hymns which come from Liku or Mutalau. Here we have songs composed in a traditional form of polyphony and designed for corporate melismatic singing. That is where a musical phrase of several notes can be sung to one syllable.

These village hymns bring together a *fakafetuiaga* into communion with each other, with nature and with the Creator of all things: they are the epitome of Niuean. One example of such coming together is Hymn 150 *Ko e faahi atu he moana*, 'The other side of the *moana*'. It describes first of all the attributes of

²³⁵ Avatele and Tamakautoga villages for a time continued to use the piano and keyboard as preferred instruments to accompany singing. Today, the influence continued to impact the repertoire of hymns these villages sing in Niue and in diaspora. Hakupu village also has had hymns using keyboard to the style of Samoans.

²³⁶ With the Samoan style of singing the quasi-Samoan hierarchical social structure was somehow inadvertently present in the attitude of some members of the community.

transcendent God: omnipotent, omniscient and omnipresent. This God possesses *iloilo* wisdom, *mana* power, and *lilifu* glory; the comparison is made with the power of natural forces: *afa* cyclones, *pakulagi* thunder and mighty *peau* waves. The contrast is drawn in order to show that the God of wisdom, power and glory is not confined by these created phenomena: *ka e nakai ko koe i ai* 'yet not in them.' The theological intention is not only conveyed by the lyrics. The way of singing is designed to provide the drama unfolding. The vocalization of thunder is created by the bass singers mimicking thunder with their deep voices of men; that is complemented by the sharp sustaining voices of women with various tones of sopranos and contraltos and harmonized by tenors and altos voices which takes both singers and listeners to an 'other' realm. The inclusion of antiphonal singing of women and men in parts of the hymn creates an environment where one is actually experiencing the calming presence of God in the midst of a thunderous storm.

The Liku songs and hymns are similar with those of Mutalau in style but with a slight variance. They possess resonance with the rugged natural environment of the eastern coastal rockscape with unusual rhythm and style. The repetitions and antiphonal singing between men and woman is iconic of Liku singing. There are uncanny similarities between these Liku hymns and those of the Cook Islands where the original settlement of this part of the island may have first occurred. That this may be the case is implied an embedded Pukapuka (an island from the northern Cook Islands) proclivity that is inherent in their singing, passed down from one generation to another.²³⁷ Cook island singing is done with passion and body movement. The use of familiar human expressions like sounds of laughter or crying with added ornamentation appeals to the hearts of hearers and moves them emotionally.

²³⁷ History states that whilst the south was first settled by Tongans, north by Samoans, the eastern side was settled by the *Pukapuka* from the Cook Islands approximately 250BC - 450AD. Walter, R & Anderson, A. *The Archaeology of Niue Island*, West Polynesia. Bishop Museum Bulletin in Anthropology 10. Honolulu: Bishop Museum Press, 2002, pp.115-122.

The interconnection between people, land and sea is evident in Hymn 262. This interconnection is less tied to any particular village. It is a general Oceanic experience. The hymn is an eschatological hymn. It is a prayer for the early return of Christ to restore creation *kia haele mai a, Iesu fakaaue mai*. It reflects the image of the Church as a 'Communion' in the 'Body of Christ' It is a community of interconnected persons. The emphasis is on relationships. 'Love, acceptance, forgiveness, commitment, and intimacy constitute the church's very fabric.' It is 'a community in which justice, peace and mutual love are realized and lived.' This hymn goes further. It sees this communion extending to the whole of creation, including wolf, lion, bear, the sea and all that is in it. Halapua points again and again to the connection and deep emotional links to one another that is in the environment with all creatures that exist therein.²³⁸ The Oceanic theologian, Leslie Boseto, argued that indigenous people should not be separated from their land and sea because they literally are one and the same: they belong together and one cannot survive without the other.²³⁹ Hymn 262 is a reflection of deep-seated belief and yearning of oceanic people that we belong to the land and sea and all there is in God's creation contrary to a western commercialized mindset where land and sea is to be exploited. The hymn is a yearning for restoration to the original harmony and coexistence of the created order. It is recognized in the oceanic context that all living things are intrinsically connected. '*Kua taha e tagata mo e tufugatia he Atua*' (humans are one with creation); human societies suffer through the sufferings of its environment and the environment suffers through the sufferings of the people.

²³⁸ Halapua, *Waves of God's Embrace*, p.7.

²³⁹ Leslie Boseto, "Do Not Separate Us From the Land and Sea" in *Pacific Journal of Theology*, Series II, No. 13, 1995, pp.69-74.

Chapter 5

The Songmaker

1. The Geography of the Heart

It is inevitable in any new contexts that people will want to reflect and respond to their new locality. For the people of Niue the performance of song and dance is close to the heart of a cultural and spiritual sensitivity. The synaesthetic effect enables a people to lay claim to a common experience. Music is made all the time and anywhere as part of life; it is their expression as they respond to new realities. The *fetuiaga* in diaspora requires new hymns. They are needed in order to help create a sense of identity and belonging. It is both a cultural imperative and also one of a faith seeking to take account of what it is like to leave behind a homeland and re-settle. For an Oceanic, and primarily an oral culture like the Niuean, it is an improvised structure which allows the migrant culture to create a new world view. What might these new songs be saying about a received history and culture and its intersection with faith? How is this people engaging with the new (multi)cultural environment they now inhabit? What images and metaphors are coming to the fore and which might challenge the received pattern of being the church – in this case the *ekalesia* Niue? Are these songs and hymns highlighting and reflecting liquid metaphors that tell the stories of Oceania and the mobility of a people who have crossed the *moana*? Can they serve as resources for imagining new ecclesiological constructions? Douglas Davies has reflected on how religious emotions arise in various ways including interaction between human agents and religious symbols or idioms.²⁴⁰

²⁴⁰ Davis, Douglas J. *Emotion, Identity, and Religion: Hope, Reciprocity and Otherness*. Oxford University Press, 2011; Douglas J. Davis & Nathaniel A. Warne (eds). *Emotions and Religious Dynamics*, Ashford, Ashgate Publishing Ltd, Great Britain, 2013, pp.2-4.

This need for a new song is part of the process of creating a new "inner imagination" of what it means to live in a new land. It is analogous to Daniel Groody's reading of the need for an "inner geography": the discussion surrounding the facts and figures of the global flows of people from one place to another must allow room for matters of the emotive heart. Groody refers to the geography of the heart.²⁴¹ Matters of the spirit are difficult to share. Sharing those spiritual journeys is a challenge for migrants. Groody argues that:

A spirituality can only reveal itself in time, often slowly, through reflection, action, and a life well lived. It is difficult to put into words, and even metaphors and analogies fall short of expressing its richness, significance, and importance.²⁴²

The contours of the inner geography are hidden but real nonetheless. One of the ways to reveal those spiritual and mental contours, for Niueans at least, is to embody them in songs, chants, dance and other creative forms.

It is clear from recent studies²⁴³ how emotions, especially shared emotions, have influenced not just communal and religious identities but also shapes fundamental human orientations and motivations. In migrant communities, a shared sense of dislocation conjures up emotions that have both visceral and affective dimensions. Whilst Niueans may feel a sense of relief and emancipation from toiling the rocky Niuean terrain, the initial overwhelming emotions are

²⁴¹ Groody, Daniel G. "The Spirituality of Migrants: Mapping an Inner Geography", in *Contemporary Issues of Migration and Theology*. New York, Palgrave MacMillan, 2013, p.140.

²⁴² Ibid., p.141.

²⁴³ Ole Riis & Linda Woodhead, *A Sociology of Religious Emotion*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); Douglas J. Davis & Nathaniel A. Warne (eds). *Emotions and Religious Dynamics*, Ashford, Ashgate Publishing Ltd, Great Britain, 2013. *Emotions and Religious Dynamics* is an anthology of recent studies by several scholars that covers a subject of 'emotions' within a wide field of disciplines and scholarship.

those of grief, fear, sorrow and nostalgia.²⁴⁴ Mapping the geographical migration is relatively easy; the inner migration and the composition of an inner imagination is something that cannot be so easily fathomed. It is more of an art.

2. The Poetics of Witness

For the purpose of this thesis I wish to turn to the autobiographical. That turn can be justified in one of several ways. The author of this thesis, a migrant, has found solace in writing and composing new songs for the *fetuiaga* in diaspora in the last few years. Going through months of adjustment in a metropolitan city, I had to deal with complex issues of "inner migration".²⁴⁵ Here I will explore and share my "inner imaginary" through songs.

The personal designation of being a songmaker is taken from the work of Albert Wendt.²⁴⁶ He himself is a noted Samoan writer, novelist, poet, playwright, living in New Zealand. *The Songmaker's Chair* is the title of one his plays. The Peseolo family comprises three generations who have striven to come to terms with living in Auckland. The first parents migrated in the 1950s; the subsequent generations have intermarried with Maori and *pakeha*. They have created what they call "the Peseola way". Melanie Anae has discerned how the lying at the heart of the story is the love between Peseola Olaga and Malaga and their desire to provide their children with a good life in a new land. It is a familiar story. Now, in their twilight years, the play revolves around a series of conversations Pese and

²⁴⁴ My emotional journey, in what Daniel Groody had called the 'inner migration', was not unique to me nor to the Niuean community. In my times of emotional loneliness I would think of the countless men, women and children who, for one reason or another, are displaced or forced from their home countries. I would think about the plight of refugees; the 'boat people' whose migration began by foot on land crossing border(s) into the sea where they had to escape by dangerous boats in hope of landing in a country of opportunities.

²⁴⁵ Groody G. Daniel. "The Spirituality of Migrants: Mapping an Inner Geography" in *Contemporary Issues of Migration and Theology*. Palgrave MacMillan, New York, 2013.

²⁴⁶ Wendt, Albert. *The Songmaker's Chair*, Honolulu, University of Hawai'i Press, 2004.

Malaga have with different family members and friends across various cultures. There are numerous misunderstandings, expressions of anger and confusion. The play is exploring how the traditional customary practice of *fa'aSamoa* is being played out over a period of fifty years in an alien country which has "not treated them well." Pese regards 'the diluted identity' of those Samoan children raised in New Zealand as a "lost generation".²⁴⁷ The family name, Sa-Peseola, can be translated as "a health giving song." The *pese* or songs within the play take a variety of forms: religious and secular, including rap. The songs are performed through different media ranging from a ghetto blaster to the sung voice, in both English and Samoan. The chair is a critical pivotal symbol. Robert Sullivan reckons that it is a "constant ghostly presence." It represents a family position, a title, the warmth of a family, their connection with the traditional spirituality, and the spirit world. Sullivan concludes that the chair creates a *va* – a cultural space – for a family whose name is one of being a songmaker. Towards the end of the play Pese dies.²⁴⁸

This example Wendt provides is very helpful for my autobiographical purpose. For the sake of the proposed *Fetuiaga Kerisiano* the role of the songmaker is to expose the contours of the Niuean migrant's inner geography. Its function is to help bridge the old and the new and charter songlines into the future. The songmaker is the equivalent of the Niuean *asafo* (master composer/singer). Their gift is more than the ability to compose and sing; they are able to connect the singers and listeners to the inner imagination as well as encapsulating their *taoga*, faith and aspirations in song and musicology. The psalmist can be seen as an equivalent of the *asafo* in some sense bringing one's state of the heart to the reading and singing public. Some semblance can be identified in the poignancy of Psalm 137, for example, in which only a migrant or exilic *asafo* could

²⁴⁷ Melani Anae, "Review: *The Songmaker's Chair*", *The Contemporary Pacific*, Volume 17, Number 1, Spring 2005, pp. 270-273.

²⁴⁸ Robert Sullivan, "Review: *The Songmaker's Chair*", *The Contemporary Pacific*, 19 (2), 2007, pp. 651-653.

author. With the majority of Niueans now residing outside Niue, much of the focus for the retention of Niuean *taoga* is reliant on diasporic communities. Working with the Carlton-Ramsgate Uniting Church has allowed me an opportunity to work prayerfully and intentionally on music as a channel of theological expression and exploring contextual theology. Mark J. Hatcher wrote,

The images, narratives, and melody that poetry put to song go beyond mere cognitive expression and involve the affective and volitional dimensions of people. Songs communicate a complexity of experience that cannot be expressed through abstract language. Their ability to capture complex dimensions of life and relationships make them significant vehicles for interaction and communion with God.²⁴⁹

This analogy of the songmaker should be situated within the wider scholarly case which can be made for the inclusion of personal and subjective experience. Rebecca Chopp refers to the telling of one's own story in some form or other as a 'poetics of witness'. Chopp argues that the kind of testimony lies in the space between fact and fiction.²⁵⁰ Jung Young Lee begins his theology of *Marginality* by way of a parable of a dandelion.²⁵¹ That dandelion represents himself. It stands for him as a Korean man who ended up not returning to Korea at the conclusion of his studies. Now he was required to come to terms with living in the United States through being a member of a minority group – and by being the only family of an Asian heritage and culture resident in the neighborhood where he lived. Lee argues that theology at times is autobiographical. This is not say that theology itself is simply the work of an individual heart and mind that is then normative for all who share something of the same ethnicity. It is au-

²⁴⁹ Mark J. Hatcher, "Poetry, Singing, and Contextualization," in *Missiology: An International Review*, Volume XXIX, No 4, October 2001, p.476.

²⁵⁰ Rebecca Chopp. "Theology and the Poetics of Testimony," in Delwin Brown, Sheila Greeve Davaney and Kathryn Tanner (eds.), *Converging on Culture: Theologians in Dialogue with Cultural Analysis and Criticism*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2001; pp. 56-70.

²⁵¹ Jung Young Lee, *Marginality: The Key to Multicultural Theology*, Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 1995, pp. 1-14.

tobiographical in the sense of the individual seeking to come to terms with their understanding of faith. It is a way of giving expression to the providence of God for the self in a time of dislocation and the search for a new way of being. Lee was conscious of how he could not speak for all Korean men, let alone women, who shared a similar experience of being marginalized. His turn to the autobiographical was justified on the basis that others might hear echoes and resonances of what had been revealed to him through his decision to remain in a host country and become a resident.

These images of the songmaker, the poetics of witness and Lee's autobiographical turn and invocation of providence need to be woven together. With the majority of Niueans now residing outside Niue, much of the focus for the retention of Niuean *taoga* is reliant on diasporic communities. The autobiographical and poetics of witness enable me to reflect on my own experience in a public way. Wendt's songmaker suggests the potential role of music and cultural performance as a medium for the doing of such for the sake of others.

Working with the Carlton-Ramsgate Uniting Church has allowed me an opportunity to work prayerfully and intentionally on music as a channel of theological expression and exploring contextual theology. Mark J. Hatcher wrote,

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²⁵² Mark J. Hatcher, "Poetry, Singing, and Contextualization," in *Missiology: An International Review*, Volume XXIX, No 4, October 2001, p. 476.

The usage of the Niuean traditional genres of music and arts has enabled me to compose a contextual piece of work that gives a synaesthetic effect of the gospel of Jesus. The two dimensional aspect of reading gives a certain stimulus in one's senses but singing and dancing have the power to impact all of one's senses and the whole being. Niueans tend to use all the senses available to them in transmitting and communicating their ideas. Although the Niueans were taught by the missionaries to remain silent and motionless in worship, their instinct is to sway and dance when they sing. This manner is evident outside the chapel in times of celebration as recorded by Thompson.

3. Songs of the Heart

On coming to Sydney I wrote some songs of praise and worship. I was seeking to express something of the strange mix of fear and gratitude. Those attempts now seem far too individualistic with a focus more on the personal pronouns 'I', 'me' or 'my' which is at odds with the communal nature of my culture. There was less use of plural pronouns that refer to a corporate body.

*Ko e fakaalofa ni, nakai fakahoania, kua ofania au he Iki.
Ko e satauro ni kua moui au; kua ofania au he Iki. Ko e
haana tau kalavalava ni kua mahala haku tau hala oti, kua
ofania au he Iki.*

The love (of God) is incomparable. I'm loved by the Lord.
It's his cross that saved me; I'm loved by the Lord, his
stripes defeat all my sins, I'm loved by the Lord.

It was a time of my life when I was subconsciously pulled towards a pervading sense of personal awareness. Everyone and everything around me demanded being treated first and foremost as an individual. In retrospect, it was a natural consequence of a mind that had to deal not only with the inner personal migration but also a myriad of emotions that came with the territory. It was a time of 'identity under pressure' as Marc Cleiren neatly puts it. In the article bearing this description, Cleiren explored how people's

emotionality is involved in getting to grips with new realities" and how the mechanisms that "underlie the changes that people individually and collectively undergo when their personal situation and, most particularly, their social environment changes."²⁵³

The changes I found in my new physical and social locality had forced me into a self-preserving mode. During the week, when I spent much of my time alone on a train or studying, I would tread deep into my personal space. Sundays in communion with fellow Niueans in corporate worship would break the monotony of the inner traverse. Again, my personal predicament is pale in comparison with those who experienced mental health conditions from trauma associated with forced migration as Valerie DeMarinis has explained.²⁵⁴

Singing Niuean hymns about the suffering of Christ helped me make sense of my emotions and identify with the suffering of others. Of particular significance were songs like *Haku satauro kua fua e au ke mui atu kia koe Iesu* (My cross I carry to follow you Jesus), and *Ko e satauro ne loloto ai au* (I sing because of the cross). The third verse especially stood out. The lyrics read: *Ko e satauro ne mahala ai e fi* (It's the cross that defeated the enemy). Here the cross symbolizes victory over defeat and over all forms of evil. There is no emotion so powerful than what the idiom of the cross carries.

Symbolism, metaphors, objects of devotions, iconic hymns I identified with would often flood my mind with visceral identification with the Avatele church building, the image of myself standing on the raised pulpit and photographic memories of the faces of loved ones in worship.

²⁵³ Marc Cleiren, "Identity Under Pressure: Motivation and Emotional Dynamics in Cultural and Religious Groups" in Douglas J. Davis & Nathaniel A. Warne (eds). *Emotions and Religious Dynamics*, Ashford, Ashgate Publishing Ltd, 2013, p.121.

²⁵⁴ Valerie DeMarinis shares her experience from a Swedish context in a field of mental health. Her article "Forced Migration and Meaning-making" is found in Douglas J. Davis & Nathaniel A. Warne (eds). *Emotions and Religious Dynamics*, Ashford, Ashgate Publishing Ltd, 2013, pp.109-120.

Singing in diaspora makes life bearable, particularly for new migrants who yearn for the familiarity of one's motherland. Issues are confronted in the writing and composing of songs. Like many Niueans living in diaspora songs give voice to their deep concerns with dislocation from families and the past, and aspirations for the future. This Niuean experience is mimicking Wendt's story of the songmaker. My initial concerns as an immigrant seemed selfish; they were a preoccupation with self-security and the ability to cope in a new and strange environment. The mere geographical distance between families and members of the Niuean community in a metropolitan city added to the sense of isolation and grief, despite being accommodated by a close family. There was a yearning for fellowship that was, hitherto, a source of social stability in my life in Niue. Attending church the first Sunday appeased that spiritual and social need and worship with fellow Christians was something that I was looking forward to every week. The church was my surrogate family, my *fetuiaga*, the community that provided comfort, especially in the absence of my *magafaoa* (immediate and extended family).

Writing poetry and songs was therapeutic; it helped give voice to the 'inner imaginary.' The Lord's Prayer became much more poignant and the line which reads 'give us this daily food' became even more meaningful as I looked to God for daily sustenance. The Lord's Prayer became a song as I adapted it into a new composition and it was personalized. Going through grief and caught in a sense of isolation, I remembered Niue. So I wrote and sang:

*Haku motu fakalele, Niue Nukututaha he moana Pasifika;
ko e takeleaga he tau toa. Haku motu fakalele, ne feaki
he tau tupuna, Niue Nukututaha, haku motu!*

My beloved island Niue the Island-who-stands-alone in the Pacific Ocean; the dwelling place of warriors. My beloved Island, built by our ancestors. Niue the Island-who-stands-alone, my home!

When one is born and raised on the 'Rock' as Niue is known, invested so much in the life of the island and its people, then it becomes embedded in one's soul.

The absence from a simple laid back island home and trying to make a new home in a fast super metropolitan city like Sydney makes nostalgia more intense. Going to the beach front and looking out to the open sea would lead to memories of Niuean home flooding in and invoke powerful emotions.

*Nofo au he mataga (he motu kehe), Ono atu - mapualagi,
tau mata kua hihina mo e loto agita; manamanatu kia
koe mo e ha taua a maveheaga. Niue Nukututaha, Haku
motu.*

I sat at the cliffs and stared at the horizon, tears streamed from my eyes and a heavy heart. I thought about you and our promises. Niue the Island-who-stands-alone my home.

Remembering close friends and elderly mentors who asked whether I would return or not left a question mark in my heart with which I have continued to wrestle. Whether promises were made by migrants or not, the notion of leaving family, friends and the familiarity of home and a possibility of not returning is a reality in the minds of many. A few years later, the song was amended and taught to the church community adding a chorus that gave it a positive twist encouraging the youth to be proud of who they are:

*Ma tau fuata taulekaleka he matamaka; ma tau afine
fuluola to mokamoka; atuhau ha Niue, mata ki luga!*

O Young men, the braves from the Rock; O young beautiful girls; the new generation of Niue, Look up! (be proud!).

4. Songs of Desire

This theme of Niue as home and the desire to encourage second and third generation Niueans in diaspora to remember their ethnic identity is a prevailing theme in my songs and hymns. *Fiti pua* (*pua* flower) is a metaphor I have used in this song to represent the young generations of Niuean descent. The flower

of the *pua* tree is Niue's national flower.²⁵⁵ The song reminds the listeners to *hei* (wear) the *pua* (flower) on one's ear with pride; it is not just a *fakamanaia* (ornament). The flower is a symbol of identity and pride. It is a call to the Niuean community to lift up the younger generation by supporting them - to take pride in them and their achievements. It is a call to love them and be proud of who they are and where they come from; it is seeking to teach and remind them of their cultural and Christian heritage.

Tau afine tau fuata Niue-e: ko e tau fiti kua matala he pogipogi; ko e tau lanu fuluola he tagaloa. Hei, hei e fitipua.

The young boys/men and girls/women of Niue are flowers blooming in the morning; beautiful colors (children) of the Rainbow/Tagaloa. Wear them with pride.

What is emerging in this revised version is a seeking to inspire cultural pride into young people living in an age of constant change who have been separated from their ethnic homeland. They are vulnerable; they lack the inner geography, the inner imagination which could simply be assumed in and through the process of growing up in what Schreiter has called an 'integrated concept of culture'. That reference to *Tagaloa* is a reminder of how they are tied spiritually and genealogically to the Niuean God *Tagaloa* (YHWH in Scriptures). The teaching aspect of the song comes in the second verse where unity and community are central in being Niuean:

Poi, poi mai ke fakavihi a taua. Ko e fiti pua mo e maile ne kapitiga a laua. Tumau kahoa ke houa a Niue, tu-tagaloa e manogi he fiti pua.

Run, run over let us entangle together as the *fiti pua* intertwine with the *maile* vine. Wear the *fiti pua-maile* necklace always to make Niue the pride of all; and may the sweet fragrance of the *pua* flower continue to linger.

²⁵⁵ The *pua* tree is a symbol of beauty and resilience. Its white and yellow (gold) flowers have a unique sweet smelling fragrance. It can grow anywhere on the island, even on the most unusual rocky terraces. It is important nowadays to gift a necklace of *pua* and *maile* leaves to visitors and dignitaries.

The act of entangling or intertwining is the making of *fetuiaga*; *communitas* happens when the two or more let go of their personal spaces and allow themselves to be strung together trusting that whatever the outcome they would learn to share and appreciate their gifts and diversity. All people have unique gifts to offer just as the *fiti pua* and *maile* have their own beautiful fragrance, the two entangled together give a combined fragrance that is a signature of *Nukututaha*.²⁵⁶ The song's purpose is to draw upon the positive aspects of the Niuean identity, and inspiring young Niueans in diaspora to look towards the future with pride and hope.

There are many in diaspora who live with ambivalence and uncertainty. There is an identity crisis for most postmodern citizens. Niueans, in particular, are in danger of extinction as an ethnic community in a global world. It pains me to watch my children's Niuean friends growing away from their cultural roots and away from the *fakafetuiaga*. The prevailing philosophy of individualism to which they are conforming is fracturing the Niuean sense of togetherness - the *fakafetuiaga*, the glue that holds together the intertwined Christian and cultural values.

"Run, run over let us entangle together as the *fiti pua* intertwine with the *maile* vine" is a playful image of dancers engaging in a celebration dance like a *tafeauhi* (a traditional dance of celebration after a victory in battle or following an epic achievement). Early religious commentators had understood this as an all night dance that involves pagan spiritualism. *Taulaatua* (shaman) would invoke the spirits and dancers until they entered into a trance when everyone would lose themselves in an 'unholy' communion.²⁵⁷ *Tafeauhi* is not a prescriptive dance which performers uniformly synchronize to the music like *meke* or an aspect of a *ta me* where the dancer's actions correspond with the meaning of the

²⁵⁶ *Nukututaha* is one of Niue's ancient names, meaning, 'the island that stand alone'.

²⁵⁷ See Loeb, Edwin M. *History and Traditions of Niue*, Honolulu, Hawaii, Bernice Pauahi Bishop Museum, 1926, pp.121-122.

lyrics. Conversely, *fakavihi* or 'entangling' is understood in the context of *tafeauhi* except that it is a communal *tafeauhi* induced by the profound power of the Holy Spirit. The dance is to be one that is controlled not by one's self-consciousness, but by joyful liberation led by the Holy Spirit as one is found immersed deeply in the fellowship. It is the kind of dance fellowship following the *ta me* when the dance troupe break from their routine to invite all to join in the dance celebration. The *fakavihi* of the *fiti pua* and the *maile* vine into a *kahoa* (necklace), then, is a metaphor of fellowship, togetherness, unity, inter-connection, and community. *Fakavihi* in this context is synonymous with the action of being in communion or *koinonia*.

The songs I wrote take seriously the diminishing influence of the Christian, Niuean ethnic cultural values, history and knowledge in the lives of those in diaspora, especially among the young. Hence the urgency *poi, poi mai...* (run, run over...); the time is running out to address the issues of identity and continuity. It is in the light of this urgency and continuity that I authored a song for children and the people of Mutalau village called SADOWIA (Sons And Daughters Of Mutalau In Australia). The song served to remind and impress upon them the legacy and honour they inherit being the descendants of the warriors who took the risk of accepting the Christian faith into the island and protected the missionaries from being slaughtered (no foreigner or returning Niueans were allowed to land on the island pre-Christian times. By law at the time, whoever attempted to enter the island would be killed).

*Atu pulapulaola taofi mau e Kupu he Atua ne tautiolo mai
he tau atuhau fakamua kua hemu mo e hula ai a taua ke
he aho mitaki nei*

Young generation, remain in the Word of God that's been passed down from generation to generation - the source of our pride and joy today.

The genesis of the Gospel in Niue was not easy nor straight forward. Threats were made to the missionaries and the mission. Ensuing generations went through difficult times to ensure the mission of God succeeded in bringing the

whole nation to the saving knowledge of God. The Gospel was proclaimed in the indigenous vernacular and helped shape the culture and values of a nation and her generations. The Christian baton, the legacy that was passed down, must be taken up and continue on by a new generation, especially those in diaspora. Calling upon the new generation, the songs emphasize urgency and continuity. Niuean culture - the synthesis of the Christian and cultural values - is unique and must be perpetuated in some form if the Niuean identity is to survive. Such themes run through songs composed in diaspora. A renowned *asafo*, a diasporic singer-composer, Allan Makani, had written and composed several songs that captured similar sentiments. Poignant in his song '*Oue tulou Niue na e*' is a message pointing a new dislocated generation to the centrality of God and nation as founding building blocks on Niuean identity.

Oi, e laia e haaku fiafia mo e koli.
Oh, how I have longed to dance and rejoice
Atuhau ti poi mai la ke lagaki e gahua.
Young people run over and carry on the work;
Fakalele e lilifu he motu
Lift up (honour) your country;
Fakalele e higoa a Keriso
Lift up (glorify) the name of Christ.
Niue, Niue
Niue, Niue
Kia fiafia mau ke he Atua
Rejoice always in God.

Manatu atu ke he vaha fakamua.
Remember the days of old;
Tau tupuna ne feaki mai e motu
our ancestors who developed the nation,
Atihakeaga he mafola
the perpetuation of peace
Ko e puhala haia ma taua.
is the way for us.
Halavaka e atuhau ainei
The way forward for this generation
Aua ia neke nimo e Atua.
Never forget your Lord God;
Liogi mau fakave.
Pray without ceasing
Mo e fiafia mau ke he Atua.
and rejoice always in the Lord.

Niue is one of the smallest nations in the world. Its traditional social structure does not lend itself to a perpetuation of its unique identity. The lack of a rigid hierarchical social structure makes it harder for a collective memorization of its many *taoga*. Therefore, the emphasis on fostering spirit of *kau fakalataha* (working together) had been persistent throughout the various social life institutions in Niue and abroad. Arthur Siakimotu, who is based in Sydney, agrees that *kau fakalataha* will play a vital role in retaining the Niuean culture and identity in diaspora. In his song, *Tau kapitiga haga mai* (Look hither my friends), the central message is that only through communal cohesion and solidarity that the many Niuean *taoga* (traditions and heritage) could be salvaged. He therefore, at once make a plea to the leaders and implores the young generation to work together because the only way to *lagaki hake* (lift up) Niue's status and declare its talents/gifts to the world is to unite and share the responsibilities of community and nation building. Togetherness, or *fakalataha*, is symbolized by the image of *lima malolo* or 'powerful hand.' The notion of 'hard work' is characteristic of Niuean culture from time immemorial. It is with reference to this trait that the author challenges and encourages the new generation. In other words, fighting for and preserving one's identity is a difficult exercise: it is a long journey. It is a task that requires divine intervention. For Niueans, God is a God of possibilities: important projects and ventures requires the enabling power of God. As the Elders say, *Ka noa mo e Atua, ti noa e tau mena oti* (Without God, all is in vain). *Fakave aki* or 'undergirding' all that makes one a Niuean (or human) with the *Kupu he Atua* (Word of God) neatly ties in with the enduring Niuean identity.

