

# A PUBLIC THEOLOGY OF RELATIONSHIPS

*REFLECTIONS FROM THE MOTHERS' UNION IN  
AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND AND POLYNESIA*

Eleanor Ruth Sanderson

December 2012

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the degree Masters of Theology, Department of Theology  
and Religious Studies, University of Otago.

## ABSTRACT

Following feminist critiques and challenges to the distinctive and discourse within the genre of public theology, this research further explores possibilities in feminist public theologies. By engaging with the work of Luce Irigaray and acknowledging the relational paradigm shift that her philosophy effects, this research explores a public theology of relationships. This exploration takes place within a corporate theological reflection with members of the Mothers' Union in the Three Tikanga Anglican Church of Aotearoa New Zealand and Polynesia. The Mothers' Union World Wide vision seeks to see a world where God's love is shown through loving, respectful and flourishing relationships. Exploring the public significance of divine and human relationships in this context challenges prior delineations and gendering of the private and public realm. Furthermore, the culturally distinct articulations of that which is loving, respectful and flourishing, illustrates the critical potential of prioritising relational language and culture within public discourse. This research raises the possibilities that ensue from considering public theologies of relationships for speaking of and within a public theology of love. Such a theology would be cognisant of the critical relational inter-subjectivity of love, following Luce Irigaray. The possibility of a public theology of relationships and the theological cultivation of loving thought are critically evaluated as potential gifts which public theology might offer to the broader public.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost I wish to acknowledge with gratitude the women who participated in this research, sharing themselves, their lives, their energy and their wisdom. I am very thankful for this opportunity to begin a journey together: Kia ora; Malo Au'pito; Thank you.

I would like to thank Professor Andrew Bradstock and Professor Elaine Wainwright for their astute guidance, reflections and invaluable support during the production of this thesis. I am also thankful for the friendship, support and encouragements given by Revd Sue Burns, Archdeacon Tony Gerritson, Bishop Jim White, Revd Dr Helen-Anne Hartley, Dr Jenny Plane Te Paa, Dr Moeawa Callaghan and Commissioner Gail Thompson during my time resident at the College of St John the Evangelist where this thesis was produced. I would also particularly like to acknowledge Revd Dr Rangi Nicholson in providing encouragement and guidance in my approach to this research topic. I am also particularly thankful for the support and encouragement of Archbishops David Moxon and Winston Hallapua.

I particularly wish to express my sincere thanks to Revd Jacky Sewell for her enthusiasm and collegiality alongside her generous gift of proof-reading.

And to those who share significant private conversations and prayers that facilitate public speech, I sincerely thank Angela Watson, Penelope Bull, the P.W.G. group, and my family.

# CONTENTS

Abstract.....	1
Acknowledgements.....	2
Chapter 1 Introduction: .....	8
Weaving Together the Personal and the Public .....	8
1.1 Embodying Public Theology.....	8
1.2 Introducing the Wider Context of this Research .....	14
1.2.1 The Political Necessity of Public Theology.....	15
1.2.2 A Relational Culture .....	19
1.2.3 The Mothers’ Union in the Three Tikanga Anglican Church of Aotearoa New Zealand and Polynesia. ....	21
1.3 Articulating a Public Theology of Relationships.....	22
Chapter 2: Public and Theological Relationships.....	25
2.1 Introduction .....	25
2.2 Called into Relationship .....	26
2.3 Being in Relationship.....	35
2.3.1 Relational Politics and Poetics .....	37
2.3.2 A Spiritual and Divine Task.....	42
2.3.3 The Possibility of a Public Theology after Luce Irigaray.....	45
2.4 A Specific Relational Context .....	47

2.4.1 Liberating Divine Relationships.....	48
2.4.2 Te Pouhere: The Birth of a Three Tikanga Church.....	52
2.4.3 The Mothers’ Union in the Anglican Church of Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia .....	56
2.5 Conclusion.....	59
Chapter 3: A Relational Research Process .....	61
3.1 Introduction .....	61
3.2 Constructing Public Theologies: Theological Reflection by Whom and for Whom?.....	62
3.3 Living and Loving Research Relationships .....	67
3.4 Reflecting Theologically within the Mothers’ Union in the Anglican Church of Aotearoa New Zealand and Polynesia .....	70
3.4.1 An Emerging Methodology through Relational Encounters.....	70
3.4.2 Tikanga Pakeha .....	75
3.4.3 Tikanga Pacifica.....	78
3.4.4 Tikanga Maori .....	80
3.4.5 Sharing our Stories and Reflections Together .....	83
3.5 The Emerging Strands of a Public Theology of Relationships.....	84
Chapter 4: Relational Reflections .....	87
4.1 Theological Reflections within Tikanga Pakeha.....	87
4.1.1 Family in Many Forms .....	88
4.1.2 A Relational God .....	91

4.1.3 The Public Reality of Private Relationships: The Public Theology of a Family in Many Forms .....	93
4.2 Theological Reflections within Tikanga Maori.....	97
4.2.1 Receiving a Gift from Previous Generations.....	98
4.2.2 A God Working in and through Culturally-Distinct Relationships .....	100
4.2.3 The Banqueting Table: A Metaphor for Public Theology .....	103
4.3 Theological Reflections within Tikanga Pacifica .....	106
4.3.1 A Home in the Abode of Love .....	107
4.3.2 Relationships Reflecting the Heart of God .....	109
4.3.3 A Garland of Praise: A Gift and Expression of a Public Theology .....	112
4.4 Banquets of Joy Among Prodigal Families .....	115
Chapter 5:.....	117
Towards a Public Theology of Relationships .....	117
5.1 Introduction: Responding to the Invitation into Strategic Theo-Political Praxis within Public Theology.....	117
5.2 Informing Feminist Public Theologies: The Potential Gift of Relationality.....	120
5.2.1 Relationships Which Constitute Theo-Political Praxis .....	120
5.2.2 Relationships as a Gendered Reality.....	122
5.2.3 A Poetics and a Politics of Love.....	126
5.3 Informing Contextual Expressions of Public Theology: A Banquet in the Public Square .....	128

5.3.1 The Banqueting Table .....	128
5.3.2 A Family in Many Forms.....	133
5.3.3 A Garland of Praise .....	138
5.4 A Public Theology of Love and a Loving Public Theology .....	143
Chapter 6: Conclusions .....	148
6.1 A Public Theology of Relationships within the Mothers’ Union in Aotearoa New Zealand and Polynesia .....	148
6.1.2 The Central Threads.....	152
6.1.2 Gifts from the Respective Tikanga.....	154
6.1.3 Gifts to and from Public Theology .....	155
6.2 Medicine for our Bodies: Shared Research Evaluations .....	157
6.3 The Task of Weaving .....	160
Bibliography .....	162
Appendices.....	171
Appendix 1: Information for Research Participants from Tikanga Maori .....	171
Appendix 2: Information for Research Participants from Tikanga Pacifica.....	177
Appendix 3: Information for Research Participants from Tikanga Pakeha .....	182

## TABLES

Table 1.1: Research Participants from Tikanga Pakeha.....76

Table 1.2: Research Participants from Tikanga Pacifica.....79

Table 1.3: Research Participants from Tikanga Maori.....82

## CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION:

### WEAVING TOGETHER THE PERSONAL AND THE PUBLIC

#### 1.1 EMBODYING PUBLIC THEOLOGY

All this day, O Lord, let me touch  
as many lives as possible for thee;  
and every life I touch, do though by  
thy spirit quicken, whether through  
the word I speak, the prayer I  
breathe, or the life I live. Amen  
*[The personal prayer of Mary Sumner<sup>1</sup>]*

This prayer of Mary Sumner expresses a very personal faith. It speaks of Mary Sumner's personal relationship with the Christian God. It also speaks of an understanding that her relationship with this God and her relationship with other people are intrinsically related. Mary Sumner expresses the understanding that her personal life is connected to that of others through the inter-relational presence of God's Spirit. This inter-relationship is then expressed by Mary Sumner through her words and language, her breath and her prayers and the way in which she lives the gift of her life. So this is a very personal prayer, a prayer Mary Sumner prays about her personal life, and yet it is a prayer that has had very public consequences.

---

<sup>1</sup> The Mothers' Union, *United in Prayer and Worship* (Bristol: JW Artowsmith Ltd., 2002), 1.

Mary Sumner was the founding member of the organisation called the Mothers' Union. The organisation began in 1876 in England and has since grown into a world-wide fellowship of more than 4 million members in 84 countries. Its vision and aims have evolved over time.

The Mothers' Union currently expresses its vision in the following language:

Our members share one heartfelt vision - to bring about a world where God's love is shown through loving, respectful and flourishing relationships. This is not a vague hope, but a goal we actively pursue through prayer, programmes, policy work and community relationships. By supporting marriage and family life, especially through times of adversity, we tackle the most urgent needs challenging relationships and communities.<sup>2</sup>

The Mothers' Union identifies itself as "a Christian Mission organisation working through a grassroots membership to support families and communities throughout the world".<sup>3</sup> The Mothers' Union articulates its mission as demonstrating "the Christian faith in action by the transformation of communities worldwide through the nurture of the family in its many forms."<sup>4</sup> It expresses its values as being "firmly rooted in a voluntary ethos" with "its governance, leadership, and programmes driven by and undertaken through members around the world as they respond to God's call to faith and action."<sup>5</sup>

Membership of the Mothers' Union is currently unrestricted by gender, marital or parental status, and open to all baptised Christians who wish to support their aims and objectives.

They describe their membership as:

Our members are not all mothers, or even all women. Single, married, parents, grandparents, or young adults just beginning to express their social conscience. For all 4 million members what Mothers' Union provides is a network through which they can serve Christ in their own community - through prayer, financial support and actively working at the grassroots level in programmes that meet local needs. We lobby local and national governments on issues affecting family life and campaign to

---

<sup>2</sup> The Mothers' Union, <http://www.themothersunion.org> (accessed July 21, 2011).

<sup>3</sup> The Mothers' Union, "Mothers' Union Logo Postcard Collection," (London: MU enterprises Ltd, 2007).

<sup>4</sup> The Mothers' Union, <http://www.themothersunion.org> (accessed July 21, 2011).

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

challenge legislation that neglects the vulnerable and marginalised. We are also represented at the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women.<sup>6</sup>

The Mothers' Union therefore has three main strands in its contemporary work. One is to provide theological resources for the spiritual growth of its members. The second is programme work, through practical community development initiatives, to support the lives of families and communities throughout the world. This programme work is driven by the needs identified by their grass-roots community membership and led by local membership groups. The work of the Mothers' Union is therefore diverse in its various incarnations throughout the 83 countries in which the organisation is established. For example, projects range from Literacy and Development, disaster relief support, family and relationships training, to affordable and accessible vacations for vulnerable families and work within prisons. The third strand within the Mothers' Union is advocacy and policy work. This work ranges from HIV/AIDS awareness in many African countries to the recent 'Buy Buy Childhood' campaign in the United Kingdom which challenges the commercialisation and sexualisation of childhood.

Mary Sumner was the wife of an Anglican Priest and consequently the Mothers' Union has grown alongside the global spread of the Anglican Church. Although the organisation is structurally independent from the Anglican Church, it has been described by the current Archbishop of Canterbury as being the fifth strand of unity within the World-wide Anglican Communion.<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Whilst this perspective has been expressed publically on many occasions by Archbishop Rowan Williams, this statement was received in a letter of personal communication by Lambeth Palace to myself and Mrs Anne Carpenter (the then Provincial President of the Mothers' Union in Aotearoa New Zealand and Polynesia), 14 February, 2007.

The Mothers' Union therefore has an implicitly public theology. It has both a direct engagement with public life through its development and advocacy work and also fosters personal public action in the personal spirituality it encourages amongst its members. In this work the Mothers' Union articulates a public theology in which the language of relationships is prominent.

*Relationships, particularly in parenting and family life are the crux of our society. It is something we are particularly worried about in the UK. Relationships are so increasingly fragmented...This is why MU's foundation is group meetings and the fellowship of physically coming together. Within MU, relationships are fundamentally about belonging and sharing...The most powerful analogy [for relationships] has been the use of the South African term of Ubuntu within MU, 'I am because you are'. I am in relationship to everyone else and it is through those relationships that my own identity is formed. Spiritually we are together and so our practical theology of that unity is so powerful. [Fleur Smith, Mary Sumner House]<sup>8</sup>*

I believe that exploration of this particular public theology has significance for a number of reasons. The first is that I believe such an exploration is significant for the growth and scope of public theology itself. This is particularly in regard to the development of feminist public theologies. Whilst the Mothers' Union's work and visions may resonate with broader feminist principles, such as the explicit support for vulnerable women in society,<sup>9</sup> there may also be points of dissonance, such as the critique of patriarchal marriage. The aspect of the Mothers' Union with which I am primarily concerned is the explicit relational framing in its approach to influencing public society and the resonance this relational approach has with the relational paradigm shift in the work of the feminist philosopher Luce Irigaray. Feminist voices within public theology have distinctive and significant contributions and challenges to

---

<sup>8</sup> Fleur Smith, interview by author, London, September 9, 2011.

<sup>9</sup> Although the Mothers' Union is currently not exclusively a women's organisation, both historically and at present its membership is more than predominantly female and in many contexts within the world it is the ecclesiological space within which women shape their teaching, spiritual growth and Christian commitment.

assert<sup>10</sup> and I believe that there is a stream of possibility in the afore-mentioned resonance that may have an important contribution to make to the growth of feminist public theologies.

Secondly, I believe that a relational emphasis within both theology and philosophy is of critical importance in contemporary landscapes of both public and academic thought.<sup>11</sup>

Thirdly, I believe an exploration of the relational framing of the Mothers' Union's public theology is important because of the ecclesial context in which it is located (i.e. the Anglican Communion) and the relational challenges that that context is currently experiencing – albeit that this ecclesial context may reflect a more indirect relationship to public theology.<sup>12</sup> If the Mothers' Union is perceived as a strand of unity within that Communion, what relational wisdom does it have to share with its wider ecclesial context?

*MU is predominantly lay led. It is an important place for affirming the voice of many people within the church...In many ways we are on the margins because that place is more real. We have a flexibility of being both within and without the church. [Fleur Smith, Mary Sumner House]<sup>13</sup>*

The final reason, or rather, motivation, for exploring the relational character of a public theology within the Mothers' Union is because I am a Mothers' Union member in a relationally unique part of the Anglican Communion: the Three Tikanga Church of Aotearoa New Zealand and Polynesia.<sup>14</sup> The three Tikanga reflects the three cultural strands of

---

<sup>10</sup> I will qualify what I mean by both distinctive and significant later on in this chapter.

<sup>11</sup> Again, this statement will be further qualified shortly.

<sup>12</sup> In the year this research began, 2011, the Diocese and Hui Amorangi within the Anglican Church in this Province were asked to vote in their respective legislative councils on belonging to the Anglican Covenant. The Covenant is the result of a long process in which theological and relational differences amongst the Communion are attempted to be addressed. For comment on this Anglican context see, for example, Ephraim Radner and Philip Turner, *The Fate of Communion: The Agony of Anglicanism and the Future of a Global Church* (Grand Rapids, Cambridge, Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2006).

<sup>13</sup> Fleur Smith, interview by author, London, September 9, 2011.

<sup>14</sup> Articulating significant aspects of my own positionality is an important part of contextualising this research and will occur in due course. However I wish to state now that I became a member of the Mothers' Union in the Wellington Diocese of New Zealand in 2009, when I was in my early 30's and after having spent time with

Maori, Pakeha and Pacifica in an intentional relationship that seeks to respect and foster the respective cultural identities of each. I am therefore part of an organisation, The Mothers' Union, with a strong relational public theology, in an ecclesiological context which is structured around being in relationship with others of cultural difference. I am therefore motivated by the uniqueness which I perceive this context adds to the significance, identified above, of the potential importance in exploring the public theology within the work of the Mothers' Union.