Kua mua ainei ma kapitiga
 My friend, the best is
A Niue Nukututaha.
 Niue Nukututaha.
Kua mua ainei ma matakainaga
 Brother/sister, it's most noble to
E mahani kau fakalataha.
 work together;
Ko e lima malolo haia ha taua
 for that is the powerful hand
Ke lagaki hake e motu
 That will lift up our island
Tuogo atu ai kehe lalolagi lahi
 that its talents shall be known

Haana tau pulotu.
across the world.

Atu fuata, atu tolotohopulu
Youth, children
Tau takitaki ha Niue
Leaders of Niue
Taofi mau e tau tufuga fakamotu
Hold on to the traditional arts;
Taula mau nivaniva ua vevete.
anchor them and hold on, never let go.

Eketaha ke tapaki e vagahau.
strive to preserve the language,
Lologo, koli, gahua lima
songs, dance, handcrafts;
Fakave aki e Kupu he Atua
Undergirded with the Word of God
Hahamo auloa e kavega.
and together carry the gifts.

This fusing of being Christian and true to one's own ethnicity and cultural identity is not particular to Niueans. Writing on the work of the Asian ethnomusicologist I-Toh, Michael Hawn observes that:

At the center of Loh's concern is a desire to feel fully Asian and fully Christian. How can Christians express their faith in ways that bring the reality of Christ's incarnation to the very threshold of the Asian cultural ethos?²⁵⁸

The inner imagery of almost every migrant from the liquid continent consists of similar sentiments. God and country is the theme found in the Old Testament. Psalm 33:12-22, for instance, looks to God's special relationship with his chosen people or a nation who chooses God to be her Lord.

Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord, the people whom he has chosen as his heritage! The Lord looks down from heaven; he sees all the children of man; from

²⁵⁸ Hawn, Michael C. *Gather into One: Praying and Singing Globally*, Cambridge/Grand Rapids, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003, p.73.

where he sits enthroned he looks out on all the inhabitants of the earth, he who fashions the hearts of them all and observes all their deeds.

This is a far cry from the Religious Right's²⁵⁹ "political gospel" of American exceptionalism and its overarching emphasis on patriotism; the Niuean "love of God and country" is more implied than outright vocal. It is woven into songs, art work and oratory.

5. *Niu Toa*²⁶⁰

It is evident that this poetics of witness demonstrates a strong concern for the future viability of a Niuean culture. The themes which lie embedded in my autobiographical narrative resonate with the concerns of others who are first generation settlers in Australia. Jung Young Lee is right not to co-opt others into his personal story but to offer it in order to help others name similar experiences. One of the implications of Lee's understanding of such a subjective turn is to recognize that this liminal space is one which falls within a divine providence. The tangle of emotions within my personal dislocation create an inner geography which is not just about cultural identity. It is also tied to where is Christ to be discerned in this life on the other side of the *moana*. The songs composed in the Niuean language presuppose this third character: they are not simply about life in Niue and life in Australia. They are also wrestling with life in Christ and within the providence of God.

²⁵⁹ The Religious Right movement in America came of age in the 1970s and included in their complex agenda the desire to see that the "American way of Life" is protected. They believed that the Christian foundation of America is eroding quickly by secularisation. See, Pierard, Richard V. and MacDaniel, Charles. "Reappropriating History for God and Country", *Journal of Church and State*, Issue 52, No. 2, Spring, 2010, pp.193-202.

²⁶⁰ *Niu Toa* literally means 'coconut warrior'. The sub-title *Niu* is being used in this context to mean both coconut and 'new'. The re-appropriation of the term *niu toa* will be explored in the next few pages.

The migrant experience of liminality is always going to have a cross-generational concern. Wendt's songmaker's chair lay at the heart of the extended Samoan family – the *aiga*. That household included past members as well as future generations. For the sake of the second and third generations of Niueans in diaspora I will make use of the *takalo* song and dance and invoke a re-presentation of the dignity of the *toa*.

Using a template of a traditional *takalo* which is an equivalent to the New Zealand Maori *haka* the unlikely genre is utilised. The medium of *takalo* is traditionally reserved for three purposes: invoking the powerful presence of God, intimidating the enemy and, acts as a pre-battle psyching session sending the warriors into another dimension, transcending the emotions of fear making them invisible with courage. Traditionally, *toa* or 'warriors' are men who have the physical ability to fight and defend their family and community.

Toa is an image that pervades the patriotic rhetoric of Niueans. It is repetitively stressed in ceremonies involving young men: haircutting ceremonies, birthday celebrations, *uta vagahau* (engagement ceremony), weddings, sports pre-match talks (*kilikiki* traditional cricket, rugby, soccer), traditional harvest celebrations *Galue Fehagai* (the exchange of food produce) and *Galue Tama*²⁶¹ (the exchange of food produce between families). It must be stated here that *toa* (warrior) has connotations of more than physical strength, ability or prowess. It is synonymous with *loto malolo* (courage) and *lilifu* (dignity). The late Sir Robert Rex was often heard to say, '*Ko e tagata e tagata!*' which can be translated as 'the person is a person!' The saying in shorthand for 'the man is not just a man

²⁶¹ These *Galue* stemmed from the church as a thanksgiving feast but is no longer practiced. Some understood *Galue Fehagai* and *Galue Tama* to be the same, however, there is a slight difference: both the *Galue Fehagai* and *Galue Tama* involved the exchange of food produce between families but the *Galue Tama* is aimed at young (*patu*) fathers/couples giving them an incentive to work hard, providing for their families and ensuring continuity of the traditional methods of farming and skills in fishing. There were fierce competitions between families, especially men, as to who are the best planters and best fishermen in the community. The *patu* (married men/couples) are encouraged to be involved in the ceremony. Shame would come to the family if they are not able to participate; *ai fai toa/taane e magafaoa ia* - 'There is no warrior/men in that family.'

but a great man' - a 'warrior' in traditional terms. This reference is not to be attributed to any man but to men who are *paka fa* (four-sided), well-rounded, and who display extraordinary gifts of generosity, service and selflessness. Thus, *toa* is equated with the notion of 'masculinity' which has a patriarchal social foundation. To be a *toa*, in other words, is to 'be a man'.

This manly image has lost its appeal in western society. Such an attitude has had consequential ramifications according to Patrick Arnold. The 'collapse of masculinity' had led to some socio-cultural problems including crime, substance addictions, divorce, single-parent families, and homelessness.²⁶² The growth of feminism over the past decades in 'balancing the scales' in a once heavily patriarchal society had unintentionally given rise to a new kind of prejudice called 'misandry' in some western communities. *Wildmen, Warriors, and Kings* by Arnold offers an appraisal on the masculine spirituality crisis in the form of father-wounds, alienation, emptiness in their work, collapsed relationships, and loneliness. The dilemma is not confined to Europe and America.

Migrant men from Oceania are especially vulnerable from these social ailments because there is an instant disconnection between first generation migrants and successive generations. In addition to the cultural shock and social confusion experienced by new migrants, they have also had to deal with the relational distancing with their children as they begin to settle in a new location. Young men, and children in general, are suddenly cut off from the reservoir of masculine archetypes they would normally have in their former traditional homes. Their fathers who were used to manual labour like working the land, hunting and fishing among other manly responsibilities now have to be content with unemployment or jobs in the factory, with their mother also working to make ends meet. The

²⁶² Arnold, M. Patrick. *Wildmen, Warriors, and Kings: Masculine Spirituality and the Bible*, New York, Crossroad, 1991. Chapter 4, "The Crisis of Men and the Church" Arnold suggested that the loss of male masculinity and the disorientation men suffer is linked to major socio and cultural problems in western society. He delineates the role the church and spirituality played in the deconstruction of masculinity. He also pointed to ways in which men could be nurtured in their natural biology and spirituality.

distinction between the roles of men and women has become blurred. It does not help when migrants find themselves in a society hooked up on "androgyny" (Greek: male and female). Arnold has argued that androgyny is a new sexual ideology developed as a solution to historic gender inequality.²⁶³ When young Niueans buy into androgynous rhetoric and practice, they begin to lose the strong *animus* aspects of masculinity that is important in Niuean *fakafetuiaga*. The Swiss psychiatrist Carl Jung²⁶⁴ pointed out that all women have the *animus* (masculine qualities) and all men have *anima* (female characteristics) in them. These are animated by spiritual qualities of a person. His assumptions are that people would identify with their given gender and embrace the "physical, mental, psychological, and spiritual influence that comes with it."²⁶⁵

Prolific usage of the indigenous concept and masculine archetype of the *toa* 'warrior' is one of the enduring symbols in Oceanic communities in diaspora. It has been useful in retaining the masculine profile of island men. One of the medium used to highlight the interest in warrior definition is the movie *Once Were Warriors* adapted from the Allan Duff's novel published in 1990.²⁶⁶ The archetype of warrior (and what a warrior is not) is expressed in several characters in the movie. Nig, the elder son of Jake Heke, wears his Maori tattoos (*te moko* tattooed on his face) to celebrate his Maori warrior heritage while the younger son Mark (Boogey) internalized his identity learnt from the Boys Juvenile Institution. Glimpses of his warrior heritage came through his performance of the Mao-

²⁶³ Arnold, M. Patrick. *Wildmen, Warriors, and Kings: Masculine Spirituality and the Bible*, New York, Crossroad, 1991, pp.20-22.

²⁶⁴ Carl Jung is heavily used by Arnold, in Chapter 1, to form an empirical foundation for his exploration work into masculine spirituality, particularly Jung's work in "Man and His Symbols", New York: Doubleday, 1964.

²⁶⁵ Ibid., p.27.

²⁶⁶ "*Once Were Warriors*" is a 1994 New Zealand movie directed by an acclaimed New Zealand director Lee Tamahori based on a novel by another New Zealander Allan Duff published in 1990. The movie is a depiction on an urban Maori family and their struggles with domestic violence, alcohol abuse and poverty. The main character Jake "The Muss" Heke is portrayed as a savage husband and father who ruined his family and those around him contrasted with the aspirations of his wife Beth to remain connected to the values of her Maori heritage of which her ancestors were warriors.

ri *haka* and voiced through the Maori chant sung at his sister's funeral. The boys' warrior depictions are contrary to a misconception that is the savagery and violence inflicted by their father Jake Heke on their mother Beth, their family and, those who crossed him. Domestic violence is, in fact, quite the opposite of the understanding of *toa* 'warrior' in the traditional island context which is essentially about *mana*, pride, courage and resilience. It must be pointed out that Jake Heke's alpha-male type character is a typical characteristic of a traditional 'wild man'; that is a quality Walter Org characterized as 'adversativeness,' or '*agonism*'²⁶⁷ except that Jake Heke's male bellicosity is grossly misguided. The function of male adversativeness is to protect the female and their offspring, and closely linked to the protective role is the male task of food gathering and providing. Even risking death, the *toa* is willing to shoulder the burden of defending one's family and community.

The ideals of *toa* have been used as tools in diaspora to empower Pacific Islander youths. In recent years the Sydney-based Pacific Island multi-arts facility, Casula Powerhouse Arts Centre, has been promoting the arts of the communities from the Pacific rim countries. The 'Warrior' theme is a recurrent in their repertoire of works and reached a climax in one of their exhibitions, namely "Niu Warrior." The title *Niu* is used for its double meaning: *niu* means coconut which is a known symbol of the Pacific islands; secondly, it is a neologism for 'new' and is intended to define the modern warrior:

"*Niu Warrior* identifies these artists as 'modern warriors', using art to promote inter-personal and cross-cultural understanding, reconciliation, bravery and leadership. Modern warrior stand in direct contrast to behaviors of violence, alienation, colonialism and racism."²⁶⁸

²⁶⁷ Walter Org quoted by Patrick Arnold in *Wildmen, Warriors, and Kings: Masculine Spirituality and the Bible*, New York, Crossroad, 1991, p.31.

²⁶⁸ Casula Powerhouse Arts Centre, Art Exhibition, 24 September - 4 December 2011, www.casulapowerhouse.com/exhibition/niuwarrior.com.au

These modern or *niu* warriors are in line with the positive portrayal of the archetype of wildmen, warriors, and kings²⁶⁹ that espouses masculine spirituality which we find in Scripture and, in some cases, the Pacific islands. The Niuean national *takalo* (or variations of it) performed by national sports teams and at special celebrations like birthdays have kept young men in touch with their indigenous masculine psyche.

The diasporic *takalo* experience has also been revived by Polyfest (Auckland Polynesian Secondary Schools Performing Arts Annual Festival) with actions accentuated to a point that it is not recognizably Niuean. Even girls, who hitherto, were prohibited from performing the traditional *takalo*, has been given a forum by Polyfest in which to exercise the *animus* in their psyche.²⁷⁰

In recent years the author of this thesis has used the *takalo* as a genre to contextualize the gospel precepts. My motivation has been, firstly, to retain the masculinity of the Niuean psychology in young men yet contrary to triple purpose of the *takalo*: to invoke the presence of God, intimidate the enemy and, to develop a psychological edge over one's enemy, I composed this new *takalo* for the *niu* warriors in diaspora in order for them to become warriors of peace. Instead of the savagery of a pre-Christian *takalo* I wrote and composed a *takalo he maama* (war dance of peace). Still performed with vigour and spirit, the *takalo he maama* is a paradox. It begins with an invocation, calling upon God to come upon the warriors (and those present and those whom they represent), followed by calling upon the leadership to head the *takalo* as per protocol. Instead of taking up the *katoua*, the fighting club, the call is to lay down weapons

²⁶⁹ These are the masculine archetypes Arnold used in his book in an attempt to bring focus on the need for reclamation of healthy masculine spirituality. Arnold, M. Patrick. *Wildmen, Warriors, and Kings: Masculine Spirituality and the Bible*, New York, Crossroad, 1991.

²⁷⁰ Girls performing the *takalo* is an ongoing debate in the Niuean community in New Zealand. The debate has been centred around the traditional practice of the *takalo* in Niue which is basically a ritual performed by men before battle. The issues around equality, female empowerment and androgyny are naturally part of the agenda. The fact that some schools competing are all-girls schools coupled with the competitive nature of the Auckland Polyfest had given rise to the issues that fuelled the debate.

of war. The call is essentially to engage in prayer for prosperity rather than an incitement to kill and destroy. The *takalo*, a war dance, is thus transformed into a liturgical dance of peace while not losing its masculinity in structure and its performance. The command is not only to put away the weapons of war, it rallies the troupe into actions of peace and reconciliation. There is a call to *lalaga* which literally means 'weave'. In a socio-religious context, *lalaga* is synonymous with *fetuiaga*. It is more than a get together; it involves intricate communion of the hearts. It presupposes forgiveness and demands reconciliation. *Lalaga e! E kautaha he mafola* means 'weaving a network of/for peace.' Weaving, of course, is a metaphor common to many cultures particularly in theological contexts.

The lyrics here, though, allude to the art of weaving baskets (*kautaha*) traditionally used to carry food for the *faiagahau* (celebrations). Another meaning for *kautaha* is a 'network', 'company' or an 'organization of like-minded people who share common objectives'. Although this word carries the connotations of business and industry, *kautaha* can be used to describe the church in its governance and internal unity. After all, its etymon is *kau* (team/group) and *taha* means 'one/together/united'. *To fakaputo e ika e, to fakafiti e manu ko* speaks of netting fish and birds (game), thus *lalaga* then takes on another meaning which is making nets. Ancient Niueans used the *ovaova* root fibre or fibres from the coconut husks to make fishing nets. It is an arduous task that involves skill and patience. It is often a communal activity as was the actual fishing. Nets or *kupega* were also an effective method for catching game birds such as *lupe* pigeons and *peka* (fruit bats). Legends depicts warriors/men building tree platforms and using exceptional skills not only to net the flying birds but the ability to lure birds close enough to be netted. Those who are able to have the skills are highly esteemed in the community.

Nets (*kupega*) obviously is a strong biblical and theological image with missiological implications. Jesus called his disciples to be fishers of people; the majority of them were called from the sea shores as they were mending or preparing nets. Some powerful metaphors and images found in Jesus' parables and

teachings involved fishing. Therefore, the image in this *takalo* - of making and *fakaputo* (netting) is in the business of the *Missio Dei* which can refer back to the great commission (Matthew 28:18-20). Below is the *takalo* and translation:

Ihova tilitili, ihova teletele
Invocation of Jehovah
Hifo mai he tumuakitualagi na
come down from the heavens
Tupuaki mai he tumuakifonua e...
Grow forth from the land...
Tauakina mai tau toa he Tafiti
Bring forth the warriors of *Tafiti*
Futiaki mai tau toa he Motu
pull forth the warriors of *Motu*
Ke fakataupa ke he mafola mai luga
encounter in the peace from above.

Monu ti tonu e mafola
Blessed and true is peace
Monu ti to fakafaahiua
Blessed and fall on both sides.

Hake mai e Tuitutaha
Come up, first Chief
Hake mai e Matatuakau
Come up, Captain
Hake mai e Nukufagamea
Come up, Scout
Hake mai e mateniu
Come up, first eldest son

Tau toa, amanaki ke koli...
Warriors, get ready to dance...

Haaku akau a e, kua lava tuai au
Here is my weapon, I've had enough
Haaku ulumiti e, kua lava tuai au
Here is my club, I've had enough
Koli gatiti e toa e, koli ke fiti e toa e
Dance to prosper, O warrior
Koli gatiti e toa e, Koli ke fiti e toa e.
Dance to bloom, O warrior.

Holikiliki, holikiliki, e-lagituataha kia maama au e!
shine, shine, (from) the first heaven to give me light
Tupuaki mai, ti tupuaki mai, i lalo he fonua kia makona au e!
grow forth, grow forth, from the land to satisfy me!

Koli gatiti e toa e, koli ke fiti e toa e
dance to prosper o warrior, dance to bloom o warrior
Koli gatiti e toa e, Koli ke fiti e toa e...
dance to prosper o warrior, dance to bloom o warrior...

Lalalaga e! e kautaha he mafola
weave! a company of peace
To fakaputo e ika e, to fakafiti e manu e
to net fish, and trap game/bird
To fakaputo e ika e, to fakafiti e manu e...
to net fish, and trap game/bird...

Monu ti tonu e mafola!
Blessed be the peace!
Monu ti to fakafaahi ua!
Blessed be upon us both sides!
Monu ti tonu e mafola!
Blessed be the peace!
Monu ti to fakafaahi fa!
Blessed be the peace upon the four corners!
Monu ti tonu e mafola!
Blessed be the peace!
Monu ti fakafatualoga mai!
Blessed be in abundance!
Kitukituea...
Amen...
Tukulua, tiohohoe!
Then let it be, (shout!)

The notion of utilizing the *takalo* dance format as a *vaka* for the mission was intentional. It is one traditional Niuean genre that requires the power of the male physique and aggression. Adolescent and young men are thus encouraged to exercise and vent their aggression in a cultural dance that focuses on positive teaching and outcome. Too many migrant Pacific male youths are being detached from their traditional communities by choice or neglect and thus severed from a reservoir of knowledge and wisdom that is to be found in their elder male role models.

Similarly, many young women have lost connection with their community mothers who possess deep knowledge of their cultural and Christian resources for meaning making and identity. It was during times of teaching songs and demonstrating dance actions that much of the traditional knowledge is passed

on in diaspora. It was incumbent on me and my community elders to translate and explain the meaning and purposes of the Niuean songs and performing arts; translations were made with sub-stories attached to lyrics and meanings. The alternative is to provide other role models through neglect. It would be easy for the young to turn to gangs, reality television models and fictitious Hollywood characters.

The ever growing cultural and social disparity between parents and children is something that is concerning. Church and *fetuiaga* is a natural place where many of the issues can be addressed if the resources are made available. Songs in worship can play a vital role in connecting and continuity between the former home and a new world they now inhabit. In realizing the dilemma in my own children, and those in the Niuean community, I composed songs that try in some way to address those concerns. Most songs I have written and composed were an attempted to appease that voice that kept nagging within me about the younger generation. The issues which came to the fore concerned *magafaoa* (family), *fakalilifu* (respect), *omaoma* (obedience) and the place of God in one's life - the basic tenets of Christian living. These were the values and teachings we took for granted as we grow up in the safety of the well contained village existence on Niue. With this in mind I looked to Scripture for well-known verses that were basic spiritual staples in our Christian upbringing in Niue.

Ka nakai atihake e lehova e fale
Unless the Lord builds the house,
Ti gahua teao a lautolu ke ati ai
those who build it labor in vain.
Ka nakai leoleo he Atua e maaga
Unless the Lord watches over the city,
Ti mataala teao a ia ne leoleo ai (Psalm 127:1-2)
the watchman stays awake in vain.

Ko e matakutaku kia lehova
The fear of the Lord
Ko e kamataaga he iloilo; (Proverbs 1:7).
is the beginning of knowledge;
Kia tua ke he Atua mo e loto katoa;
Trust in the Lord with all your heart,
Aua neke falanaki ke he haau ni a pulotu

and do not lean on your own understanding.
Ka e manatu e Atua ke he tau aho oti (Proverbs 3:5-6).
In all your ways acknowledge him.

Tau kapitiga fanogo mai la
Listen my friends
ke he tala ke he pulotu;
To a story about a wise man;
Kua iloilo ke fakatu e ia haana fale
Who built his house
Ke he mena patu ke tumau ai,
on solid ground
ko Iesu ni haia (Matthew 7:24-27).
that is Jesus.
Tau fakafele, kia manatu mau e Atua
Loved ones, remember God always.

6. The Child in Our Midst

It is imperative today to revisit the whole approach to children's ministry, especially for Niueans in diaspora. The changes of context for migrant families demands that children are to be carefully nurtured during the period of transition and songs are important resources in addressing some psychological effects stemming from the impact of changes. An anthology of essays contained in *The Child in Christian Thought* helps to reflect on questions of complex emotional, intellectual, moral and spiritual lives of children. In an ever shifting milieu children adapt well, but the changing structures of families and communities have the potential to affect every aspect of children's development. This is particularly true amongst the islanders' migrant communities. The children's perceptions on material values have changed as though there is no correlation between spirituality and the material world. We were taught at the young age that the material goods we enjoy are blessings. We were taught that God is the source of all life and, therefore, all that sustains us are signs of God's providence. The danger in our striving for material blessings in a consumer world is that we accumulate at the expense of our spiritual well-being. In writing songs for the Niuean migrant community and children, I am in agreement with Don Browning and John Wall's

assessment that contemporary theologians have for years "neglected childhood as a serious intellectual or moral concern."²⁷¹ That same concern is evident in the work of Marcia J. Bunge. It is her concern that more than ever we need to reflect theologically on issues that concern our ministry with children, parents and the community.²⁷² The task is one of growing young men and women who will become responsible, contributing citizens. This journey is founded on Jesus Christ and Scripture and just as important are resources from a well of Niuean wisdom that are carried by songs and hymns. The responsibility of ensuring continuity falls on the Church and the *fetuiaga* who also reach back to the inspirational ancestors. Developing a new generation under the guidance of the church and traditional knowledge of Niue is an important ministry. I wrote a simple teaching song using a catchy tune with these thoughts in mind:

Tau fanau haga mai,
Children, pay attention,
hahaga mai ka e tala atu:
listen while I share a story:
totou mau e Tohi Tapu
always read the Bible
(mo e) liogi nakai noa.
and pray without ceasing.

Ko e tau fakaakoaga
The teachings
ne fakaako atu he Matua:
your parents taught you is
(ko e) fakaveaga he moui
that the foundation of life
(ko) Iesu ni e Fakamoui.
is Jesus the Saviour.

Ko e fakaalofa ke he Atua
Loving your God
ko e poaki fakamua;
is the first commandment;
Omaoma ke he Matua

²⁷¹ Marcia J. Bunge (ed). *The Child In Christian Thought*, Grand Rapids, Michigan, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001, p.xi

²⁷² Ibid., pp.3-4, 19-28.

and honour your parents
ko e monuina.
is the source of your blessing.

Ko e lalolagi nei
This world
fuluola ka e fakavai,
is beautiful but deceiving;
laulahi haana tau hala
Its ways are many and wide
ka e mua e hala ke he lagi.
but the 'way' to heaven is best.

Ko e auro mo e siliva,
Gold and silver,
ko e uaina mo e kai -
Wine and dine -
homo e koloa ma e tino
material things are good
ka e mua ni e Kupu he Atua.
but the Word of God is life/best.

Most of these songs are not like traditional hymns. They have a pedagogical function born out of a concern for the intertwining of faith and cultural identity. They do not make use of the standard theological images and models of the church for the purposes of forming community. The songmaker's present task here is prior to that particular task. The overriding concern is more contextual and is reliant upon song and dance to generate a new synaesthetic effect and establish a new geography of the heart across generations.

Chapter 6
Fai[umu] ko e Halavaka
The *Umu* as Hermeneutical Tool

1. Introduction

This practice of music and dance has performed the role of a bridge. The words, the sounds and rhythm, the actions have been like a vehicle for a diasporic people to maintain a route of connection back to the home island. That line of connection has been visible, aural and physical. The synaesthetic effect of music involves the whole person and enables the Niuean in a new land to feel at home in a nostalgic sort of way. The shifts in language and the emergence of new lyrics and art forms can lead to a repositioning which the very act of migration represents.

It is now time to take a step back from the immediacy of music and dance. It is time to reflect further. It is evident that this task will be well served by the construction of an appropriate hermeneutic. The point and purpose of such is to establish an interpretive connection between one place and time - and another. In the case of the Niuean diaspora we are faced with the task of interpreting a received tradition which has been expressed through music, dance and word into Bauman's liquid postmodernity. It is now a case of interpreting that tradition for the sake of a relocated people, for their understanding of cultural practices and their social imaginary in a new land.

2. The Analogy of the Mat: *Ko e Lalaga he Potu*²⁷³

The hermeneutical task is theological. It comes to us by way of analogy of a mat. In Pacific cultures the mat sets the space for where talk takes place. Sisilia

²⁷³ *Lalaga he potu* literally means "The weaving of the mat" referring here to a theological methodology that is at hand.

Tupou-Thomas describes the mat as a place of family communion where the traditions are handed down from one generation to the next by word of mouth; it is the place where tales are told and misunderstandings resolved.²⁷⁴ This mat can be an awkward space for those who live in diaspora, especially for those who have become uncertain of who they are and where they now fit into an integrated concept of culture.²⁷⁵ That term is used by Schreiter to describe the kind of traditional culture where you are a member by birth and upbringing: you know its patterns, its rhythms, its structures of authority as if by instinct. That practice of culture is disrupted through the crossing of the *moana* and the settling in a new land. Risatisone Ete considers the mat which lies embedded within the *fa'a Samoa* to be a threat. Being second generation, raised and educated within a *palagi* system, he does not know where he fits into what the mat represents. He feels like he is one of the tassels which is not fully woven into the mat and which mark the border between the received and relocated, dislocated culture.²⁷⁶ For the Niuean diaspora the mat can likewise signify similar pressure points for the living of life and how those lives might speak of God and follow Christ in this liquid world of relationships which ebb and flow, come and go.

The theological hermeneutic that is required for the Niuean *fetuiaga* presumes this disruption. Its mat has many threads. There is the point of tension between the homeland and the new land which is reached by crossing the *moana*. Here it is clearly experienced and observed in a way which is open to cultural and sociological renderings. The angle of approach can be altered again. The threads bear a different tension – and those points of tension can have several sides. How is the relationship of gospel and culture to be understood and woven into the mat? The flight of the plane from Hannan International Airport outside Alofi to Auckland, and then onto Sydney, might suggest a rather transcendent point

²⁷⁴ See Sisilia Tupou-Thomas, "Telling Tales" in *Faith in a Hyphen: Cross-Cultural Theologies Down Under*, Pearson, Clive & Havea, Jione (eds.), Parramatta, NSW: UTC Publications, 2004, p.3.

²⁷⁵ See Schreiter, R. *The New Catholicity*, New York: Orbis Book, 1999, pp.47-52.

²⁷⁶ Ete, Risatisone, "Ugly Duckling, Quacking Swan," in *Faith in a Hyphen: Cross-Cultural Theologies Down Under*, Pearson, Clive & Havea, Jione (eds.), Parramatta, NSW: UTC Publications, 2004, pp.43-47.

of view: the gospel hovers above culture – it looks down on life beneath. The liquid below which makes up the *moana laulahi* is to be covered, overcome, in the shortest possible time, with the cheapest fare. The difficulty is that this flight lands the people it carries into a new context which is very different and, while familiar, is also alien. The arrivals hall signifies a setting in which the living out of the gospel is to be performed in a new way. Where the mat is located is now different: once its place was culturally accepted and understood. Now it is set down on linoleum, tiles, carpets, and wooden floors.

The life of faith is to be embedded in a context where fresh questions and issues of life are raised in new forms. The *moana* is not so easily and quickly crossed. It can now signify both a gap between lands and, at the same time, an entity which connects them. This theological hermeneutic cannot forget this thread while it considers another. This time the thread which runs through the mat is tightly theological: how is the balance in the necessary relationship between transcendence and immanence to be woven? How is the drawing near of Christ and the triune God to be represented while the attributes of otherness are respected? How can this hermeneutic address the risk of the gospel being collapsed into cultural performance and practice?

The task before us is complex. On the one hand, it must delve into cultural practice and custom. On the other hand, there needs to be a theological axis that informs and transcends the cultural dimension of this particular choice. The task facing us is not anthropological or sociological but theological. The ultimate issue at stake here is how do these people - the Niuean diaspora in Sydney - become a vital community of Christ which is being informed by their new inner geography? The diasporic *fetuiaga* draws upon the homeland Niuean Ekalesia but it cannot be identical. The cultural settings of the *fetuiaga* and the Ekalesia are not the same.

There is a decision then to be made. For the sake of this hermeneutic, where do we begin? Is it with the Bible and with theological ideas and principles? Are they to provide the drivers of the narrative and argument? Is the core systematic

theological agenda to be applied and each area of doctrine then given a Niuean rendering? Or, should the cultural practice provide the lead? And if so, why and on what basis?

For the purpose of this thesis the case will be made for beginning with the cultural practice and, in particular, with the cultural event of the *umu*. The *umu* is being employed as the point of departure because it lies at the heart of communal life and for its capacity to exercise a representative metaphorical role. The *umu*, as a symbol, is laden with rich themes. Its capacity for such enables a way of reading and speaking out of an immediate cultural practice. The themes which are attracted to the *umu* strongly resonate with the professed life in Christ. This coming together of the cultural symbol and the Christian life enables talk of Christ which comes from below. That angle of entry allows the way of Christ to be understood initially at a level of grass roots. If the discussion was to happen with a theology from above there is a risk. The practice of Christ would be more likely to be imposed in a manner which might assume an uncritical acceptance of the legacy of missionaries. The problem here is well put by Schreiter, "The gospel never comes to a culture in pure form, it is embedded in the less than pure culture of the speaker."²⁷⁷ For both the Niuean Ekalesia and the diasporic *fetuiaga*, a contemporary hermeneutic must come to terms with the western clothing in which the missionaries proclaimed the gospel. This yet another thread to the mat. There is a hermeneutic of suspicion which is woven into this story-telling mat,

Now this concern does not wish to diminish the formative role played by the missionaries like Paulo and the Lawes brothers - George and Frank. There is an awkward particularity in the Christian faith. It depends upon a confession of a creator God whose will is made known in and through the history of a particular people – Israel, and then further revealed in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. These revelatory events come to us from another time and

²⁷⁷ Schreiter, R. *The New Catholicity*, New York: Orbis Book, 1999, p.71. Schreiter points out that all communication is interpretation.

place. They need yet another mode of mediation. The construction of this necessary hermeneutics is taking place in the wake of the emergence of post-colonialism and a revisionist view of history – including church history. The coming of the missionaries and the transmission of the gospel to a native people is not as innocent and as straightforward as was previously assumed. The coming of the gospel to Niue required specific individuals – the Lawes' brothers and subsequent missionaries - to carry this message to the ends of the earth - in this case, Niue. There is an awkward dilemma here which a hermeneutic must recognize and evaluate. The Christian faith would not have come to Niue without missionaries from outside – and those missionaries were not without their own cultural bias.²⁷⁸ The hermeneutic which the *feuiaga* requires must take seriously the fusion of values to be found in the very act of proclaiming the gospel.

Schreiter points out that all communication is interpretation. Those who first brought the gospel to Niue had crossed the *moana* from Europe to Oceania; at the point of contact their original and seemingly culturally innocent interpretation was foreign. With the passage of time and the advent of post-colonialism, this manner of reception of the gospel has become problematic. Mosese Ma'ilo has concluded that the missionary translations and interpretations which came to the islands were "literary productions of imperialism" based on the notion of "difference", of "otherness". That sense of difference and otherness was not merely, then, a reflection of the holiness of a creator God over against creaturely existence. The theology of the good news was woven into a professing of the gospel which bore the accidents of history and yet another culture – a third culture. Ma'ilo further argued that,

...island Bibles constitute a poetic of imperialism; languages packed with Western oriented Christian culture. The desire of missionary

²⁷⁸ Although a local Niuean named Nukai Peniamina introduced the gospel to Niue, it was the English brothers George and Frank Lawes, who took the reigns from the Samoan Paulo, entrenched the institutional church in Niue. With the proclamation of the gospel came also the western 'norms' perceived by the locals as intrinsic part of Christianity. Missionaries established law and order, basic infrastructure and education systems. See Loeb, E. M. *History and Traditions of Niue*, Bernice P. Bishop Museum, Bulletin 32, Honolulu, Hawaii, 1926, pp.38-39.

translators was not entirely to translate God's Word. It has to be a Word with the power to convert, dominate, and re-direct the savage islanders' moral, spiritual, and cultural consciousness through the power of language.²⁷⁹

Elia T. Ta'ase agrees: European missionaries had the power and ability to impose what they brought upon, what they assumed to be, the "heathen natives".²⁸⁰ These imperial attitudes lay the foundation for biblical hermeneutics that affected the 'ways', 'how' and the 'who' does biblical interpretation for island communities. It was deemed fitting only for the realm of the missionary and the like.

Now, by its very nature, a hermeneutic for the *fetuiaga* cannot help but carry a sense of suspicion with regards the initial transmission of the gospel. It is a hermeneutic which emphasizes the contextual. Before a further step is made, though, the case for a hermeneutic of the *fetuiaga* should negotiate the kind of criticism Ma'afu Palu has made of those whom he names as the Pacificans. It is only once this ground is cleared that the constructive task of creating a hermeneutic of the *fetuiaga* can begin.

Palu argued with conviction that the place of the Biblical theology should not be compromised by the contextual imperative. Biblically bound theology, he believes, is being put at risk by exponents of contextual theologians, interpreting God from a distance and using cultural images of the Pacific. Contextualization in Pacific theology and its constitutive principles, he argued, ultimately do not hold true to the intended purpose of the gospel. Transplanting Christ into Pacific soil runs a risk of severing the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith. He said that taking the contextual approach encouraged by the patriarch of theology in the Pacific Rev. Sione Amanaki Havea runs a risk of reducing Christian theolo-

²⁷⁹ Mosese Ma'ilo, "Celebrating Hybridity In Island Bibles", *Pacific Journal of Theology*, Series II, Issue 50, 2013, p.49.

²⁸⁰ Ta'ase, Elia T. *"The Congregational Christian Church in Samoa: The Origin and Development of an Indigenous Church, 1830-1961"*, PhD Dissertation, Fuller Theological Seminary, 1995, pp.131-132.

gy to anthropology, among many dangers.²⁸¹ To imagine a Pacific Christ, for instance, is a way of mythologizing the biblical Jesus; it is a way of reading into the biblical figure of Jesus the pre-existing Christ idea derived from myths and legends. He writes:

Thus, to re-configure the biblical Jesus with our myths and legends is to reduce Jesus to a deliberate creation of a 'Pacific' mind. In other words, what we have effectively done has been to 'mythologize' the Jesus of the Bible by clothing him with a legendary and mythical cloak extracted from our legends and myths.²⁸²

The contextual imperative for Palu should not be based upon the projections upon the 'subject matter' but "where the 'subject matter' is allowed to give us the proper question with which we are to deal in the theological enterprise."²⁸³ He alludes to the way in which contextualizing is analogous to a "projection" of human ideals to the finite. So, to speak of Jesus as the 'coconut of life' or the 'Tongan Jesus' is a "re-creation of Jesus in our own image as a Pacific Islander."²⁸⁴ He explains:

While all of these are attempts at making the biblical picture of Jesus pertinent to us Pacific Islanders, they suffer being the 'projection of Pacific ideals' to the finite. Jesus may perhaps be accepted in Pacific Theology as a real man, but we have projected upon him the mental images which reflect the variety of temperaments and ideals of Pacificans.²⁸⁵

Notwithstanding Palu's objection to the practice of contextualizing Christ, the discipline of making Christ real in the Islander's experience is imperative. The

²⁸¹ Palu, Ma'afu, T. "Pacific Theology: A Re-consideration of its Methodology", *Pacific Journal of Theology*, Series II, Issue 29, 2003, p.49.

²⁸² Ibid., p.39.

²⁸³ Ibid., p.39.

²⁸⁴ Ibid., p.40.

²⁸⁵ Ibid., p.40.

risk of taking Palu's methodological criticism to be correct, on the other hand, is naive given the scholarly tradition of contextual theology world-wide thus far. Furthermore, the theological understanding of Christ as one who is our 'contemporary other' make sense when relevant metaphors are responsibly employed. Otherwise, Christ remains an abstract ideal. Islanders relates more to a Christ who took on our flesh and became one with us (John 1:14; Philippians 2:5-11). The decision has already been made for this hermeneutic to commence with a cultural symbol. That decision recognizes that we never receive the gospel in a pure form. It is also made on the back of a perceived need to counter the extent to which the missionaries' proclamation of the gospel bore the marks of a western imperialism. The cultural difference becomes clear when the respective nature of the two social structures are placed over and against each other. The missionary culture emphasized the individual and the subjective nature of personal conversion and salvation. By way of comparison island culture is communal. The Niueans tend to read and interpret their stories and history communally and in a dialogical sense. It is precisely from this perspective that the cultural event of the *umu* is an appropriate tool for the proposed hermeneutical task.

3. Hermeneutical Shifts

Now at face value there is need to make some prior connections. The *umu* is an earth oven. How and why it should become a representative symbol for a theology which binds culture and gospel is not self-evident. The *umu* is culturally specific. Its natural home is in a Niuean island *habitus* and not necessarily in the diasporic *fetuiaga*. The *umu* also belongs to another time and place compared with first century Palestine. Its earthiness sets it apart from the images and symbols which have been driving the current interest in an Oceanic biblical hermeneutic. Here the rhetoric is much more fluid and liquid. The images invoked have to do with the *moana*, the ocean, islands, waves, ebbs and flows, and tides.

It is also important that a more contextual and communal approach to theology does not become self-enclosed. Writing in his *Models of Contextual Theology* Stephen Bevans noted that there needed to be a set of principles which might ensure a degree of acceptance and legitimacy in a plurality of cultures. One of the most critical risks facing any contextual theology is the risk of becoming only intelligible to those within the given context. The Christian faith seeks to engage with particular cultures but it also endeavours to transcend them. There is a need, then, for good conversation partners so that a Niuean hermeneutic (whatever form it might assume) can participate in and receive constructive criticism from other contexts. In the case of this *umu* (and communal-based hermeneutic) the line of approach might be best viewed in the light of a western preconception of hermeneutical theory and the emergence of a distinctively Oceanic version. Once this work is done the way has been cleared for a descriptive and metaphorical account of the practice of the *umu*.

The relative ambivalence towards the missionary past is grounded in a hermeneutic of suspicion. The critical foundation for such was laid by the French philosopher, Paul Ricoeur. His theory was animated by the "willingness to suspect and a willingness to listen". Ricoeur was writing with regards to texts rather than imperial and subaltern cultures with which Ma'ilo and Ta'ase are dealing. He observed that it is simply too easy when reading a (biblical) text, especially one that we are familiar with, to do so with a rigidity and complacency that tends to "freeze" its meaning irrevocably. He suggested that every text should be approached with suspicion: does what the text appear to say really correspond with its true message? This manner of "suspicion" needs to operate with a bipolar focus. The practice of suspicion must be applied to the interpreter as well as the text: the ever-present risk is one of imposing his/her own meaning upon the text and making it do things for which it was never intended. Here we have the butt of complaint that Palu delivers on those whom he designates as the Pasificans. They take a biblical text and replace it with a cultural representation and then, in effect, co-opt the text for their purpose.

Now it is at this point that we should invoke the work of Hans-Georg Gadamer. In his thinking on *Truth and Method*, Gadamer introduced the idea of horizons. He referred to the need for a dialectic to be made between the "horizons of the text and horizon of the reader".²⁸⁶ For Gadamer interpretation is a "living dynamic".²⁸⁷ the reader engages in a relationship with the text in response to their own questions. Those questions are influenced by their 'effective history', by which he means that all processes of understanding take place only in and from a comprehensive cultural tradition, a tradition in which the interpreter, too, is unavoidably situated. One's situation within one's *fetuiaga* and all that it encompass in one's horizon is what Gadamer called the "effective-historical consciousness". How one encounters the text must consider the text's and one's historical situation, and thus, in scrutinizing and interrogating the text, one must make allowance for active dialogue - an event - by which one could even to be transformed.

The text is now treated as alive and dynamic rather than passive or static. Gadamer has resisted the tendency to prescribe to certain 'norms' and rules of interpretation; the hermeneutical experience has become a 'dialogical play' between the past and present, between text and interpreter. The act of interpretation is no longer merely one of technique; it is rather an ongoing process without any final completion. According to Grant R. Osborne it has become more of a hermeneutical spiral.²⁸⁸ Gadamer believed that understanding in interpretation

²⁸⁶ Interpretation is a living dynamic in which one does not merely follow rules in the scrutiny and interrogation of passive texts, according to Gadamer, it also allows them to draw one into their own world, while the interpreter remains rooted in the present. And since each reading of a text is grounded in its own context, no one reading offers a definitive or final interpretation of the text. See more in, Gadamer, Hans-Georg. *Truth and Method*, translated by Joel Weinsheimer & Donald G. Marshall, New York, Continuum, 2nd Revised Edition, 2002.

²⁸⁷ For Gadamer, truth is not reducible to a set of criteria but an event or experience in which readers find themselves engaged and even changed. In other words, hermeneutics is not just an interpretative methodology, it is an event! The *umu* hermeneutics follow Gadamer's lead in that it is a "hermeneutic of practice". See Gadamer, Hans-Georg. *Truth and Method* for principles like "horizons", "effective-historical consciousness", etcetera.

²⁸⁸ Osborne argued that hermeneutics is a spiral from text to context. He contends that the process of interpretation is a movement between the horizon of the text and that of a reader that spirals closer and closer toward the intended meaning of the text and its application for the reader(s). Refer to Grant R. Os-

happens through the 'fusion' of horizons. That fusion is between the reader's historically situated horizon of knowledge and experience, and the horizon of the text. There ought to be an interplay between horizons.²⁸⁹ For Anthony C. Thistleton the coming together of these two horizons is the imperative frame of reference in any hermeneutical task. He argues that the merging of these two horizons must be a basic element in all explanatory interpretation.²⁹⁰

The language of horizons is, of course, particularly appealing to islanders. The land easily gives way to the interplay of sea and sky in daily experience. The horizon is always 'there'. It is a part of the given land/seascape. The *mapualagi* (horizon) in a Niuean worldview represents the limits of human understanding. In fact, the Niuean translation *mapualagi*²⁹¹ means end or folding (*mapua*) and *lagi* translated sky or heavens. All that is within the foreground of the horizon is the known and beyond it is the realm of heaven. This way of understanding is illustrated in the traditional hymn where the horizon - the meeting place of *moana* and *lagi* - is the symbol of our epistemological boundary. The hymn goes, *Ko e faahi atu he moana, i luga he lagi, nakai kitia...ha mena tumau* translates 'Upon the horizon, beyond the *moana* and in the sky, there is nothing seen to be of permanence'. It speaks of the need of transcendence between horizons to bring meaning, understanding and relevancy. In one sense, it refers to the folding of the sky into the *moana* or vice-versa. In other words, it is where the sky transcends into the *moana*; the unknown is joined into the known. Texts

borne. *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, InterVarsity Press, 2nd Edition, 2006

²⁸⁹ Paul Ricoeur critiqued Gadamer's hermeneutics because it offers no scientific methodology for gaining real meaning. He believed that Gadamer's approach was simply too subjective. In other words, it did not conform to the orthodox approach of the known methods. See Geoffrey D. Robinson, "Paul Ricoeur and the Hermeneutics of Suspicion: A Brief Overview and Critique" in *Presbyterian*, 23/1 (1997): pp.43-55

²⁹⁰ Thistleton, Anthony. C. *New Horizons in Hermeneutics*, Harper Collins Publishers, London, 1992, pp.8-24, 42ff

²⁹¹ The Niuean understand *mapualagi* to belong to the realm of heaven or the 'unknown' sometimes equated with other side of life. It is a traditional place where the Polynesian spirit of the dead return to. Because it is a place of mystery or the 'unknown' *mapualagi* is equated with *Fonuagalo* - a mysterious place where the original ancestors of Niue hailed from. It makes sense to point to the horizon and say "we come from yonder" (*O mai a mautolu he fonuagalo*). *Fonua* means 'land' or 'place' and, *galo* - 'unknown' or 'beyond the known'.

have their own horizons that include the social, political, cultural and spiritual peculiarity - there lies the worldview of the author. Thus, the convergence of horizons (the known and unknown) becomes an interesting space. The prologue to John's gospel speaks about convergence of horizons; it talks about the *lagi* and unknown folding into the *moana* and the known, and in that convergence, the unfolding of the mystery was made.

In a more extended sense there is another experience of horizon which concerns the place of the Niuean in the wider world. The epistemic horizon – the world of knowledge – which is available to the village life in Niue has been altered by the arrival of television and other forms of digital communication. The more immediate horizon – that of island life, with its diverse cultural customs and expectations – is far removed from the social and political complexities of life beyond the 'liquid continent'. The language of 'remote' and 'isolated' bear witness to a difference in horizons. The coming and going of the Niuean diaspora represent that difference to some extent.

In terms of hermeneutical theory this talk of horizons is helpful. It allows the 'reader' to name, own and use their own experience. Gadamer's theory provides more space and flexibility, more liquidity than does Palu's too tight a dismissal of the Pasifican. The 'native' Niuean brings to his/her reading of Scripture his/her knowledge of the *umu*, the arts of weaving, fishing, oratory and dance. They are part of the hermeneutical equation in which meaning is to be found. The work of the songmaker can be woven into this mix and blurring of horizons.

The way is then also cleared for subaltern readings which come from the underside of history. The importance of this aspect of the reader/interpreter's horizon cannot be downplayed. The coming of the gospel *via* the missionaries was informed by the cultural assumptions that Ma'ilo and Ta'ase discerned. The evolution of an Oceanic hermeneutic takes for granted a desire to move away from a Eurocentric interpretation of faith and place alongside it one which is

more true, one which resonates better with island life. The case for such has been most powerfully put by Jione Havea.

Havea raised the prospect of a distinctively Oceanic hermeneutic back in 1995. It was time for Oceanic theologians to pursue Pacific hermeneutical events that express their "islandic" experiences. The goal was to transcend the western way by charting and sailing Oceania's own course. Havea advised Pacific Island theologians to retain the peculiarity of their pacificness by remaining "native".²⁹² In effect, Havea was inviting a reading of faith and Scripture from an Oceanic perspective and seeing those readings as anomalies in a continental world context. Havea's interest was more one of oceans, islands, and is-lands. Rather than viewing the anomalies in a negative light as evil, Oceania should seek to understand itself as critical contributors to a wider hermeneutical discourse.

Havea here is standing inside what was then a contemporary interest in describing the Pacific as a "liquid continent". This idea was being put forward at the time by Sevati Tuwere as a theological reference. But it was Professor Epeli Hau'ofa who stressed the a shift of terminology from the colonial-laden "Pacific" to "Oceania" in his book *Our Sea of Islands*.²⁹³ Tuwere shared Hau'ofa's conviction that Oceania needed to shake off the western cultural consciousness coined by the colonizers because it had become associated with smallness and "smallness", in turn, had become synonymous with eternal dependence on political, religious and foreign aid.²⁹⁴ "Oceania" as a regional name, and as a theological operating term, is more holistic and indigenous in the liquid continent.

²⁹² Havea, J., "The Future Stands Between Here and There: Towards an Is-land(ic) Hermeneutics", *Pacific Journal of Theology*, Series II, No.13, 1995, p.63.

²⁹³ Hau'ofa, E. *Our Sea of Islands*, Suva, University of South Pacific, 1993.

²⁹⁴ Tuwere, I. S. "An Agenda for the Theological Task of the Church in Oceania" in *Pacific Journal of Theology*, Series II No.13, 1995, p.9. "Oceania" was also significant in terms of distinguishing geographically and ideologically the smaller Oceanic nations from the surrounding world powers in the Pacific rim, the United States, Japan and other Asian countries.

This terminology shift was necessary but it was not meant to be a sign of arrogance, according to Tuwera "...but a sign of growth and maturity."²⁹⁵

For Havea this liquid continent occupies the gap between the West and the East. It is a unique place in which to be and from which to view currents of life and faith. That uniqueness must be retained by offering an "alter[native]" approach to interpretation and that is, an "Is-land(ic) hermeneutics". This interpretive event, Havea claims, must account for the unique "islandic" experiences of the liquid continent people. Such experiences are marked by the fluidity of "boundaries" between the *moana* (ocean) and the *fonua* (is-land). Here a different intersection and interplay of horizons is being marked out. The colonizing west may perceive the islanders as the "anomalous" and thus push them to the "margins"; in a contrary mode Havea encouraged the Oceanic communities to claim their peculiar "anomaly" as a positive trait.²⁹⁶ It should not be allowed to be circumscribed by the pressure of the continental west for them to be "naturalized" or "saved" – as, indeed, the missionaries attempted at first contact.

For Havea such an approach needs to take account of boundaries and the *moana* as context. What he suggest for hermeneutics is, first of all, the realization of the fluidity of textual boundaries. There is an inherent liquidity in Oceanic interpretation. Meaning is difficult to tame in this approach because like the wave marks on a sea shore, they shift and move with the unstable boundary of the text. And, in every movement that the textual boundary makes, it washes away, and then adds meaning to the text. Subsequently, Havea reckons, that: islandic hermeneutics should not follow the desire to tame and control textual meanings which is characteristic of the hermeneutical practices of the (colonizing) West. Rather, we should allow the boundary to de-/re-fine meanings,

²⁹⁵ Ibid., p.9.

²⁹⁶ Havea, J., "The Future Stands Between Here and There: Towards an Is-land(ic) Hermeneutics", p.64.

bearing in mind that we may never be able to step onto the same meaning once.²⁹⁷

What Havea is suggesting is that an islandic hermeneutics finds its natural place within the margins and it is there that it operates from. It points to the way the Bible is to be read; it should be done from the boundary through the lens of liquidity where meaning is never static but ebbs and flows. Havea's islandic or Oceanic hermeneutic is essentially one to do with Bible and culture. It shares much in common in terms of its general direction with the 'alter-native' theoretical work of Nasili Vaka'uta. Once again there is a hermeneutic of suspicion directed towards a discipline-based continental hermeneutics. Vaka'uta invokes the Tongan idea and practice of *talanga*.²⁹⁸ This indigenous line of approach encompasses "dialogue, verbal interaction, conversation" that involve the acts of "speaking and listening".²⁹⁹ It is a "dialogical process" that involves both the acts of speaking and listening which take place concurrently. The very notion and practice of *talanga* lends itself to the hearing of subaltern voices. In the case of this Tongan context Vaka'uta especially referred to insights which come from a *tua*-wise reading of the text. The *tu'a* are the 'commoners' in an otherwise hierarchical society. This coming together of the *talanga* and *tu'a* enables the emergence of a method which will "scrutinize dominant voices, and ... recover repressed and unheard voices in texts."³⁰⁰

²⁹⁷ Ibid., p.65. Also, see the changing fashion of interpretation from a more Eurocentric towards a growing contextualized voices from the "underside" in *Voices from the Margin: Interpreting the Bible in the Third World*, edited by R. S. Sugirtharajah. Revised and Expanded Third Edition. Maryknoll, New York, US, Orbis Books 2006.

²⁹⁸ Vaka'uta believed that biblical interpretation is still largely dictated by Western norms of scholarship and criteria. It is a form of homogenisation; hence, a form of colonialism. He proposed *lau fakatu'a* (*tu'a* or "commoners" reading) as a Tongan "alter-native" way of reading that is not bound up in the Continental that restricts the reading, counting and talking (orality) to the island ways. Refer to Vaka'uta, Nasili. *Reading Ezra 9-10 Tu'a-Wise: Rethinking Biblical Interpretation in Oceania*, a Society of Biblical Literature, Atlanta, 2011, Introduction pp.3-13, and chapter 2, pp.35-63.

²⁹⁹ Ibid., p.74.

³⁰⁰ The "text" in Vaka'uta's understanding can be biblical, colonial or cultural. See Vaka'uta, Ibid., p.153.

Havea and Vaka'uta have both striven to work outside western definitions and frameworks. They have proposed their own 'alter-native' lens and methods. Vaka'uta's concern for the *tu'a* and a reading of the biblical text from the underside is mirrored in the dissertational work of yet another Tongan, Sioeli Vaipulu. In a rather bold move he argues that the Christian faith was miss-given by the missionaries, miss-heard (and thus miss-received) by his Tongan culture. What transpired was a vertical rendering of the gospel which allowed the Christian faith to be imposed upon a Tongan hierarchy. In the transmission of such the more horizontal reading of the Christian faith which prizes the humanity of Jesus and his call to love one's neighbour as oneself and demonstrate a concern for the outsider was compromised. Like Vaka'uta, Vaipulu makes use of the social standing of the *tu'a* in the service of a reading from below. Vaipulu is writing more explicitly as a theologian than a biblical scholar and reminds his readers of how there are verbal links between '*Otua* (God) and *tu'a*. Vaipulu is arguing the case for an '*Otuality* and will seek to reconcile the three persons of the Trinity and the divinity and humanity of Christ into what he calls a *tu'a*unity.

The theme of liquidity found in Havea and Vaka'uta also permeates Vaipulu's work as well. He refers to a stream of interpretation which he calls a *ngaofe* hermeneutics. The reference is to tides and how they ebb and flow. He develops this insight further by drawing upon a neologism coined by a Caribbean literary poet, Kamau Brathwaite.³⁰¹ The critical insight taken from Brathwaite is, firstly, how the ebb and flow of tides create ripples – and, secondly, the invention of the word "tidalectic".³⁰² Tidalectic is a fusion of two terms, tide and dialectic. Brathwaite made use of it to describe a way of interpreting Caribbean life and history (including struggles of slavery and colonialism) which he likened to the nature of the sea in its movement: it ebbs and flows and ripples. Vaipulu used this tidalectic tool to read the place of God in relation to the *tu'a* (commoner) in a Tongan socio-political context. It is a hermeneutic that points to a God

³⁰¹ Brathwaite, K. *Words Need Love Too*, Cambridge: Salt Publishing, 2004, p.xiii

³⁰² Vaipulu, Sioeli. *Towards an 'otuality: Revisiting and Rethinking the Doctrine of God in Tonga*, unpublished PhD Thesis, Charles Sturt University, 2013, pp.338-342.

that is understood from the vantage point of a social trinitarianism which respects the *tu'a* who are oppressed, neglected and marginalized.³⁰³

These cultural metaphors are being used to inform a biblical and theological hermeneutic. They share a desire to make use of Oceanic images and express a suspicion of western hermeneutics and a missionary endeavor. They favor a perspective which is mindful of those whose voice is not always heard or drowned out. They are liquid and flexible in their intention. They ebb, they flow, they spiral – they are not linear in the way in which an idea or an argument is expressed and developed.

This liquid theological rhetoric is especially thick in Halapua's *Waves of God's Embrace*. Here the *moana* metaphor to do with the 'ocean' is given prominence. Here the *moana* is used to describe an oceanic self-understanding with relationship to God and an inherent interconnectedness with nature which is embedded in their Pacific way. Vaka'uta will indeed speak of *fonua-e-moana* in order to describe an ecology of land and sea. *Moana* in Halapua's definition speaks of the "mystery of the depth of the sea." It ebbs and flows, shaping the reefs and the islands themselves. He reads *moana* as "ancient pathways" that holds the beliefs in the continuation of life after death.³⁰⁴ Contrary to popular belief that the sea separates islands and continents, Halapua interprets *moana* differently. He argues the case of Oceanic anthropologist Epeli Hau'ofa that *moana* "links the island groups and gives life to the people...The emphasis is placed on...its inclusiveness, embracing all the islands."³⁰⁵ Understanding *moana* this way conjures up rich religious symbolism that provides refreshing ways of reading and understanding God; it also informs a dynamic way of living in rhythm with creation and in community.

³⁰³ Ibid., p.339.

³⁰⁴ Ibid., pp.4-5.

³⁰⁵ Ibid., p.9.

In terms of a hermeneutic, meaning ebb and flows like waves, and depends on tide movement, boundaries shift and change. So often boundaries are normally employed to define who is in or out, who is the exception and who is the anomaly. Instead, in an Oceanic-Islandic reading, meanings shift and drift.³⁰⁶

The construction of a Niuean hermeneutic is set within this emerging tradition of island interpretation. For the purposes of a Niuean diaspora the time is now right to re-think the relationship between the received institutional ecclesiology of *Ekalesia Niue* and the more fluid nature of the *fetuiaga* on a distant shore. The rich symbolism of waves, ebbs and flows, tides and ripples is retained – but the pivotal lens through which this hermeneutic will emerge is the cultural event of the *umu*. It does not so easily lend itself to flexibility and liquidity at face value: it is an earthbound oven. The case will now need to be made.

For the purposes of this hermeneutical exercise the first task is to explain what is involved in the holding of an *umu*. This task is initially descriptive. It is relatively easy to find out that an *umu* is an earth oven. How it is constructed and its function in the life of the community is not necessarily obvious. Nor is it clear how an earth bound oven can then be used as a symbol for a way of understanding a culture and diasporic view of that culture's faith across the *moana*. The *umu* is bound to the ground: it does not immediately attract a sense of liquidity and the ebb and flow of waves. In the circumstances, is the *umu* a cultural practice bound to its own home? Can it migrate? There is work to be done.

³⁰⁶ "Boundaries" and the concern for the "marginalized" have been a hallmark of Havea's hermeneutical concern throughout his writings. To name but three, see "Shifting the Boundaries: House of God and the Politics of Reading," in *Pacific Journal of Theology*, Series II, No.15, 1996; Also see "The Future Stands Between Here and There: Towards an Is-land(ic) Hermeneutics", *Pacific Journal of Theology*, Series II, No.13, 1995; and, in his paper presented at the Communitas Contextual Theology and Mission Conference, United Theological College, 2009, namely "The Cons of Contextuality". Havea, among many Oceanic theologians, has taken to the liquid images to frame their theological methodologies. Others includes Halapua, Winston. *Waves of God's Embrace: Sacred Perspectives from the Ocean*, London: Canterbury Press Norwich, 2008; Vaka'uta, Nasili. *Reading Ezra 9-10 Tu'a-Wise: Rethinking Biblical Interpretation in Oceania*, a Society of Biblical Literature, Atlanta, 2011; Vaipulu, Sioeli. *Towards an 'otualogy: Revisiting and Rethinking the Doctrine of God in Tonga*, unpublished PhD Thesis, Charles Sturt University, 2013.