The question at the heart of this research is therefore: 'what are the central threads for weaving a public theology of relationships in the context of the Mothers' Union in the Three Tikanga Anglican Church of Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia?' Two subsidiary questions which assist in addressing that question are: what do 'we' draw from in our Tikanga in ascertaining what is loving, respectful and flourishing in our relationships; and in what ways do we perceive our relationships to inform our public theology?

In order to address these questions I have sought to work in a collaborative way through intentional dialogue and theological reflection within the Three Tikanga Mothers' Union community of this context. I have employed participatory and action-reflection methodologies in which I myself am an active participant, rather than seeking a detached participant-observation style of research.<sup>15</sup> I therefore embody this research and through that embodiment questioned what it is that I might, or do, embody as a new Mothers' Union member in my personal and corporate public theology? It has been that same

---

the Mothers' Union in the Province of Tanzania. Around the time of my joining, three other similarly-aged women joined and there has been a recent interest in joining the Mothers' Union by both younger women and men in this context over the previous years.

<sup>15</sup> The various opportunities and challenges that come from this approach will be explored in Chapter 3.

question that I have discerned amongst other Mothers' Union members who have joined me in this research.

## 1.2 INTRODUCING THE WIDER CONTEXT OF THIS RESEARCH

There are three wider contexts within which this research sits and to which it relates. The first is the historical context of the Mothers' Union within the Three Tikanga Church of Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia. It is in respect to this context that I use the imagery of weaving in the central research question, because weaving has become a chosen metaphor for women engaging theologically from within this Pacific context.<sup>16</sup> The second is the broader context of public theology and particularly the articulated challenges of cultivating feminist voices within the genre. Thirdly is the potential significance of the relational paradigm shift engendered in the broader philosophy of Luce Irigaray. Luce Irigaray's work is an analytical lens which informs my attention to the possibility of a public theology of relationships.<sup>17</sup>

Responding comprehensively to each of these wider contexts of research would be a significant piece of work in their own right. The historical context of both the Mothers' Union and the Three Tikanga Church is complex. A potential analysis of the public theology implicit within the work of Luce Irigaray is also a significant and valuable piece of work. Expansive contextual understandings of the relational theologies upon which Mothers' Union members may draw, or reflect, requires involved, comprehensive analysis. This

---

<sup>16</sup> Lydia Johnson and Joan Alleluia Filemoni-Tofaeono, eds., *Weavings: Women Doing Theology in Oceania* (Suva, Fiji: Institute of Pacific Studies, University of the South Pacific, 2003).

<sup>17</sup> Questioning whether or how this lens is appropriate in this context is important to consider.

particular thesis can therefore in no way seek to offer a comprehensive account of the separate parts which it brings together. Instead, however, I assert that these different contexts are already interwoven in the public sphere and merit the beginning of a significant reflection upon and with them. Therefore I seek to make a beginning – to identify the central threads of a particular public theology of relationships and to articulate them – of what could become a bigger work. And from this initial beginning, to find an appropriate way in which that bigger work could continue: a path to which it should be faithful.

The remainder of this introduction therefore briefly introduces those wider contexts and then concludes by outlining the structure of the thesis.

### *1.2.1 THE POLITICAL NECESSITY OF PUBLIC THEOLOGY*

Public theology is generally defined as that aspect of theology that is expressly engaged with the character, shape and concerns of public life.<sup>18</sup> This aspect of theology has developed within two main schools of thought: a stream within the United Kingdom which has been particularly influenced by the work of Duncan Forrester<sup>19</sup> and a stream within the United States that has been particularly influenced by the work of Max Stackhouse.<sup>20</sup> Both these streams affirm the rigorous theological interrogation of socio-political and economic forces constructing and re-constructing public social realities. Public theologies emerging from

---

<sup>18</sup> John Atherton, for example, highlights how the contemporary global realities of public life require theology to be “an exercise in practical divinity for the good of the world, of God’s world”. John Atherton, *Public Theology for Changing Times* (London: SPCK, 2000), 3.

<sup>19</sup> Duncan Forrester articulates this concern as: “Public theology seeks to be a theology that makes a difference, a theology which engages with the real issues of today and tomorrow, that focuses on the places where people are hurting, where there is conflict, where there are seeds of vision and hope”. Duncan Forrester, “Afterword. Working in the Quarry: A Response to the Colloquium,” in *Public Theology for the 21st Century*, eds. William Storrar and Andrew Morton (London, New York: Continuum, 2004), 432.

<sup>20</sup> See Deirdre King Hainsworth and Scott R. Paeth, *Public Theology for a Global Society. Essays in Honor of Max L. Stackhouse* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2010).

these streams emphasise the need for public theological discourse to be publically accessible and not restricted to methods and arguments that are “specifically religious”.<sup>21</sup> They are concerned with the ethics, issues and institutions of society explicitly alongside a concern for the teaching and practice of the Christian church in its various forms.

The concept of public theology, however, also has the potential to speak to and inform long-established binary oppositions in historical and contemporary discourses, whose persistence has long been of concern to feminist theorists and theologians. The dualistic thinking that sustains the concepts, for example, of public and private, can be traced to an enlightenment paradigm and are expressly connected to particular valorised manners of constructing the dualities of male and female subject positions. The enlightenment paradigm itself reflected the industrialization and rationalization of public life in that era and consequently the repositioning of religious power and knowledge,<sup>22</sup> as well as redefining the expected domains of male and female subject positions. The binary oppositions between public /private, spirit/matter, male/female, mind/body, for example, and the way in which one half of those oppositions was either subordinated or elevated as part of that repositioning, has had considerable influence in the subsequent development of theological and academic thought and consequently the shape of public life (see for example, Doreen Massey’s critique of the elevation of time over space<sup>23</sup>). This subordination has had serious consequences for a normative secular assumption within the development of disciplines and sub-disciplines. There has been a recent challenge, for example, from within the humanities and social sciences for religious and spiritual categories of experience to gain more

---

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>22</sup> See, for example, Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart, *Sacred and Secular: Religion and Politics Worldwide* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

<sup>23</sup> Doreen Massey, *for space* (London: Sage Publications Ltd, 2005).

concerted attention within these disciplines and within public policy.<sup>24</sup> The Society and Religion Programme, for example, illustrates a new found enthusiasm to engage in the public interplay of religious identity, organisation and influence.<sup>25</sup> These developments reflect a relatively recent rejection of the enduring relegation of spirituality and religion to the private realm within Western society.

Such binary oppositions, however, have been particularly serious for the subordinated female subject position and strongly challenged by the breadth of feminist philosophy and theology. Marcella Althaus-Reid, for example, accuses a colonial and patriarchal “theology which equated women with nature and subordination” with the current environmental catastrophe.<sup>26</sup> Creating new ways of conceiving the different interrelationships which make up the human experience of this world has consequently been an important endeavour within feminist theologies. An example is found in the eco-feminist theology of Mary Grey who also strongly rejects the perpetuation of subordinating binary oppositions and challenges their theological justification.<sup>27</sup>

---

<sup>24</sup> See, for example, the rapidly growing debates: within the field of International Development Theory and Practice, for example, K. A. Ver Beek, "Spirituality: a development taboo," *Development in Practice* 10, no. 1 (2000); K. Greany, "Editorial," *Gender and Development* 14, no. 3 (2006); within Human Geography, for example, Terry Slater, "Encountering God: personal reflections on 'geographer as pilgrim'," *Area* 36, no. 3 (2004); S. Grimes and J. Nubiola, "Reconsidering the exclusion of metaphysics in human geography," *Acta Philosophica* 6, no. 2 (1997), Eleanor Sanderson, "The Challenge of Placing Spirituality within Geographies of Development," *Geography Compass* 1, no. 3 (2007).

<sup>25</sup> One of the main publications from this project is *Religion and Change in Modern Britain*, eds. Linda Woodhead and Rebecca Catto (London, Routledge, 2012).

<sup>26</sup> Marcella Maria Althaus-Reid, "In The Centre there are no fragments: *Teologias Desencajadas* (Reflections from Unfitting Theologies)," in *Public Theology for the 21st Century*, ed. William Storrar and Andrew Morton (London, New York: T & T Clark a Continuum Imprint, 2004), 367.

<sup>27</sup> Mary Grey cites Paul Avis' summation of the way traditional Christianity has embodied this dualistic construction of thought: "The negative – dualistic, ascetic, world-denying, women-hating, eros-reviling – has been emphatic and overwhelming. The alienation from our embodiment – our physical and sexual nature – has been massive and has brought with it profound alienation of the conscious rational mind from the unconscious intuitive mind, of men from women, children, nature and living creatures. The damage to human lives and the destruction of actual and potential human well-being is incalculable". Paul Avis, *Eros and the Sacred* (London,

If it is the shape of public life that public theologians have as a principle concern, then a critical engagement in the dualistic oppositions that sustain certain characteristics of public life should also be of concern. Feminist contributions to the growth of public theology are therefore very significant. A feminist public theology, for example, immediately holds the possibility to challenge any relegation of the 'female' to the 'private' and consequently to re-envision the articulation of Divine inter-relationships within our experience of the world. As the contributions of feminist voices speak into public theology, they illustrate a distinctive that can and *should* inform the development of public theological thinking and debate.<sup>28</sup>

To include in the introduction to this thesis such a grand narrative (fraught with necessary over-simplification and absences) is politically necessary and also limiting. It is necessary in order to locate the politics of *this* work; pointing out the background that generates the motivation for new research and highlighting what is at stake in the production of that new work. However it is limiting because it provides an opening context in which I and the voices within this research are already identified as speaking from 'somewhere else' in order to inform and shape a more dominant paradigm. This is an inherent challenge within feminist and also contextual theologies (being subject-positioned as 'other' and 'alternative'), which

---

SPCK, 1989): 81-2, quoted in Mary Grey, *Sacred Longings. The Ecological Spirit and Global Culture* (Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 2004), 59.

<sup>28</sup> Whilst the following chapter will explore this contribution more fully, a particular example which is important to mention here is the work of Christina Landman. Her research around the "intimate spaces" of sexual relationships and domestic violence expands the spatiality of the 'public' within public theology. Christina Landman, "A Public Theology for Intimate Spaces," *International Journal of Public Theology* 5(2011): 63.

necessitates the political consideration of *how* to speak as well as the political incentive to enter the conversation.<sup>29</sup>

### 1.2.2 A RELATIONAL CULTURE

*No human subjectivity, no human society has ever been established without the help of the divine.*<sup>30</sup>

Luce Irigaray's philosophy and writing approaches the interaction between the personal and the public in a unique framing. She represents a paradigm shift in thinking (or the framing of philosophical thought) from a foundation of sexual difference which draws upon psychoanalytic, linguistic and philosophic narratives. Her foundation of sexual difference articulates a 'culture of the two' between male and female sexuate identities, that fosters within it a progression to a 'culture of the many'.<sup>31</sup> Her work critically challenges the philosophical history of Western thought as being within a singular horizon – being as 'I' and not being as 'we'.<sup>32</sup> In other words, the structuring of propositional thought, such as that illustrated in the previous section, is symptomatic of a singular identity making sense of the world in relation to itself. Her alternative desire is to see the formation of a more expressly

---

<sup>29</sup> Again, these challenges will be more fully articulated and discussed in the following chapters, but it is significant to highlight here the writing of Heather Walton who both questions the possibility of speaking as a feminist within public theology and challenges a more radical critique of the genre of public theology, in order to better reflect the contemporary context. Heather Walton, "You Have To Say You Cannot Speak: Feminist Reflections Upon Public Theology," *International Journal of Public Theology* 4 (2010).

<sup>30</sup> Luce Irigaray, *Sexes and Genealogies* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), 62.

<sup>31</sup> A fuller elaboration of this aspect of her work can be found in, Eleanor Sanderson, "A Future Shaped by Love: Towards a Feminist Geography of Development and Spirituality," in *Teaching*, ed. Luce Irigaray and Mary Green (London: Continuum, 2008).

<sup>32</sup> "In the Western conception of identity as unity closed upon what is one's own, this relational dimension of the human is forgotten. As is forgotten the fact that the human is not one but two. The act of entering into relation is conceived as a relation to oneself and not as a relation to the other". Luce Irigaray, *The Way of Love* (London: Continuum, 2002), 89.

relational development of thought that would instead come from a singular identity, recognising their own singularity and the immediacy of their relational identity, from which would come an expressly inter-subjective exploration of being. The progression of her work from *I love to You*<sup>33</sup>, *The Way of Love*<sup>34</sup> and *Sharing the World*,<sup>35</sup> articulates the intricate demands of the relational culture she perceives as necessary both for the personal subject position and the cultivation of public life. This relational culture, as the opening quote for this section strongly illustrates, is one in which theology is very strongly implicated. Her writing includes both a theological critique and theological construction in which her own writing is self-consciously located.

Luce Irigaray's later work particularly is articulated towards the 'age of the breath', which is a self-conscious cultivation towards the "passage to another epoch of the reign of spirit".<sup>36</sup> Such cultivation is a "passionate and beautiful" task which Luce Irigaray charges to women in the cultivation of their own liberation, but also for creating "a culture of life and love"<sup>37</sup> which reflects the Spirit's Age. These are articulations which speak to the depths of the critiques highlighted in the previous section.

This spiritual and relational language and imagery is both provocative and resonant with the relational language of the Mothers' Union. The public theology within Luce Irigaray's work could therefore play an important exploratory and analytic role in articulating possibilities for a public theology of relationships.

---

<sup>33</sup> Luce Irigaray, *I love to you* (London, New York: Routledge, 1996).

<sup>34</sup> Luce Irigaray, *The Way of Love* (London: Continuum, 2002).

<sup>35</sup> Luce Irigaray, *Sharing the World* (London, New York: Continuum, 2008).

<sup>36</sup> Luce Irigaray, *Between East and West: From Singularity to Community*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 91.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 91.

### 1.2.3 THE MOTHERS' UNION IN THE THREE TIKANGA ANGLICAN CHURCH OF AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND AND POLYNESIA.

The history of the Anglican Church and the Mothers' Union in Aotearoa New Zealand is complex and often contentious. Those histories provide insight into relational and public theologies from different cultural approaches with regard to relationships between Christian theology, church and social structures. It is important to give an, admittedly and necessarily limited, introductory account of this context and the different theologies which can be perceived within them. To illustrate institutional debates within the Anglican Church in both its colonial and post-colonial positioning serves to recognise the threads amongst which any public theology of relationships, which may emerge from this research, must be woven.

Of particular significance is the forming of the Three Tikanga church structure in 1992 through *Te Pohere* following the 1986 Bi-cultural Commission on the Treaty of Waitangi, as well as appreciating the role of the Anglican Church in The Treaty of Waitangi itself. The Mothers' Union needs to be understood in its relationship within a consciously Three Tikanga church structure. In addition, it is important to appreciate the positioning of the Mothers' Union in relation to other organised women's groups within the Anglican Church in each of the three Tikanga of the church. Of particular importance here is the creation of the Association of Anglican Women which occurred as an intentional split with the World-Wide Mothers' Union in the 1980s as a result of the then exclusive membership policy of the Mothers' Union and the creation of Kahui Wahine within Tikanga Maori.

These contextual histories both position the contemporary context of the Mothers' Union in the Anglican Church of Aotearoa New Zealand and Polynesia as well as potentially influencing the public theologies of relationships that have, and are, and can be, developed within it.

### 1.3 ARTICULATING A PUBLIC THEOLOGY OF RELATIONSHIPS

The following chapter in this thesis, *Public and Theological Relationships*, expands on the three central themes identified above by articulating, through recent research and writing, the threads into which this research will be interwoven. It particularly seeks to discern the importance given to relationships in the interchanges between feminist theologies, public theologies and contextual theologies. In the light of that exchange, I articulate the influence that an Irigarain approach could have in the development of feminist public theologies. That chapter concludes with a necessarily succinct contextual history of the Mothers' Union in the Anglican Church of Aotearoa New Zealand and Polynesia, articulated through a lens of culturally diverse public theologies of relationships.