This descriptive task must be done because it is not self-evident what an *umu* is. Its lack of meaning and transparency will be most obvious for the person who is not Niuean. Here the task before the theologian in service of the *fetuiaga* is to avoid the trap which befell the missionaries. The contemporary theologian is much more likely to discern the likelihood of how any representation of the gospel is informed by cultural values and presuppositions. Here that influence is named; it is the metaphor of the *umu*. The lack of self-evident meaning may also be found within the Niuean culture also. This time there is a different level to the descriptive task at hand. The insider may well understand that the *umu* is a communal feast and indeed have often participated in one. But that insider may not necessarily be so aware of a raft of associated customs, meanings, practices, and, one might say, the share potential of the *umu*. The theologian of the *fetuiaga* must at this point exercise an appropriate level of humility. The scope for blindspots – analogous to those which the missionaries experienced – remains. This employment of the cultural practice of the *umu* should be done in the expectation that others will want to subject it to a level of hermeneutical suspicion which the theologian of the *fetuiaga* has not entertained.

4. *Faiumu*: Making of the Niuean *Umu*

It is now time to explore the cultural and linguistic anatomy of the *umu*. The first thing to be said is that it is an integral part of Niuean life. It is the focus for the family and community. Whenever there is a ceremony, a celebration of welcoming and farewelling, or any gathering of Niuean community - even a funeral - there is always an *umu*. It is inherently communal. Its preparation involves the *magafaoa* (the extended family) and the *maaga* (the village/community). While a standard *umu* involves only the immediate family, a feasting *umu* embraces the community. Traditionally, the *umu* is the main form of cooking. It was a daily reality. And, although most Niuean households today own an electric/gas oven or some modern cooking facilities, families and communities still prefer the traditional *umu* cooked food.

What is involved in the working of the *umu* is best seen through an example. The one below is taken from a traditional wedding feast. It encompasses three parts: *pulega mo e fakatokatoka* (planning and preparation); *tolo ke faiumu* (convergence in the *umu* making); and, *taonaga* (celebration inclusive of the ceremony).

The preparation part involves initially a *tau pulega* (that is, family meetings and/or arrangements). The *uta vagahau* (traditional engagement) is a fundamental part of *pulega* insofar as it involves extended families on both sides of the intended union. The *pulega* may include the majority of the community; it is a time of intense negotiation and debate that reflects the genealogy and status of families within the social structure of the community. The date, venue and magnitude of the celebration reach consensus in this *pulega*. The planting of taro plantations and other produce takes up to eight months. *Tatanaki* (planting, hunting/fishing and gathering) takes weeks depending on the season and availability of resources. The week of the celebration has the community converging at the concerned families' homes making final preparations for the *faiumu* that include harvesting the produce, chopping firewood, collecting heating rocks, and digging the *umu* pit.

For the actual *umu*, the ground is dug to approximately two to three feet deep and two meters in diameter. Two or three large *umu* of this size may be needed to cater for the size of the feast. It is then laid with rocks to cover its bed. A group of mostly women and children then venture into the forest to gather *le* leaves (*macaranga harveyana* – a native tree with large round leaves) for the purpose of covering (*tukeleu*) the *umu*. A whole day is usually set aside for harvesting the taro plantations. Other land produce is harvested at this time also. The last few days before the *taonaga* is a time of *fakamaopoopo* (a period of gathering and home preparation).

Now we come to the second phase of the process. This is the time of *faiumu* (that, is the convergence and making of the community *umu*) which sees families and the community assemble to make the *umu*. This stage can commence the evening before the ceremony with the *magafaoa laulahi* (the extended families) and *maaga* (community/village) coming together at the family's home, bringing gifts and various contributions of pigs, baskets of taro and other land produce, large fish, cartons of chickens. This practice is reciprocal and based on the principle of *kua liligi mai ke liligi atu* (it has been poured in so it can be poured out). In other words, God has generously given, so that what is necessary can be generously shared. Times of *foaki mo e momoi* (giving and sharing/contribution) are moments of familial affirmations and community solidarity. Reciprocity and hospitality is the heart of this Niuean community building.³⁰⁷ In the ebb and flow of gathering and giving, children may enquire about the meanings of this generous giving and familial connections. Those who are distant relations are re-connected with the family by the means of *foaki fakaalofa* (generous giving). Genealogical lessons are given to children and family members alike, as well as community interconnections, relational imperatives and values of Christian hospitality.

The second part of the process continues during the night and the following morning: people of all ages - men, women and children - congregate to participate in the making of the *umu*. Affirmation of family and communal connections are not only the intentional outputs of the *umu* process but the physical solidarity displayed in the actual "performance" or living out the teachings are critical in community building. Women and young girls display this by work in their usual tasks of peeling and wrapping food, while the men and boys engage them-

³⁰⁷ Pahe Faitala gives an elaborate study on the *fakaalofa* "generous giving/sharing". He concludes that giving and reciprocity makes up the heart of Niuean social and spiritual identity. The word *fakaalofa* in its etymology refers to "love" but it has multiple meaning depending on the context. A gift (noun) for instance, can be understood as *fakaalofa*, even the act of giving (verb) itself can be defined as *fakaalofa*. See Faitala, P. *Christianity in Niue Context*, unpublished Bachelor of Divinity thesis, PTC, Suva, 1983, pp.56-59.

selves in heavier arduous task of cleaning and gutting pigs, wrapping large food portions, etc., as well as making, putting down and covering the *umu*.

The *umu* normally takes up to three hours to cook depending on its size. It is a time of waiting. This waiting (*fakatali*) for the *umu* to be cooked is not passive. Behind the biblical word translated “wait” or *fakatali* lies the Hebrew verb *qwh*. In Semitic languages it seems as if this word originally had to do with twisting or plaiting strands together, as in *lalaga* (weaving) of a basket or making a cord. Waiting around for the *umu* to be cooked involves other chores such as weaving baskets and *polapola* (traditional serving plates woven from coconut leaves); the *kahoa* (flower necklaces); and the *tui* and strung together ready for the celebration: what we have here in this act of waiting is an act of *fetui* (plaiting, stringing or binding together) a community.

Waiting for the *umu* is not always a comfortable time. There is a Niuean saying, *Tao e umu ke moho* (Ensure that the *umu* is well cooked) meaning, “bring a task to its proper end”. It can also mean “finish what you have started”, implying “do not start what you cannot finish lest shame is brought upon the family”. The act of pulling, bending, weaving and binding of strands involves pain. If humans are like pulled and strained strands, then it is always uncomfortable to change, reorder discordant lives and weave them in a way to fit into a whole (*potu tanini* - prized mat for *fetuiaga*). Therefore, *fakatali* involves patience and perseverance.

The word *fakatali* or its variant *tatali* also conjures up an image of a *kumete* (container) catching and storing water. It is analogous with the young opening up his/her mouth to receive food from the parent. This image corresponds to a feminine form of the translated word *tatali* - in Hebrew, *mqwh* which is used to

denote a place for collecting waters (reservoir, tank or cistern).³⁰⁸ From this perspective, waiting for the *umu* to cook is not a wasted time. Rather, it is a time of gathering and collecting resources, of *lalaga* and *ponataki* (binding/knotting) - a community building process. There is a sense of the strength that comes with "active waiting" because it involves weaving and binding together a *fetuiaga*; It is waiting that involves gathering and weaving the frayed strands of the community together; a time of reinforcing and enabling. Throughout the *umu* making process, the younger generation plays an important part thereby the knowledge and skills are passed down. Traditional didactics pertaining to Christian-cultural values and traditional protocols take place in this communal setting.

The third stage of the *umu* event is the *taonaga* (celebration) itself. Once the *umu* is well cooked and the food moved to the banquet area, tabled and arranged, the community then moves quickly to their homes cleaned and dressed for the *taonaga*, they would return not just as co-hosts but also as guests. The *umu* now assumes the banquet mood; the dynamics around the fire, sweat, smell and dirt suddenly change to one that involves worship, word, feasting, singing, dancing and exchanging of gifts. The mood, colors, aesthetics, fragrance and movement now reflect a *fetuiaga* that can be experienced as *koinonia*, a communion of a *fetuiaga fiafia* (joyful community). In this *taonaga*, distinction between appointed leaders and the *timotua*, host and guest, fades - the *fetuiaga* becomes flexible, fluid.

Throughout the whole process there is much *tutala* (talking, conversing) and *talanoa* (informal talk or gossip); there is a sharing of stories, experiences, history, aspirations, and singing - even the odd argument might break out around the *umu*. It is really a time and space where the *fetuiaga* engages itself in affirming,

³⁰⁸ The Niuean *fakatali* is made of *faka* (prefix) and *tali* meaning "wait" but also resonates with the Hebrew feminine form of *gwh* that is *mqwh* meaning "catching" or "collecting" as water tank collecting water from the roof. *Kua fakamaga e gutu he fonua ke tali aki e uha* (The land/womb opens up to receive *mqwh* the rain) connotes sexual overtones that perceive land in a feminine form. It parallels the notion of *fonua* in the mythology of the *Tokamotu*.

challenging, strengthening and building relationships. (Building a community means intricate, lively conversation). Relationships are grown by dialogue and robust conversation. The formalities within the church building may achieve important decisions but real life issues including taking risks, open negotiation are often played out around the open *umu*.

5. Virtues and Values in *Umu* Hermeneutics

This description of the *umu* is not the hermeneutic itself. It is rather an introductory exercise in explanation of a practice to another culture. This act of description is really a task which belongs to several disciplines – cultural studies, anthropology and sociology. It is not immediately theological. It can become such by a double process. The first has to do with the salient values to be found in the discrete elements of the *umu*. Those elements may be designated as ones of *faiagahau* (celebration) and *taonaga* (feasting). Embedded within these elements are particular values - *fakaalofa* (love), *felagomataiaki* (reciprocity), *foaki* (giving), *fakamokoi* (generosity), *kau fakalataha* (togetherness), *fuhiulu* (solidarity), *fakafello* (reconciliation), and *feofanaki* (love-hospitality). These values provide an analogy with a number of Christian virtues which flow from the call to follow Christ, to imitate him – and, effectively to respond to his summons ‘to go and do likewise’.³⁰⁹ What we have present here in the *umu* is a number of cultural virtues which resonate with a range of similar biblical virtues which are tied to the following of Christ. There is no word in Niuean for virtue. The nearest equivalent is *mahani hakohako*.³¹⁰ In terms of a Christian faith the language of

³⁰⁹ See William C. Spohn. *Go and Do Likewise: Jesus and Ethics*, Continuum Publishing Company, New York, 1999. In this book, Spohn argued that the best ways to appropriate Jesus' moral vision in the New Testament is found in "virtue ethics" and "spirituality." His delineation of "virtue ethics" is concerned with the deeper level of moral living; the same concern shared, practiced and reflected in the values found in the Niuean *umu*. Chapter 2 is particularly helpful, pp.27-50.

³¹⁰ There is no direct Niuean translation for the English "virtue". The closest word would be *mahani hakohako*: *mahani* refers to "manners" and *hakohako* means "correct". However, *mahani hakohako* is a direct translation of the English word "integrity" we find in the Bible (Psalm 41:12; Proverbs 11:3; 19:1). Another variant for virtue could be *mahani tutotonu* which is translated "righteous manners" (Proverbs 8:18).

virtue has been used to describe a distinctive type of ethic; this ethical disposition is beyond the individual. It is to do with a *fetuiaga*, with the community.³¹¹

The practice of the *umu* seeks to encourage the building of character. It attracts the virtues of a considerate relationality along with a desire to form identity. Christian ethicists like William C. Spohn point to the importance of these kinds of imperatives. He argues that virtue ethics³¹² and appropriate spiritual practices (baptism, Eucharist, prayer, biblical meditation/discernment, forgiveness, and solidarity) shape the dispositions and identity of Christians. These virtues emanate from Jesus. Thus, Christian spirituality is forged in *fetuiaga kerisiano* of the *umu* where virtue is cultivated and nourished. The fusion of the *umu* tradition and Christian virtues over the years helps a community reconfigure their spiritual dispositions and encourage the habits of the heart to draw closer to the attitudes of Christ.³¹³ It is within the *umu* community that Christian identity is nurtured; this is a place where virtues like "compassion" - the virtue that sees others in the way that God does³¹⁴ - is crucial to Christian identity. Spohn includes "service" and participation in the in-breaking of the kingdom of God as keys to forging a community's Christian identity.³¹⁵ The practice of the *umu* is a locus for spiritual learning and practice of Christian virtues. Around the *umu* lies a *fetuiaga* that teaches, nurtures and practices an Oceanic-Christian virtue ethics across generations. The environment of the *umu* provides that space conducive for transformation by God's grace. The *umu fetuiaga* is a Christian community, a

³¹¹ Aquinas argues that a "virtue is a habit or disposition ordered to an act." Quoted by Michael G. Lawler and Todd A. Salzman, "Virtue Ethics: Natural and Christian" in *Theological Studies*. 74, No. 2, 2003, p.443

³¹² Ibid., Chapter 1. This opening chapter detailed the New Testament witness to the life of Jesus as the figure of model morality for emulation. Refer also Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 2nd ed., Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame, 1984. See also G. E. M. Anscombe, "Modern Moral Philosophy" in *Philosophy*, 33, 1958, pp.1-19.

³¹³ William C. Spohn. *Go and Do Likewise: Jesus and Ethics*, pp.73-74.

³¹⁴ Ibid., p.87.

³¹⁵ Ibid., p.153.

place of communal discernment. The *fetuiaga* looks to the Holy Spirit as a transforming agent. Spohn writes:

Christian moral discernment is the spiritual practice that brings together actions and ways of living with the normative pattern of the story of Jesus. It seeks practical ways to live in a manner appropriate to the gospel.³¹⁶

That linking to a Christian ethic of virtue provides the second phase of this hermeneutical process. The performance of the *umu*, and the values to be found therein, acquire a Christian layer of meaning and reference by means of analogy. Here the comparison can be made with the practice of Jesus' own ministry in Galilee. There is a world of difference, of course, between the biblical landscape and that of Niue. The social and political structures are likewise far apart in terms of customary practice and the exercise of imperial power and authority. There is the ever-increasing distance in time between the first century and the twenty-first century in which this analogy is to be made. To emphasize the obvious there are no *umu* in the gospels – the word for *umu* is not even used in the Niuean translation of both Testaments.

These differences must be respected. Palu is not wrong in wishing to retain the integrity of the Biblical text – but there must also be points of correlation and resonance in order for the Scriptural witness to engage with a culture from another time and place. The most obvious points of connection between the *umu* and Jesus' ministry is the practice of hospitality and his teaching on the love of neighbor. His teaching was not just *tutala* (talk), it was loud and clear in his actions. The New Testament portrays Jesus as one who regularly practiced friendship and hospitality in his life and ministry, so much so that scribes and Pharisees judged that he welcomed sinners and ate with them (Luke 15:2). Jesus describes himself as the Son of Man who "has come eating and drinking"

³¹⁶ Ibid., p.152.

and is accused of being "a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners" (Luke 7:34).³¹⁷ Hospitality is a recurring theme in the sayings and parables³¹⁸ of Jesus, particularly in Luke. He even delineated a proper conduct for guests and hosts (Luke 14:7-14). The point that needs to be highlighted here is the *gahuahuaaga* (practice/action) of hospitality in a world where there are lines drawn between *tau pule* (the powerful or those of status) and the *timotua* (underclass or the marginalized). Letty Russell understands hospitality as

the practice of God's welcome, embodied in our actions as we reach across difference to participate with God in bringing justice and healing in our world in crisis.³¹⁹

The ideals and virtues of the *umu* event correspond with the teachings and the very act of Jesus' hospitality. The *umu* can thus become an encompassing metaphor for the traditional *fetuiaga*, or gatherings of the community, now also conceived in Christ.

6. Expanding the Metaphor of the *Umu*

The metaphorical use of the *umu* can help overcome the hermeneutic of suspicion which now surrounds the missionaries' conveyance of the gospel. The practice and the metaphor of the *umu* reaches back in time. One of the evident benefits is, indeed, its relative longevity. The *umu* is practised in the present while it also loops back into a past which is also pre-western contact. The pur-

³¹⁷ People such as Levi, Zacchaeus, Martha, Mary, and the two from Emmaus invite Jesus into their homes and offer him hospitality. He was often found receiving and offering hospitality wherever he went. He even accepts invitations from Pharisees (Luke 7:36; 14:1).

³¹⁸ Examples in Luke's gospel, for instance, like the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37), the Great Banquet (Luke 14:15-24), the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32), the Dishonest Manager (Luke 16:1-15), and the Rich Man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31), are rich with themes and teachings about hospitality.

³¹⁹ Letty M. Russell, *Just Hospitality: God's Welcome in a World of Difference*, ed. J. Shannon Clarkson and Kate M. Ott (eds), Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009, p.54.

pose of developing an appropriate hermeneutic for the *fetuiaga* on a distant shore is a contemporary concern with one eye on the future. The *umu* is nevertheless a cultural practice, which in terms of ethnography, stretches back beyond the coming of the missionary and the arrival of the Christian faith. It is thus pre-Christian, indigenous and ancient. It establishes a line of connection back to ancestors through lines of genealogy which have practised the art of the *umu* in distant times. This cultural custom has the capacity to link both time (past, present and future) as well as place (the Niuean homeland and the Niuean diaspora). It also possesses a theological potential. The *umu* can provide a link for gospel and culture. The *umu* has become a site where matters of life and faith can be discussed.

For the present purpose the *umu* becomes a hermeneutical tool to interpret the Bible and other texts - written or oral - for the *fetuiaga* today. Though it is a 'way of life' (a culture), it is a presumption - not intentional - that the *umu* event is also a methodology: it is a way of doing things not just for the conveyance of values from one generation to another. It outlines the principles for communal reading. The *umu* can serve as a lens for seeing or ways of reading the Bible and thus [re]structuring (*umu foou*), [re]freshing (*umu fakafana*) and [re]interpreting (*umu hila*) the Niuean story.

This reading of the *umu* highlights a cluster of hermeneutical critical points. The first has to do with the act of my being a theologian. The *umu* is an earth oven. It needs to be dug out. In performing that action I am earthing myself by digging deep into the past and looking towards the future. I am not carrying out this task alone. I am doing it in the company of others. What emerges through this activity are a number of elements that help articulate the proposed interpretative method. They can be listed as: the process of earthing (digging); exposing the *vaka* – (which will attract the life-carrying themes of "roots/arteries"); recognising the mode of *tala-tutala* (talk-conversation, story-telling and orality); revealing the importance of the hard work of *pona/pipi fatuaua* (tying/binding/loosening); and, finally, observing the hospitality of *taonaga/faiagahau* (ban-

quet/feasting/celebration). Each one of these elements refers back to something which is both actual and metaphorical in the art of the *umu* – and, by extension, how this core cultural event might serve the task of doing theology in this particular context. Embedded in these elements are core principles of *fakaalofa* and *feofanaki* (love and hospitality), *foaki-momoi* (giving/offering/sharing), *fakalili-fu/fakatokolalo* (respect/humility), *fekafekau/gahua* (service/work), *fakauka* (persistence/perseverance), and *kau fakalataha* (unity/ togetherness). These are the fruits of digging around the *umu*.

7. *Umu: Vaka* of the Gospel

Now it is time to probe deeper. The process of setting up and celebrating an *umu* is a straight forward descriptive task. It is subject to empirical observation and recording. The practice of the *umu* lends itself, however, to a much thicker reasoning. It is when this task is done that the potential links to a Christian hermeneutic can be constructed. The foundation for such is established through seeing the *umu* as a canoe or the vessel of the gospel. Let me explain. This guidance is necessary because it is at this point we move into the Niuean cultural worldview which is very different from the usual western linguistic and philosophical categories that inform a classical theology.

There are many forms and locations for transmitting the story of the Christian and Niuean experience. In formal occasions we hear the salvation story of Jesus within the sacred walls of the community chapel of western architecture. We can also read the Jesus story in the paperback Bible that comes in various translations plus commentaries, or by googling the internet. Likewise, the Niuean history is now recorded by western scholars and stored in paper documents or online. Accessing the information is not an issue anymore. There are many

vaka (canoe/vessel) that have carried the Niuean *taoga* (treasures) from time immemorial but this thesis proposes that the *umu* be seen as a *vaka*.³²⁰

It is not unusual, of course, for the church to be seen as a boat. That metaphor is to be found in the ecumenical symbol of the World Council of Churches. What is different about this Niuean claim is the way in which an earthbound *umu* is being viewed as a canoe, a vessel. The reason for binding these two together lies initially in some of their shared aspects. The key to this connection lies in the capacity of the *vaka* to carry two main meanings. The more obvious is 'canoe' which suggests mobility, the sea and fishing. The *vaka* is a mode of *puhala* (transport). The less obvious meaning is 'root'. Here we have a sense of 'stability', earthiness, and the *fonua* (land). It is from this second meaning of the *umu* that the proposal of the *umu* being a *vaka* for the gospel is made. The benefit of this association is that the *vaka* through its first meaning of 'canoe' and 'vessel' can give the *umu* a sense of movement, a capacity for it to migrate from one place to *another*. The *umu*, being a *vaka*, carries theological strength and weight. Both *umu* and *vaka* are metaphors that symbolise *monuina* (providence), *makona* (sustenance), and *puhala* (vessel/transport) for the *fenoga* (travel/journey). Seen together the *umu* conceived of as a *vaka* can help us "move forward to the past and backward to the future".³²¹

8. *Vaka-he-Fonua: Rooted in the Land*

That reference to *vaka* or "root" leads easily into a discussion of the *umu* as a cultural symbol that is "rooted" in the *fonua*. Like *Adam*, the human being as a

³²⁰ I am utilising the term *vaka* in a way Winston Halapua has used in proposing *moana methodology* as a "creative and vigorous way of moving forward and addressing contemporary human and environmental realities and crises." Halapua, W. *Moana Methodology of Leadership*, Talanoa Oceania, UTC & CSU School of Theology, Sydney, 2008, p. 5.

³²¹ Nasili Vaka'uta in "Fonua-e-Moana: Re-[en]vis[i]on[ing] an Oceanic Hermeneutics." *Pacific Journal of Theology* 11, no. 38 (2007), p.5.

living creature, rises out of *adamah*, the earth, "...then the Lord God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature." (Genesis 2:7). The *fonua* is where the Oceanic life-cycle begins and ends.³²² At some mysterious level, the *fonua*, as a living entity has a deep impulse to nurture all that it has brought forth into existence. In some symbolic sense, *fonua* becomes a relational metaphor for God in the same way that Halapua implied the *moana* does for the nurturing Oceanic God.³²³

For the purpose of hermeneutical endeavor though, *fonua* in its etymology refers to both "land" and "placenta". The ritual of returning the afterbirth (placenta) to its natural *kaina* (home) is best described by the Tahitian theologian Celine Hoire.³²⁴ She stipulated that in oceanic tradition, the *fonua* is a place of life-formation and sustenance. By burying the placenta and the *pito* (umbilical cord) in the family land, it symbolizes the fact that that person was born and is rooted in that particular place. The practice recognizes that wherever that person goes, s/he will always have a perdurable connection to the *fonua*. That inherent link will have the *pito* calling back its owner.³²⁵ *Umu* can be seen as a spiritual *pito* (umbilicus). Even though the bio-physical link between the child and the *fonua* is severed after birth there will always be a psycho-spiritual connection - a *vaka*, to where he or she had come from.³²⁶ Like a child will always be a beloved/child

³²² Ibid. p.8.

³²³ Halapua, W. *Waves of God's Embrace: Sacred Perspectives From the Ocean*, Canterbury Press, Norwich, 2008.

³²⁴ Celine Hoire, "Polynesian Perspectives on Birth, Marriage, Death and Hospitality" in *Ecotheology*, 4, 1998, pp.51-57.

³²⁵ Ibid., pp.52-53.

³²⁶ It is a Niuean/Oceanic practice that after birth the placenta *fonua* is returned to the land *fonua* of the family to be buried either at a particular place to mark the boundary of the family land or with a tree on it as a marker.

of a mother, so there is a spiritual bond of *tagata he fonua* 'person-being of (who belong to) the land'.³²⁷

The traditional *umu* is made by *iihi e manava he kelekele* (literally, 'cutting open the womb of the land'). The *fonua* (land/placenta) is dug into or exposed to earth (to fit in) the *umu*. This act alone is an analogy of "looking" back into the place of our birth and origin. Therefore, the *umu* in light of this act is a "lens" through which we look back and connect with the Creator as well as an act of [re]connecting with the past and to the *tupuna* (ancestors) and their wisdom.

Within this context, the *umu* takes the place of a corporate *pito*, a mark of an entrance (*pu fonua* - entrance into the earth), therefore, a symbol of the [re]connection and thus a relationship with the past. The past in this instance can be equated to *Fonuagalo*, (*fonua* is land, *galo* is unknown/mysterious/lost) the mythical place where the founding gods of Niue hailed from.³²⁸ Moreover, and importantly, it signifies history, ancestors, genealogy, with the rich repertoire of their *taoga*. The past *taoga* includes the apostolic history and traditions that is of the Church of Christ. It is a *fonua* that is rich in life-giving information that feeds and nourishes the *fetuiaga* and others.

The *umu* then becomes a conduit that links the present to the past as well as the future. It is a place where the present can peep into the mystery of past or the past could be studied, revised, lived and inform the shaping of the future. This *fonua talumelie* (fertile land) is to be equated with the wealth and fertility of

³²⁷ The Niuean philosophy of the *tagata he fonua* (man/woman of the land), is equivalent to *tangata whenua* of Maoridom. It is a view that the Niuean is inextricably linked to the land. The land rights of the Maori as clearly stipulated in the 'Treaty of Waitangi' reflects their passionate affiliation to the land. (see Orange, Claudia. *The Treaty of Waitangi*, Wellington, Bridget Williams Books, 1989). Normally, land tenure is shaped by the Niuean community and vice-versa. The failure to observe the traditional methods had fractured families and communities. Niueans continues today to re-define *fonua* in a court of Law as families grapple with the western system of land management. *Fonua* is scared. To fight over and defile the land is equivalent to self-abuse. Thus, the *fonua* is to be cared for and used sensibly for the benefit of all.

³²⁸ Legend spoke of Fao and Huanaki who came from *Fonuagalo* and created Niue by stamping on one side of the submerged reef raising the other side. After one side came to be, the same was done on the other side resulting in a raised coral island we have today.

the life-giving word of God that is the Bible. One can trace its *vaka* (roots) way down to the biblical creation narrative (Genesis 2). From the *fonua* sprung vegetation and life of different kinds. God created the first human from the *fonua*. There is an image of fertility that is associated with land. Like the biblical creation story, the Niuean reading of the *fonua* bring to mind the understanding that *fonua* (Hebrew *adamah*) is a feminine form. Thus, land, seen from the Niuean ancient world-view, is like a fruitful woman to a husband. One of the two most powerful Niuean traditional gods, the *tokamotu*, was said to be represented by a phallus shaped symbol wrapped in a woman's pubic hair stored in dried banana flower petal³²⁹ and hung under a fire for warmth. This religious practice (keeping it in a dried warm place) is to invoke rain; and rain signifies semen that falls and penetrates the *fonua* fertilizing it, thereby bringing about abundant life in every form. The point is, the *fonua* holds significant meaning to Niueans. Embedded in the *fonua* is the *umu* with its *vaka* (roots) deeply grounded in it.

This religious reading becomes the source of its traditions and practices. *Fonua*, therefore, is the bed where the Niuean community finds its bearings and life. It is inseparable from living communities (all living creatures and their kinds) described by Cliff Bird as *pepesa*,³³⁰ an understanding from the Solomon Islands' Marovo community, that land is inclusive of all living beings. Bird's view cannot see land without people and all the life forms it comprises. Tofaeono shares a similar perspective in his eco-theology of the *aiga* (extended family) where he argued the inclusivity of both *fonua* and *aiga* in the household of life. He equat-

³²⁹ There are variations to the story of the *tokamotu* god of fertility. The late Terry Chapman was one of the cultural commentators who held this description. His reference to the dried banana wrapping was at odds with one traditional custodian - elder Posini Talaiti, who mentioned *laukaka* (coconut web fibre) as the wrapper instead. It could well be that both elements were used to secure the form in place. Talaiti was the primary source who named the woman's pubic hair as the inner wrapper of the phallic shaped *tokamotu*. These accounts were orally shared with me by these two sources. The written article can also be found in Loeb, E. M. *History and Traditions of Niue*, Honolulu, Hawaii, Bernice Pauahi Bishop Museum, Bulletin 32, 1926.

³³⁰ Bird, Cliff. *A Theological and Ethical Exploration of Pepesa (Land) as Community in the Marovo Context, Solomon Islands*, unpublished Master of Theology Thesis, Pacific Theological College, Suva, 2001, chapter 1.

ed land with "life" particularly in small island groups. Land is a "life-supporting resource"³³¹ that without it there is no community - human or ecological.

The *umu* is firmly rooted in the *kelekele*.³³² It is dug and grounded in the *fonua*, hence linked with ideas of life and rich heritage. The associated notions of *umu* and *fonua* understand the concepts as mechanisms for interconnections and relationships; they both conjure up the image of the *pepesa fetuiaga* or *aiga* the household of life.

The *umu* grounded in the *fonua* is not only about life-giving; it is also associated with the end of a life. Essentially, *umu* making is to do with celebrations and banquets; it is a happy and joyful gathering. But it is also concerned with pain, particularly funerals. A community gathers around the *umu* to help and support the family prepare and offer hospitality for guests and mourners. In the same way the *fonua* is cut open for the *umu*, the land is opened to receive the body of the deceased, "*Kua ihi e manava he kelekele, kua liuaki ki ai haana tino*" (the womb of the land is ripped open to receive back her own). This Niuean proverbial saying resonates with Job's understanding of the life cycle in relation to land as *fonua*. "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I shall return there! The Lord gives and the Lord takes away! Blessed be the name of the Lord." (Job 1.21).

The *umu* whose *vaka* is deeply rooted in the *fonua* is an analogy for the life-cycle itself: life begins with the opening of the *fonua* and laid with rocks; fire is ignited, fueled with firewood, rocks are heated; the heated rocks are parted, wrapped food is laid in the *umu* under the hot rocks; and, finally, the *umu* is covered with leaves then buried with soil. Here, the process symbolizes the unfolding of humanity from its birth out of the *fonua*, ignition of life signified by the

³³¹ Tofaeono, Ama'amalele, *Eco-Theology: Aiga - The Household of Life: A Perspective from Living Myths and Traditions of Samoa*, World Mission Script 7, Freimund-Druckerei, Neuendettelsau, 2000, p.45.

³³² A Niuean word for 'land' (*kelekele*) used interchangeably with *fonua*, although it carries no reference to placenta as does *fonua*. *Kelekele* can also mean 'below' or 'under'.

lighting of the fire and its delicate beginnings. The fire grows and intensifies as it is fed with firewood symbolizing the input of the surrounding community. The heated rocks represent the influence and lasting impact this fire (life) has on the immediate environment. But with time (age) the fire would burn out and eventually "die" out. The impact of its heat then would be utilized to transform (cook or make ready) the food for the banquet by covering and burying. In reality (visually), covering of the *umu* is likened to a burial of the dead. Even the uttering reflects the burial rhetoric of a funeral as the *umu* is being covered: "*mohe taha, mohe totonu...*" (Sleep well, rest in peace...).³³³

Understanding the *umu* as having its *vaka* (roots) deeply embedded in the *fonua* speaks about *totou fakamotu*; reading and interpreting texts not only from a historical, traditional point of view but also from an ecological perspective. It is a reading (and counting) from a context where human society understands itself as *pepesa* (community), *aiga* (household of life) and an *umu fetuiaga* (fellowship of the *umu*).

Interpreting the *umu* as *vaka* leads to the second meaning of *vaka*, that is "vessel, vein or artery". Any of the three terms could be used to articulate the function of the *umu* in hermeneutics. The term *vakatoto* (vein or artery) is appealing for the purpose of *umu* hermeneutics. The whole word is an associated affix of *vaka*. Like roots, the arteries in the body carry the blood cells (which is the 'life force') of the living body. As the roots carry the nutrients deep from the *fonua* to the branches and the leaves, so do the veins and arteries carries life-force ingredients (oxygen, nutrients, hormones, and cellular products); powered by the heart to the rest of the body and back as part of the regeneration and sustaining

³³³ The ceremonial rhetorics and practice of the traditional "*umu ti*" in particular closely resemble that of Christ's burial and resurrection. The lighters of the *umu* are not to bathe until the *umu* is opened on the third day. Although this was a pre-Christian practice the resemblance to Jesus' death, burial and resurrection on the third day provides an interesting comparison. *Ti* root (tuber) is a traditional food; a source of nourishment especially in times of drought and famine. The Niuean saying "*Ko e fakamoui he vaha toto kelea...*" (It is a savior in times of need) at some level compares the *ti* root to Christ as source of nourishment in times of famine - be it physical or spiritual. Some description can be found in Loeb, Edwin. *History and Traditions of Niue*, Honolulu Hawaii, Bernice Pauahi, Bishop Museum, Bulletin 32, 1926.

process.³³⁴ The body in its molecular level is a very complex. How they function depends on the every other part of the body. In other words, every part of the body is interdependent. There is a network of systems in the body that life depend upon. The *umu* here is compared to the *vakatoto* (cardiovascular system) in its function. Like the *vakatoto*, the *umu* is vitally important to the social and spiritual wellbeing of the community. It serves to sustain the value system of a community that marks it as Christian and Niuean. As a *vakatoto* the *umu* serves not only to "transport" life-sustaining values from time/generation to another but also as a hermeneutical lens.

The faith, history, stories, genealogies, dreams, values, teachings, wisdom, and all the *taoga* (heritage) of the past - the 'social-spiritual nutrients' that are necessary for the abundant life of the living community - are grounded in the event of the *umu*; that is, through the deep-rooted *vaka*. What is seen above is determined by the rich life-giving mystery below/of the past. The luxuriant growth of a tree is attributed to the fertility of the *fonua* it feeds on. The importance of roots to the overall wellbeing of a tree is crucial. Therefore, as a *vaka* or "root", the *umu* plays a significant role, not only in linking the past to the present, but linking the past, in this case, the rich ground of our being Jesus Christ as recorded in Scriptures. William C. Spohn made the connection between roots and fruit in this way, "If you would change the fruits, you have to go to the roots: no one expects to gather figs from a thorn bush (Matt.7:16-20)."³³⁵

Communities thrive when they draw from the wealth of their past. The language of *fonua*, trees and roots naturally leads to family networks and genealogy. It speaks about connections between the past, present and the future; those con-

³³⁴ The cardiovascular system transports approximately 5 litres of blood throughout the body every minute. Although the cardiovascular system is very complex. Its function is simply to carry the blood throughout the body. Refer to learn.fi.edu/learn/heart/vessels/veins.html. *Umu* is suggested here to have a similar function as an artery transporting Christian and socio-cultural values from one time/generation to another.

³³⁵ Spohn suggests that Jesus in this text is calling upon Israel's tradition to challenge its troubled present. He stated that the radical call of Jesus was not for a change of behavior but a change of heart and identity. And that ought to start at the roots. See Spohn, W. C. *Go and Do Likewise: Jesus and Ethics*, New York, Continuum Publishing company, 1999, p.31.

nections can be seen as ones between the visible of the present drawing the wisdom of the invisible past and feeding it on to the generation of the future.

The image is analogous to the psalmist's vision of a person who delights in the law of the Lord. "He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers." (Psalm 1:3). Being rooted in God's love empowers the community, as the apostle wrote to the Ephesians, "I pray that from His glorious, unlimited resources He will empower you with inner strength through His Spirit. Then Christ will make His home in your hearts as you trust in Him. Your roots will grow down into God's love... And may you have the power to understand... how long, how high, and how deep His love [for you] is... Then you will be made complete" (vv. 16-19 NLT). Empowerment comes through communal reading and understanding of God's love. It receives spiritual nourishment when biblical and cultural narratives are connected to and fed upon. When the community understands its foundation and draws out the spiritual nutrients and life-force, it continues to flourish, standing up to the tests of time, and becomes a resting place nourishing and strengthening the other.

9. *Vaka-he-Moana*: The Journey on the Moana

The hermeneutical *umu* has been explained in terms of its being a *vaka* "rooted" in the *fonua*. The associating of the metaphor of the *umu* with the *moana* may seem unusual beyond the liquid continent. The rhetoric of the *moana-fonua* is consistent with the "island way". Reading from the perspective of the *umu* is fluid because the occasion of the *umu* is liquid. Like the *moana* a gathering around this event is never static. It ebbs and flows. There is never a permanent structure or a strict order to follow in such a gathering. Unlike the formal institutions of community, the *umu fetuiaga* can be spontaneous. Yet, there is an underlying rhythm as though the Spirit is conducting the community's movement. This gathering responds to the pulse of nature, to the beat of breaking waves.

It is very important to note that the event of the *umu* is not just a *vaka* linking the *fetuiaga* and their history. It is a vessel crossing members of Niuean origin and others from different heritage. The liquid *fetuiaga* permeates the event of *umu faiagahau* and beyond the human boundary. Halapua used the liquid image of *moana* to best describe the endless interconnection that seeps beyond human relationships.³³⁶ It reaches to the natural environment as demonstrated by Bird and Tuwere.

The *umu* seen as *vaka* (canoe) lends itself to interpreting texts both vertically and cross-laterally. A vertical reading is represented by the *vaka akau* (root) or *vakatoto* (arteries-veins) that was delineated previously. It applies here also because *moana* speaks of depth as it does of horizons. The horizontal mode of reading is about reading and interpreting texts horizontally. This way of reading involves reading the text forward and backwards or reading the text across the page and then back-tracking to pick up meanings that one may have missed reading conventionally. Reading from left to right involves the western methodology, suitable in the western empirical language and format. On the other hand, reading backwards - from right to left - is unconventional reading that involves highlighting keywords, images and metaphors. It is a practice of the poetic languages: it is visual, audio and dynamic using creative imagination. The cross-lateral or horizontal reading is communal because the reader(s) look across to fellow readers to work together in the interpretive task. This interpretive mode can take the form of painting, weaving, singing and dancing. The horizontal reading is multicultural and cross-culturally inclined. In the act of migration, *vaka-he-moana* reading connects one community with another. In reading cross-culturally the communities help each other come to terms with their strangeness.

The *vakaakau* (tree root) and the *vakatoto* (blood vein/artery) are elements of the *vaka-he-fonua* (canoe of the land) hermeneutical mode. They represent a

³³⁶ Halapua, W. *Waves of God's Embrace: Sacred Perspectives From the Ocean*, Norwich, Canterbury Press, 2008.

vertical relationship between human-divine and present-past. On other hand, the *vaka-he-moana* (canoe of the ocean) mode represents a horizontal reading, that is, human-neighbour relationship which also includes the human-nature relationship. Both modes of reading are represented by the *vaka* canoe as articulated by Vaka'uta when he made this observation, "...in Oceania, we move forward to the past and backward to the future."³³⁷ He explained that our canoes can only move forward by rowing backward and vice versa. In other words, we can envision the future by moving forward to the past, and in the same manner, revise the past by moving backward to the future.³³⁸

The *umu* hermeneutic depicted in a *vaka* metaphor offers possibilities of [re]visiting the past and [re]reading its stories. It opens up the possibility of [re]learning the ancestors' life-ways, even querying their decisions and practices by [re]living the stories through rituals, ceremonies and song. Songs especially play an important role as the *vaka* in this case carrying the migrant's *taoga* from into new lands. As *vaka* the songs and hymns link them to their land of origin and help shape their new identity in their new home.³³⁹

In contrast to the *vaka-he-fonua*, the *vaka-he-moana* (canoe of the sea) is not a land-locked approach: it is liquid.³⁴⁰ The *vaka* is universally recognized as a means of movement, mobility, transport, and migration. There is an obvious appeal here for those who have crossed the *moana* through an act of migration and now find themselves living in diaspora. The *vaka* represents their movement into another place; the *vaka-he-moana* attracts to itself meanings of conveyance, communication, and [inter]connection – and, in the process of such, brings to mind the practice of being a community. The *fonua* and the *umu* are

³³⁷ Nasili Vaka'uta in "Fonua-e-Moana: Re-[en]vis[ion]ing an Oceanic Hermeneutics." *Pacific Journal of Theology* 11, no. 38 (2007), p.5.

³³⁸ Ibid. p.5.

³³⁹ Refer to previous chapter on ethnomusicology and the role music plays in the formation and affirmation of diasporic communities.

³⁴⁰ Halapua, W. *Moana Methodology of Leadership*, p.5.

bearers of roots, ancestry, lifelines, and *fetuiaga*. Contextually, the *vaka* operates on liquid stuff. The *umu* social context is liquid. The community around the *umu* best describes the nature and character of Niuean sociality: fluid and acephalous. In the heat of the activity, members of the *fetuiaga* ebb and flow, here and there, back and forth. It becomes a hive of activity where *taoga* is transmitted and relationships reaffirmed. The *umu* methodology/hermeneutics, from this perspective, seeks to read, [re]connect and retrieve the best from the past in order to critique/enrich the present and flourish in the future. It is an interpretive imperative.

These horizons speak of the future that includes the many in diaspora where the encounter with the strange other is inevitable. Ebbing and flowing is not only between Australia and Niue or with New Zealand where the large majority of Niueans reside. It also embraces the fellowship and intercourse which is a daily reality between Niueans and communities of other ethnicities, cultures and religions. The *umu* is not confined to those from the island. The Niuean communities abroad are attached to others from different backgrounds and cultures. It is being adopted by others who have joined the Niuean community; it is inclusive of second-third generation Niueans and others of multiethnic backgrounds and cultures. The *umu* as *vaka* is able to offer those who are of different and restricted dispositions the gifts of community and hospitality. This mode of reading is cross-lateral. It offers them a lens to see and interpret texts from the context of a Niuean *fetuiaga*. It enables the members of communities to "cross" over to different contexts, at different levels. As a *vaka*, the *umu* hermeneutics carries readings and meanings from different physical locations and social perspectives to converge. The *umu* as a *vaka* in this regard is likened to a hyphen. According Clive Pearson, a hyphen can both join and divide; it is about movement and migration. In a linguistic context, a hyphen joins two terms together. He writes:

The hyphen option acts like a point of departure for the first term; for the second the hyphen can act like a conduit, an arrow, pointing in a direction that will never be fully realized.³⁴¹

This resonates with an experience of migrants departing from the familiar to the unknown - the *vaka* (canoe, vessel or root) acts as a hyphen - linking the essence of being a Niuean, for example, with the essence of being Australian.³⁴²

Another metaphor that parallels the function of the *umu* is "bridge". In crossing over turbulent waters, bridges are needed to ensure easier access from one side to the other, or in hermeneutical terms, from one world to another. The flexible environment of the *umu* eliminates the social barriers that exist in institutionalized events allowing free flow communication and information. Where stringent compartmentalization so often defines formal institutions like the church and Government the opposite is true in the liquidity of the *umu* fellowship. Reading from this milieu has the benefit in enabling all members to participate in the hermeneutical practice. A sea of ideas is better than a solitary notion. This idea of the *umu* as a hermeneutical *vaka* carries more sensible weight. Especially when considering the communal nature of the interpretive task. *Totou* (reading) is concerned not just with human-centred texts. It is holistic. The *umu* in both its land-rooted and liquid modes has an ecological foundation. *Fonua* and *moana* provide the basis for Niuean and oceanic world-views. Their culture and spirituality are founded and shaped on the elements and principles of the natural environment. Therefore, the Niuean *fetuiaga* permeates the human margins of the *umu*. This holistic reading views the biodiversity not as part of the *umu* event but quite the contrary: the human gathering around the *umu* is but a temporary part of the natural island environment.³⁴³ It is a mistake

³⁴¹ Clive Pearson, *Faith in a Hyphen: Cross-Cultural Theologies Down Under*, Clive Pearson and Jione Havea (ed), Parramatta, NSW: UTC, 2004, p.8.

³⁴² Ibid., p.9.

³⁴³ The central argument of most Pacific contextual exponents revolves around the notion of the interconnectedness of all living things in the environment. *Umu* being a human activity is a *locus* for reading and

to think otherwise. The Solomon Island concept of *pepesa* defined by Cliff Bird reflected this understanding. Among a raft of Oceanic theologians Tuwere's theological preoccupation in the past years has been an ecological concern. *Vanua*³⁴⁴ is one of his main subjects.

The *umu* hermeneutics espousing the reading modes of the *vaka he fonua* and *vaka he moana* are a communal imperative especially for those in diaspora given the liquid "liminal space" they find themselves. Through these principles, displaced *fetuiaga* readers continue to connect and [re]interpret the life-giving text for their communities engaging and pronouncing new meanings to a community who are geographically, culturally and spiritually dislocated.

10. *Vahaloto*: The Principle of Space

It is now time to consider the principle of space - that is, *vahaloto* – in this emerging hermeneutic. The need to consider such is implied, of course, by the invoking of the *vaka-he-moana*. The *vaka* moves across the *moana*; it carries people from one space to another. The very idea of living in diaspora presupposes an exchange of space. The *vahaloto* is necessarily implicated in this hermeneutic, even before closer attention is given into how a sense of space informs the Niuean practice of communal living. Now *vahaloto* can refer to the space between objects, people and/or in-between time. It leads inevitably into a

doing eco-theology; a hyphen that bridges human and nature, faith and culture. It is a *vaka* that carried skills and intellectual knowledge from one generation to another, from one place to others. For instance see Halapua, W. *Waves of God's Embrace: Sacred Perspectives From the Ocean*, Canterbury Press, Norwich, 2008.

³⁴⁴ *Vanua* is a Fijian word for land. Tuwere's drive is to encourage an appreciation for Oceania's natural environment as theological *locus*. His work on the contextual theology of the *vanua* has been inspirational within the region. Most of his *vanua* work began with his Th.D thesis *Making Sense of Vanua (Land) in the Fijian Context: A Theological Exploration*, Melbourne College of Divinity, 1992. Others had espoused similar concerns of the land, refer to Joseph Bush Jr. "The *Vanua* is the Lord's", *The Pacific Journal of Theology*, Series II, No. 13, 1995, pp.75-87; in the same series of *Pacific Journal of Theology*, Leslie Boseto, "Do Not Separate Us From the Land and Sea", pp.69-74.

concern for relationships and how space is organized in village life. The hermeneutical issue will become one of whether (and how) the *vaka* moving across the *moana* dislocates an accepted understanding of space and requires a revised interpretation of *vahaloto*. That need becomes clear in a consideration of the locations of the *umu* at home and in diaspora in its relationship to the formal site of the church, the *ekalesia*.

The location of the *umu* within the community boundaries is imperative in hermeneutical space or *vahaloto*. Reading the Bible from the *vahaloto* requires a *fetuiaga* or a community. *Vahaloto* in the Niuean context speaks of a space between two or more people. There is no space in an individual. It is not only notionally wrong to associate the word *vahaloto* with an individual: it is a misnomer. One could argue from a western perspective that everyone has an 'inner' space but the Niuean equivalent *loto* has no reference to 'space' but to one's mind or soul. The Niuean space or *vahaloto* refers to relationships between individual or objects. For instance, one could speak of physical space between trees or boundaries like the village green '*Ko e male he vahaloto he tau kaina he maaga.*' (The village green is located in the space between the village house). *Vaha* means "space" and *loto* is "inside" or "within/between". In social terms, *vahaloto* speaks of "relationships" – an example of such would be *kua moumou e vahaloto ha lautolu* (the space between them has been violated).

The space between the *umu* and the church building affects how texts are read and meaning is interpreted. Centre space is allocated to the church building while the *umu* is located at the margin of the village, at the very edge of the residential area. The relationship between these two spaces is contrasting. It has an impact on who and how interpretation is done. Centre/middle and margin/outside determines who and what is important and otherwise. In universal terms, the centre will always be the significant space. It is equated with status of importance and honor. In a typical Niuean village the church building and the manse is at the *loto uho* (centre) of the village signifying the centrality of God in a community. The minister's residence likewise is situated next to the church building conferred by an understanding that God is represented in these two

central symbols. Thus, to be a minister or being part of a leadership team in the central institution, the more prestige and respect one commands. This social gravitation towards the centre in community life defines one's spiritual and political pursuit in a traditional community environment. Located at the centre is the *male fono* (meeting place) for the village community. It is in this space that the community also meets to discuss community matters,³⁴⁵ engage in social and sports activities. Even families who reside closest to the centre often boast in pride saying that they are descendants of the *tupunas* who gifted the land to the Church. Henceforth, the closer one's resident is to the middle the higher one's respect demands.

The *vahaloto* of the *umu* in relation to the Church are at odds: they are polarities within the village structure. Whilst the Church building and village green occupy the centre and are regarded as "sacred space", the place of the *umu*, on the other hand, is not even detected within the periphery of the village green. It is not even beside the homes. The *umu* is located *i tua* (behind/at the back) of the residential area towards the bush, often hidden from public view. The *faahi tua* at the periphery is a space where families burn their rubbish. Its location symbolises what Mircea Eliade called the "profane space". It is equivalent to the biblical location of Gehenna (the valley of Hinnom) outside the city walls of the sacred city of Jerusalem; it is a place where the rejects are banished to dwell and the ostracized suspended. It is thus associated with suffering and death.

The relationship between sacred space of the centralised institutional Church at the middle of the *male fono*, and the "profane place" of the *umu* gives a contrast of readings depending where one is situated. This understanding of space requires a community reading beyond the conventional understanding of a received and adopted faith. There is a need to move hermeneutics beyond the

³⁴⁵ The usage of village green as central 'meeting place' is not unique to Niue. Most island communities lay out their village structure in this manner. See also Samisoni Moleli in "Samoan *Pulega a Alii ma Faipule*" in *Pacific Journal of Theology*, Series II, no. 50, 2013, p.39.

structuralist frame. One way of doing so is by means of Lindsay Jones's seminal two-volume work, *The Hermeneutics of Sacred Architecture*.³⁴⁶

Jones set out a comprehensive set of categories with which to explore the meanings created by dynamics between communities and their religious buildings and places across geographical areas, traditions, and time periods. Jones proposed to focus on the particularist and contingent character of religious spaces. What he said about buildings applies to all sacred spaces. It means meaning is never static even if the space seems to remain fixed: individuals and communities change and thus, experience can never be the same. The centrality of the church building may not change in its location, nor its sense of sacredness, but the experience of those who occupy these spaces ebbs and shifts. They change. Likewise, the *umu* at the physical margin of the village may never be centralised but it can become a hub of community gathering - a hive of activities in celebration preparation. From this end, a shift has taken place. The *umu* becomes a focal point of community assembly and thus re-positioned. Space is redefined. This understanding then is analogous to Jonathan Smith's idea of how ordinary spaces can be "sacralised". Building on the notion of "lived religion", Smith sees "sacred spaces" as spaces

...created by believers through many actions: how they design the spaces, how they ornament them, how they prepare to enter them, how they dress to do so, and what they do within them. Such behavior brings meaning to spaces.³⁴⁷

This notion of lived religion applies to the *umu* space as much as it does to a chapel or any other lived space because space is "sacralised" by the perfor-

³⁴⁶ Jones, Lindsay. *The Hermeneutics of Sacred Architecture: Experience, Interpretation, Comparison*. 2 vols, Cambridge, Mass.: Centre for the Study of World Religions, 2000.

³⁴⁷ Smith, Jonathan Z. *To Take Place: Toward Theory in Ritual*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1987, pp.47-83.

mance of the community. The process of sacralisation is brought about by a hierophany (Mircea Eliade) as do all sacred phenomena.³⁴⁸ The manifestation of Christ in and through his believers in fellowship (in every time and place) renders the space sacred, "For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them." (Matthew 18:20).

Space in Oceania is considered from a relational perspective as outlined in this revealing dictum: "*Ko au ha ko koe - ko koe ha ko au*" (I am because you are - you are because I am). Individualism is a heresy in the oceanic world-view.³⁴⁹ The respect oceanic communities render to all its members is bound in the understanding of communal space. *Kua talahaua e maaga ha ko e vahaloto (fa-kafetuiaga) he tau tagata* (The reputation of the village is known/regarded by the healthy space/relationship of its members). This does not mean that *umu* community is free from relational disparity. Every fallen community has an innate propensity to divide. Niueans are no different, particularly in the formal institutions such as the Church. However, the received gift of modern Niuean society is the ability to maintain Christian and cultural values that hold individuals together. Community spiritual and social reality is determined by the renewal of relationships between members of the community. The observed *vahaloto* "space" between the minister, elders, deacons, etcetera, (those of status) and the non-members of the church is challenged in the context of the *umu*. Where dress, rhetoric, deacons' court and pulpit separates the ecclesial leadership of the church and the rest of the community in formal worship and meeting, the community in the *umu* context redefines "sacred space". This "lived-religious" space is observed not just in formal "space" in worship but also means "practice lived space" around the *umu*.

³⁴⁸ Eliade, Mircea. *The Sacred and the Profane*, New York: Harper & Row, 1961, p.20; See also *Patterns in Comparative Religion*, New York: Meridian Books, 1963.

³⁴⁹ This view concurs with Vaka'uta *et al* that "individualism" is inherently at odds with oceanic ethos. See Vaka'uta, Nasili. *Reading Ezra 9-10 Tu'a-Wise: Rethinking Biblical Interpretation in Oceania*, Atlanta, Society of Biblical Literature, 2011, p.73.

In reading the Bible, the community is informed and affirms its understanding of sacred space. This practice involves challenging the western Christian orthodoxy of a specified structuralist approach so often engendered to support the hierarchy, thereby sustaining the *status quo* of the colonial agenda. Reading from the *umu* perspective, then, involves the communal lens from the periphery. Those who are located at the margins are empowered by the fact that they are not disregarded; living out their Christian calling within the space of the *umu* is significant as is the formal assembly in a designated sacred chapel found at the centre of the village.

The premise of this thesis is based on the liquid *fetuiaga* suggesting that the Niuean sense of community is fluid. This discussion highlights the hermeneutical tool to support the interpretative task comes from the event of the *umu*. One of the supportive principles for the task is the notion of "sacred space" where reading sacred texts and cultural insights require a communal reading even from the marginal location of the *umu*. It is suggested here that the *umu* as a symbol is significant in the light of Eliade's terms. God is experienced around the *umu* as a gathering of people practicing *feofanaki* (love and hospitality). It is thus proposed here that the *umu* is consecrated; it occupies both the "margin" and "centre" simultaneously.

The *vahaloto* is defined by boundaries and "boundaries are givens of existence."³⁵⁰ It was mentioned that the *umu* is located at the "margin" or boundary and, therefore, perceived as being of no significant consequence to a formal definition of the church as we know it. Anything that is outside the "centre" is not as important. The institution of the church established by the missionaries had instilled in communities' dispositions and understandings that define "sacred spaces" from "profane spaces" and what is "normal" as opposed to the "anomaly", who is important and who is not. For example, the church building and sur-

³⁵⁰ Jione Havea, in *Voices from the Margin: Interpreting the Bible in the Third World*, p. 63.

rounding facilities are sacred and thus very important. Anyone who holds a place in church leadership (i.e. minister) is perceived as superior and often venerated, raised onto the pedestal. On the other hand, the common *timotua* (lowly/peasant) is considered insignificant and have no place in the elite category. In the *umu* context, church ministers and leaders are recognised as those who hold important status in community. Within those rigid walls, they are viewed as "elite" and thus "superior" than the *timotua*. However, within the informality and fluidity of the *umu fetuiaga*, any power or tension of a politically monolithic, socio-religious hierarchy, is duly released. The general hierarchy of church and community status gives way to a republican nature of the *umu fetuiaga*. Fellowship takes precedence, relationships are amplified.

The question of who does the reading and interpretation, and where, therefore depends on the location. The western missionary hermeneutics are practiced in the institutional church found at the middle; the trained minister is the master reader and interpreter of texts, together with the trained and experienced lay leaders. At the other end, all who gather around the *umu* at the edge of the village, are (potential) readers and orators. No one is above the other apart from the formal Devotion where the local minister takes precedence in blessing the occasion. In place of a minister in this informal *fetuiaga* is a community. In lieu of an ordained minister, the formal proceedings can be led by an elder who possesses the equanimity of a *tupuna pulotu* (ones of proven wisdom). How one reads in the chapel is conditioned by a sacred space within a prescribed liturgy. In contrast, in the liquidity of the republican *umu* community is an open forum - all have the right to contribute to the reading and interpretive process.

In the flux of the *umu*, the *vahaloto* between its members are tested. How one reads texts either affirms or negates the other, but it is within this working community that the "Other" is encountered. God can be found in relationships, embodied in the giving, compassion and solidarity. It is a space where the hierophany took place in the giving of value, direction and purpose to the *fetuiaga*. As Eliade states, "...any place consecrated by the hierophany may come to be

honored as the navel of the cosmos, the junction of heaven, earth and underworld."³⁵¹

An *umu* hermeneutics acknowledges what Havea calls the "fluidity of textual boundaries"³⁵²; text, meaning, and definitions shift and drift in a fluid communal context. According to Havea, the tendency is to conform to the hermeneutical practices of the colonizing west, that is, to control and tame the meaning. "Rather", he suggested, "we should allow the boundary to de-/re-fine meanings, bearing in mind that we may never be able to step onto the same meaning once."³⁵³ Located at the boundary, reading from the *umu*'s fluid and flexible *fetu-iaga* in some unique way can be a lens through which meanings could be understood and [re]defined. Like *tala fakaholomuia* (exaggerated-humorous talk), the text could be read and interrogated from different perspectives - each bringing to the whole a different strand "adding" and "taking away", defining and refining meaning as a community.

As a hermeneutical principle, the question for a diasporic community of the *umu* is 'How do we read from a community (Christian Church) that no longer holds a central place in public life?' When Niueans, who believe that the practice of church and worship are central, arrive and find church to be at the margins, what is their approach? How do diasporic Niueans interpret and define *vahaloto* in a liquid postmodern "i" culture – that is, a sociality that seems to be deeply entrenched in "my space" or "i-space" and where nothing is sacred? How is community to be defined in the *vahaloto* of the Internet – in virtual space and cyber space? Moreover, where do they find communal space to define who they

³⁵¹ Eliade, Mircea. *The Sacred and the Profane*, New York: Harper & Row, 1961, pp.375-378.

³⁵² Ibid., p.65.

³⁵³ Havea refers to island coastlines (boundaries) changed by being washed away and then adds to by waves of the Pacific Ocean. An oceanic image cleverly employed by Havea as a hermeneutical analogy. Ibid., p.65.

are, where they come from and where they are going? And, in those unusual spaces, how can they read and theologise as a community?

The task is difficult considering time, spatial and temporal distances between ancient texts and narratives, not to mention the dislocated communities between Niue and distant shores; those diasporic families are dispersed in various postcodes and the "centre", that is their gathering worship space - the church – can be far away. Furthermore, in their inner geography, "space" has now being redefined by their new experience in a foreign environment where a new kind of liquid environment where the individual takes precedence over community.

11. *Tutala* Orality

The practice of the *umu* requires space. Its *vahaloto* has to do with time and place, as well as the space between and among people. This space, this *vahaloto*, is a place of word or talk as much as it is one of deeds. This *vahaloto* is a time of conversing, exchanging ideas, and using words and song to mark the occasion and create, exchange and share meaning. This use of words is *tutala* and is a daily reality. It takes place every day, any time and at any place. It is a "favorite pastime of the Pacific"³⁵⁴. It is an oceanic necessity. It is a feature of an oral community. The development of an *umu* hermeneutic must engage with a theoretical reflection on this principle of orality conceived within these flexible spaces.

The event of the *umu* may be a community gathering to assist the family in preparation for a *taonaga* (ceremonial-celebration space) but it is an occasion

³⁵⁴ Sitaleki Finau in his opening statement for the preface of *Talanoa Ripples* make this simple yet truthful comment that points to the 'laid back' nature of the island communities. It fits the *Umu* social environment perfectly. See Jione Havea (ed). *Talanoa Ripples: Across Borders, Cultures, Disciplines...*, Massey University, National Library of New Zealand, 2010, p.7

for *tutala* and *talanoa* at many levels. Orality is defined by Jione Havea as *talanoa*. He writes:

Talanoa refers to three overlapping events: story, telling, and conversation. *Talanoa* is not one or the other, but one in relation to the other two. Story is, in relation to telling and conversation; telling is, in relation to story and conversation; conversation is, in relation to story and telling; *talanoa* is all three at once. *Talanoa* is usually informal, fluid, and flexible.³⁵⁵

Here, Jione Havea neatly summarizes the very nature of the *talanoa*. The word and practice has been employed as an operating term for an oceanic reading of the Bible. The Niuean equivalent to Havea's *talanoa*, *tutala*, as a hermeneutical principle of the *umu fetuiaga*. *Tutala* comes from an all-encompassing term *tala*. As a root or *vaka* (root-word), *tala* is the origin of *tutala*, *talanoa*, *fakamatala*, *talatala*, its associated affixes. But *tutala* is a generic form that covers a raft of terms under orality.