The third chapter, *A Relational Research Process*, introduces the other people who participated in this research and the processes of theological reflection that were chosen as a means of addressing the research questions. It also addresses relevant methodological challenges around theological reflection and feminist and contextual methodological concerns. In this chapter, I more fully elaborate upon my own positionality and articulate the dialogical process through which this research occurred. Through illustrating the relational processes through which this particular research project was shaped, this chapter

will begin to articulate aspects of the relational theology at work within this case study context.

The fourth chapter, *Relational Reflections*, will directly address the central questions within this research and, through interweaving my own analysis with the theological reflections from the research participants, will explore and express the threads of a public theology of relationships from within the Mothers' Union in the Anglican Church of Aotearoa New Zealand and Polynesia. This chapter explicitly prioritises the story-telling of the research participants and our shared reflections on their stories.

The fifth chapter, *Towards a Public Theology of Relationships*, will then consider the significance that the theological reflections in this work might have, within the broader development of feminist public theologies. This chapter reflects my own extension of the theological reflections shared in the research process. By extending these reflections in conversation with other theologians, I point to possibilities that could be generated by any further intentional theological reflections and weaving by and amongst the Mothers' Union members themselves. This extension occurs in order to demonstrate the significance the central threads of this research have within the developing genre of feminist public theology. I believe that it is important to explore this extension in order to consider the significance that a public theology of relationships might in fact have.

The final chapter, *Conclusions*, will evaluate the acknowledged 'beginning' that this research represents in the corporate theological reflections initiated. This chapter includes reflections upon this research process by research participants and explores ways in which this research could develop further. Through emphasising the central threads of the public theology discerned within this work and the lessons learnt in this particular research

process, I will suggest ways in which that work should be carried out. Ultimately, to write in relation to words of Duncan Forrester, it will express the “seeds of vision and hope”<sup>38</sup> within a public theology of relationships in this context and consider how those seeds can be watered and nurtured to a greater fullness of life.

---

<sup>38</sup> Forrester, "Afterword. Working in the Quarry: A Response to the Coloquium," 432.

## CHAPTER 2: PUBLIC AND THEOLOGICAL RELATIONSHIPS

### 2.1 INTRODUCTION

Theologians working in the field of public theology have the potential to intentionally refocus the relational context in which theological conversations take place. Feminist and contextual articulations of public theology can further bring into focus the power dynamics of historical and contemporary relationships, through which theologies are formed. Feminist and contextual public theologies also illustrate and critically analyse the relationships, particularly relationships between humans, the earth and God, which theologies themselves can generate or encourage. As such, many feminist and contextual theologians assert that their theologies *in general* are implicitly public theologies because they directly seek to influence the power dynamics in the public relationships in which theology is directly implicated.<sup>39</sup> The first section of this chapter, *Called into Relationship*, explores those themes within current public theology writing and research. I intend to bring to this exploration the analytical lens of the Mothers' Union vision concerning loving, flourishing and respectful relationships.

The second section, *Being in Relationship*, explores the implicit public theology within the work of Luce Irigaray in order to discern the insights that the relational paradigm shift in her work might hold for furthering feminist public theology contributions. Again, the conceptual

---

<sup>39</sup> As well as having a potentially longer history of challenging the social implications of theological thought than the more recent growth of interest in the category of public theology.

lens of loving, respectful and flourishing relationships will be the analytical tool I will use, to discern the implications that Irigaray's work might hold for a public theology of relationships.

The third section, *A Specific Relational Context*, begins to articulate the public and theological relationships which surround the Mothers' Union in the Anglican Church of Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia. By describing, albeit briefly, the historical background to the Three Tikanga Church context in which the Mothers' Union is located, I seek to illustrate the culturally distinct approaches to the relationships which characterise this context.

This chapter therefore illustrates important relational demands that exist in a call into divine, human and worldly relationships – relationships which are central to the Mothers' Union and which also ultimately lie at the heart of any public theology.

## 2.2 CALLED INTO RELATIONSHIP

Any work seeking to contribute a feminist public theology needs to pay attention to the challenges and possibilities which Rosemary Carbine articulates in her recent work which encourages a direction for and a distinctive of feminist public theology.<sup>40</sup> Rosemary Carbine provides a strong feminist critique and theological reflection on the nature of public

---

<sup>40</sup> Rosemary Carbine, "Ekklesial Work: Towards a Feminist Public Theology," *Harvard Theological Review* 99, no. 4 (2006).

theology (particularly in the context of the United States). She significantly draws attention to the terminology of “public”:

“the term ‘public’ communicates a main purpose of this kind of theology: public theology acts on a convocative or community-building imperative to theologically envision and enliven a common political order...”<sup>41</sup>

Drawing on criticisms levelled at public theology, Rosemary Carbine criticizes simplistic concepts of the public which privilege a rational power-free human subject of public polity. In asserting the exclusive nature of such a supposed subject, she instead calls public theology towards the generation of critical “participatory citizens”.<sup>42</sup> Her engagement with the work of Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza evokes the “*ekklesia* of wo/man” to provide an alternative “counterpublic” in which “different political realities might be imagined”.<sup>43</sup> This leads her to advocate a feminist public theology that has *change* rather than *consensus* as a desire, which generates an affinity with solidarity rather than the aim of generating consensus community building. The emphasis towards solidarity relies on the recognition that the theologian is situated amidst multiple communities and between present patriarchal political orders and future possibilities of public life:

Such theologians, then, contribute to a theo-political praxis, that is, an intellectual and lived struggle, of creating an alternative political community that more clearly supports human fulfilment and flourishing.<sup>44</sup>

Rosemary Carbine provides a deeply compelling and rigorously constructed direction for feminist public theology. Her work and the analytical research she draws on within it, witnesses to the need for more respectful and flourishing relationships within public life. This is a need to which public theology should attend. Her conclusions lead me to want to

---

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 436.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 445.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 449.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 455.

counter-pose the 'rational subject', which is a foundational critique within the writing she draws on, with the possibility of the 'loving person'. This counter-position would privilege the human subject as characteristic of relationality, of loving and being loved, as opposed to humanity being distinguished and determined by the sole characteristic of rationality. This counter-position calls upon the dialectic between passion and reason which has a rich vein in the tradition of public theology.

There is a stream within public theology that operates strongly within the Enlightenment progression of thought which I articulated in the previous chapter. These public theologies have a concern for exploring, defending and discerning the philosophical robustness of rationality as a means by which theology can participate in the public arena.<sup>45</sup> Owen Anderson,<sup>46</sup> in particular, illustrates the way that notions of human reason have been at the heart of historical debates about the 'provable' nature of God, which ostensibly gives rise to the privatisation of religious thought because such thought is considered to lack the rationality which should characterise openly public discourse. Hence, "a defence of public theology must first be a defence of reason as a publically available means for knowing God".<sup>47</sup> Likewise Majid Amini asserts that public theology must first be "subject to precepts of rationality".<sup>48</sup> Such debate, however, does not always acknowledge how the philosophical discourse within which rationality is predicated has historically proved to exclude particular groups of people who were historically not considered able to have the rational capacity to

---

<sup>45</sup> See, for example, Owen Anderson, "Public Theology, the Ethics of Belief and the Challenge of Divine Hiddenness," *International Journal of Public Theology* 1(2007); Majid Amini, "Religious Identity: Reflections on Revelation and Rationality," *International Journal of Public Theology* 3(2009).

<sup>46</sup> Anderson, "Public Theology, the Ethics of Belief and the Challenge of Divine Hiddenness."

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 406.

<sup>48</sup> Amini, "Religious Identity: Reflections on Revelation and Rationality," 459.

participate in the public square: namely women, indigenous and ethnic minorities.<sup>49</sup> An analytical lens which privileges relationality immediately reframes such a conceptualisation of public theology as profoundly limited in its capacity to generate respectful, loving or flourishing relationships amongst human beings. As such, it becomes a questionable mode of privileged dialogue to act as arbitrator of 'public' exchange. It is perhaps more helpful to understand the conversations within this particular stream of public theology as belonging to the ongoing Euro-centric narrative of theo-philosophical concerns which are specific to that context. Experiencing different contexts with different theological imperatives can provide insight into more relationally-conducive language or precepts, in which public theology might operate.

Mario Aguilar<sup>50</sup> identifies a need for public theology to relocate from a European 'home' to the peripheries, particularly of Latin America and Africa, in which theology, by nature of those contexts, expresses a political and public resonance distinct from a Euro-centric intellectual discourse. Aguilar identifies the way that public theology, by its nature, challenges a European context in the same way that the metaphor of liberation challenges Latin American society.<sup>51</sup> He also perceives a resonance between South American liberation theology and the public theology of Duncan Forrester and Jürgen Moltmann. Both articulate a search for solidarity with the marginalized in society and desire to use insights from within their Christian traditions to challenge the world in which they are situated. Such a direction and focus is also strongly resonant with Rosemary Carbine's perspectives on the distinctive

---

<sup>49</sup> See, for example, Genevieve Lloyd, *The Man of Reason: 'Male and Female in Western Philosophy'*, (Methuen and Co Ltd, 1984).

<sup>50</sup> Mario Aguilar, "Public Theology from the Periphery: Victims and Theologians," *International Journal of Public Theology* 1(2007).

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 328.

character and concern of feminist public theology.<sup>52</sup> What is perhaps common in this direction is a loving momentum towards those individuals or communities whose experience within the public square is characterised by a lack of respect or mutuality of flourishing. The relationally unsatisfying character of that unequal exchange compels the, in this case, theologian, to seek a transformation of the means of respect and flourishing within their own contextual public. Such a transformation comes to be perceived as necessary for the theologian themselves as much as any loving concern for the other to whom they recognise themselves in relationship.

An exchange between the 'centre' and the 'periphery' (to use the language of Aguilar)<sup>53</sup> is a politically-complex endeavour. Marcella Althaus-Reid, using the challenge given by Spivak of whether the subaltern can speak,<sup>54</sup> critiques the "neo-colonial dependency" upon which concepts such as the margins rely.<sup>55</sup> She and Duncan Forrester engage in a valuable dialogue regarding the concept of fragmentation within his work, with Marcella Althaus-Reid contending that "*in the centre there are no fragments*". Marcella Althaus-Reid challenges that the theologian can not naively expect to enter into the margins without first engaging with critical awareness of their own context of theological production and recognising the power differentials that generate the distinctions upon which the positioning of a centre and a margin rely. Elsewhere, Elaine Graham also warns against "theological tourism" in which researching 'the other' becomes objectification, without proper attention to political

---

<sup>52</sup> It is important, however, to also recognise the, sometimes, overlooked Euro-centricity within feminist writing.

<sup>53</sup> Aguilar, "Public Theology from the Periphery: Victims and Theologians."

<sup>54</sup> G. Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?," in *Marxism and the interpretation of culture*, ed. C Nelson and L. Grossberg (University of Illinois Press, 1988).

<sup>55</sup> Althaus-Reid, "In The Centre there are no fragments: *Teologias Desencajadas* (Reflections from Unfitting Theologies)," 366.

and ethical issues of power and difference.<sup>56</sup> In agreeing with these challenges, Duncan Forrester also speaks of the hope that “theological fragments”, with the “necessary caveats” which they require, can still have in challenging “an oppressive and over-systematic understanding of theology”: “Theological fragments can play many roles in public theology – as irritants, as illumination, as road metal, as lenses and, ultimately, perhaps, as building blocks once again.”<sup>57</sup>

Within these debates I perceive that there is an underlying desire and recognised need to challenge the process of theological production (including that of public theology), in order to illustrate more explicitly that theology is always distinctly embodied and relationally produced. Vinoth Ramachandra, whose work provides an important alternative lens to Euro-centricity in his analysis of global public theologies, describes the embodiment of theology with gentle yet powerful eloquence:

Christian theology is more than a set of doctrinal beliefs or systematic arguments. It is a way of seeing, of so dwelling in a particular language and doing new things with that language so that its revelatory and transformative power is manifest in the world. That language arose out of specific historical events that both constitute us as the *ekklesia* of Christ and call forth characteristic social practices... Such a theology seeks comprehensiveness, because it seeks to bear prophetic witness to One whose speech-acts heal, renew and transform the world in its entirety, but its own speech is always broken, sharing in the not-yet-redeemed character of the world.<sup>58</sup>

---

<sup>56</sup> Elaine Graham, "Power, Knowledge and Authority in Public Theology," *International Journal of Public Theology* 1(2007): 57.

<sup>57</sup> Forrester, "Afterword. Working in the Quarry: A Response to the Colloquium," 436-7.

<sup>58</sup> Vinoth Ramachandra, *Subverting Global Myths: Theology and the Public Issues Shaping Our World* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 13-4.

A claim to perceive the relational context of theological precepts or insights, therefore, is an encouragement to embody with humility the human character of a theological project as occurring between particular people in particular places whose divine relationships do not negate their humanity. Public theology is, after all, a theology partly motivated by perceiving the experience of particular people in particular places. For example, John Atherton speaks of the need for a public theology which is both partial and subjective and yet able to cross contextual boundaries, in order to engage with the challenges emerging within a globalised economy.<sup>59</sup> The themes of partnership and reconciliation, to which Atherton calls public theology have, significantly, a strong relational foundation. In discussing a public theology of relationships, I therefore do so with a prior recognition that all public theology contains within it an implicit theology of relationships.

From this broader perspective, I wish to return now to Rosemary Carbine's call for feminist public theology to engage in "theo-political praxis" in order to support a greater flourishing humanity<sup>60</sup> and briefly articulate some of the distinctive contributions being made within feminist public theology. As stated earlier, feminist theology in general can be seen as public theology<sup>61</sup> and there is therefore significant research within feminist public theology that is particularly concerned for the way in which women's lives and bodies are implicated in public discourse and decision-making. Such research contributes perspectives from feminist theology into debates concerning reproductive technologies,<sup>62</sup> abortion<sup>63</sup> and domestic

---

<sup>59</sup> Atherton, *Public Theology for Changing Times*.

<sup>60</sup> Carbine, "Ekklesial Work: Towards a Feminist Public Theology," 455.

<sup>61</sup> A particularly helpful overview can be found in Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Feminist Theology: Where is it Going?," *International Journal of Public Theology* 4(2010).

<sup>62</sup> Heather Widdows, "The Janus-Face of New Reproductive Technologies: Escaping the Polarized Debate," *International Journal of Public Theology* 4(2010).

<sup>63</sup> Tina Beattie, "Catholicism, Choice and Consciousness: A Feminist Theological Perspective on Abortion," *International Journal of Public Theology* 4(2010).

violence,<sup>64</sup> for example. Such research challenges, in the words of Christina Landman, the need to bridge “the public and the unpublic”.<sup>65</sup> Closely connected to these debates is the role that the church has in influencing and informing the lives of women (particularly regarding the above debates) and the way that women have informed and influenced the church and theology more generally.<sup>66</sup> Within this analysis comes recognition of the need for solidarity amongst women when an affinity with women’s worlds or experiences are not always readily visible within institutional church structures or academic theology. As Christina Landman asserts, public theology “is not for theologians only”<sup>67</sup> and networks of mutual support amongst Christian women can have a powerful potential in generating places of healing and progressive restoration which have public significance.

Many writers within feminist public theologies also strive towards a new poetics within public theology itself. Reflecting the debates highlighted earlier between ‘centre’ and ‘periphery’, the search for a means and vitality of speech for women within public theology discourse is a critical feminist concern and of questionable possibility.<sup>68</sup> Heather Walton, in particular, speaks for the longing of a poetics that moves well beyond rational discourse and its inability “to approach the unbearable mystery of human suffering”,<sup>69</sup> and embraces an

---

<sup>64</sup> Landman, "A Public Theology for Intimate Spaces."; *ibid.*; Esther McIntosh, "The Concept of Sacrifice: A Reconsideration of the Feminist Critique," *International Journal of Public Theology* 1(2007); *ibid.*

<sup>65</sup> Landman, "A Public Theology for Intimate Spaces," 77.