For the sake of this hermeneutical exercise there is need to clarify some differences. Havea's understanding of *talanoa* in terms of "informal conversation", and more literally, "gossip" is problematic. Certainly, this event is done as a pastime between friends and family over a meal or "a few drinks" (*kava* bowl in some cultures. However, *talanoa* around a *kava* bowl is non-inclusive because traditionally women are excluded). For Niueans *talanoa* is what happens around the *umu* as the community work together to prepare for the *taonaga*. Talking and sharing in laughter (crying sometimes) are part of *talanoa*. The subject of conversation is non-prescriptive in this informal setting. Gender, age, status and persuasion float to the background as "inclusive fellowship" is foremost. This conversation setting is *talanoa* but *talanoa* also has another powerful meaning.

³⁵⁵ Havea, Jione. "Diaspora Contexted: Talanoa, Reading, and Theologizing, as Migrants", *Black Theology: An International Journal*, Vol. II, Issue 2, 2013, pp.185-200.

Talanoa to a Niuean refers to informal conversation or 'open talk' normally understood as "gossip", as opposed to *tutala* which perfectly fits Havea's above definition. *Talanoa* henceforth is non-inclusive to the Niuean audience, thus the decision is made to use *tutala* as an operating term here.

Talanoa, as an affix of *tala* has two parts: *tala* is story, telling, sharing and conversation; and *noa* (post-verbal emphatic particle) means 'without',³⁵⁶ as in, 'without any basis of truth', hence the allusion to its meaning "gossip". *Talanoa* also carries hurtful connotations of ridicule and mockery. In this vein, it also means 'openly talked about' without sensible regard as *noa* refers to an 'infinitesimal state'; that is to say, 'boundless' or 'without reserve'³⁵⁷ which leads to another meaning that adds an extra bite to *tala*, and that is 'barb'. With this meaning comes a warning. Words of *talanoa* have the power to heal or kill. It is to be handled carefully and responsively. This is true of any mode of communication but especially in *talanoa*; speaking in this mode is likened to using sharpened 'barb' to inflict pain and cause harm. In this sense, it is a means of criticism, insult, abuse, sarcasm and mockery. Its pain is more piercing when *talanoa* is used to reveal and expose secrets and guarded personal stories. Such pain lingers when these *talanoa* reverberates throughout the community, fracturing relationships, tearing trust. In this sense, *talanoa* is overtly transgressive.

Furthermore, *talanoa* often breeds neologism of which some new creations are useful; it is a practice, however, that often distorts the language rather than preserving its integrity. Indigenous words are replaced by a hybrid Niuean-*palagi* words. *Tutala*, on the other hand, captures the essence of creative conversation and [in]formative sharing. *Tala* in one sense is singular as in '*tala e tala*' (tell a

³⁵⁶ As a post-verbal emphatic particle, *noa* is used in many expressions to signify non-existence or infinitesimal states like *fiafia noa* (to be excited without cause) or *koli noa* (dancing without music). Refer to other examples in, Wolfgang B. Sperlich (ed). *Tohi Vagahau Niue: Niue Language Dictionary*, Government of Niue, University of Hawai'i Press, 1997, p.242.

³⁵⁷ This understanding is captured in its use in the word '*fakaalofa noa*', literally 'grace', or 'boundless love'.

story) and *tutala* is plural, '*hau ke tutala*' (come and talk/come and have a conversation). Nuances that includes *tu* (stand) as rising or standing for formal speech and *tu* as conscientious sharing, alluding to giving time or consideration and courtesy to other. *Tu* can also be an abbreviation for *tupu* (growth/progression/development) when used in *tala tu[pu]-fakaholo* (*tala tupu-fakahaga*) meaning "history or life-story". Life giving [hi]stories *tupu fakaholo* speaks about stories that grows a community as each is nurtured within the stories. *Fakaholo* means "to drive" which indicates the importance of such stories to the life of the *fetuiaga*. Imperative in these stories are fundamental values that continue to drive the community forward. This is true with cultural stories and songlines as it is with biblical narratives especially. The story of the Bible is "life-giving". Communal reading of *tala tu[pu]-fakaholo* then is an important aspect of the *umu* hermeneutics.

Equally important is an understanding of *tala tupu-fakaholo* as oral stories passed down from one generation to another. In every oral tradition, there is a propensity to "change" or "transform" according to the use of language and images, context, dynamics between orator and audience, etcetera. Every story depicting an historical event that is transmitted orally always has the potential *ke tupu* (to grow) into a new story as each generation and tellers weave their own experiences (sub-stories) into it. Indicative of places of significance in the story grow with time.

Tutala around the *umu* is informal and less prescriptive. It is more liberating and less boring/inhibiting than in the restricting and limiting environment of the church. It is more encompassing than the institutional chapels. It is woven within the life story of the community, married with elders' spoken texts and preserves a sense of dignity and respect which is at risk in Havea's use of *talanoa*.

In the course of the *umu* event, the *tutala* and *talanoa* eventually give way to *fono* or formal *fakamatala* at a certain stage. *Fono* and *fakamatala[aga]* are

synonymous, they mean "speech". These forms of *tala* are presented by designated family and community orators and invited guests but, oftentimes, in a Niuean fluid sociality, anyone is invited to speak. Here lies the difference between the Niuean and the more rigidly structured societies like Samoan and Tongans. They have clear protocols with orators and designated speakers in their hierarchical system.³⁵⁸

Niueans, like Samoans and other island communities depend on their elders who have acquired oratory skills to lead in their reading and interpreting processes - the *umu fakamatalaaga* (speeches) is one of the occasions. For in such time, the experienced orator (reader, interpreter, theologian) takes the community back to the past, retrieve the lessons and weave them into the social fabric they now create. Each community member participates in their listening drawing their inner imagining. Orators are skilled in interpretative methods digging deep into the rich repertoire of the ancestors, into the teachings of the gospel that had sustained the community for generations. The *umu* environment is the aspiring leaders' classroom.

In the integrative learning environment, *talanoa* brings to mind important figures and events of the past that shape and continue to shape the community and the future. Shaping (or being formed) takes place at all levels of the *tutala*. The spiritual message is drawn from the biblical text pronounced as a blessing upon the community. At the formal *fono*, dictated by the occasional theme, exemplary persons are named with their contributions to the family-community. *Talanoa* around the *umu* recall the people and stories of some influence, while the *fakaholomuia*³⁵⁹ sessions at the edges of the gathering dig at stories of past char-

³⁵⁸ The social organization of the Samoan society is briefly described by Leulu F. Va'a on pages 50-56, and the continuities and changes in diaspora communities outlined in chapter 7. Va'a, L. F. *Saili Matagi: Samoan Migrants in Australia*, Samoa, USP and National University of Samoa, 2001. Also refer to Vaka'u-ta, Nasili. *Reading Ezra 9-10 Tu'a-Wise*, pp.20-31, for a Tongan social system.

³⁵⁹ *Fakaholomuia* is a communal practice of recalling past stories, exaggerating parts by adding or subtracting to poke fun while making a point. Such practice is prevalent in the *umu* community.

acters who would not be mentioned at a formal *fono* but played an affective role in community building nonetheless.

This reverence for the past *via* the *fakaholomuia* (retold stories with added humor) is what Elizabeth Schussler Fiorenza called "a Hermeneutics of Remembrance".³⁶⁰ Fiorenza argued for a reading that "remembers" the less prominent in ancient texts, those who are oftentimes ignored in traditional patriarchal readings. Hermeneutics has a role in remembering as it does in retrieving meaning from the text, story, design or song. *Fakaholomuia* are powerful when the stories are being told together by several speakers each adding on parts as it is being relayed. Stories of the *fakaholomuia* are re-told stories about people or events witnessed from several perspectives. Depending on the witnesses' location a story could be totally different from others. As a story is told, each witness may add or take away making the narrative as humorous as possible without losing the main point of the story. The process therefore is not one dimensional but a communal engagement, pitching the past and present, engagement between the text and reader, context and the contexted,³⁶¹ the speakers and the hearers, and the painter and the observer.

Talking and reading from the *umu* surrounding varies depending on the process. The mode of *tutala* shifts as the *fetuiaga* moves from the *umu* area to the *taonaga*. Celebrations or *taonaga* in the oceanic context never formally happen without a worship service led by the local Minister, a trained biblical interpreter and "contexted" theologian. For many, this is the crux of the occasion. The *umu fetuiaga* finds its point of climax here. Here, the *Tala Mitaki* (equated with 'Gospel' in the Niuean vernacular) is contextualised. Unlike the Sunday *lauga* (ser-

³⁶⁰ Fiorenza, Elizabeth Schussler. "A Feminist Critical Interpretation for Liberation: Martha and Mary, Luke 10:38-42". *Religious and Intellectual Life* 3 (1986), pp.21-36.

³⁶¹ According to Havea, to be contexted is not so much concerned about contextualized by borrowed texts or teachings, but it is about the local reader(s) being in one's element, so to speak, living and deeding in the local wisdom of ancestral history and heritage. See Jione Havea, "Diaspora Contexted: Talanoa, Reading, and Theologizing, as Migrants", p.190-191.

mon) the *fakamatalaaga* (reflection) is a much more contextualized interpretation suited for the occasion. The challenge for the local theologian-interpreter is to at once *vetevete* (exegete), *fakamaama* (interpret), and *lalaga* (weave) the *Tala Mitaki* with the story of the family and community, and vice-versa, reinforcing and affirming the synthesized values that have grown the community into a unique whole. All the work and fellowship *fetuiaga* of the *umu* culminates at this point where the formality of worship liturgy intersects with the ordinary *fetuiaga*, a fluid mixture of sorts within the community. The chief narrative is heard and interpreted in light of the multiple stories of the *fetuiaga* and vice-versa.

Stories and orality are not limited to *talanoa*, *tutala*, *fakamatala* or other variants of *tau kupu vagahau* (word of mouth). Stories and history of the *fetuiaga* are manifested in songs and dances. Values and traditions are woven into mats and bags, painted onto *hiapo* (cloth traditionally made from tree bark) that provided the background to the seating of the main guests; stories are told in the lyrics and expressed in the dances. These "living texts" are conversation partners of the "living Word" mediated by those in the *fetuiaga* for their own sake, and for the wellbeing of the *fetuiaga*.

These individual and corporate stories are inclusive of the *fono* (speeches), *tau lologo* (songs), *tau koli* (dances), *tau potu mo e tau hiapo* (mats and tapa designs), and even *tau kahoa fakamanaia* (flower necklaces and arrangements). Orality and aesthetics are to be carefully considered when texts and interpretations are based on cultural perspectives such as those found in the celebrating community around the *umu*. As Vaka'uta neatly stated, "Our texts were, and still are, parts of our lives, and we live with them."³⁶² Reading and understanding the Biblical texts in the context of the communal *fetuiaga* is fundamentally influenced/shaped not just by the context but by the inherent texts of the local community. The goal of one's reading then is to affirm and build on the unity and

³⁶² Ibid., p.156

solidarity of the *fetuiaga* whilst exposing the detrimental elements of individualism that pervades Niuean communities in postmodernity. It is done in a way that critiques the postmodern's preoccupation with consumer-capitalism and the individualistic reading of sacred texts and the life stories of communities. One is not a lone reader. Rather, an oceanic reader belongs to a community of readers. That is one way an oceanic reader differs from the westerner.

The *umu* hermeneutic seeks to consult the "oceanic imaginary"³⁶³ and dehegemonize hegemonic claims.³⁶⁴ As a consequent, it is hoped that with interaction with texts, new theologies are acquired that ultimately contribute to formation of new ecclesiological developments; models that affirms the vitality of the received *taoga* of *fetuiaga*.

Acknowledging the interaction between texts, contexts and the contexted then conjures up questions of voices, sounds and context especially in light of diasporic *fetuiaga*. The apparent advantages of this *umu* hermeneutic within the island milieu is the context itself. It allows considerable space for all to have a voice throughout the *fetuiaga* - from the informality around the *umu* itself, the devotional *kupu fakamafana* (theological reflection), *fono* (speeches) - to the context of celebration in song and dance. It is an inclusive space. On the other hand, however, can this be replicated in a diasporic setting? What is the equivalent in diaspora? Numerous questions could be asked here: In a diasporic setting, who does the *tutala* (talking)? When is *tala Tala Mitaki* (*Tala Mitaki* equated with 'Gospel' in the Niuean vernacular)? When do we *tala* the *Tala Mitaki*? Can *tala Mitaki* be shared in the *magaaho tutala* (informal conversation) or even *talanoa*?

³⁶³ Subramani, "Oceanic Imaginary," *The Contemporary Pacific* 13, no.1, (2001):151, cited by Vaka'uta, *Pacific Journal of Theology*, Series II, Issue 38, 2007, p.9.

³⁶⁴ David Gegeo cited by Vaka'uta. Ibid., p.9.

What does it mean for diasporic Niueans who find themselves needing a different type of orality? English, being their second language and, technologically, illiterate, means being disadvantaged. What are we to make of the linguistic and technological gap between the second-third generations and their parents? What is the conversation content, what are the main issues, the subject? Moreover, are they on the same page, screen or tablet? As they *tutala*, in whose language are they using? around the re-located *umu*, what language is used? Who's using the language? How do we read and listen to the Bible?

In reading the Bible, who has the dominant voice and who are voiceless and why? In what social setting are those of the low social standing able to speak? Which biblical characters could those around the *umu* identify with? In reading the ancient texts (biblical and historical) how and in whose language will the message be read/interpreted? How will it be conveyed? Will *fakamatala* (speech/sermon) be enough or should *tutala* be appropriate? How flexible is the *fetuiaga* in order to allow a hybrid between *fakamatala* and *tutala* to take place? Can the church afford *tutala* time and space in worship? Will the church recognize *tutala* around the *umu* (*faiagahau/taonaga*) as means of communicating the *Tala Mitaki* (gospel)? Has *tala fakaholomuia* a place in biblical interpretation? Is it that what New Zealand Polynesian *Bro'town*³⁶⁵ is all about, Polynesian cultural issues in diaspora and the re-telling the gospel tenets in a funny humorous genre?

³⁶⁵ The television animated comedy series *Bro'Town* is New Zealand's first adult animated show. It follows the adventures of 5 Samoan boys living in New Zealand Polynesian dominated suburb. It deals with the themes and nuances of Polynesian culture and being in a western society. One unique characteristic of the show was the way in which it mediated religion both sympathetically and critically to this wider audience. In doing so the show functioned as a site of theological reflection and a vehicle for the doing of contextual theology. Through the way in which religion was mediated in the show, issues related to personal, ethnic, religious, family and community identity are explored, drawing upon the negotiation of the three-way relationship between God, land and people running through Māori and Pacific Island cultures. See Stephen Garner's "Morningside for Life!: Contextual Theology Meets Animated Television in *Bro'Town*" in *Studies in World Christianity*. Volume 17, Issue 2, 2011, pp.156-174.

Is the *fetuiaga* singing the same song and dancing the same dance around the relocated *umu*? What are the differences with the lyrics of songs of home and in diaspora? Are the traditional singing and dancing used in church or still reserved for outside *umu fetuiaga*?

These questions guide a reading of biblical texts through the lens of the *umu fakafetuiaga*. Such questions guide readers of the *fetuiaga* to engage and scrutinise the text while considering their social position around the *umu*.

12. The Hermeneutics of Practice

Hermeneutical practice is the empirical reality of the *umu*. The Niuean notion of *tu-tala* is a verb in that it is animated talk; there is a presupposition of action or movement. *Tu* means to stand. Unlike the *talanoa* image of people sitting around the *kava* bowl engaged in conversation, illustrated by Havea in *talanoa*, *tutala* is generic for conversation regardless of the participant's physical position. However, the etymology of the word suggests the speakers should be in a standing position. Whilst a casual *tutala* ignores the where and how one speaks, formal speech-making in the Niuean culture demands that an orator stands before an address is made. To speak in a formal ceremony while sitting is disrespectful. This type of *tutala* is exercised in the formal part of the *umu* banquet.

Tutala also conjures up the notion of active orality. To stand (*tu*) in contrast to sitting indicates movement and action. The spoken word in this context points to active engagement and participation. The Niuean proverb, *vagahau mo e tau lima* (speak with your hands) is an example of active orality. This is typical *tutala* around the *umu*; it is *tutala* while working in pairs, groups or between groups - men, women and children. It is "word" in action. From this angle *tutala* is a contrast to Havea's *talanoa*. Unlike *talanoa*, this talk feeds into the *umu*. The prima-

ry function of the *umu* gathering is to work – in other words, becoming the hands and feet of the host. The image is analogous to the church as the Body of Christ. In a similar manner, each member of the community becomes an extension of the host's being - the hands and feet, working and serving. *Ka loga e lima ti mama e fekau*, the 'load becomes lighter when there are many hands to help'. When the challenge is issued, *vagahau e gutu ka e gahua e tau lima* is a Niuean way of saying "walk the talk". Literally, it translates, "speak - but as you do, use your hands (work)." It means more than physical work; it implies living out the wisdom of the gospel, do as it was taught by the *tupuna*; do as shown and practiced by the older generations.

Words in this milieu pertain to the teachings of the Bible. Theology, of course, is a study of the Word, a study of God. The Word incarnate in Jesus is a Word in action, the living Word. Words around the *umu* is enfleshed by the actions of the community. Words of love, compassion, generosity become real as they are practiced and realized around the *fetuiaga* of the *umu*.

As the bodies move in to the rhythm of work the living out of the word, talks and debate, jokes, teasing, mocking, laughter and crying take place concurrently. Reading, reflecting, reciting, debating, interpreting and singing are the features of this communal hermeneutic of practice. It is a *totouaga fakamotu* (reading/counting the island way) where both the imaginary and the physical are embraced. This involves reading, counting and interpreting in the manner of the local community. *Totou fakamotu* is similar to Vaka'uta's Tongan *lau fakatu'a*,³⁶⁶ that is, a *tu'a* (commoners) way of reading and talking. But, in the case of *totou fakamotu*, the *timotua* (the Niuean parallel to the Tongan *tu'a*) are not isolated. All are within the *fetuiaga*, including their traditions, culture and their natu-

³⁶⁶ Vaka'uta, Nasili. *Reading Ezra 9-10 Tu'a-Wise*, p.154. Jione Havea's idea of reading the "islandic way" resonates also in the notion of "totou fakamotu". See Jione Havea, "The Future Stands Between Here and There: Towards an Is-Land(ic) Hermeneutics" in *Voices from the Margin: Interpreting the Bible in the Third World*. Edited by R. S. Sugirtharajah. Revised and Expanded Third Edition. Maryknoll, New York, Orbis Books 2006.

ral environment; these are properties of the *motu* (island/context). This local way of reading and talking is inclusive because it is a communal practice that encompass the perceived hierarchy (whole community) - their *vagahau* (words) and *gahua* (work). It is a *vahaloto* where there is a sense of movement and liquidity.

Plainly, *totou* means to read, count and interpret. But, depending on a particular context, *totou* could also mean "estimation"; here *uta he tua* is alluding to the imaginary which challenges a reader to probe beyond the obvious in the text. The inner imaginary of readers influence the way one interprets the text, for one's internal geography is often shaped by the encounter with the familiar and the unfamiliar "other". The social and physical horizon of the reader[s] plays an influential/formative part in their *fetuiaga*. Engaging the basic senses give valuable experiences that affect the reading of texts and narratives, [re]telling stories and envisioning the future. *Totou fakamotu* engages the visual, audible and aromatic; the tangibles that are synaesthetically pleasing, or otherwise. The smell of cooking food, *tiale* and frangipani; sight of the abundant food and colour and beauty of dancer's dress and decorations; and, the sounds of laughter and music - of children happily playing are elements that contribute to the *totou fakamotu*. It encompasses individual and corporate imaginary, as well as the physical aspects of community practices.

Most importantly, this hermeneutics of practice is a Christian practice. It is a practice of "being" and building community. It is not just a methodology patterned after the principles of the *umu* community. Reading, listening, interpreting, talking, singing, dancing and working happens simultaneously. The interpretive process is reflected in the values practiced by the community around the *umu* event: giving, reciprocity, hospitality and fellowship. It is not only concerned with texts and orality (words and stories) but how these are read and translated in the practice of life.

The hermeneutic of practice is a *totou fakamotu* that is orally and culturally based. This practical method takes into account the local environment and its texts. According to Vaka'uta, island texts comes in forms: "myths, poetry; they were woven onto our mats, drawn onto our barkcloth, lashed onto our *fale*, expressed with our *haka* and worn around our bodies as *ta'ovala* (waist mat)." These are tangible things that are used every day around homes and their physical environment. Vaka'uta further observes that, "Our texts were, and still are, part of our lives, and we live with them."³⁶⁷

As real as these island texts are, interpretation categories are practiced, plaited into lived teachings of the community. As a Niuean proverb goes, *Fakataufata e mafiti he gutu mo e gahua he tau lima*, meaning when you speak with authority, make sure you follow through with actions. *Totou fakamotu* is reading and counting using the mode of *gahua* or service. Leaders in the Niuean social order were determined by the virtue of their service to their community. Meanings and values are seen in the natural and social environment. The *umu fetuiaga* consists of meanings and values from a synthesis of traditional culture and Christian tenets. These are found in the *fonua* and *moana* and all that is within them; it is within the weaving, singing and dancing; the *momoi*, *tau lagomatai* (reciprocal giving), *tau gahua* (physical presence in helping) - they are part of the *totou fakamotu*. An *umu* hermeneutics then is holistic.

It is a hermeneutics based in a respectful orality. *Ka vagahau ti fakatapulu e tau kupu*, meaning, as you speak, ensure that you put clothes on your words. In other words, speak with care/respect/conscientious. From another angle though, *fakatapulu* points to how 'words' are treated - as though they have physical properties. Words are considered, they are to be treated carefully. It resonates with the theological reality written in John's prologue, the Word became flesh. How words and language are used is critical in an oral culture like

³⁶⁷ Vaka'uta, Nasili. *Reading Ezra 9-10 Tu'a-Wise*, p.156.

Niue. Words can build or destroy community, they can heal or wound. Words can give or destroy life. Orality is a mechanism that is essential for building *fetu-iaga*.

13. The Way of an *Umu* Hermeneutics

This way of hermeneutical practice clearly emerges out of an island oceanic-world. It shares much in its aspirations with those who first spoke of the liquid continent and sought to explore biblical interpretation and the doing of theology through metaphors of the *moana* and the practice of *talanoa*. It is not expressed in and through usual western philosophical categories, though it is greatly indebted to Ricoeur and Gadamer who provided the perspectives and the language of two horizons. It is a communal hermeneutic; it is expressed through cultural events and practices like the *umu* and the *tutala*. It makes use of biblical texts which seemingly correspond in aim and intention with a wealth of proverbial sayings – as is a common practice in an islandic rendering of faith. This *umu* hermeneutic shows a desire to bind the past and its wisdom with the present and the future; there is a hermeneutic of remembrance at work here. Through this *vaka* of the *umu* it likewise seeks to weave together gospel and culture in a way which both respects the legacy of the missionary but calls into question, through a hermeneutic of suspicion, the way in which that legacy was also, so often, tied and seen through a western mindset.

The issue which arises is how well will this hermeneutic serves a diasporic Niuean church and community. Is it able to handle the flexibility and mobility of living in a new land and somehow drawing upon the life-force, the veins and arteries which come from the ancient *fonua*? Can it reframe an understanding of *vahaloto* in cultural diverse society where space is often privatized or where a dominant other predominates? What kind of songs will be sung that mediate this hermeneutic of the *umu* and help create a fresh, adaptable, mobile ‘inner geography’ which bears witness to faith, the *tupuna* (ancestors), and the com-

plexities of a post-modern world? Will the virtues of the *umu* – hospitality, provisioning and celebration – help create a vibrant *fetuiaga kerisiano*? Will that *fetuiaga* bear the marks of a generous and welcoming Christ on this far side of the *moana*? Will the *tutala* be informal enough, yet rich enough, to furnish an understanding of the body of Christ which is able to bear still the classical marks of being the church and being part of that ecumenical *vaka*? What songs will the songmaker sing in a strange land?

Chapter 7

The Liquid *Fetuiaga Kerisiano*³⁶⁸

1. Question Marks

The experience of the Niuean church in Australia is that of a migrant other. For those from the liquid continent who have landed in this part of the world they have had to negotiate the physical and political *vahaloto* (space) as part of the migration process. For this purpose they have need to produce identity documents, find accommodation and register in appropriate agencies for legal, taxation, medical and social services. These first generation emigrants have undergone what Bouma called the settlement phase or process. These kinds of processes are now routine; they can nevertheless be complex and situate the migrant in a liminal space, a threshold between what was and what will be. With the passage of time the diaspora has found itself also needing to map a new terrain and develop a spirituality for what Daniel Groody had called the "inner geography". There is an emotive region of the heart in which the drama of an "inner migration" is worked out – consciously and unconsciously. They have made their way by means of a *vakalele* (an aeroplane) and crossed the *moana*. They are acting out their part in the spreading flow of a liquid modernity. In finding themselves in this new *moana* and new space, they need to deal with their changing identity and their Christian faith.

The previous chapter had established an *umu* hermeneutic that espouses some critical principles to speak into their new *vahaloto* (spaces) and situations: what does it mean for them to be Niuean and followers of Christ in a new *habitus*? How can the principles of the *umu* help them in the process of re-location? Can concepts of *fonua* and *moana* provide new meanings for them once they are "beached" in a new land which does not carry their indigenous story? Will the

³⁶⁸ Here for the first time, the term *Fetuiaga Kerisiano* is proposed and used as the name for a recognized congregation. The Niuean worship group in the Carlton-Ramsgate Uniting Church congregation officially changed their name from "Ramsgate Niue Ekalesia" to "*Niue Fetuiaga Tapu*" in 2011.

principles of *vaka* to do with being a mix of vehicle, roots, and a life-giving vein - carry and [re]define them in a new location? How will they engage their *tutala* (orality) in their new *vahaloto*? Will they be able to *lologo* (sing) and *koli* (dance) a new song in a new and strange land? Will the traditions to do with performance and music be able to evoke a synaesthetic effect in a way which serves as a sign that a new inner geography has found its spirit? Will the hermeneutical objectives of the *umu fetuiaga* help them [re]define who they are in a new *fonua* and facilitate the move away from them being an institutional *Ekalesia* Niue into becoming a liquid *Fetuiaga Kerisiano*? The grammar of this conclusion is evidently a list of questions.

2. Relocating the *Umu Fetuiaga* Habits

This new state of being is like a new and strange *moana*. It is a *moana* with a difference. It is a kind of *moana* unlike the liquid continent Niueans called home. The comparison between Sydney and village life could hardly be greater. For those who have migrated there is now a need to reframe how life is lived. It is no accident that in this liquid modernity Bauman had written on the theme of the art of life. Through the choices we make in this world of labels, logos, and economic growth Bauman believes 'we are all artists of life'. How we pursue that task will reveal matters to do with identity and character. The world Bauman is writing about is full of emancipated individuals. That has not been the way of Niuean culture. It is communitarian by nature. Those living in this new diaspora – set apart from the original vision in Auckland – are faced with the prospect of creating a new *habitus*. There will be a need for the acquisition of new skills and habits simply to survive in life within this urban *moana*.

That word *habitus* can simply mean habit³⁶⁹ and habitat.³⁷⁰ According to a sociologist-anthropologist Pierre Bourdieu, *habitus* is the set of dispositions which structure and generate practices and representations.³⁷¹ The individual develops these dispositions in response to surrounding circumstances. It leads to a form of generally consistent behavior and conduct. Loïc Wacquant defines *habitus* as

the way society becomes deposited in persons in the form of lasting dispositions, or trained capacities and structured propensities to think, feel and act in determinant ways, which then guide them.³⁷²

The act of migration for those who make up the Niuean diaspora to Sydney requires the development of an appropriate *habitus*. There is a new habitat which is quite different. It is a site without an established *habitus* for this people now living in between two cultures. By way of comparison it might be useful to consider how David Ford drew upon Bourdieu for the sake of seeking to reveal what actually happens in the Eucharist. That may seem like an unusual suggestion but the further comparison can be made between the Eucharist – a celebration of hospitality, an act of thanksgiving while participating in Christ – with the way in which the Niuean *umu* functions.

For David Ford the "eucharist has, in many variations, been a condensation of the Christian *habitus*."³⁷³ It is celebrated in the more sacramental traditions of the Christian faith on a weekly basis. The form is more often than not the same.

³⁶⁹ An acquired behavior pattern regularly followed until it has become almost involuntary; it can be a particular practice, custom, or usage; addiction and mental character or disposition are results of habit(s). www.Dictionary.com

³⁷⁰ dictionary.com defines *habitat* as the natural environment of an organism; place that is natural for the life and growth of an organism. It is also a place where a person or thing is usually found; and it is also a special environment for living in over an extended period.

³⁷¹ See Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977, pp.72-76.

³⁷² Wacquant cited by Navarro, Z. 'In Search of Cultural Interpretation of Power', IDS Bulletin 37(6): 2006, pp.11-22.

³⁷³ Ford, F. David, in the "What Happens in the Eucharist?" *Scottish Journal of Theology*, Vol 48, Number 3, 1995, p.361.

The congregation know what to expect – it knows what to do, what happens where and when. The underlying meaning and intention of the act is the same. It does not change from one week to another – but the congregation can. There can be minor variations in the actual celebration of the rite: there is that structured understanding and purpose but the passage of time from one week to another, the difference in the membership of congregation and perhaps in who does what allows for some flexibility within the known pattern.

The hermeneutic which has been proposed in this thesis is derived from the customary practice of the *umu*. It is associated with hospitality and celebration. In terms of cultural practice the *umu* is an island earth oven. It is in common practice in the local village community in Niue. It attracts its own distinctive *habitus* with regards to what is ‘really happening’. For members of the village that *habitus* is second nature. It is a form of tacit knowledge. Its repeated form has led to a set of dispositions or habitual ways of doing and behaving – and, what is important for the sake of this theory of *fetuiaga kerisiano*, is the manner in which these predispositions, assumptions, inclinations remain in place when an *umu* is carried out in diaspora. Those habits have been established by the *tupuna*. The habitat has changed and the way in which the feast is arranged has altered but the meaning remains.

Like Ford's eucharistic *habitus*, the re-located *umu* has changed in more ways than a geographical habitat. Its form and material have changed. In place of the Niuean hardwood *kafika*, the river red gum (*Eucalyptus camaldulensis*) and jarrah (*E. marginata*) is used; Niuean limestone is replaced with Australian bricks; Australian newspaper is used in place of traditional Niuean *le* leaves for a *tukeleu* (cover); long metal tongs replace the coconut ones. The Niuean taro and *takihi* is replaced with potatoes and imported Fijian or Asian taro. Instead of taro plantations and physical gathering of foodstuff over months, all produce are brought at a local market within an hour. Easier still, large mobile gas ovens are now replacing firewood and bricks. All these components of the *umu* have

changed with the context along with "non-verbal" symbols³⁷⁴ such as dress, language, music, roles, rooted in a homeland that is a distant in place and history. The *umu* habitus has adopted the "necessary improvisation"³⁷⁵ required for the appropriate outcome of the re-located *umu*. It is no longer carried out in a homogenous village in a traditional way but has been adapted to Sydney suburbia.

The *habitus* performed with "necessary improvisation" points to the context that needed to be taken seriously. There has been a level of change, then, but the essence and function continues, as it was in its natural *habitus*. The location is now applicable in the principles and themes provided for in its hermeneutics. Its central themes of hospitality, reciprocity, giving and sharing, *tutala*, networking and community building remains. In the case of the re-located *umu*, it is not a physical *umu* of the fire and smoke that marks its being; it is the *fetuiaga* of a people. It is in the "hermeneutics of practice" of a gathering community to celebrate life. God being the source of all life, worship and devotion are duly rendered unto him in celebration and, in so doing, perpetuates the values that makes them who they are as Niueans and Christians. Whilst the social landscape continues to change and shift the innate yearning for community will continue to find fulfillment.

3. *Umu* in Diaspora: The Binding and Making of a *Fetuiaga*

Sustaining a community in a new land requires a raft of virtues: these may be designated as consistency, repetition, wisdom, and tolerance. The formation and sustenance of a *Fetuiaga Kerisiano* is the goal of the *umu* hermeneutics. It takes a concerted effort and mutual love by the members, the body of Christ, to ensure the spiritual and cultural values – the life-giving *taoga* of the community - are passed on to new generations. Significant *faiagahau* or *umu* events in the

³⁷⁴ Non-verbal symbols can either remain changeless as identifier of one's culture, or alter in contact with the new culture. This idea is defined by David F. Ford in "What Happens in the Eucharist?" published in *Scottish Journal of Theology*, Vol 48, Number 3, 1995, p.361.

³⁷⁵ Ibid., p.361. Bourdieu drew attention to the "art" of the "necessary improvisation" which defines excellence in a living culture.

life of the community are an imperative for ensuring the survival of a people and their identity. The *umu* brings together the *vaha kua mole* (the past space-time), *vaha nei* (the present space-time), and *vaha i mua* (the future space-time). All these space-times converge in a *fetuiaga* (gathering). Every important *fai-agahau* (celebration event) involves an *umu* (food-feasting) and such an occasion is a time of convergence and *lalaga*, the weaving a community together - *ko e pipiaga he fetuiaga* (binding-tying together of the community). The wisdom saying of the elders, *kia ponataki e mafola he maaga* (tie-knot the community together in peace) is practiced in the *umu* event. Solzhenitsyn identified a "knot" of history as a time when significant strands converge so as to impact the moment and affect the shape of history.³⁷⁶

The "knot" as a metaphor is equivalent to the Niuean weaving of a *potu*. Each convergence of strands woven together signifies an important milestone for a family or a community; it is as if through the whole *umu* event, from the preparation, gathering to the actual feasting and celebration, there is a weaving together of important strands of the past for the future. The significance of this "knot" or the Niuean translations - *pona* or *pipiaga* - should not be underestimated for its potential in the task of theologizing. Both *pona* and *pipiaga* as theological operating terms are critical in understanding the Niuean *fetuiaga*.

Pona is both a noun and verb, that is, a 'knot' and 'to knot'; which connotes irreversibility. To make a knot is to ensure that it will remain permanently tied. The Niuean proverb states *ponataki ke mau nivaniva* (tie into a knot that it will never break, referring here to a relationship). *Pipi* or *pipiaga* is synonymous with *pona* or *ponataki*, but without a sense of permanency. It is accurately interpreted as tie or tying like tying one's shoelaces. An ancient example of this *pipi* is found in the *pipiaga he mafola he kautu* (tying/binding the nation's peace). This statement refers to a pre-Christian political ritual that began with Mutalau Hake-maitoga's encounter with the chief Tihamau who was the incumbent chief at the

³⁷⁶ Ford, D., 'What happens in the Eucharist', p. 374.

time. Mutalau, a warrior prince of Niuean descent from Tonga arrived in Niue and asked Tihamau for a demonstration of an existing model of government. Using eleven *kafika* sticks, Tihamau placed the longest one in the middle and five on each side depicting the king in the middle flanked by his chiefs. Mutalau saw the deficiency in the model and proposed a more binding one. He picked up all the sticks and using a *mahiva* (va vine string) '*pipi*' tied them together.³⁷⁷ Thereafter the ritual became a *habitus* (practice) whenever the chiefs meet; *pipi fatuaua e mafola* (the peace is tied 'twice over'). It is important to note that the *kafika* sticks were not tied into a 'knot' but simply tied 'twice over'. According to recorded history³⁷⁸ the sticks were not to be tied into a permanent knot. The moieties of Motu and Tafiti had over time strayed into war. At such times, the chiefs had to untie the *kafika* sticks and when peace is declared the chiefs again engaged in a meeting and a ceremony of *pipiaga he mafola* (tying/binding the nation's peace). *Pipi* or *ponataki* may seem to conjure up a physical rigid image but the underlying motion behind the *pipiaga* is in fact liquid; it espouses 'social fluidity', less hierarchical and more egalitarian. The longer stick (symbol of the king) bound up tightly with other sticks suggests solidarity - a fusion between leaders which implies/reflects the social structure(less) of the *umu* community.

Ponataki is a term derived from the act of tying together; it is always referred to in wisdom rhetoric concerning relationships and communal solidarity. Orators *tufono* and community elders *tau matua maaga* are the main exponents of such language. Weddings and family social functions are occasions where the call for *ponataki* is evoked and encouraged. The *habitus* of the *umu* is, therefore, a natural *habitus* and a central event for *ponataki* – that is, for building and affirming the *fetuiaga*. Importantly, in such events, *ponataki* is synonymous with *koinonia*. Binding and tying a community together (*ponataki*) in a Christian context,

³⁷⁷ Hafe Vilitama, Terry Chapman, Fifita Talagi, Ikinepule Etuata, *et al. Niue: A History of the Island*, Suva, IPS, The Government of Niue, 1998, p.94 .

³⁷⁸ Loeb, Edwin M. *History and a traditions of Niue*, Honolulu, Hawaii, Bernice P. Bishop Museum, 1926, p.25.

is an exercise of 'being' church; this has been especially the case in a Niuean society where the Niuean culture is a synthesis of gospel and culture.

What does it mean to *ponataki e fetuiaga* 'bind a relationship'? *Ponataki* is a verb that refers to two or more things (or beings) relationally tied together. To be together, as in *koinonia* or communion, does not necessarily mean loss of freedom. That is the risk that Bauman identified as a fear of liquid modernity. On the contrary, it refers to a relational realm where individuals find their true identity in relation to one another. *Ponataki* again is a mechanism that functions for togetherness and solidarity reminding the community of what Christ had done to secure lasting peace and salvation for humanity. Often in the communion of the *umu* the glory and beauty of a free flowing community moved by the Spirit of God, momentarily free from hierarchical restrictions is a glimpse of the community prayed for by Christ:

The glory that you have given me I have given to them,
that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and
you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the
world may know that you sent me and loved them even as
you loved me. (John 17:21)

The oceanic image that is evoked from an *umu* community is that of a school of fish who do not have an apparent leader(s) giving direction and instruction yet move in one accord and unison. Inside this communal movement the needs and aspirations of the hosting family are being attended to, even if little communication is made. Constant practice and repetition of the *umu* event becomes second nature - a way of life. The *umu* event is where an acephalous nature of the Niuean *fetuiaga* is best displayed.

The practice in the island village context is different to one offshore. What happens when the *umu* is re-located and practiced in a new *habitus*? What takes place – and is understood to have taken place - what location where and when a new kind of liquidity is experienced? It is one that has quite the opposite goal and that is to be free from the inhibiting effects of community, as explicated by Bauman. As a humanist, his concept of community is bound up in the faculty of

human disposition, thus the individual's future is dependent upon one's choices as a free agent - that is, in community or otherwise. His ideal picture of community, however, is like that of swarms. Bauman suggests that

Whoever may wish to keep the swarms on target should tend to the flowers in the meadow, not to the trajectory of an individual bee.³⁷⁹

Bauman's profile of late-modern humanity and identity is determined by constant social shifts and flux. And, as such, whilst community offers a sense of security, yet it is too inhibiting to the emancipated individual that thrives on individual freedom to do whatever one desires without the constraints and being tied down by others. The re-located *umu* finds it difficult to practice *fetuiaga* in a context where the community is caught on the *peau pa* (changing tides) and 'rip' currents of western culture.

4. Remembering *Vahaloto*

This coming together of an *umu* hermeneutic and a liquid modernity privileges the distinctively Oceanic rhetoric of the *vaka* and the *moana*. How we settle and create a new *habitus* for them is critical for developing and refreshing the inner geography and imagination. There is an irony that needs to be negotiated for this to be plausible, however.

The level of so much rhetoric on the *moana* throughout this thesis would seem to suggest that a comparable reference would be made to beaches. Niue has no beaches except for tiny pockets around the coral reef and rock pools. It is, indeed, an anomaly to speak about beaches from a Niuean context. The contrast can be made with the new land. The beach is an iconic metaphor in the

³⁷⁹ Bauman, Z., *Community: Seeking Safety in an Insecure World*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 2001, p. 127.

Australian seascape; it is part of the Australian persona and experience. The beach has played a central role in the constitution of Australian culture and in developing its sense of national identity. The beach³⁸⁰ has come to symbolize the Australian way of life – it is associated with pleasure, freedom, independence and enjoyment. It is a converging space for Australians from all ethnic backgrounds.

The beach is also a contested space: that was nowhere more evident than during times of cultural confrontation. The Cronulla beach riots in 2005 were the most striking example of such; it should be interpreted now in the light of the debate over what the beach signifies for Australian identity. Leone Huntsman has argued that the beach is one of the primary portals for determining what constitutes being a "real Australian".³⁸¹ From this iconic location the migrant can view one's new home through the sea of bodies and their behavior. Even in the leisure of the seafront setting, between the calmness and the wave surges, routine and interruption, fluidity and coalescence, shapes and colors, the crowd gives to their new place; a place now they call "our home" - a "home girt by sea."³⁸²

This talk of home is problematic for a Niuean hermeneutic. It is clearly not their ancestral homeland. The mere use of the word diaspora is a sure sign of how that is not the case. The way in which the *umu* hermeneutic is informed by metaphors of the *vaka* and the need to cross the *moana* on a journey assumes another's land. This Niuean diaspora may be an act of migration, but it is more

³⁸⁰ Many beaches host citizenship ceremonies on Australia Day and according to the Australian Official Tourism Website, on Christmas Day up to 40,000 international visitors converge on Bondi Beach. Google www.australia.com/

³⁸¹ See Huntsman, Leone. *Sand in our Soul: The Beach in Australian History*. Melbourne University Press, Australia, 2001.

³⁸² The Niuean and islanders could easily mistake this line of the Australian national anthem to refer to their home islands. It makes sense to them to associate this line with their home countries because it was a reality that informed their identity as a people.

than that. It is a living in and on the land of another indigenous people. The way of being in this new place raises the principle of *vahaloto*. The act of migration is often reflected upon in the light of how to come to terms with the dominant culture which is other. The prior question which this hermeneutic ought to consider concerns what does this *vahaloto* mean to the *tagata he fonua* (inhabitants of the land).

The beach is part of the *fonua* of this place and is not *terra nullius*³⁸³ as first thought by Captain James Cook; it belongs to a people and they belong to it. The new *fonua* is part and parcel of the first people whose beliefs and relationship to the *fonua* resonate with the Niuean. To avoid the *palagi* colonial mentality the emergent Niuean quest for identity must take seriously the first peoples understanding of *fonua*. Land is not just *kelekele* (soil), sand, rocks or minerals, but a whole environment that sustains, and is sustained by, residents and culture. That way of indigenous living in the *vahaloto* is expressed in and through a reflection by Big Bill Neidjie (an Gagudju Elder):

I feel with my body. Feeling all these trees, all this country.
When this blow you can feel it. Same for country... you feel
it, you can look, but feeling... that make you.³⁸⁴

This feeling is one which is familiar to the *umu fetuiaga* whose idea of *fonua* is that of *pepesa*, *ainga* or *kaina* - a household of God³⁸⁵. The recognition of the

³⁸³ "*Terra nullius* is a Latin term meaning 'land belonging to no one'. When colonizing Australia, the British Government used this term to justify the dispossession of Indigenous people. The British colonists did not recognize the land was being used as Indigenous people did not use the land in the same way as the British. The British saw no evidence of agricultural, social or religious structure like their own, and therefore incorrectly concluded that Indigenous people did not own the land but simply roamed it. By using the principle of *terra nullius*, the British Government claimed sovereignty over Australia, ignoring the rights of Indigenous people who had lived there for at least 60 000 years." Read more at:

<http://australianmuseum.net.au/indigenous-australia-the-land#sthash.F5a7lbVp.dpuf>

³⁸⁴ Big Bill Neidjie, Gagudju Elder, Kakadu, in <http://australianmuseum.net.au/indigenous-australia-the-land#sthash.F5a7lbVp.dpuf>

³⁸⁵ Tofaeono, Ama'amalele, *Eco-Theology: Aiga - The Household of Life: A Perspective from Living Myths and Traditions of Samoa*, World Mission Script 7, Freimund-Druckerei, Neuendettelsau, 2000. Refer also

indigenous right to this *vahaloto* assumes that a Niuean rendering of the *Fetuiaga Kerisiano* and should demonstrate a solidarity in mindfulness of the indigenous inhabitants' relationship to the land. They are the first people. They have "occupied Australia for at least 60,000 years and have evolved with the land - changing it and changing with it."³⁸⁶ Understanding the new *fonua* like that of their own *umu* epistemology associates the Niuean *fetuiaga* not just with the land itself but also with the world-view of the indigenous people themselves. It is now a shared space. Seeing the new land in which the *fetuiaga* is resident in terms of *pepesa*, *aininga* or *kaina* is to employ the *umu* hermeneutic of *vaka-he-fonua* (roots-artery of the land). It is to draw upon the understanding of Scriptures and the *tupuna* that land is sacred because it is the origin of a people and thus a part of their being. Being guests and sharing in the *fonua* means rendering respect to those who belong there and the value they place upon their *vahaloto*.

This interpretation of *vaka-he-fonua* is also in line with the teachings of Scripture. It is to be seen as the source of *monuina* (blessing and prosperity). From this perspective, land that is treated as sacred in its providence for human and ecological sustenance is to be preserved for time immemorial as practiced by the First People of Australia. When the first colonizers arrived in this country they saw land to be taken. Beryl Timbery Beller observed:

Lieutenant James Cook first set foot on Wangal land... he said oh let's put a flag up somewhere, because these people are illiterate, they've got no fences. They didn't understand that we didn't need fences...that we stayed here for six to eight weeks, then moved somewhere else where there was plenty of tucker and bush medicine and we kept

to Bird, Cliff. *A Theological and Ethical Exploration of Pepesa (Land) as Community in the Marovo Context, Solomon Islands*, unpublished Master of Theology Thesis, Suva, Pacific Theological College, 2001

³⁸⁶ <http://australianmuseum.net.au/indigenous-australia-the-land#sthash.F5a7lbVp.dpuf>

moving and then come back in twelve months' time when the food was all refreshed..."³⁸⁷

For Beller and her people the land is the core of all spirituality and this relationship has been deeply misunderstood. This understanding of the *fonua* is very different from the culture of consumption which lies behind Bauman's description of liquid modernity. The very nature of the Niuean heart and mind is always to respect the past and its *tupuna*. Here, that *tupuna* belong to another indigenous people. The way in which the land is lived upon should heed that received wisdom: this is a way of being on the land which is seen as not being a commodity to be exploited with no regard to the environment and its future. The Niuean *umu* hermeneutic brings to this *vahaloto* a cultural concern for the creation itself and the way in which the land provides for human sustenance.

5. Considering the Lifelines

How Niueans share the land with the indigenous and the local other is informed by their received *taoga* including their faith as resource. The *fonua* that counts for diasporic Christians is a spiritual one - the *Tohi Tapu* and the *Tohi Lologo Niue* (the Bible and the Niuean Hymn Book). These *taoga* (treasures/assets) are companions on the way for Niueans; they become a mobile *fonua* that sustains them on their life journey. They are lifelines. This *fonua* provides landmarks and signposts that help navigate with issues of the "inner migration". They are the equivalent of the indigenous Dreamtime and Songlines.³⁸⁸ In this

³⁸⁷ Aunty Beryl Timbery Beller quoted in www.aboriginalheritage.org/history/history/

³⁸⁸ In the Indigenous Australian belief system, "Dreamtime" refers to the time of creation, the time before time, when the world came into being. It was during the creation period when ancestral beings created landforms as well as the first plants and animals. The Dreamtime laid down the patterns of life for the Aboriginal people. Modern indigenous people still refer to "Dreamtime" or "Dreaming" as significant to their art and identity today (www.crystalinks.com/dreamtime.html). "Songline" is one of the paths across the land which mark the route followed by localized creator-beings during the Dreaming. The paths of the "songlines" are recorded in traditional songs, stories, dance, and painting. An elder or tracker can navigate the territory by repeating the words of the song which describe the location of landmarks, waterholes, and other natural phenomena. See en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Songline

fonua the migrants learn of their fertility and connection to their ancestors of/in the faith. The Bible in this view is a fertile *fonua* that carries not just a link to their Creator but through it to the ancestors of their faith and blood through reading as of their *tupuna* of their ancestry. Many of the wisdom sayings and foundational teachings for community building are stored in the spiritual *fonua*. Employing their traditional modes of reading helps in the "digging" and "unearthing" of the truths for living in a strange new world. They are to learn how to partner with the other - residents and migrants - to dig and share the fruits of their findings. The diggers from different backgrounds would find different *taoga* from their readings and who will contribute to the multicultural feast of the Kingdom. Like the *umu* - the metaphorical place of the *pito* (place of the umbilical cord - naval) - an opening allows us to "peep" into the past, a conduit that links the past, the present and the eschaton. It is a place of convergence of horizons.

This convergence leads to an encountering of new situations and a different set of principles of relationships. These principles nurtured in the *umu* fellowship applies here in diaspora: respect, hospitality, generosity, and giving of one's best demonstrate the relational nature of one's culture and spirituality. The foundation is Christian. When Jesus said, "love as I have loved you", the *Fetui-aga Kerisiano* which bears his name is called to do likewise. It is appealing to the virtues that make a Niuean Christian who s/he is. The command to "be as Christ to others" is not just personal, nor individual – it is communal.

Any good deed rendered in public brings honor and pride to the family according to the Niuean proverb - *lilifu e magafaoa/maaga ha ko e tau mahani he tagata* (a family/community is honored by the conduct of a child).³⁸⁹ In a new place where individuals are placed above community, the received teachings

³⁸⁹ Elders in family or community farewell would encourage would be travelers to carry the family and community with honour by how they conduct themselves. Therefore words like, *Fano ti manatu e higoa he Magafaoa mo e maaga, leveki e tau mahani* (On your journey, remember to honor your family and community in all you do) or variants in similar vein are pronounced. It is important to note that the honor or dishonor affects not just a family, the community carries the same honor or burden of the individual.

inherent in migrants are challenged. The second and third generation who live in a liminal space - between teachings of community at home and individualism at school - *vaka* (roots-arteries) becomes imperative. In this new *vahaloto* the *vaka* (the roots and arteries) are nurtured or ruptured. Life in the new liquid *moana* can easily lead to a rupture of the arteries that link the values of the *tu-puna* emanating from the island home with the new *atuhau* (generation). Those lifelines are at risk.

This risk of rupturing the *vaka* is why the practice of the *umu* fellowship is crucial as a *vaka* where the presence of the elders and their wisdom are utilized. It is much more pertinent in the diasporic setting given that their ethnocultural identity is held in a thread, a larger context where the arteries could be ruptured at any time. The institution of the *magafaoa* (family) holds a vital place in diaspora. They are the custodians of the received traditions. The *lotu* (church/religion) becomes as a *tefito* (centre/heart) of gathering families, nurturing them as of the Body of Christ, ensuring the network of lifelines and interconnections that are healthy, pulsating and flowing onto new members and the *atuhau tupuhake* (new generation).

6. The Practice of a Liquid *Fetuiaga*

It has become clear that the concerns which give rise to a more liquid understanding of the *ekalesia* have to do with a number of separate issues. The initial presenting issue which tends to lay claim to being the priority is one of how to be the church, the body of Christ, for a people in diaspora. In the case of Niue that necessarily involves probing into how can the church continue to sustain and nurture what had been a relatively integrated culture where the Christian life was woven into the very being of being Niuean. Of particular urgency is the issue of the preservation of an indigenous culture under threat. The Niuean way of being is at the mercy of a liquid modernity, emigration, and assimilation. This issue is not theoretical. It is not a matter of whether a traditional culture will be

consigned to a museum piece. These waves, these storms, these cross-currents in the contemporary *moana* of life affect real people, real families, real villages. The way in which a culture experiences these pressures in the absence of a communal inner geography is diverse. The cutting edge can easily become one of what is to be handed on to a succeeding generation. In the case of a diaspora community, dynamic young people have been raised, educated, and nurtured in a liquid modernity. Will they know and be in a position to hand on the Niuean way of believing the gospel within the embrace of a familiar culture?

The *fetuiaga* in a diasporic setting is significant as a hermeneutic of practice. Its communal nature is designed to create an environment flexible enough to accommodate the nature of the young who are highly suspicious of institutionalized structures and authorities. The pedagogical strategy for handing on a tradition of culture is by watching, learning and practice in an informal fellowship. It is within these locations that the roots are nurtured.

The new *fonua* may require a new *vagahau* (language) for the Niuean arrivals. *Tutala* (oratory/speaking) in *vagahau* Niue is not to be taken for granted in the new context. There is an expectation to integrate and assimilate. The younger generation are expected to learn how to speak English, to think and act like Australians. What of their *vagahau*? *Tutala* is a critical mode for transmitting the gospel and cultural values that is foundational in Niuean *fetuiaga*. It is a *vaka* that carries the very core of Niuean identity. In this new place, attention is put not just on the "what" or "why" of the *tutala* but "who", "how" and "when": there are protocols of orality other than Niuean that are needed to be observed. Other voices around the mat need acknowledgement. There are *palagi* of many kinds, as there other cultural groupings each with their own hold on the English language, accent – and body language.

Learning from the *umu* event, *tutala* in its many forms teaches that there is a time and place for the different modes of *tutala*. *Tala tupu-fakaholo* (an historical narrative) is important in diaspora as the story of the community, its life narrative, is passed on to a new generation. *Tala fakaholomuia* does not fit in formal space of a church but is an essential past time practice of the informal *umu fetuiaga*. Even the monolingual conversation, the use of *vagahau* Niue for *tutala* in the new location can become problematic. In a context where the young are non-speakers of the *vagahau* Niue, the roots become strained and the inter-generational *vahaloto* (space) becomes wider. What is simple in a homogenous village surrounding becomes complicated in a multicultural setting. In an integrated sense of culture, where everyone speaks the same language, community building becomes a natural outcome. On the other hand, a glocal sense of culture challenges a monolingual approach. Schreiter points to this space where the global culture intersects with the local: the individual is caught in the middle, having to live and have his or her being in both worlds simultaneously. In a village life protocols are infused into the ethos of the community. But in the glocal space protocols and the essence of community is to be [re]defined by insertion of new values determined in a global sense. Where the young are seen but not heard in a traditional formal setting, the environment of a relocated *umu* welcomes their contribution. Children need time and space to speak. In this diasporic space they are to be full participants of a *fetuiaga* where value is placed on people rather than modes of being/speaking. The *vagahau* Niue may be valuable in cultural identity and meaning-making process, but communication takes precedence. Building and retaining the sense of *fakafetuiaga* is paramount. The young are to share in a *vagahau* (language) they are best able to communicate.

In a context where the modes of *tutala* are rapidly changing, the *fetuiaga* needs to adjust and improvise. How *tutala* was done in the village may not be replicated in a new land. Repetition of cultural principles may be attempted in new locations but they may never be the same. This is what Kierkegaard called "non-

identical repetition".³⁹⁰ New modes of *tutala* now involve mobile phones and Skype, texts and Facebook accounts are used; iPads, tablets and other technological gadgets are now employed as means of conversation. These new means come with a threat, however. The very means of easing access and communication also has the potential to alter exponentially the course of a language. With mobile texting and Twitter use, words of the Niuean lexicon change - abbreviations and neologisms are created. Attention to linguistic orthodoxy diminishes and ancient epistemology that words carry will soon become extinct. Furthermore, new technological gadgets come in between community; they promote self-autonomy and ideals of individualism. They promote the notion of the "I" and "self-gratification", thus labels such as "i-Phone", "i-Pods", "i-Tune" and "i-Pad" are invented. The concept runs contrary to the heart of the gospel message of "selflessness" and "self-sacrifice" and "dying to oneself". Be that as it may, technology cannot be ignored by the *fetuiaga*. Rather, new means of building or retaining community should be embraced and intentionally employed to ensure the overflow of the *taoga* from the past into the future. Multimedia and the use of Internet can be employed to promote the idea of *fetuiaga*. For practical purposes, language nests are being developed in distant shores in response to imminent threat to *vagahau* Niue (Niuean language). *Tutala* is encouraged despite the proliferation of new technology. And the church is at the forefront in promoting *tutala* as a principal mode of transmitting the gospel and building human relationships.

Orality presupposes who is listening and who is silent, who understands and who does not. The biblical text is a written account of the spoken words of Jesus and description of his life and ministry. The Hebrew Scripture is a written account of a history of God's people, a revelation of his relationship with them. Similarly, the New Testament writings recorded the beginnings of an early

³⁹⁰ Kierkegaard's take on identified repetition is a critical concept for modern philosophy. The practice of repeating is immensely important but he argued that nothing is ever identical. Kierkegaard cited by Ford in "What Happens in the Eucharist?" published in *Scottish Journal of Theology*, Vol 48, Number 3, 1995, p.375.

church. From a *tutala* perspective, reading from a written Scripture may require a *fetuiaga* imagining themselves as speakers and hearers, as ones who have given voice. People tend to read and speak from what they see and hear. It takes longer to read out a text than speaking them; it takes more time to understand and process the written word than the spoken. Some are too young to fully comprehend the power of words and others too reluctant or lack the confidence to use words. Many are comfortable with reading the word rather than *talahau* or *fakaleo* (pronouncing). They worry about what to say and how to *tutala* (talk/speak). Moses was one such reluctant speaker but the Lord assured him that he will be with his mouth and teaching him what he shall speak (Exodus 4:10-12). Christ himself promised his disciples that the Holy Spirit shall give them the right words and wisdom when time comes to witness for him and his kingdom (Luke 12:12; 21:15; Matthew 10:19).

When *tutala* is found challenging in a new land, other principles are employed. Texts can be translated or transferred into other forms of expressions. Bonhoeffer rightly stated that "Our song on earth is speech. It is the sung Word."³⁹¹ It is the most natural thing for Christians to do when in community. This experience is more intense when a *fetuiaga* finds themselves in a strange land and doing what is familiar helps them deal with the sense of loss and disorientation. The Apostle encouraged Christians in Ephesus, "Speak to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs." (Eph. 5:19). Ethnodoxology has been a study of music, a *vaka* carrying God's word for generations; it has carried the *taoga* across the *moana* of time, even to distant shores. Many migrant Niueans prefer singing the word rather than reading it: there is a propensity to learn more from hymns than Bible reading. Bible study is not a strength of Niueans. *Tutala* and singing is. It is corporate learning. Singing unites them in a way reading cannot. Dietrich Bonhoeffer held that Christians sing when they are together

³⁹¹ Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. *Christian Community: Life Together*, translated with an introduction by John W. Doberstein, Germany, Christian Kaiser Verlag, 1954, p.59.

because in singing together it is possible for them to speak and pray the same Word at the same time; in other words, because here they can unite in the Word.³⁹²

By singing, the *fetuiaga* is reminded of the reality of the Church's unity in Christ; they are her presence on earth and each individual voice, a contribution as a member of the Body, and, pre-eminently, of the great God who is the subject of all praise.

Cultural metaphors in hymns and songs play an important role in diaspora. Not only do they possess the *taoga* from the *tupuna* (ancestral cultural readings of Scripture) but they also lend themselves to new and fresh interpretations. Hymns and songs carry with them communal meanings and values etched into corporate memory by moving melodies and tunes. Far removed from the island origin, familiar lyrics and unique music blends cause them to ebb and flow back and forth to their island homes. Like Songlines of the indigenous Australians, their songs and hymns provide spiritual pathways marked by ethical landmarks and moral waterholes quenching their inner yearnings for God and home. The Scriptural content in hymns continue to inform and ground their faith together despite their drifting experience. Bible verses are fused and appropriated into lyrics, woven into their cultural proverbs which conjures new meaning for them in a new place.