<sup>66</sup> See for example, Julia Pitman, "Feminist Public Theology in the Uniting Church in Australia," *International Journal of Public Theology*, no. 5 (2011); *ibid.*; Clint Le Bruyns, "Corporate Social Responsibility and Gender Justice in South Africa," *International Journal of Public Theology* 3 (2009); Ann Loades, "Simone Weil: Resistance and Writing," *International Journal of Public Theology* 4 (2010).

<sup>67</sup> Landman, "A Public Theology for Intimate Spaces," 73.

<sup>68</sup> See Althaus-Reid, "In The Centre there are no fragments: *Teologias Desencajadas* (Reflections from Unfitting Theologies)."; Walton, "You Have To Say You Cannot Speak: Feminist Reflections Upon Public Theology."

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

“irruption of an unmanageable transcendence”<sup>70</sup> which she perceives has been strongly lacking in public theology to date.

It is from these longings that I now wish to engage with the writing of Luce Irigaray. Luce Irigaray’s work resonates with many of the distinctive characteristics of feminist public theology, but particularly speaks to the creation of “alternative political community”,<sup>71</sup> and the spiritualities needed within them, in which women are able to flourish.

First, however, to summarise the debates within this section: public theologies and particularly feminist public theologies, contain within them the important possibility of articulating and challenging the socio-political dynamics through which humans are in relationship with each other and of questioning the way those relationships do or do not reflect the relational characteristics of the Christian God. Such a relational framing of the discourse of public theology is, however, not usual. The dominant streams of public theology reflect a strong engagement with the rational, political and economic characteristics of public discourse, which have given rise to critical challenges by those whose subject identities do not easily fit within dominant public paradigms. These voices of challenge to, and within, public theology, illustrate an explicit discerning of loving, respectful and flourishing relationships in our publically shared world. Such critiques illustrate that seeking such relationships is a politically and culturally complex endeavour. This is an endeavour to which, I believe, Luce Irigaray’s work speaks.

---

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 36.

<sup>71</sup> Carbine, "Ekklesial Work: Towards a Feminist Public Theology," 455.

## 2.3 BEING IN RELATIONSHIP

The French feminist philosopher Luce Irigaray espouses a relational paradigm shift within Western philosophy, based on her conceptualisation of sexual difference. As a linguist, psychoanalyst and a philosopher, her work has developed over many years from a critique of the sexual indifference embedded within the philosophical history of Western culture to a creative call towards a new relational culture. Her early work illustrated and challenged the sexual indifference (seen in the assumption of the gender neutral subject, indifference to the question of gender, or the feminine articulated only in relation to the masculine) of significant philosophical figures within Western history: Plato, Aristotle, Plotinus, Descartes, Kant, Hegel, Lacan, Freud, Marx, Levi-Strauss, Spinoza, Nietzsche, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, Sartre and Levinas.<sup>72</sup> Through the intricacies of this critique, she traces the need for philosophy, and humanity, to perceive that 'being' belongs not to a unitary horizon, but first to two. In other words, our philosophical foundation is primarily relational (as we can not 'be' in isolation). Therefore by uncovering the hidden negative of the female subject position upon which the masculine (assumed neutral) figure of philosophy relies, she challenges the singularity of the supposedly-neutral solo subject position. Margaret Whitford has described Luce Irigaray's philosophy as a *Philosophy in the Feminine*, which seeks a female subject position which is not "locked into a patriarchal metaphysical

---

<sup>72</sup> Penelope Deutscher, *A Politics of Impossible Difference. The later work of Luce Irigaray* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2002), 27.

framework” and is able to perceive the patriarchal foundations in the “high discourse of universality and reason”.<sup>73</sup>

Luce Irigaray’s work has also sought to expand the creative actualisation of female subjectivity. She has written extensively regarding liberating possibilities for women, particularly in relation to sexual, spiritual and civic identity.<sup>74</sup> Her writing combines a concern for both the practical experienced realities of women in their public identities but also, importantly, in the symbolic ordering of Western thought through which those identities are constructed. To understand Luce Irigaray’s work, Penelope Deutscher contends, one must understand Irigaray’s presupposition that “social change must be concerned with ingrained signifying and symbolic structures for sexed identity and the problem of their transformation”.<sup>75</sup> Luce Irigaray identifies theology and religion as an important aspect of these signifying and symbolic structures.

Luce Irigaray’s work is therefore both strongly political and strongly theological and profoundly concerned about the possibilities for humanity that are acculturated through the public realm. There is arguably<sup>76</sup> a public theology within her work and certainly implications for a public theology in which her work is seriously considered. In view of the significance that Luce Irigaray might have for a public theology concerned with relationships, this section will first articulate the relational demands that her work asserts and their resonance with the Mothers’ Union vision. I will then consider the spiritual and divine nature of that task as conceptualised by Luce Irigaray. This section will then conclude

---

<sup>73</sup> Margaret Whiford, *Luce Irigaray Philosophy in the Feminine* (London: Routledge, 1991), 10.

<sup>74</sup> See for example the different core directions of her work identified in the section headings of Luce Irigaray, *Key Writings* (London, New York: Continuum, 2004).

<sup>75</sup> Deutscher, *A Politics of Impossible Difference. The later work of Luce Irigaray*, 11.

<sup>76</sup> I use the term ‘arguably’ because of the care one should use in ascribing theology to the way Luce Irigaray engages with the divine – a consideration discussed later in this section.

by discussing the possibility of an Irigaray public theology in relation to the concerns and calls for feminist, 'marginal' and 'fragmented' public theologies discussed in the previous section.

### 2.3.1 RELATIONAL POLITICS AND POETICS

"Irigaray sees the project of opening up space for another style of living as crucial not simply for the woman that she would empower, but for men as well and for a new kind of ethics that would go with a new way of thinking, speaking, and being."<sup>77</sup>

This "new way",<sup>78</sup> of which Tamsin Lorraine speaks, is intentional relationality. The relational paradigm within Luce Irigaray's work lies in her foundation of sexual difference. The foundation of sexual difference is complex and often contentious.<sup>79</sup> The call to perceive sexual difference in identity as the first, or principal, difference has at times been interpreted as an essentialist positioning of male and female identity which is out of kilter with contemporary complexities in gender studies and gender identity.<sup>80</sup> In commenting on this aspect of Luce Irigaray's work, and recognising the critique surrounding it, Penelope Deutscher observes that a tension can sometimes arise from the varying way 'genre' as

---

<sup>77</sup> Tamsin Lorraine, *Irigaray and Deleuze: Experiments in Visceral Philosophy* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1999), 48.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> The following summary by Toril Moi appropriately illustrates the perception of that which is at stake in these debates: "To eradicate awareness of sexual difference usually amounts to assimilating women to the male norm. To overemphasize sexual difference is usually tantamount to locking women up in their female difference". Toril Moi, "From femininity to finitude: Freud, Lacan, and feminism, again," in *Dialogues on sexuality, Gender and Psychoanalysis*, ed. Irene Matthis (London: H. Karnac Books Ltd., 2004), 124.

<sup>80</sup> See, for example, Amy Hollywood's commentary on the unproblematic use of male and female characterisations in Luce Irigaray's writing. Amy Hollywood, *Sensible Ecstasy. Mysticism, Sexual Difference, and the Demands of History* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press 2002).

'gender' is often translated in Irigaray's writing.<sup>81</sup> In addition, Penelope Deutscher perceives an occasional oscillation between fluidity and fixity in Luce Irigaray's articulation of sexual difference. Luce Irigaray herself speaks of the "culture of the two" (which is founded on sexual difference) in the manner of "conversion" and that critiques of essentialism belong to a difference paradigm of thought and being.<sup>82</sup> Whilst participating in the nuances of these debates lies beyond the scope of this thesis, an awareness of the critical context in which Luce Irigaray's work is located is important for appreciating both possibilities as well as potential difficulties that can emerge from an engagement with her work.

In spite of the complexity of gender analysis that surrounds the conceptualisation of sexual difference, the paradigm shift of an explicitly relational thinking and being within Irigaray's work is salient. Irigaray's foundation of sexual difference seeks a central perception that 'being', that humanity, immediately consists of two and not one and that that first separation of differentiation is 'sexuate'. Our way of 'human being' is therefore immediately relational; we relate to the one who is other than ourselves and the first other we encounter is a sexually different other. Her work therefore challenges the continued assumed neutrality of western philosophy to recognise that there is an 'Other' to which one must differentiate<sup>83</sup> and the lack of centrality this relational dynamic has had within the framing of Western thought:

In the Western conception of identity as unity closed upon what is one's own, this relational dimension of the human is forgotten. As is forgotten the fact that the

---

<sup>81</sup> Deutscher, *A Politics of Impossible Difference. The later work of Luce Irigaray*.

<sup>82</sup> Luce Irigaray, interview with author, September 15, Paris, 2012.

<sup>83</sup> Luce Irigaray provides repeated detailed psychoanalytic assessment of why this self-differentiation is difficult for the masculine subject position within Western culture. See, for example, a concise summary in the *Afterword* of Irigaray, *Sharing the World*.

human is not one but two. The act of entering into relation is conceived as a relation to oneself and not as a relation to the other.<sup>84</sup>

The politics of this relationality in Luce Irigaray's work is articulated through a temporal and spatial poetics of love.<sup>85</sup> This is a poetics particularly expressed in *I love to you*,<sup>86</sup> further articulated in *The Way of Love*,<sup>87</sup> then more recently in *Sharing the World*.<sup>88</sup> The chosen language of the phrasing 'I love to you' illustrates the spacing which Luce Irigaray seeks to generate between the two subject positions of 'I' and 'you': the 'to' prevents the 'you' being lost within the desiring of the 'I'. Her concern is not to deaden the world of the other within the appropriation of the self:

Freedom must, at every moment, limit its expansion in order to respect other existing beings and, even more, to find ways of forming with them a world always in becoming where it is possible for each human or non-human living being to exist – or ex-ist.<sup>89</sup>

The spacing of desire Luce Irigaray generates occurs within three notable phases of perception and cultivation: the extension of the self towards the other; the place of being with the other; the return to the self. The "path towards the other" is to embark on a path towards the "infinite" in which "both I and the other risk losing ourselves".<sup>90</sup> This risk occurs in realising that to meet the other as other they can not be contained within an already formed subjectivity:

---

<sup>84</sup> Irigaray, *The Way of Love*, 89.

<sup>85</sup> Elsewhere I have sought to articulate the dynamics of this poetics (see, in particular, Sanderson, "A Future Shaped by Love: Towards a Feminist Geography of Development and Spirituality"). Rather than creating a repetition of that work here, I intend to focus on the more recent encapsulation of that poetics in *Sharing the World*, which has been published subsequently.

<sup>86</sup> Irigaray, *I love to you*.

<sup>87</sup> Irigaray, *The way of Love*.

<sup>88</sup> Irigaray, *Sharing the World*.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, p.xx.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, p1.

“To recognise the existence of another subjectivity implies recognising that it belongs to, and constitutes, a world of its own, which cannot be substituted for mine; that the subjectivity of the other is irreducible to my subjectivity”.<sup>91</sup>

The language with which Luce Irigaray describes the encounter, the shared space of being with, is strongly resonant of annunciation imagery.<sup>92</sup> The shared space reflects the “question” and the “yes”.<sup>93</sup> The corresponding space is therefore internal, not external and generates a new life of its own:

“Establishing or restoring human being between us. So that this newborn, which we have brought into the world, is ours, and more. It is a child of the human element, the seed of humanity – born of an exchange of word(s) and flesh between us. It is a real different from all that has been taught to us about reality”.<sup>94</sup>

From this encounter with the other, Irigaray speaks of a path of fidelity that guides a return to the self. This fidelity is articulated in terms of seeking to find a path of faithfulness to the self and to the other in the movement away from the exchange. It is desire and affection which guide this process and Irigaray particularly emphasises the key role of cultivating self-affection.

Luce Irigaray’s articulations of these movements are imbued with the intricate nuances she perceives through her linguistic, psychoanalytic and philosophical insights into Western culture. Particularly drawing on psychoanalytic readings of subjectivity (in which she articulates a differing mode of self-affection between the masculine and the feminine

---

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., p.1.

<sup>92</sup> The annunciation is a strong theme within her work from which an emphasis on the virginity of the woman has come. She reinterprets virginity in the use she gives the term to relate to the need for a civic virginity and right for the human subject.

<sup>93</sup> Irigaray, *Sharing the World*, 39.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid, 40.

subject position)<sup>95</sup> she narrates both a possibility and impossibility regarding achieving the relational culture which she articulates. Penelope Deutscher interprets Irigaray's work as presenting *A Politics of Impossible Difference*, the impossibility of which is part of illustrating the foundation of relational difference on which it rests.

This relational paradigm shift therefore evokes both a strong poetics<sup>96</sup> in perception and actuation but also a strong politics to negotiate the, often hidden, inter-relational dynamics which the political and the public encompass.

Before being solitary subjects in charge of some decision or other, we are and remain beings in relation. Such a truth changes what can be discovered concerning our being in the world as well as the manner of experiencing it. Neither mood nor dereliction nor other feelings appear as being of the same nature and they cannot be explained in the same way if we consider them from a relational point of view irreducible to the artificial facticity of a 'one'.<sup>97</sup>

The absence of a genuinely relational culture is a significant component of the wide commentary of Luce Irigaray's work, focussing not just on relations between the sexes but also between cultures.<sup>98</sup> Penelope Deutscher, in identifying particular political possibilities within Luce Irigaray's work, sees the possibilities of applying the rigour of sexual difference

---

<sup>95</sup> Irigaray contends that the masculine subject position, through his exterior formation of self-affection and cultivation of life, "is in exile from his relational being" *ibid*, 103.

<sup>96</sup> Part of this poetics results from Luce Irigaray's linguistic demands within the process of becoming woman. Her writing is characteristically poetic in style and actively engages with the reader. Gillian Rose particularly highlights the way that Luce Irigaray's theoretical approach is embodied within a linguistic style that solicits a relational response from the reader. Gillian Rose, "A body of questions", in *Using Social Theory: Thinking through research*, ed. M. Pryke, Gillian Rose, and Sarah Whatmore (London: Sage Publications, 2003).

<sup>97</sup> Irigaray, *Sharing the World*, 117.

<sup>98</sup> The relational dynamics within her work can, on the one hand, not be genuinely considered divorced from an awareness of sexual difference, and yet on the other hand the relational dynamic is not necessarily dependant upon or needs to be considered only in the light of sexual difference.

within cultural difference.<sup>99</sup> This is a progression already within Irigaray's development of ideas; a 'culture of the two' enables a progression to the 'culture of the many'.

Luce Irigaray's work is particularly pertinent, therefore, in exploring a public theology of relationships. The Mothers' Union vision to see a world transformed through loving, respectful and flourishing relationships, takes on a particular perspective when considered alongside Luce Irigaray's philosophy. The considerable expanse of Irigaray's work indicates the implications of a relational foundation for philosophy, for politics, for theology. The detailed expressions in her work regarding the temporality and spatiality of a relational poetics of faithful exchange adds a considerable weight to the conceptualisation of what could be considered 'loving' and 'respectful'.<sup>100</sup> In addition, her work invites a particular manner of love and respect required in order for humanity to flourish.

### 2.3.2 A SPIRITUAL AND DIVINE TASK

The task of social transformation is perceived by Luce Irigaray as a spiritual and divine task. It is important to consider here, albeit in a necessarily limited way, the character of spirituality and divinity within Luce Irigaray's work as it pertains to the context of public theology.

---

<sup>99</sup> It is important to note that Irigaray has been criticized for her relative lack of cultural rigour in relation to that which she has applied to the category of sexual difference, as an earlier writing of Penelope Deutscher asserts. Penelope Deutscher, "Between East and West and the Politics of 'Cultural Ingenuite' Irigaray on Cultural Difference", *Theory, Culture & Society* 20, no. 3 (2003).

<sup>100</sup> For example, Luce Irigaray's work *Elemental Passions* is an illustration of a subject yearning towards the other with a longing for such a relational flourishing.

As mentioned above, Irigaray is concerned with challenging the signifying and symbolic structures of Western thought which frustrate sexual difference and relational culture. Her work therefore contains considerable reinterpretation and re-imagination both within, and potentially beyond, the Judeo-Christian tradition. Articulating an Irigarain 'Divine', or spirituality, is an extensive and complex endeavour, which lies beyond the scope of this thesis. There are therefore three particular aspects which I want simply to highlight in this context: a non-binary articulation of the spiritual; reinterpretation in relation to the Judeo-Christian tradition; and creativity within 'the age of the breath'.

Luce Irigaray's work often refers to the spiritual nature of cultivating a relational culture. The way in which she uses the language of spirituality, however, can often force the reader to have to rethink their prior conceptualisation of the spiritual. Her use of spirituality certainly uproots enlightenment dualisms of spirit/matter. Her writing, "*Spiritual Tasks for our Time*",<sup>101</sup> could also be read under the potential heading: political and ethical demands for our time. The writing is concerned with the "appropriate solutions" required for the "problems of our time" – of which she names globalisation, multi-cultural co-existence, relations between the sexes, relations between humans and nature, advances in science and technology, to name a few.<sup>102</sup> Whilst some of her work specifically focuses on the cultivation of spirituality, as more readily defined, (found particularly in *Between East and West*<sup>103</sup> or *The Age of the Breath*<sup>104</sup>), her use of spirituality is often a call to access resources within our humanity which have been frustrated by a less expansive way of being human. She critiques, for example, the dissolution of the "soul" within the "human sciences"

---

<sup>101</sup> Irigaray, *Key Writings*.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 183-4.

<sup>103</sup> Irigaray, *Between East and West: From Singularity to Community*, Columbia University Press.

<sup>104</sup> Irigaray, *Key Writings*, 165-170.

through the privileged manner of scientific method which she perceives that they employ.<sup>105</sup> Her concept of the “sensible transcendental” also illustrates her emphasis on the immediacy and accessibility of the spiritual and material aspects of humanity.<sup>106</sup> There is therefore a resonance between Irigaray’s spiritualization of humanity and the call within public theology to the practical implications of theology within society and culture: “At every instant Heaven is created. Even if it extends before and after us, it is also our own achievement.”<sup>107</sup>

As Irigaray’s work expressly dialogues with Western culture, she directly engages with the Judeo-Christian tradition. She critiques the patriarchal dominance in interpretation of this tradition and re-imagines and reinterprets aspects of the tradition.<sup>108</sup> Her most well known critique is perhaps found in *Divine Women*,<sup>109</sup> in which Irigaray speaks of the need for women to have a trinity in the feminine.<sup>110</sup> To give full justice to this interpretation, as well as her frequent use of the term ‘God’ in her writings, requires a psychoanalytic appreciation of the vertical and horizontal horizons of subjectivity in which ‘God’ is implicated. Irigaray, however, does not solely refer to a ‘God’ who is atheistically conceived in psychoanalytic terms. Irigaray writes passionately, regarding the divine in ways that do speak within, as well as potentially beyond, Christianity.

Luce Irigaray writes that cultivating an awareness of our “task” as human beings in the relationships within and to this world might awaken within us, and correspond to, “what

---

<sup>105</sup> Irigaray, *the way of love*, 122.

<sup>106</sup> An illustration of her articulation of the sensible translation is perhaps best found in Luce Irigaray, *Everyday prayers*, trans. Luce Irigaray and Timothy Mathews (Paris: Maisonneuve & Larose, 2004).

<sup>107</sup> Luce Irigaray, *Elemental Passions*, trans. Joanne Collie and Judith Still (New York: Routledge, 1992), 93.

<sup>108</sup> Her most recent work is a reinterpretation of the annunciation. Currently written in Italian it is awaiting English translation. Luce Irigaray, *Il Mistero Di Maria* (Milano: Paoline, 2010).

<sup>109</sup> Irigaray, *Sexes and Genealogies*.

<sup>110</sup> For a detailed discussion of how Irigaray interprets Christ in the feminine as part of a divine trinity see Alison Martin, *Luce Irigaray and the Question of the Divine* (Leeds, United Kingdom: Many Publishing, 2000).

Judaeo-Christianity designates as the third age of salvation history: the time of the spirit?"<sup>111</sup> Alison Martin comments on the way that Irigaray considers Christ as a potential bridge for all humanity into an age of the spirit: "...for Irigaray it is Christ who was a bridge between an incarnation of a masculine/neuter divine and its beyond in a new form of spirit as the incarnation of two sexed divines."<sup>112</sup>

Irigaray approaches an interior exchange with the spirit in a similar way to the cultivation of breath, drawing upon both Eastern Orthodox Christianity and 'Eastern' spiritualities (such as within the Yoga tradition) in the 'divine becoming' of humanity.<sup>113</sup> The stringent poetics articulated in relational encounters, however, make Luce Irigaray particularly sceptical of the way spiritual communities can facilitate and not deaden such encounters.<sup>114</sup>

### 2.3.3 THE POSSIBILITY OF A PUBLIC THEOLOGY AFTER LUCE IRIGARAY

Luce Irigaray's existential project opens up possibilities for me personally, in the way that I engage with the Christian tradition to which I have come to belong. This is not to deny that some tensions may remain regarding Luce Irigaray's interpretations within the Judaeo-Christian tradition. It is, however, Irigaray's articulation of both the need for, and the cultivation of, a relational culture which is implicitly a spiritual task that holds transformative potential. Her poetics of relationality has the potential to inform the cultivation of a spirituality of encounter in the Christian tradition, which has at its heart a

---

<sup>111</sup> Irigaray, *Key Writings*, 184.

<sup>112</sup> Martin, *Luce Irigaray and the Question of the Divine*, 197.

<sup>113</sup> For a more detailed exploration of the significance of breath within Irigaray's work and its potential creativity and tension within the Christian tradition, particularly relating to the Mothers' Union, see Eleanor Sanderson, "The Prayers we Breathe: Embodying the Gift of Life in the Maternal Feminine," in *Breathing with Luce Irigaray*, eds. Emily Holmes and Lenart Skof (Bloomsbury Continuum, forthcoming).

<sup>114</sup> See in particular the section *sharing needs, sharing desires* in Irigaray, *Sharing the World*, 24-29.

relational encounter between God (the Divine) and humanity, between and amongst human beings, and between humanity and the naturally inter-related world.

To speak of an Irigaray public theology though, would, I feel, not be faithful to the entirety of Irigaray's work. Her work undoubtedly entails an implicit public theology in both its interrogation of the symbolic structures within theology which influence the public experience of personal and corporate subjectivity and a practical and political concern for the experience of individuals and societies, in which spirituality and theology are deeply implicated. However, to speak of an Irigaray public theology would, in some way, seem to contain Irigaray's work within the external casing of Christian theology, which her writings would undeniably resist. I consider it more appropriate, therefore, to think in terms of a public theology *after* Luce Irigaray. That is, a public theology which takes seriously her demands for a relational culture and is able to critically consider the implications of the politics and spirituality within her work, towards generating such a culture. For example, there is strong resonance with the politics of impossible difference which Penelope Deutscher<sup>115</sup> identifies with Irigaray's work and the boundaries of impossibilities identified by a number of feminist theologians in relation to a feminist public theology.<sup>116</sup> There is also a similar resonance with the challenges for multi-cultural re-imaginings within the discourse of public theology.<sup>117</sup>

To return now, however, to the contextual focus within this research. It may seem more appropriate to explore a public theology of relationships by beginning with an analysis of

---

<sup>115</sup> Deutscher, *A Politics of Impossible Difference. The later work of Luce Irigaray.*

<sup>116</sup> Althaus-Reid, "In The Centre there are no fragments: *Teologias Desencajadas* (Reflections from Unfitting Theologies)."; Walton, "You Have To Say You Cannot Speak: Feminist Reflections Upon Public Theology."; Carbine, "Ekklesial Work: Towards a Feminist Public Theology."

<sup>117</sup> Aguilar, "Public Theology from the Periphery: Victims and Theologians."

Trinitarian models of relationality, arguably the most explicitly relational aspect of Christian theology, rather than a feminist philosopher who might not always sit comfortably within Christian theology. The relational symbolism within the Trinity might speak with greater resonance and insight into what might be considered loving, faithful and respectful in approaching relationships from a distinctly Christian theology. However, it might not be the place of a *public* reality – the realities to which public theology necessarily must relate. Luce Irigaray’s work expresses a deeply constructed inter-related subjectivity attentive to the realities and needs experienced within this contemporary world. It is from that experienced reality that the rigour to concepts such as love, faithfulness or the flourishing of humanity have emerged within her work: by illustrating what is not, she has then moved to cultivating what could become. The public theologies of relationships that I explore through this research are therefore ‘after Luce Irigaray’ in that it is an Irigarain sensitivity to relational exchange that will inform my methodology (explored in the following chapter) and an understanding of the political and cultural implications in talking both about a public theology and a theology of relationships.

## 2.4 A SPECIFIC RELATIONAL CONTEXT

The current multi-cultural era opens us up to perspectives on the relative aspects of our tradition. We believed our world to be the only one, but we discover that it is a partial and incomplete evolution of humanity. A part, until now unrecognised, of our truth can be revealed to us thanks to the other, if we accept and welcome the other as other without intending to dominate, to colonize, or to integrate this other into our past.<sup>118</sup>

---

<sup>118</sup> Irigaray, *Sharing the World*, 132.

The corporate theological reflections within this research take place in an explicitly multicultural context. In order to appreciate the contemporary relational context of the Mothers' Union in the Anglican Church in Aotearoa New Zealand and Polynesia, an understanding of the historical origins of the Three Tikanga structure of the church is needed. Likewise, appreciating the significance of the Three Tikanga structure requires an understanding of the different 'ways of being' that each Tikanga might respectively express. This section will therefore briefly illustrate different cultural understandings of relationships regarding the Christian Gospel and the people and land in this place. That illustration will take place in the context of an overview of the historical relationships through which the Three Tikanga structure of the Anglican Church in this region was formed. The section will then conclude with an overview of the history of the Mothers' Union in the Anglican Church of Aotearoa New Zealand and Polynesia. This discussion will illustrate how the Anglican Church in Aotearoa New Zealand and Polynesia explicitly embodies a public theology and also contains culturally distinct understandings amongst its Three Tikanga, regarding the character of loving, flourishing and faithful relationships.

#### 2.4.1 LIBERATING DIVINE RELATIONSHIPS

*"I saw the English flag flying, which was a pleasing sight in New Zealand. I considered it as a signal and the dawn of civilisation, **liberty**, and religion, in that dark and benighted land."* Samuel Marsden 1816 (emphasis mine).<sup>119</sup>

*"Go back; do not thou sit here. What wilt thou sit here for? We are not thy people. We are **free**. We will not have a governor. Return, return; leave us. The Missionaries*

---

<sup>119</sup> Missionary Register November, 1816: 71, Quoted by Allan Davidson "Culture and Ecclesiology: The Church Missionary Society and New Zealand" in *The Church Missionary Society and World Christianity 1799-1999*, ed. Kevin Ward and Brian Stanley, (Grand Rapids, Michigan and Surrey, UK: Eerdmans and Curzon, 2000), 205.

*and Busby are our fathers. We do not want thee; so go back, return, walk away.”*  
Chief Hakiro at the Treaty of Waitangi (emphasis mine).<sup>120</sup>

These two quotations illustrate two very different understandings of how the Christian Gospel in Aotearoa New Zealand, at one particular historical juncture, brought about liberating divine relationships. The quotation from Samuel Marsden shows how, for him, the liberty within the good news of the Gospel was inextricably linked with British Sovereignty. Hakiro, on the other hand, identifies his liberty in his freedom from foreign rule. Unlike Marsden, Hakiro makes a clear distinction between the Gospel and British cultural identity: he rejects British Colonial rule and yet embraces the Gospel, as associated with the missionaries, in referring to them as “fathers”. The relationships between Christianity, colonisation and the Anglican Church in Aotearoa New Zealand and Polynesia are therefore very complex and often contentious. Any contemporary research within this context must be cognisant of the historical complexities of experience which inform present day relationships.

Before articulating the historical birth of the contemporary Three Tikanga Anglican Church structure, I want to pause on the distinctions being expressed in the above quotations, regarding liberating divine relationships. In this moment I want to consider, very briefly, some of the cultural characteristics articulated in theological expressions from within the three respective Tikanga that might have informed the distinctions being made in the quotations above.

Tikanga Maori refers to the Anglicans within the different Maori Iwi and Hui Amorangi within Aotearoa. Henare Tate, a Maori Catholic theologian, believes that Maori spirituality

---

<sup>120</sup>Waitangi Action Committee, “The Historical Drama of Waitangi.” In *Te Hikoi ki Waitangi - 1985*. (Auckland: Waitangi Action Committee, 1985), 24.

should be first understood as principally relational: “*te tapu o te Atua*...from God’s being-in-relationship, there flows forth in love, a spiritual power (*mana*) which creates all non-divine reality, and sets it up in relationship to God’s being”.<sup>121</sup> A Maori spiritual world-view is therefore holistically concerned for the whole of the person and that person’s inter-connectedness with the living world. This is expressed in the inter-relationship between *Atua* (or *atua*), *Whenua*, and *Tangata*, (God, Earth and People). The nature of this inter-connectedness is articulated through the concepts of *mana* (power, honour) *tapu* (sacred as intrinsically relational) *tika* (what is just and ‘straight’) *pono* (truth, integrity) and *aroha* (love, compassion). Seeking to discern whether an action or attitude is faithful or respectful, through a lens of Maori spirituality, therefore requires a discernment of the relational exchanges in which that event takes place. As Henare Tate explains, “we are failing to act with *tika* when we fail to acknowledge or when we ignore *Atua*, or people, or *whenua*, and when we fail to acknowledge them in their relationships.”<sup>122</sup>

Tikanga Pacifica refers to the Diocese of Polynesia which includes the nations of Fiji, Tonga, Samoa and the Cook Islands. Ilaitia Tuwere articulates a Fijian theology of place which illustrates a “Trinitarian solemnity” between *Vanua* (land), *Lotu* (Religion and Spirituality) and *Matanitu* (government) within Fijian culture.<sup>123</sup> Within the concept of *Vanua*, people are understood as the inner part of the land.<sup>124</sup> Tuwere uses the image of God and the Gospel community as gardeners, as a means of articulating a just response to the Gospel in Fiji: “Gardening which is of God is not only for the participation of mankind but for the

---

<sup>121</sup> Henare Tate, “Stepping into Maori Spirituality” in *Spirituality in Aotearoa New Zealand: Catholic Voices* ed. Helen Bergin and Susan Smith (Accent Publications, Auckland, 2000), 39-40.

<sup>122</sup> *ibid.*, 45.

<sup>123</sup> Ilaitia Tuwere, *Vanua: Towards a Fijian Theology of Place* (Suva, Fiji: Institute of Pacific Studies, University of the South Pacific and College of St John the Evangelist, 2002), 52.

<sup>124</sup> *ibid.*, 35.

entire created life. All creatures are full participants in the act of gardening... To live in God's garden-community is to practise peace and justice... The Garden is not merely an external reality. It is in God."<sup>125</sup> What is respectful, loving and flourishing, within a Fijian theology is inter-connected and its embodiment occurs in sacred community.

Tikanga Pakeha refers to the seven New Zealand Dioceses which reflect the immigrant communities to New Zealand and are predominantly characterised by an inherited European tikanga. I have discussed previously some of the historical characteristics of European thought, particularly the privilege of rationality, enlightenment dualisms and a propositional approach to truth. Concepts such as truth and liberty, in this context, can be seen as universal ideals rather than primarily as relationally-embodied experiences.<sup>126</sup> It is possible therefore, in this context, for a true (or right) articulation of the Christian Gospel to be debated in the abstract, rather than through the relational exchanges between the peoples of the Gospel,<sup>127</sup> or the lands in which they live.

These different ways of theologically approaching key relational concepts, such as liberty and justice used in the opening example, potentially illustrate how Samuel Marsden (according to the quotations given above) can connect so tightly the Gospel of Christ with English 'civilisation'. Civilisation embodies the tools of rationality and enlightenment that make the Gospel (as articulated by Europeans) itself understandable.<sup>128</sup> Hakiro, on the other

---

<sup>125</sup> *ibid.*, 210-211.