The case may be different for the younger *atuhau* (generation) in diaspora; the lure of the pop culture and rhythm of hip-hop music dominates their attention. The preference for the contemporary alienates the sounds of their ethnic heritage. The sounds of the *tupuna* (ancestors) and the voice of the Lord is not heard frequently enough because the young are not frequenting the churches. The question for the *fetuiaga*, then, is: 'How can the Lord's song be sung in a

³⁹² Ibid., p.59.

strange land when the *atuhau* (young generation) prefer the songs and language of the strange?' This creates a challenge to a *Fetuiaga Kerisiano*. A new generation are to learn the songs and hymns; the gospel story needs to be transferred if the community is to be sustained well into the future. The *fai-agahau* (celebration) in a new *moana* has a place for hymns and songs as a *vaka* carrying the *taoga* (heritage assets/treasures) of a people on a journey; it is not just for the sake of the custodianship of their faith and identity but as a responsible "other" who have unique gifts to offer in a new land. It is to this need that some *asafo* (composers) in diaspora have developed a raft of songs, hymns, chants, dances and *takalo* (war dance). The exercise has had them compose new music and dance by exploring their received *taoga* and had re-appropriated them to give voice to their deep yearning, making sense of questions and their search for identity; their creations seek to speak to their current situations in diaspora. Songs were composed with Christian themes, even the *takalo* and cultural performances are being expressed in Christian symbolism. The blessing of the food (banquet) is deliberately worded to provide hints pointing to the Lord's Supper. For those who do not attend church, they have always found these gathering as their Christian and cultural points of reference. They speak to the need for community and relationships. These practices are done despite the experience of the second and subsequent generations who are deeply embedded in popular music and the contemporary modes of singing and dancing. In a visual culture where postmodernists tend to listen with their eyes and think with their feelings multimedia and performing arts are imperatives. The youth's preference for modern genre is not to be ignored in this *fetuiaga*, their reading and interpretations are acknowledged and valued; their stories are woven into the community narrative.

7. By way of a Conclusion

Let us conclude. It is accepted that the Niuean diaspora now lives in a liquid modernity. It is time for there to be a shift in emphasis of being the church away from the traditional site - the chapel and church building. For this Niuean dias-

pora it is time to wrestle with what it means to be the body of Christ, the *vaka* of the gospel, in the "ordinary" spaces of life. The fluid *fetuiaga* of the *umu* has been described; the case has been made for the *Fetuiaga Kerisiano*. Once the *umu* was situated on the edge of the village: it was considered to be profane compared with church and the minister living at the center. In the context of this liquid existence it is time for the informal liquid *fetuiaga* to be recognized as the new frontier in being the church. The current and potential members need to [re]discover and define anew the nature of being church. This will require a *metanoia* of hearts and minds which have been disposed to thinking of the church as a place of worship.

To unwind something that is deeply ingrained is not easy, especially in an integrated culture that is based on conformity to tradition. The church building or temple in popular understanding is the heart of the Niuean Christian community. It is the centre of the village. To make a case in favor of moving away from the centre towards profane spaces of *faiagahau* (celebration) - symbolized by the *umu* in this thesis – is radical. And yet, the proposed remodeling is an alternative paradigm that may offer a fresh approach for a church-wary generation who are losing their connection back to the cultural *tupuna* (ancestors).

For the sake of a way ahead it is time to recall the imagery and intention of the hymns to be found in the *Tau Lologo* (songs/hymns). There was little reference to the church, let alone the church building, of course. The great majority of hymns focused on Jesus and Christological claims. The underlying intention of those hymns, which might capture a sense of fellowship and friendship, was to look to God for protection in the midst of storms and confess that Jesus was the church's foundation. From a consideration of recent songs and laments to do with migration we have been exposed to a diversity of images which describe the emotive aspect of living in diaspora and the consequences for the home island and its culture. There is an obvious need for a new imaginary, a new geography as well as a way of understanding of what it means to be the church. There may have been very little in the way of a reflected ecclesiology in the Ni-

uean experience. The categories of the standard text-book style of understanding the church have their place. They are a useful conversation partner which can show both what is possible and what might be necessary in order to refresh the practice of being the church. In these circumstances of a diaspora scattered across the *moana* in a liquid modernity the next step may be to recover and use again that understanding of Christ as the foundation. There is a close link between how we understand what the church is called to be and how we understand who Christ is – for us.

Jesus understood what the Temple meant in the religious and political landscape of his people. Although he was not of the priestly line, Jesus visited the Temple. According to Luke it was his Father's house (Luke 2:49). Except for the birth narratives and Luke's account of his visit to Jerusalem at the age of twelve, there is no description of his growing up. These are his missing years, except for how Luke once again refers to how he grew in wisdom. He was apparently able to debate with the teachers in the Temple (Luke 2:41-52). Jacob Neusner³⁹³ had claimed Jesus, not being of the priestly order, never entered the sanctuary of the Temple; his teaching took place in several courts open to laymen, generally in the treasury area (see Jn 8:20); most of his teaching was done outside the Temple, on a mountain, from a boat, along the way, and in the synagogue. Those who were inclined to circumscribe the life of faith in law, regulation and understandings of holiness were at odds with him. In the context of the four gospels the Pharisees and the Sadducees are actively opposed to Jesus' public ministry which included fellowship, eating and drinking, with tax collectors and sinners. Jesus seemingly prophesied the destruction of the second Temple that came to pass in 70 C.E.

³⁹³ Neusner's *A Rabbi Talks with Jesus*, is a classic form of Jewish-Christian encounter. Jesus, in Neusner's argument, never had the privilege of entering the most holiest in the temple. This supports the view of this thesis that Jesus' indiscriminate choice of location for most of the time in his teaching ministry legitimizes the location of the *umu* as a place of 'being' church. See Jacob Neusner, *A Rabbi Talks with Jesus*, Montreal & Kingston, London, Ithaca, McGill-Queen's University Press, 2000.

Now, Jesus did not in his teaching deny the role of the Temple. He was well aware of its importance and its centrality in Israel's history and identity. In the center of the Temple - in the holy of holies - the Ark of the Covenant was set. And there, in the heart of the Temple complex, in the middle of the city which served as the spiritual and political heart of Israel, God dwelt among God's people. The theological significance here is critical. Understanding the Temple as the place where the actual presence of the Almighty God dwells with his people was not missed by Jesus when he identified himself as the Temple. Jesus' statement (John 2:19-20) was taken literally after his resurrection when he was raised, as he said, after three days. Since early Christians believed that Jesus had already replaced the Temple as the expression of a new covenant, they were relatively unconcerned with the destruction of the Herod's Temple.

How might the Niuean understanding of Christ be seen in the light of his estimations and actions towards the Temple? It is evident that Jesus sought to focus attention away from the building - that is the Temple and its sacrificial system - towards his proclamation of the coming close of the kingdom of God. What that meant in practice was a ministry of teaching and healing and eventually the focus fell on the Easter events of the dying and rising Christ. In the gospel of John Jesus is portrayed as the "Living Temple". Jesus said that the Temple would be destroyed and rebuilt again in three days (John 2:19) – thus, the fulfillment is confirmed in his dying and rising on the third day. The New Testament have re-interpreted the pre-messianic understanding of God's Temple in light of the coming of Jesus, the Messiah.

Rick Thompson draws from the Johannine tradition and the epistles to argue that the work of Jesus fulfilled the Temple in five ways: i) Jesus, conceived as the Temple, embodies the presence of God. In him we have "God's dwelling" among us (John 1:14). The literal translation of dwelling is "tabernacle" which points us to Jesus as God's incarnation who has now come to his people in full

fruition. Thomson writes, "As long as the tabernacle stood, it was a reminder that the messiah had not yet come."³⁹⁴ ii) Importantly, it must be noted that through Christ and his work, a new temple is built up in his followers (1 Corinthians 3:16). iii) Thompson also argued that the temple was constructed with partitions making it exclusive. On the contrary, Christ as the living temple offers an open invitation to the whole world. All who call upon his name are "grafted in" to the temple, his Body (Ephesians 2:15,19). iv) Humanity was once separated from God by sin but in Christ the "curtain" has been torn in two...new and living way is opened up..." (Hebrews 10:19-20). v) Ezekiel's vision is fulfilled in Jesus, the "new spiritual temple out of which rivers of living water would flow." (Ezekiel 47:1; John 7:37-38).³⁹⁵ Thompson argues that what we see here is a shift from a cultic-priestly worship that was a temple-based institution to a "body of believers" of which Jesus himself is the head. In John 2:19-20, when the Jews demanded a sign, Jesus spoke of the temple of his "body" as being destroyed and raised up in three days. His remark contrasted the new Temple of the Spirit with the hand built edifice described by his opponents: "Forty and six years was this temple in building." The Johannine Jesus is clearly pointing to himself as the new Temple. He is to be the "house of prayer for all nations" prophesied in Isaiah 56:7. The Son of God is to be a non-exclusive Temple, he told the woman of Samaria, "The hour cometh, when neither in this mountain (in Samaria), nor in Jerusalem, shall ye worship the Father" (Jn 4:21). Jesus is saying that he is the place where the presence of God dwells among his people. He is a foundation in that sense and not the sense of being a particular kind of building.

Yves Congar rightly pointed out Jesus' attitude towards the Temple: that it is to be transcended, it was doomed to disappear.³⁹⁶ The majority of his life and work was focused not in the building of the Temple but upon his relationships and fel-

³⁹⁴ Rick Thompson, "Jesus is the New and Better Temple", in *Council Road Baptist Church*, www.councilroad.org, posted on Tuesday, March 19, 2013.

³⁹⁵ Ibid., Thompson's observations of Jesus as the "true temple" supports the notion of the *Fetuiaga Kersiano* that the church is not bound by church as institution, rather, it is mobile and fluid.

³⁹⁶ Congar, Yves. *The Mystery of the Temple*, trans. Reginald F. Trevett, Westminster, MD: Newman, 1962, p.112.

lowship (*fetuiaga*) with ordinary people in ordinary gatherings. It was his presence that made these ordinary fellowships "extraordinary". It will be Christ himself through the Spirit who makes the *umu fetuiaga* Christian. There were social gatherings in existence before the incarnation of Christ in Israel and his introduction to Niue. The manifestation of Christ himself into these gatherings transforms them into a body of believers, disciples, who are called to imitate the one who is their cornerstone and foundation.

A community who accepts Christ as Lord, who has accepted his teachings as a mode of living distinctively marks them out as communities of Christ. Niuean social celebrations outside the bounds of the church has always been considered "worldly": *ko e tau mena i tua* (outside/worldly things), even though most celebrations begin with a worship devotion. The fashion in which these festivities were performed are the very essence of what islanders are essentially about. The synaesthetics of their music and dance, the eloquence and wisdom of the cultures speech makers, the reciprocity and generosity of the giving, and the relationality and communal nature of which the fellowship was conducted is the very heart of the *fetuiaga*. Through his ministry Jesus exemplified the human face of God in situations where there was a need of forgiveness, healing, conversion. Through the incarnation this public ministry is given a divine sanction. Reading Scripture in the light of a Niuean *faiagahau* (celebration) would see Jesus immersed in the reality of the Niuean life. It is through his words (*tutala*) and deeds (*gahua*) that his presence is known and transformed.

There have been attempts made in the past to introduce Niuean cultural elements into the formal worship life of the community. The obstacle lies in how the way of the missionary has become entrenched in worship as the norm; it has become the ecclesial orthodoxy. Following the missionary theology, Niueans had always identified church with the formalities that take place within the holy chapel. Once the worship service comes to an end, church is deemed finished and life gets back to normal again. The church is so often associated only with activities around the church premises.

It was assumed that there could be a clear line of demarcation made between what is gospel and what is pagan. The challenge for an ecclesiohistorian, in this instance, has a double prong. The first is to provide a theological rationale for an innovation; the second has to do with a recovery of culture and make the case for justifying the informal or liquid fellowship (*umu fetuiaga*) as legitimate means of being a mode for ecclesial representation. Undoing the embedded missionary attitude towards indigenous culture is an immensely difficult task. The church culture that we have today is the accepted identity in a way that many call it the closest to indigenous. The fear of new introductions is well founded, especially when embracing the local character which may sway the church towards pantheism. This fear is what theologians like Palu warn against.³⁹⁷ The issue is whether such changes can be shown to be consistent with the divine purpose revealed in and through Christ.

It has been the aim of this thesis to make a theological case for a liquid ecclesiology that embraces the ordinary celebrations of the Niuean community. In this quest, one would look at who is a Niuean, what their unique gifts are and how might those gifts be best used to glorify God. As human beings, Niueans have a natural inclination to celebrate. The best celebrations Niueans engage in are often found outside the church. This fact has prompted elders to remark, *Foaki age nukua e malolo katoa ke fialia ke he lalolagi ka e fakaofofo ke he tau tapuakiaga* (They give their best in celebrating the world but their least in church). These elders are not talking about giving of money but the way in which an island people will perform with zest in their worldly celebrations. The comparison is adversely made with the demeanor displayed church. There is a need to blur the line between the formality of the liturgical life of the church and its celebrations outside its doors.

³⁹⁷ There is always a risk in trying to contextualise Christ into a particular cultural metaphor according to Palu. He is entitled to his theological interpretation but failing to understand the notion of God incarnate will result in a community worshipping a God who is always foreign. See Palu, Ma'afu, T. "Pacific Theology: A Re-consideration of its Methodology", *Pacific Journal of Theology*, Series II, Issue 29, 2003, pp.48-49.

This thesis proposes making a start. It is appropriate to begin with the liquid nature of the diasporic Niueans in Australia. Here a Niuean population, who is transient not by their choice but by the very nature of their new environment, have become a pilgrim people of God. Most would acknowledge their Christian heritage but they are also on a quest seeking something else in life: career, money, wealth, pleasure, power, freedom. They are trying to find their place within Bauman's liquid modernity. How can the church offer a safe haven and an attraction for a restless people who are adrift in a tumultuous storm? If the church is the Body of Christ, then how can this be communally expressed?

Jesus became a living Temple and journeyed with his disciples fellowshiping with the crowds bringing meaning and transforming their lives. He and his followers walked from town to town, eating, teaching, sharing and giving life to all who gather around him. This is church on a mission. Jesus and his disciples is an *ekklesia* on a journey - an image itself for a liquid church.

The Emmaus story in Luke becomes paradigmatic for the life of the *Fetuiaga Kerisiano*. Many travelers of life are despondent. Many are confused with the institutionalized church. They are asking the philosophical question, "Is God dead?" Instead of waiting for the world to walk into cathedrals and chapels to find out, *Fetuiaga Kerisiano* proposes to venture out in the boldness and humility of Christ. Its way of being is through a seeking to join in with the people on the way. The *Fetuiaga* is to walk alongside them, listen to them, empathize with them, share anew with them the living gospel and break bread with them. As Stephen Pickard simply puts it, this is "the body which breaks bread and hears the Word on the move".³⁹⁸

³⁹⁸ Pickard, S. *Seeking the Church*, SCM Press, London, 2012, pp.36-37.

The old model is represented by the monolithic Temple stationed at the centre of traditional systems. It is rigid and motionless. *Fetuiaga Kerisiano* represents a household on a move (Hebrew 3:6) and wanderers of the earth (Hebrew 2:5; 11:14-16). For the diasporic Niueans whose culture was bathed in the baptismal waters of Christ, the image is that of an alien people – a church in exile. How do we respond in a secular and oftentimes hostile environment? Peter encouraged a diasporic Church,

Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God... (1 Peter 2:11-12).

As a wandering *Fetuiaga Kerisiano* in exile, they are to flow along in the currency of their new home yet fail not to do good as of the Lord. Peter encourages a diasporic church,

For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people. Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God. Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God..." (1 Peter 2:15-17).

The *Fetuiaga Kerisiano* proposed here is for the diasporic Niuean to look to Jesus' simple fellowship with the common people. Much will be learnt from the context of his feasting and banquets. Much of his teaching was done in the context of these celebrations. The parables of the messianic banquet, for example, point to the notion of a *Fetuiaga Kersiano*.

The comparison can be helpfully made with Ward's idea of the liquid church.³⁹⁹ Writing from a *palagi* consumer culture that stems from individualism, Ward looks to centralize the person to person encounter over against congregational worship or the church programs; there is some truth in his intention. Personal encounters are part and parcel of being church - it is a given. The emphasis for the *fetuiaga* differs through the priority assigned to "communal encounters" (*fetuiaga laulahi*) inclusive of a worship gathering but not exclusively so. Formal and informal *fetuiaga* outside church is church. It is in the "fellowship", the *koinonia*, that communion takes place. Around the liquid *fetuiaga* of the *umu* comes the practice of *fakaalofa* (love), *feofanaki* (care/hospitality/concern) for one another, *foaki* (giving), *leveki atu e falu mo e tau tagata kehe* (hospitality), *momoi* or *femomoiaki* (reciprocity), *fetufatufaaki* (sharing), etcetera. The body of believers "living out" the life ways of Jesus' church is communal.

Ward's notion of church as liquid takes as a premise the understanding that church is a people interacting and living out their faith at coffee shops and shopping malls;⁴⁰⁰ it is not necessarily bound to a Sunday morning worship service. Church, in this sense, is implied at times when Christians interact with each other and with the wider community by communicating Christ. These spiritual activities in the community, according to Ward, are sufficiently church rather than a weekly congregational meeting. The congregational worship and meeting will need to be de-centred and reworked so as to serve the people's spiritual activities out in the community and not the other way round as previously done. The goal of this approach is designed to connect to the growing spiritual hunger in society rather than being a place for the committed to belong.⁴⁰¹ In other words, in place of attending church on Sundays, the main focus is on "living as Christ's body" in the world. Ward is not suggesting that attending Sunday services should cease altogether. Rather, he is shifting the order of priority in a way by suggesting that Sunday worship is secondary to the encoun-

³⁹⁹ See Pete Ward, *Liquid Church*, Peabody, Hendrickson Publishers, Paternoster Press, 2002.

⁴⁰⁰ Ibid., p.2

⁴⁰¹ Ibid., p.57

ters and networking that are taking place out in the public sphere. Jesus' words seem to fit this perspective when he said, "For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them." (Matthew 18:20).

Ward's model is one of a church engaging with liquidity. The idea of a "congregational-less" church is less likely to commend itself to a Niuean culture which is inherently communal. The proposal of this thesis is for a *Fetuiaga* ecclesiology to embrace the *fetuiaga* around the *umu* celebrations as the practice of church - it is church in essence. This notion also challenge the popular definition of church as limited and confined to the church building only and its priestly functions. The common understanding is that, activities perceived to be social or cultural, belong outside of what it means to be church. Yet, on the contrary, actual service and socio-cultural celebrations should be seen as genuine expression and, indeed, the heart of Christian worship. There needs to be an intentional and natural interflowing between what happens inside the chapel and out around the *umu*.

This rhythm links in with how Ward describes the church sociologically and theologically.⁴⁰² It has to do with the context of Christian praxis as well as locus/subject for ecclesiology. Ward refers to sociological descriptions of contemporary economic life as context for Christian networking to take place, and made a theologically rationale by referring to the doctrine of the Trinity as a *perichoresis* dance and intimate communication between persons within the Trinity. The Church is called to live and have its being in the world, as commissioned by Christ in Matthew 28:18-20. To withdraw into its shell and refuse to engage with its immediate surrounding is to surrender to a slow and certain death. For a church to remain within the four walls of its building and to become a Sunday religion is to deny her central purpose to exist and that is to witness to the saving grace of her founder and head Jesus Christ. The Church is commissioned to

⁴⁰² Ibid., Refer to chapter 4, "Network and Flow in the Liquid Church" p.40ff

go out to the world and proclaim the love of God in Christ. The Church is called to mission and ministry.

There is a propensity for migrant churches to become self-enclosed, an enclave for social and cultural reasons. Their ecclesiological models are normally replicas of their home churches. They often take little notice of the complex intersection between their received traditions and their local context. Their primary concerns revolve around their denominational, ethnic and cultural identity. In highlighting these tendencies, though, the church is employed here to be a custodian of their unique culture, and mission is minimized to their own kind.

Liquid church, on the other hand is largely defined by how the church engages in mission. Mission's primary goal, in Ward's liquid view, is not to win people into the pews on Sunday mornings but to bring people to experience Christ; it is to introduce people to Christ in any "messy" place where they find themselves. Church, as in *fetuiaga* around the *umu*, is a people in action sharing the love of God in the network of relationships. The *Fetuiaga Kerisiano* would perceive its mission platform as a communal activity. Celebrations, in this respect, are more than an occasion to get together and enjoy each other's company in fellowship. In so doing, it is an engagement in mission. The values they demonstrate throughout the *faiumu* (*umu* event), values encouraged in worship devotion, the wisdom and love expressed in speeches and song, embodied in dance, are all central in the act of mission.

The informal fellowship Ward speaks of is nothing more than a worldly "get together" as the *umu fetuiaga* is without Christ. Any fellowship or relationship without the Christian content is not church. Likewise, the *fetuiaga* of the *umu* community as a worldly party is nothing without Christian consciousness. Be that as it may, and given the integrated sense of culture Niueans live by - a synthesis of gospel and culture - Christ is central to the constitution of Niuean communal activity/being. Unlike the western sense of culture that is based on

individualism, secularism and capitalist ideals, the *Fetuiaga Kerisiano* is a socio-cultural expression of Christian values. In a community contained within the bounds of a Niuean village, Christ is easily recognized. It is a challenge, on the other hand, in a city like Sydney. The key in the quest of a re-located *umu* is locating Christ in a context where Christ is pushed to the margins. There is a cacophony of voices, a competition of images and philosophies to contend with. The choices are endless for Niueans who were hitherto protected in a secluded monotheistic village.

The task of the songmaker is of central importance for an island people whose sense of community is to be found in the synaesthetic effect of dancing and singing. We have noted that the Niuean hymnary makes scant reference to the church, that is true of both divisions of the hymn book - traditional hymns (*Tau Lololo Tuai*) and modern hymns (*Tau Lololo Foou*).

We also noted that there has been an absence of the ecclesiological work done in Niue. The various images, models and marks devised by Paul Minear and Avery Dulles are hardly known. And yet, there is a potential benefit in making a connection between this more formalised ecclesiology and the liquid state of being the *Fetuiaga Kerisiano* finds itself in.

The focus on the hospitality of Christ, for instance, naturally lends itself to that cluster of images which makes up the model of the Body of Christ. Christ as the *Vaka* (canoe, root and artery) or *umu* (traditional earth oven) are metaphors that makes up the overarching ecclesiology of the *Fetuiaga*. These images speak of life-giving hospitality of Christ. The metaphor of Christ as the *umu* conveys the idea of Christ the host in and through whom all things are made ready for the *taonaga* (banquet). Embodied in the *fetuiaga* as a host sees Christ offering himself up for all people.

This interplay of image and hermeneutic can stimulate the poetic imagination as well as the craft of the songmaker. Seeing the *Fetuiaga* as a model of being the church might enable a picture of Christ working around the *umu*: there he is digging the *fonua*, laying the stones and firewood, harvesting the taro and cleaning the produce. Christ, the host, could be seen bringing in the fish and chicken, preparing and cooking for the *faiagahau* (celebration). He might be seen *tutala* (conversing/talking), sharing and laughing together with others around the *umu*. He might be imagined to be heard in a private corner whispering and attending to an over-burdened *timotua* (underclass/marginalised), or sharing with a group of children a tale with a lesson attached. The Christian *kerygma* of the *Fetuiaga Kerisiano* is not done, then, exclusively from the pulpit but within the liquidity of a gathered community: *tutala*, (conversation), *fono* (formal speech), *fakaholomuia* (joking-exaggeration), and even the odd *talanoa* (gossip) are *vaka* (channels/modes) in this liquid church.

In this diasporic imaginary Christ can be seen around the mobile gas *umu* wrapping food with women or walking into the kitchen with a handful of shopping for the banquet. This model of being church also conjures up an image of Christ being a guest who comes into the *taonaga* (banquet), is greeted with many *kahoa* (flower necklaces) of many colours and fragrances, and immersed in a *ta me* (sing and dance) of the *faiagahau* (celebration).

This dancing image, of course, takes us to the Greek word *perichoresis* used by the early church patriarchs to describe the relationship within the Trinity. The dancing of God in Christ, being host and guest, is embodied in a singing-dancing *fetuiaga*. Here, in the dance of God, Christ (who is host and guest simultaneously) move outside the original circle of the dancing Godhead, inviting all to follow and join in the interweaving movement of the *perichoresis*. John Ziziou-

las' writing in *Being as Communion*⁴⁰³ points to the dynamic relationship within the Godhead as the defining pattern for the church. In the same manner, the life of the *fetuiaga* is intimately connected to the being of God and its liquid dance. Miroslav Volf makes the same point in his book *After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity*, where the *fetuiaga* (fellowship/church) is to be shaped after the *fetuiaga* (communion/*koinonia*) of the Trinity.⁴⁰⁴ Christ revealed that reality in his life amidst the communal celebrations outside the temple and synagogues.

Within the *fetuiaga* ecclesiology is a sacramental dimension that is facilitated by the network and interflowing of the *taonaga* (banquet). The sacramental nature of the hospitality of God is reflected in the *umu* metaphor where Christ is seen as both host and guest in the *fetuiaga*. Central to this model is the emphasis on the importance of always holding together the divine and the human elements in the church. The *fetuiaga* as sacrament can be understood as an intimate union with God and of the unity of all mankind. In other words, *Fetuiaga Kerisiano*, as a church, can be seen as a sign and instrument of such union and unity. It communicates hospitality and considers the missional premise of the *Fetuiaga Kerisiano* that God's activity in our world is concerned with giving life, and more specifically, that Jesus describes that giving of life as the feeding of human hunger.⁴⁰⁵ It is a sign of grace where the presence of God is embodied and realized. In the midst of the *umu fetuiaga* or *faiagahau* (banquet celebration), the presence of grace comes into fulfillment. The church, then, becomes an actual event of grace when it appears most concretely as a sacrament - there in the actions of the people giving, receiving, feasting, drinking, singing and dancing - that is a visible sign of Christ as sacrament. This sacramental angle of the *fetui-*

⁴⁰³ See John D. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church*, Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1985.

⁴⁰⁴ Refer to Miroslav Volf, *After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity*, Grand Rapids, Michigan.: Eerdmans, 1998, 208-213.

⁴⁰⁵ See Mark Stamm. *Let Every Soul Be Jesus' Guest: A Theology of the Open Table*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2006. Refer to chapters 3 (Biblical descriptions and theological reflections on Jesus' meals) and 8 (hospitality and continuing challenge). These descriptions and understandings forms the basis of the hospitality and the sacramentality of the *umu fetuiaga*.

aga also include an eschatological dimension. Now we can see where Jesus is pointing to a time when all people and all creation are gathered up in him in all its glory. This thesis set out to explore what it means to be a church in an Australian liquid culture. There are still resonances of those models identified by Dulles.

The institutional model is important even in a sea of liquidity, of so much ebbing and flowing. There is still need for some sense of an institutional model because institutions provide some sort of structure and framework for memory and hope. This model of the *Fetuiaga* remains a way of providing an 'institution' that can carry the Niuean culture and its Christian experience in liquidity - but it will be different. It will not be institutional in a hierarchical understanding of authority, inhibiting an egalitarian sense of being. This model recognizes the necessity of an institution for the perpetuation of the received *taoga*. It plays a pivotal role as custodian of the endangered Niuean identity. It is arguably the case that the word custodian might even be better than institutional.

The herald model of the church manages to preserve the gospel, the good news of forgiveness of sins and salvation through proclamation. It is a model which takes seriously Palu's complaint that the Pacificans are sacrificing the biblical faith for cultural expressions. In a new context where *tutala* is directly challenged by virtual social media, the *fetuiaga* relies heavily on the proclaiming the gospel through *tau gahua* (action/practice) and *lologo-koli* (song and dance). In a liquid and diffuse sense of culture, the need to attend to the trauma and effects of migration and intergenerational differences is captured in the diaconal model. Even in a liquid culture there is need for those who have the notion of being a body of disciples who retain the core even if, and especially when, others in diaspora might be resistant to the demands of the church. Without the core group holding the body together, - the church as a community of disciples - there will be no substance for new members to attach themselves to and coagulate in an ever-changing fluid society. In this model, the *Fetuiaga* is concerned with being disciples, in the footsteps of Jesus, meeting needs in this world. The

cultural celebration and performance enables a rendering of a fellowship of the Spirit.

We might even suggest that a *Fetuiaga Kerisiano* parallels the Mystical Communion image best. Where the *fetuiaga* take place at a birthday or a wedding, Christ is embodied in the nature of communion, serving and the celebrating with the people. The intentional interweaving of the Christian narrative and social activity beginning in and around the kitchen right through to the worship devotion and *ta me* (dancing-singing) involves aspects of different classical models. The *Fetuiaga Kerisiano* is the "Body of Christ" recovering its received gifts inherent in its ethnic and cultural DNA, flowing and adapting in the new liquid environment. In a flexible ecumenical nature of the Uniting Church in Australia, the *Fetuiaga Kerisiano* will continue to sing and dance inviting all along the way to join in the holy *perichoresis* of God.

This thesis began with the intention to think in terms of what it means to be the church for a culture and community in diaspora. The practice of an *umu* hermeneutic may well be the only way ahead to address a dual purpose. How is the Niuean sense of the gospel as a corporate activity to be maintained in such a scattered and fragmented way of being so far across the *moana* where the villages remain? The second has to do with the transmission and preservation of culture from the *tupuna* through an older generation to hyphenated young people increasingly more at home in the world of the stranger? The two purposes are interwoven on account of the close identity of gospel and cultural identity in the homeland. The task ahead is partly one of organizing and mobilizing; equally, if not more important, is the composition of a new imaginary, an inner geography which will provide some signposts for the art of living. That is the task of the theological songmaker who can capture a people's diverse poetics of witness and weave them into a fresh communal understanding.

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