<sup>126</sup> To give a modern day example, 'contextual theology' is a term used to refer to theologies within cultures outside of a western-European heritage, arguably because the Western-European heritage does not recognise its contextual specificity, because of the universal nature of its philosophy and truth claims.

<sup>127</sup> A potential example of this occurring is in the great debates that surrounded the creation of the creeds of the church. These debates were fierce as to what was deemed the propositional truth about the Christian Gospel, which was accompanied by considerable social violence and unrest. Stephen Need *Truly Human Truly Divine: The Story of Christ and the Seven Ecumenical Councils* (London: SPCK, 2008).

<sup>128</sup> It is interesting to mention, however, the movement of the established European church away from Celtic articulations of Christianity just prior to the Colonial period. Philip Newell relates his experience of articulating

hand, does not perceive a right (*tika*) ordering of relationships between Atua, Whenua and Tangata in English claims to sovereignty within Aotearoa, but can perceive righteousness (right (*tika*)-ordering of relationships) in the Gospel of Christ.

The purpose of pausing on this particular moment of historical record is to illustrate, albeit very briefly, the cultural depths that interact in the historical relationships within this context, when discerning the nature of divine relationships. The challenges of cultivating multi-cultural relationships will inevitably be visible through any historical and contemporary articulation of this context. It is also important to note that there are rich and diverse histories and contemporary expressions within the Three Tikanga Anglican Church which will inevitably be lost in any reductive, yet necessary, description.

#### *2.4.2 TE POUHERE: THE BIRTH OF A THREE TIKANGA CHURCH*

Te Pouhere, the Constitution of the Anglican Church of Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia, was created in 1992 in response to the findings of the 1986 Bi-Cultural Commission on the Treaty of Waitangi. The Commission's task was to consider whether there were Gospel principles in the Treaty of Waitangi that should inform the structure and development of the Anglican Church.<sup>129</sup> The commission clearly identified two such principles: the principle of partnership and the principle of bi-cultural development.

---

Celtic theology alongside indigenous community leaders in North America and the shared grief they expressed in reflecting on how history might have occurred differently had Celtic theologies been dominant in the Christian culture of the Colonial period. Philip Newell, *Christ of the Celts. The Healing of Creation* (Glasgow: Wild Goose Publications, 2008).

<sup>129</sup> *Te Ripotea a te Komihana me to Kaupapa Tikanga Rua mo to Tiriti o Waitangi.*

The history of the Anglican Church in Aotearoa New Zealand, between the signing of the treaty of Waitangi in 1840 and 1992, can be critiqued for its lack of cultural partnership and its frustration of bi-cultural development. Throughout this time there had been many examples of the Maori church being disadvantaged in its progression to fulfil its ministry amongst its people, in comparison to the progression of the European (Pakeha) church. This tension finds its roots in the arrival of the Settler Church as distinct from the Maori church in the years following the Treaty.<sup>130</sup> Whilst missionary philosophy can be best characterised by the CMS founder Henry Venn, in prioritising self-determination, self-propagation and self-support,<sup>131</sup> the priorities of the Settler church are best described by their desire to express and maintain their “familial link with the Church of England”.<sup>132</sup> The first constitution of the Anglican Church in Aotearoa New Zealand in 1857, in many ways, illustrates the assimilation of the Missionary Church within a more dominant Settler Church because it did not involve any direct representation by Maori. Maori presence in the ecclesiastical structure during this period of time was limited, particularly regarding clerical appointments and the determination of Diocesan boundaries that bore no relation to tribal boundaries.<sup>133</sup> There has been considerable critique at the slow speed with which Maori were ordained, particularly given the recognised role of Gospel dissemination amongst Maori by Maori.<sup>134</sup> The lack of a Maori Bishop was challenged from early in this history (a critique raised by CMS in 1876) and only after a long struggle was the first Maori Episcopal appointment made

---

<sup>130</sup> This is both an institutional arrival (with the arrival of ‘settler’ church clergy as distinct from C.M.S. missionaries) and a numeric one in terms of European settlement. Dramatic changes in the population structure occurred between 1840 and the 1890’s, with Maori decreasing from 70,000 to 42,000 and Pakeha settlers increasing from 2,000 to 700,000. Allan Davidson “Culture and Ecclesiology: The Church Missionary Society and New Zealand” in *The Church Missionary Society and World Christianity 1799-1999* (Edited by Kevin Ward and Brian Stanley, Grand Rapids, Eerdmans and Curzon, 2000), 213.

<sup>131</sup> *Te Ripotea a te Komihana me to Kaupapa Tikanga Rua mo to Tiriti o Waitangi*, 3

<sup>132</sup> Allan Davidson, “Culture and Ecclesiology: The Church Missionary Society and New Zealand,” 215.

<sup>133</sup> *Te Ripotea a te Komihana me to Kaupapa Tikanga Rua mo to Tiriti o Waitangi*.

<sup>134</sup> Rota Waitoa was the first Maori to be ordained as Deacon in 1853 and then Priest in 1860.

in 1928 with F. A. Bennett consecrated as the first Bishop of Aotearoa.<sup>135</sup> It was only in 1964 that the Bishop of Aotearoa was given a full seat on General Synod and as late as 1978 the General Synod established Te Pihopatanga O Aotearoa which gave the Maori Bishop a licence to the Primate, rather than as a suffragan Bishop within the Diocese of Waiapu. This history illustrates the dominance of European culture in both ecclesiastical structure and ecclesiastical power in the Anglican Church in Aotearoa New Zealand.<sup>136</sup> That dominance was firmly challenged by the 1986 Bi-Cultural Commission on the Treaty of Waitangi and the new constitution, Te Pouhere, was explicitly created to enable the church to develop, “within the different cultures of the peoples it seeks to serve and bring into the fullness of Christ”.<sup>137</sup>

It is important to recognise that motivation to honour the Treaty of Waitangi within the Anglican Church reflects the significant role played by Christian missionaries in the creation and signing of the Treaty. Both within England<sup>138</sup> and within Aotearoa New Zealand,<sup>139</sup>

---

<sup>135</sup> This role was, however, severely restricted in comparison to other Episcopal sees. Bishop Bennett was not able to attend General Synod unless elected as a clerical representative and needed the approval of each Diocesan bishop in order to minister amongst Maori in that Diocesan area. This approval was not given by Bishop Simkin, the Bishop of Auckland, during his term from 1940-1960. Allan Davidson, *Christianity in Aotearoa: A History of Church and Society in New Zealand* (Education for Ministry, Wellington, 2004).

<sup>136</sup> It is for this reason that Rangi Nicholson asserts the unique aspects of a Maori theology in relation to the common strand of tradition within Anglican theology: tradition in this context necessarily gives rise to questions of self-determination and justice for Maori. Rangi Nicholson, “The Theological Implications of Three Tikanga Church” in *Proceedings of Theology in Oceania Conference, Dunedin, 1996. Doing Theology in Oceania: Partners in Conversation, Hanga Mahi Karaipiture Ite Moana Nui-A-Kiwa: Tutaki A Kanohi, Kia Whakawhitwhiti Korero*, ed. Clive Pearson (Dunedin, 1986).

<sup>137</sup> *Te Pouhere o Te Hahi Minihare ki Aotearoa ki Nui Tireni, ke nga Moutere o Te Moana Nui a Kiwa* Constitution of The Anglican Church in Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia, 1990, 4.

<sup>138</sup> Within England, prominent evangelical Anglicans, such as James Stephen (the nephew of William Wilberforce), Lord Glenelg and Thomas Fowell Buxton, had influential roles in the background to the Treaty of Waitangi. It was James Stephen, acting as the Under-Secretary of the State for the Colonies, who drafted the instructions for the Treaty of Waitangi. These individuals are undeniably connected with the ‘Clapham set’, who were the great reformers challenging the colonial operations of England following their success in the abolition of slavery.

<sup>139</sup> Within Aotearoa New Zealand, Henry Williams was the most influential Christian missionary in relation to the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi. His arrival marked a change in direction from the very first missionaries who had a mandate to ‘civilise’ and ‘Christianise’. It is important, however, to recognise the strong role of Chief Ruatara in the invitation of these first missionaries and their ‘protection’ or inter-relationship with

Anglicans actively influenced the political climate in which the Treaty came to life. In particular, the active role that Henry Williams played in translating the Treaty of Waitangi into Maori and in the discussions that surrounded the signing of the Treaty means that the Treaty itself should not be understood outside of the context of the influence of the Christian Gospel and the regard with which that Gospel was held amongst many Maori.<sup>140</sup>

Te Pouhere represents the desire to restore *tika*, justice, to a partnership covenant between different cultures and nations in the Treaty of Waitangi which, it can be argued, became lost in a history of oppression and injustice for Maori. The history of the Anglican Church in Aotearoa New Zealand, particularly between 1814 and 1992, illustrates the need for institutional safe-guards to assist genuine partnership between majority and minority partners. Archbishop Brian Davis asserted that Te Pouhere “recognised the reality and integrity of the major cultural groupings that make up the Anglican Church and the rightness of giving each the opportunity to worship and serve Christ in the way that fits that culture best”.<sup>141</sup> He further asserted that acknowledging cultural diversity is “not a threat to unity

---

particular Maori chiefs and Iwi. Henry Williams’ concern was to emphasise peace-making within and amongst Maori Iwi, to emphasise evangelisation and literacy. By 1840 *Te Hahi Mihinare*, The Maori Anglican Church, was coming into being. Alan Davidson *Christianity in Aotearoa: A History of Church and Society in New Zealand* (Education for Ministry, Wellington, 2004). This followed both the spreading work of European Missionaries, but also, very importantly, the evangelisation amongst Maori by Maori. A particularly significant part of this history is seen in the story of Tarure and her Gospel of Luke which lead to the building of the Rangiatea Church in Otaki (a version of this story can be found by Joy Cowley *Tarore and Her Book*, (Wellington: Bible Society New Zealand, 2009). See also “Poi” by Kingi Ihaka, which chants the heritage of Maori missionaries amongst Maori, found in A New Zealand Prayer Book *He Karakia Mihinare O Aotearoa* (Christchurch: Genesis, 1989), 157.

<sup>140</sup> An illustration of this overtly Christian context can be seen by the recorded response of chief Hone Heke, who encouraged others to sign the Treaty because of the trust he accorded to the missionaries. He expressed the assertion that the Treaty was a sacred covenant within which both Maori and European would be equal under God. Such an understanding fits clearly within the Maori Spiritual framework expressed in the previous section. The Treaty of Waitangi represents a particular covenantal inter-relationship between Atua, Tangata and Whenua. Claudia Orange, *The Treaty of Waitangi*, (Wellington: Allen & Unwin with Port Nicholson Press, 1987), 57.

<sup>141</sup> Brian Davis, *The Way Ahead: Anglican Change and Prospect in New Zealand* (Christchurch: The Caxton Press, 1995), 39.

in Christ, but rather emphasises the richness of God's creation of human beings and the wonder of God's manifold grace".<sup>142</sup>

It is now 20 years since the formation of the Three Tikanga Church structure. There is an opportunity for a concerted evaluation amongst its very varied expressions as to the way in which the Gospel principles of partnership and bi-cultural development are indeed fostered by the reality of this contemporary Three Tikanga Structure.<sup>143</sup>

#### *2.4.3 THE MOTHERS' UNION IN THE ANGLICAN CHURCH OF AOTEAROA, NEW ZEALAND AND POLYNESIA*

An important part of the theological reflection within this research will be the invitation to share stories and reflect on the personal history of Mothers' Union members. This brief section therefore seeks simply to identify key events in the history of the Mothers' Union in Aotearoa New Zealand and Polynesia which are particularly important in understanding the historical context within which this research takes place.

The previous chapter illustrated the global origins of the Mothers' Union in 1876 with Mary Sumner in England. It was only 10 years following that date that the Mothers' Union began in New Zealand. The wife of the vicar in the parish of Avonside, Christchurch, formed the first Mothers' Union meeting in 1886, which became the first branch outside of England.<sup>144</sup>

---

<sup>142</sup> Ibid., 39.

<sup>143</sup> One such evaluation which perceives a growing distance between the Three Tikanga partners and a lessening of the priority placed on the Treaty of Waitangi can be seen in Rangi Nicholson *Ko tem ea ui, ko te aroha: theological perspectives on Maori language and cultural regeneration and practice of the Anglican Church*, Phd diss., The University of Auckland (2009).

<sup>144</sup> Nancy Robertshawe, "The Mothers' Union in New Zealand 1886-1952," in *A History of the Mothers' Union and the Association of Anglican Women in New Zealand*, 1.

In 1893 the Mothers' Union was established throughout New Zealand through the active role of the Countess of Glasgow, the wife of the Governor, and the support of the Diocesan Bishops.<sup>145</sup> The Mothers' Union branches were not always exclusively Anglican and often contained a very varied mix of women from different socio-economic backgrounds. In 1912 the Mothers' Union became an Incorporated Society with a revised constitution and, "following this there was a considerable tightening up and solidifying of the work in New Zealand".<sup>146</sup> It is recorded that the social concerns particularly expressed by the Mothers' Union groups in these early days related to prayer, the spiritual wellbeing of children, religious education and the training and support of mothers, as well as an active role in social issues of the day which included legislation around alcohol and contraceptives.<sup>147</sup> The Mothers' Union played an active role within the National Council of Women in New Zealand.

In the 1950's the nature of the relationship between the Mothers' Union in New Zealand and England began to change considerably: "The paternal control of the Central Council in London was the bone of contention. No one quarrelled with the ideals of the Mothers' Union... But there was growing desire for the Mothers' Union in New Zealand to have greater independence from the Central Council".<sup>148</sup> The second significant point of contention related to the regulations restricting membership to married women in a post-war period in which divorce had become a more significant part of social life. The first step towards greater autonomy from England came after the Lambeth Conference of 1958 in which New Zealand, Australia and Canada were identified as "giving" not "receiving" Dominions outside of England and encouraged to rename themselves as the Mothers' Union

---

<sup>145</sup> Ibid.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid.

<sup>148</sup> Nancy Robertshawe, "The Mothers' Union in New Zealand 1952-1969," in *A History of the Mothers' Union and the Association of Anglican Women in New Zealand*, 1.

in New Zealand, Australia and Canada respectively, and to develop their own initiatives in outreach to missionary Dioceses in their area.<sup>149</sup> In 1965 the Mothers' Union in New Zealand took over responsibility for the work within Polynesia and Melanesia. At this time the Bishop in Polynesia identified "a young Tongan woman" to train in Melbourne as a Mothers' Union worker in the diocese.<sup>150</sup> This woman is a participant in this research.

The recorded history of the Mothers' Union in New Zealand<sup>151</sup> identifies the later part of the 1960's and early 1970's as years of considerable challenge and change, particularly regarding the founding ideals and values of the Mothers' Union and the shifts in wider society within which those ideals were required to adapt. There was growing discontentment regarding the pastoral care which the Mothers' Union was able to effect in relation to divorced women in the church and community and in the need for autonomy to be granted to the Mothers' Union in New Zealand. These concerns were presented as resolutions to the World-Wide Mothers' Union conference in 1968 and, whilst deeply debated by all members, the resolutions were not passed.<sup>152</sup> On return to New Zealand, Mothers' Union members embarked on making a difficult decision about its affiliation with the World Wide Mothers' Union. From these discussions was born the 'Christian Family Fellowship' which quickly became the 'Association of Anglican Women'. Belonging to either The Mothers' Union or the Association of Anglican Women was determined Diocese by Diocese, branch by branch and member by member. This has meant that since that time

---

<sup>149</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid.

both organisations have co-existed as organised women's groups within the Anglican Church in New Zealand.<sup>153</sup>

There is no accounted history of the Mothers' Union in New Zealand at the time of the 1992 Constitution in which the Three Tikanga Church came into being. Neither is there a specific history of the Mothers' Union in this land that directly relates to the cultural autonomy experienced within the Mother's Union here by Maori and Pacific members. However, an authorised history of Kahui Wahine<sup>154</sup> is currently being produced.

## 2.5 CONCLUSION

The brief history of the Mothers' Union in the Anglican Church of Aotearoa New Zealand and Polynesia indicates the implicit inter-change that has occurred between the developing theologies of this church, and its associated organisations, and the public sphere. The contemporary Three Tikanga structure of the Anglican Church of Aotearoa New Zealand and Polynesia embodies and affects a very public theology.<sup>155</sup> Approaching the Mothers' Union vision of seeing a world transformed through loving, respectful and flourishing relationships takes on a particular salience in light of both the history of the Mothers' Union and the contemporary structure of the Anglican Church in these lands. This salience also strongly

---

<sup>153</sup> It is important to note that the World-Wide Mother's Union did shortly afterwards make a significant change in its membership provision and in the autonomy granted to member countries. The ethos of the Mothers' Union strongly developed away from Colonial paternalism to a grass-roots and membership-driven organisation. Historical commentary on this change can be found in Bishop of Willesden, "New Dimensions: the report of the Bishop of Willesden's Commission on the Objects and Polies of the Mothers' Union," (1972); and O. Parker, *For the Family's Sake: A History of the Mothers' Union 1876-1967* (Oxford: Mowbrays, 1975).

<sup>154</sup> This is the main women's organisation within Tikanga Maori.

<sup>155</sup> It must be noted, though, that there is ongoing important debate regarding the 'true' nature of partnership and bi-cultural development that this Three Tikanga structure has affected. This is particularly in regard to resource sharing amongst the Three Tikanga and the degree to which *active* partnership occurs.

resonates with the recent calls within public theology for public theology to relocate to the “margins”<sup>156</sup> and explore more radical possibilities in political communities.<sup>157</sup> A public theology from this contextual location is both relatively absent in public theology discourse and yet potentially extremely pertinent to its current debates. As is also the further contribution of feminist public theologies, in both their subject matter and distinctive poetics and politics, of which theological reflection amongst women in Aotearoa New Zealand and Polynesia have an important contribution to make.

Undergirding the potential importance of all the above contributions is perhaps the ongoing transformation of western thought as indicated in Luce Irigaray’s work: the discovery of one’s own truths through the encounter with the other as other, which repositions the one knowing in a liberating praxis for both the knower and the one known. This praxis is crucial for relationships to be both respectful, loving and flourishing in ways which historically have not been the case, both between the sexes and between different cultures. A relational theology after Irigaray appreciates that all manner of relational engagement has consequences for the symbolic conception and embodiment of our cultural public and our theological divine and therefore demands our critical attention.

---

<sup>156</sup> Aguilar, "Public Theology from the Periphery: Victims and Theologians."; Althaus-Reid, "In The Centre there are no fragments: *Teologias Desencajadas* (Reflections from Unfitting Theologies)."

<sup>157</sup> Carbine, "Ekklesial Work: Towards a Feminist Public Theology."

## CHAPTER 3: A RELATIONAL RESEARCH PROCESS

### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

The decisions facing public theology in the twenty-first century will be as much about approaches as about issues. At stake are its contents *and* its methods, what it considers important *and* why, what it does *and* what it is.<sup>158</sup>

Conducting research in an era where the connections between power and knowledge have become well-articulated, requires methodological concerns to have a prominent place in the construction of research.<sup>159</sup> The first section of this chapter, 'Constructing Public Theologies': Theological Reflection by Whom and for Whom?', discusses issues pertinent to this research methodology from within the field of practical theology and the methodological imperatives raised within public, feminist and contextual theologies, to which this particular research relates. The second section, 'Living and Loving Research Relationships' will apply the relational poetics and politics within Luce Irigaray's work to the practical concerns of cultivating research relationships, with particular reference to Edward O de Bary's call for a relational model of theological reflection.<sup>160</sup> The third section will then

---

<sup>158</sup> William Storrar and Andrew Morton, "Introduction," in *Public Theology for the 21st Century*, ed. William Storrar and Andrew Morton (London, New York: T & T Clarke, A Continuum Imprint, 2004), 7 (emphasis in original).

<sup>159</sup> The connection between power/knowledge is most explicitly made in the work of Michael Foucault but also within the work of Paulo Freire. See Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Continuum, 1983). These works have greatly influenced the emergence of a body of participatory research methodologies and action-reflection approaches to research in a range of academic disciplines. See Sara Kindon, Rachel Pain, and Mike Kesby, eds., *Participatory Action Research Approaches and Methods: Connecting people, participation and place* (Oxford, New York: Routledge, 2007).

<sup>160</sup> Edward O de Bary, *Theological Reflection - The Creation of Spiritual Power in the Information Age* (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2003).

narrate the dialogues and encounters which shaped the corporate theological reflections which formed this research. The chapter will therefore conclude by expressing some initial insights into the relational public theologies within the Mothers' Union in the Three Tikanga Anglican Church of Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia, which can be interpreted from the relational processes within this theological reflection.

### 3.2 CONSTRUCTING PUBLIC THEOLOGIES: THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION BY WHOM AND FOR WHOM?

Within the field of practical theology there has been a strong emphasis on the communal responsibility and communal ownership of theological reflection. Theological reflection, Elaine Graham et. al. assert, “enables people of faith to give an account of the values and traditions that underpin their choices and convictions ...[and] enables the connections between human dilemmas and divine horizons to be explored”.<sup>161</sup> Such an exploration requires an astute multi-disciplinary awareness,<sup>162</sup> which causes O de Bary to assert that theological reflection relates to every aspect of life and every form of human knowing.<sup>163</sup> Theological reflection, therefore, is a process which requires resourcing in both reflective depth and breadth: breadth of accessibility and participation and depth of spiritual reflection and analytical rigour.

---

<sup>161</sup> Elaine Graham, Heather Walton, and Frances Ward, *Theological Reflection: Methods* (London: SCM Press, 2005), 5-6.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid.

<sup>163</sup> O de Bary, *Theological Reflection - The Creation of Spiritual Power in the Information Age*.

There are a variety of methods and practices espoused for theological reflection. Graham et. al. have sought to categorize this methodological variety and also more explicitly connect them within biblical, theological and systematic theologies.<sup>164</sup> One such category that they outline is corporate theological reflection, which they refer to as “Writing the Body of Christ”.<sup>165</sup> The terminology of writing the Body of Christ is particularly appropriate for this research project. This project can be summarised as a corporate theological reflection from within the Mothers’ Union in Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia, upon the contextual gifts and wisdoms that inform members’ public theological expression of a world transformed through loving, respectful and flourishing relationships.

The corporate character of theological reflection is strongly emphasised by a number of theologians. Howard Stone and James Duke, for example, assert that theological reflection will always be communal because verification cannot happen in isolation; the personal must also be “interactive, dialogical and community-related”.<sup>166</sup> The model of theological reflection as community has a constructive as well as descriptive aspect. Through the process of communal theological reflection, communities are generated or re-generated as members both express, listen and respond to the reflections of other members.<sup>167</sup> This is a particularly significant process for those members of the Body of Christ, more broadly, who have historically had the theological conversation stacked against them<sup>168</sup> (such as women, minority and colonized cultures and those with fewer resources to enter into broader theological conversations from within the ‘less-developed’ world). Graham et. al. draw on the work of Mary McClintock Fulkerson to highlight the power dynamics within the subject

---

<sup>164</sup> Graham, Walton, and Ward, *Theological Reflection: Methods*.

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*, 109-137.

<sup>166</sup> Howard Stone and James Duke, *How to Think Theologically*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006).

<sup>167</sup> Graham, Walton, and Ward, *Theological Reflection: Methods*, 126.

<sup>168</sup> To use the phrasing of Stone and Duke, *How to Think Theologically*, 5.

positions which are generated within theological communities and the necessity at times to “‘change the subject’ in order to create a different Body of Christ that reflects more authentically the needs and voices of all members”.<sup>169</sup>

It is therefore not surprising that strong links exist between contextual theologies, such as theologies of liberation, and the methodological motivations articulated by practitioners of theological reflection. Graham (et. al.) highlight the way that theologies of liberation not only served to politicise the church, but also brought about a democratising of theology for and by the people.<sup>170</sup> There is strong resonance with this prioritization of the popular ownership of theology and the calls within public theology, expressed in the previous chapter, to relocate public theology to the margins and offer theologies of fragments.<sup>171</sup> A similar motivation is differently, but also explicitly, expressed by Christina Landman in her *Public Theology for Intimate Spaces*, as she articulates her desire to enable the vocality of the “voiceless” within the “public arena”.<sup>172</sup> Elaine Graham also explicitly calls for public theology to assist the process of theological empowerment which lies at the heart of liberating theologies, from a wide range of minority subject positions.<sup>173</sup> Graham asks critical questions about the participatory potential of research methodologies to enable research participants to be “subjects of knowledge” in their own right and not objectified by the research process.<sup>174</sup>

Such questions of researcher subjectivity are debated broadly within the social sciences, but particularly raised within feminist methodologies and within post-colonial cultural contexts.

---

<sup>169</sup> Graham, Walton, and Ward, *Theological Reflection: Methods*, 131.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid.

<sup>171</sup> Althaus-Reid, "In The Centre there are no fragments: *Teologias Desencajadas* (Reflections from Unfitting Theologies)."; Aguilar, "Public Theology from the Periphery: Victims and Theologians."

<sup>172</sup> Landman, "A Public Theology for Intimate Spaces," 63.

<sup>173</sup> Graham, "Power, Knowledge and Authority in Public Theology."

<sup>174</sup> Ibid., 60.

Linda Smith, for example, specifically argues for the decolonization of methodologies.<sup>175</sup>

Within Aotearoa New Zealand, Kaupapa Maori methodologies are now well-recognised.

Kaupapa Maori methodologies relate to appropriate models of research practice amongst and within Maori culture, but also relate to the analytical lens through which the research is subsequently approached.

Underlying these conversations and concerns is a recognition that generating a 'genuine' culture of many, a culture in which different subjectivities are both anticipated and facilitated, has not been the norm either within research practice, or within wider public space. These conversations therefore resonate strongly with the relational paradigm shift within Luce Irigaray's work and the cultivation of loving inter-subjective relationships.

Before articulating how the poetics and politics within Luce Irigaray's work can be translated within research practice, I wish to articulate, first, three approaches towards theological reflection which are pertinent to the cross-cultural research dynamic of this work, in the light of the issues raised in this discussion so far.

The first is that expressed above, of corporate theological reflection and writing the Body of Christ. This framing of theological reflection entails recognising the rich variety of ways that the Mothers' Union is embodied within this particular Three Tikanga context. It also means recognising that this research will, in some ways, be a constructive process in reflecting on the communal identity of the Mothers' Union in this particular church context, but also in its positioning within the World Wide Anglican Communion as a whole. There is a political praxis therefore at play in writing from within this particular expression of, and lesser known part of, the Body of Christ.

---

<sup>175</sup> Linda Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: research and indigenous peoples* (London: Zed Books, 1999).

The second is the analogy of approaching theological reflection as conversation, which is expressed by Howard Stone and James Duke.<sup>176</sup> Theological reflection based on conversation, they assert, “allows for an appreciation of diversity, healthy debate and creative tension”.<sup>177</sup> The concept of conversation recognises the inter-subjective dialogue of collaboration through which a corporate theological reflection must necessarily take place. Theological reflection as conversation – particularly as sacred conversation – is, in practice, the first building block in generating a collaborative process, as has been the case in this research project.

The third approach is that of storytelling, as articulated by Elaine Graham in relation to the negotiation of “power, knowledge and authority in public theology.”<sup>178</sup> Elaine Graham engages with the work of Jeffrey Heskins and follows his emphasis of listening to “unheard voices” through employing the politics of contextual and liberation theologies which seek to hear the stories of others. The process of story telling is understood as, “an essential part of articulating identity, of reflection on practice, of a theology of experience”.<sup>179</sup> There is a participatory liberty attached to story telling, because it facilitates a democratizing of research practise. The sharing of stories is also a culturally appropriate model of research engagement within the Pacific, particularly amongst women.

Constructing this relational public theology is therefore a corporate process of storytelling, guided by conversations amongst women within the Mothers’ Union in Aotearoa New

---

<sup>176</sup> Stone and Duke, *How to Think Theologically*.

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid*, 7.

<sup>178</sup> Graham, "Power, Knowledge and Authority in Public Theology."

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid.*, 60.

Zealand and Polynesia. This research is a relational public theology in its methodology, as well as in its theoretical focus. The research focus is formed through a collaborative theological reflection which also inviting a conversation to initiate how these theological reflections can also be intentionally *for* those taking part in the research. These collaborations, conversations and sharing of sacred stories are then encased in a relational understanding of inter-subjectivity. It is to a deeper articulation of that relational framing of this research process, that I now turn.

### 3.3 LIVING AND LOVING RESEARCH RELATIONSHIPS

Theologizing becomes political activism, because it has started from a social action in solidarity that has led to a further emptying of the self and of the self's content.<sup>180</sup>

Mario Aguilar claims that a public theology from the periphery is born out of relationships with individuals and communities who have a peripheral experience of the public sphere. Importantly, however, the fruit of that relationship, as articulated here by Aguilar, is a change to personal subjectivity. This encouragement to relational solidarity resonates very strongly with the poetics and politics of the inter-subjectivity of loving relationships articulated in Luce Irigaray's work: the path towards the other, the place of being with the other and then the return to the self. This journey, Luce Irigaray consistently reminds her readers, is an internal journey, a journey of cultivating a new construction of subjectivity and inter-subjectivity.

---

<sup>180</sup> Aguilar, "Public Theology from the Periphery: Victims and Theologians," 331.

A relational approach to research is therefore an invitation for the researcher to become open to their own personal subjectivity being exposed, vulnerable and potentially reinterpreted, as a consequence of seeking a genuine encounter with those with whom one engages in research. The language of a 'genuine encounter', though, hides the complexity of inter-subjectivity both between sexes and between cultures. Penelope Deutscher seeks to enrich Irigaray's work through engaging it with the important critiques which Gyatri Spivak brings, to challenge a European history of philosophy reliant upon a "native informant".<sup>181</sup> She does this both by challenging this potential reliance within Irigaray's work and by recognising the strong resonance between Irigaray's and Spivak's own work in cultivating politically significant relational encounters. Penelope Deutscher therefore re-frames a crucial methodological question emergent from their work, in recognising the "secret" or "silent" aspect of any encounter with the other whom one's own subjectivity can dominate.<sup>182</sup> The question she then re-poses is "how to *earn* the 'secret encounter' with the contemporary hill woman of Sirmur"?<sup>183</sup> This is an important question which acknowledges the relational demands of researching with others. As Irigaray writes, albeit not in reference to methodological questions, "a subject can not be confused with a tool at the disposal of one who would like to use it."<sup>184</sup>

A relational framing of researching with others requires less a set outline of potential methods per se (although the growth of work around participatory methods and approaches is extremely salient), but more an explicit engagement with the inter-subjective demands of the researching process. Relational research approaches require being attentive

---

<sup>181</sup> Deutscher, *A Politics of Impossible Difference. The later work of Luce Irigaray*, 180.

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid.*, 182.

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid.*, 182: quoting Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?", 273, emphasis placed by Penelope Deutscher.

<sup>184</sup> Irigaray, *Sharing the World*, 82.

to these inter-subjective experiences. It is these experiences which will potentially mark out both the boundaries of the research relationships and its progress. Luce Irigaray articulates this inter-subjectivity as:

Compelling me to an opening in time, the other also compels me to an opening in space. The other asks me to interrupt the composition of my own weaving of time and space, not in order to go from a subjective to an objective perspective – as is the case in a scientific approach – but to be capable of meeting another subjectivity.<sup>185</sup>

These methodological discussions come back to the distinction within a public theology which emphasizes public relationships, rather than a purely rational engagement at the centre of a pre-figured public space. This distinction between rationality and relationality is central to Edward O de Barry's articulation of a relational approach to theological reflection.<sup>186</sup> O de Barry charts the rationalized history of western thought through which, he maintains, a theology by the people of God was blocked. In seeking to articulate a relational approach to theology, O de Barry emphasises the need for time and patience, the awareness of both individual and community identity and a flexibility to the formation of a growing faith, emergent, not from ecclesiological "hierarchies" and "academics", but from within the midst of a "community of belief".<sup>187</sup> O de Barry perceives that an attention to our relationships in theological reflection serves the building of community. The cornerstones of the spiritual life within the process, he expresses, are "the expression of our self-awareness as we work out our relationship with ourselves, with our neighbours, and with God."<sup>188</sup>

---

<sup>185</sup> Ibid., 86-7.

<sup>186</sup> O de Bary, *Theological Reflection - The Creation of Spiritual Power in the Information Age*.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid., 64-5.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid., 65.

The following statement by O de Barry is particularly interesting for the specific context of this research: “There is a way to love: to emphasize relationships rather than rules. Relationships use rules as tools but do not idolize them.”<sup>189</sup> O de Barry is not writing with reference to Irigaray’s work by using the phrase ‘way to love’, and yet his words resonate with Irigaray’s emphasis on a new dialectic within humanity towards *the way of love*.<sup>190</sup> Similarly, de Barry is not writing in reference to the Mothers’ Union in using the phrase “Relationships rather than rules”, yet the theme ‘Relationships not Rules’ was the Mothers’ Union’s global theme for the year 2010. His observation is therefore an appropriate summary for the relational approach to a corporate method of theological reflection. Rather than highlighting particular ‘tools’, the challenge within a relational approach to research is to *earn* the relational encounters (to speak in relation to Penelope Deutscher’s use of Spivak and Irigaray) and be open to the inter-subjective demands of cultivating the possibility and impossibility of those encounters.

### 3.4 REFLECTING THEOLOGICALLY WITHIN THE MOTHERS’ UNION IN THE ANGLICAN CHURCH OF AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND AND POLYNESIA

#### 3.4.1 AN EMERGING METHODOLOGY THROUGH RELATIONAL ENCOUNTERS

To narrate the corporate theological reflection of this research requires beginning with an (albeit selected) articulation of my own subject position. Originally from England, I am now

---

<sup>189</sup> Ibid., 52.

<sup>190</sup> Irigaray, *The Way of Love*.

an ordained priest within the Anglican Church of Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia.<sup>191</sup> I was not raised within the Anglican Church, but came to the Christian faith as a teenager and began working within the Anglican Church shortly afterwards. My first contact with the Mothers' Union occurred during my doctoral studies between 2003 and 2006 with the Mothers' Union in the Anglican Church in Tanzania. Through the process of sharing the stories and experiences of the Mothers' Union in Tanzania, I came to know many of the members of the Mothers' Union both in New Zealand and the United Kingdom.<sup>192</sup> I then joined the Mothers' Union in 2009 and was admitted at the same time as two other younger members within Tikanga Pakeha.

The first conversations regarding the possibility of this present research began in 2010 between myself and the then Provincial President of the Mothers' Union in this Province. The idea of a theological reflection on the importance of relationships in the public work of the Mothers' Union within our Three Tikanga context was warmly received. As part of my own praxis within this research, I and my family became resident at the College of St John the Evangelist, which is the Three Tikanga theological college for the Anglican Church in this context. Whilst there was obviously a funding implication around being a sponsored student at this College, it was the substance and content of the research which then led to a cognitive decision to live within an intentionally Three Tikanga community in order to undertake this particular research.

---

<sup>191</sup> Ordained deacon then priest in 2005 and 2006 respectively. I moved to Aotearoa New Zealand in 2000.

<sup>192</sup> A book of prayers and reflections from the Mothers' Union in Tanzania was created and supported through sales in New Zealand and England for its free distribution within Tanzania. Eleanor Sanderson, *Our Hearts are our Homes and our Homes are our Hearts: Reflections and Prayers from members of the Mothers' Union in Tanzania* (China: Everbest Print, 2006).

During this period of time I was also in conversation with Luce Irigaray regarding continuing my engagement with her work. Luce Irigaray was very encouraging of a work that would engage her ideas with the work of the Mothers' Union. In our initial conversation she directed me away from a focus on motherhood and the divine and towards the different relationships expressed within the Mothers' Union. Her rationale for this emphasis was, first, her concern to move away from an emphasis solely on feminine expressions of the Divine and instead to engage in the 'wedding banquet', the age of relational celebration in the progression of spirituality that her work has adapted and reflects. Second, she expressed a concern to move away from working with only one sexuate group, to the cultivation of relationships across difference. Her recommendation was therefore that I work with a group of Mothers' Union members to discuss their approaches to a range of relationships: relationships with themselves, the divine, the female other and the male other (in the singular and in the plural), relationships with the world and with the child.

From these beginning conversations, I originally set out a research process by which two members from each Tikanga would participate in a series of theological reflections, ordered around the different relationships identified by Luce Irigaray. At the same time, I intended to introduce key aspects of Irigaray's philosophy to the participating group. In a sense I was seeking to initiate a conversation between Luce Irigaray's work and members of the Mothers' Union in this Province. The intention was to run four workshop days over a period of six months and to reflect with participants on each of the different types of relationships articulated by Luce Irigaray, by sharing stories from our own experiences and Tikanga. Aspects of Irigaray's work would then be introduced to participants, in order to further

reflect on the resonance or dissonance that that work held, in relation to the theological reflections taking place.

This original process became significantly modified as the research relationships grew and the conversations around our corporate theological reflection developed. Despite my prior sense of relationship amongst the Mothers' Union within this Province, I came to understand that this initial outline of process reflected the preferences and protocols of my own Tikanga and was not developed in genuine consultation, corporally, amongst participants of all three Tikanga. Instead of this very clear and ordered methodology, what emerged was a more fluid and organic means of theological reflection that came to reflect the approaches and preferences amongst the Tikanga respectively. There were a number of times when I came to question very seriously whether it was appropriate for me to carry out this research. This questioning came from recognising that I, as a member of Tikanga Pakeha, may not necessarily be the right person to initiate and invite this corporate theological reflection to take place. This was a time of "emptying of the self", to speak in reference to Aquilar above.<sup>193</sup> I recognised that no matter how intellectually compelling this research might be for me and my academic context, the sensitivity to the historic and contemporary colonial relationships that have strongly shaped the Anglican Church in this province should, without question, take precedence. In other words, honouring the points of tension as well as points of embrace in these early conversations around the research, meant taking very seriously the priority of relational exchange above an external academic process. During this time I took considerable counsel from kaumatua<sup>194</sup> within my academic

---

<sup>193</sup> Aguilar, "Public Theology from the Periphery: Victims and Theologians," 331.

<sup>194</sup> A term in Te Reo Maori used to refer to one's elders and identified leaders within a community.

and church institution and was strongly encouraged to continue with the development of these research relationships and to pursue this corporate theological reflection.<sup>195</sup>

The significant point of moving away from my original methodology, and the questioning of this research process, came from the opportunity to gather together with potential research participants at the Mothers' Union Provincial Conference in 2011. Three main potential leaders from within each Tikanga had been suggested by the then provincial president, who was from Tikanga Pakeha. At that conference I met with the leader identified within Tikanga Maori for the first time. It became clear that the process of theologically reflecting together, as a three Tikanga group, was not seen as the best way forward to respect the kaupapa within Tikanga Maori. Instead I was encouraged to meet with each Tikanga in a way appropriate to each Tikanga and then consider the possibility of bringing the three Tikanga together. The leader identified within Tikanga Pakeha supported this idea, but the leader identified within Tikanga Pacifica expressed her desire for a process in which the three Tikanga could reflect together. Bearing these different desires in mind, and through ongoing conversation, a new process was established by which I would spend time within each Tikanga and work to develop a means of theological reflection within each and then look to the possibility of sharing those reflections more broadly amongst the three Tikanga, as a potential second phase to the research.

Alongside these conversations I also intuited that to provide the time and space necessary for the scope of reflection within each Tikanga, it was necessary to limit the range of relational aspects that had been suggested by Irigaray. More importantly perhaps, it was

---

<sup>195</sup> It is very important to state that this questioning of the appropriateness of this research project and process can never reach a point of complete resolution. I have embodied this tension throughout the research experience, particularly regarding the danger of perpetuating culturally dominant modes of theological production.

clear that providing the space for reflection within each Tikanga required the freedom to discern how the concept of relationships could be approached, without a prior determination or classification of the types of relational aspects that should be addressed. I also intuited that to seek to introduce the work of Luce Irigaray into these reflections would be to frustrate the freedom that was needed for this first initial phase of corporate reflection. In a sense therefore, this particular thesis has become a first stage, a beginning, in what could be a much bigger process of corporate reflection. It has been important to honour the time and space required to engage appropriately at this first stage.<sup>196</sup> This research has therefore aimed to determine the central threads of a public theology from within this context, rather than to embark on a more ambitious path of developing those threads into a corporate theological weaving.<sup>197</sup>

### 3.4.2 TIKANGA PAKEHA

Within Tikanga Pakeha, the main leader and myself discussed the most appropriate way in which we would theologically reflect together within our Tikanga. We decided that the

---

<sup>196</sup> Such a lesson clearly corresponds to Edward O de Bary's assertion that a relational approach to theological reflection will, above all, require time, patience and an awareness of individual and community identity. O de Bary, *Theological Reflection - The Creation of Spiritual Power in the Information Age*.

<sup>197</sup> I think it is significant to note that the imagery of weaving was explicitly used in introducing the scope and manner of this research to the potential participants. The following passage is an extract from the information sheet given to research participants within each Tikanga: *The image of weaving is at the heart of this research project's aims and philosophy. Weaving is a metaphor used by women doing theology in the Pacific. I approach the gathering and sharing of our stories as the gathering of flax; a process which respects the life and spirit of the gifts given by the earth and by God. I therefore particularly want to acknowledge the life and gifts given by each story teller, each research participant. The process of preparing and then weaving the flax, is the process of reflection and analysis that I undertake as a researcher following our sharing of stories in addition to our own reflections together. The challenge I give to myself is that my own process of weaving creates a gift which is then given back in a life-giving way to the community, such as is the case with the woven mat in Pacific culture or the kete in Aotearoa. My intention is therefore that participating in this research is a life-giving process for all those involved.* The full text of the Information for Research Participants can be found in the appendices.

model of gathering for a focus-group or workshop would be appropriate. We decided that we would seek a group of four Mother's Union members to be part of this reflection and sought to include people who would represent a range of both history and recent involvement within the Mothers Union. Together, we invited these participants and I began a conversation amongst us as to the manner in which we would meet. We decided to come together for a two-day focus-group / retreat. Each participant, including myself, was asked to prepare two stories to share with the others regarding the significance of relationships for them in their life and work as a Mothers' Union members. They were told that the stories did not have to be about the Mothers' Union directly, although they may well be, but stories that came to their minds as they thought and prayed about the Mothers' Union world-wide vision and the significance of relationships for them. The members of the Tikanga Pakeha corporate theological reflection included:<sup>198</sup>

**Table 1.1 Research Participants from Tikanga Pakeha**

Research Participants	Chosen Descriptive Attributes
Jenny Dawson  Rosemary Bent  Geraldine  Perdita Bentall	Members of the Diocese of Wellington, Taranaki and Waipuu.  Ordained and Lay church members. Representatives of vestry and synod, Archdeacons for regional area and ministry area, executive for the Anglican Board of Missions, member of Tikanga Pakeha Missions Council, member of social services and community development board, convenor of parenting programmes. Missionary experience within Polynesia and Melanesia.  Mothers' Union Diocesan Presidents, Provincial President. Members of AAW, Executive of AAW,

<sup>198</sup> Within each Tikanga, some research participants wished to remain anonymous whilst others wished to be identified. I have therefore used a combination of actual names and chosen pseudonyms. I have also chosen to combine the description of relevant experience and attributes of participants, in order that descriptions are not directly linked to people who have chosen to use a pseudonym.

	Overseas and Outreach convenor for AAW, member of New Zealand Council of Women.
--	--

I facilitated the two-day workshop, which began and ended with a time of prayer created from Mothers' Union collections of prayers and liturgies. We took it in turns to share our story and then reflected on that story together. Each person shared one story each day. As part of the last session of the day, we then chose one moment from within one of the stories to use for a microscope method of theological reflection. The microscope method of theological reflection is a model used within Education For Ministry with which some of the members of the group were very familiar.<sup>199</sup> This model focuses on a particular moment within a story, asks participants to reflect on the main emotions that emerge from that moment, with the story teller then being invited to choose the two most significant emotions from the suggestions that spoke most strongly to that moment. It then asks participants to think of a metaphor for those emotions (such as, for example, a birthday cake or a locked door). The world of the metaphor is then explored through reflecting on what aspects of our culture and our Christian tradition may be relevant. During this process participants are encouraged to think of reflection or action points that they have perceived afresh through the exercise and that they intend to carry away with them. At the end of the second day, I also asked a series of short discussion questions, in order to directly explore the significance of relationships within Pakeha culture.

All the participants expressed the hope that there would be the opportunity to broaden this reflection with the other Tikanga members.

---

<sup>199</sup> Education for Ministry "The Microscope Method" in *Common Lessons and Supporting Materials (Year One)*, pt. 2.1.1, (Sewanee: The University of the South, 1998).

### *3.4.3 TIKANGA PACIFICA*

The first conversations with Mothers' Union members within Tikanga Pacifica occurred with two members based in Auckland, one from Samoa and one from Fiji. The member from Samoa was a person of long-standing association within the Anglican Church, a priest and Archdeacon, with international roles (such as a former Anglican Observer at the United Nations). The member from Fiji was the wife of a Fijian priest and a new Mothers' Union member. Together we discussed how the Mothers' Union was not very prominent in their countries, as the Association of Anglican Women had been the women's organisation initiated in the Anglican Church in both their countries. The Kingdom of Tonga was identified as being the part of Tikanga Pacifica where the Mothers' Union has had a very strong history. I was encouraged to make contact with the president within the Mothers' Union in Tonga at the same time as reflecting with the two Pacifica members based in Auckland. Although we did discuss the Mothers' Union and built up a strong fellowship together, both of these women had to return to their countries at short notice before we had formerly carried out the story-telling and theological reflection which we had intended. The main emphasis of theological reflection within Tikanga Pacifica has consequently taken place within the Tongan Mothers' Union.

Conversations around the scope and aims of the research took place over e-mail with the president of the Mothers' Union in Tonga before I visited them. Upon my arrival I met with a broad group of Mothers' Union members which involved long-standing members and

younger women, some of whom had recently joined and others who were considering becoming members. Together we discussed the scope of the research and the manner through which we should work together. The process of sharing our stories was very warmly received as a particularly appropriate way of corporately reflecting within Tongan culture. It was agreed that the group of women would each consider the stories that they would like to share and that we would meet as a group to reflect together. At the same time it was identified as important that I should visit with the oldest members of the Mothers' Union who represented the very first Mothers' Union group in Tonga. A small group from within the women were identified as the team who would co-ordinate the research with me and make the arrangements for me to meet with these women. In these discussions it was expressed that these older women had very rich stories that had not been gathered and there was a sense of great joy that together we would be capturing an important part of the history from within Tonga. The members of the Tikanga Pacific corporate theological reflection included:

**Table 1.2: Research Participants from Tikanga Pacifica**

<b>Research Participants</b>	<b>Chosen Descriptive Attributes</b>
Amelia Tu'inukafe	Members of St Matthias' and St Paul's Parishes.
Grace	One ordained priest. Clergy spouse. Vicar's warden, Sunday School teachers, prayer intercessor.
Ana	
Lavinya	Teacher, nurse and Health Educator. Community councillor. Youth Advisor.
Tina	Former Mothers' Union worker for the Pacific.
Toeumu	
Moliketi	
Kalolaine	Diocesan Mothers' Union President, AAW secretary, previous and current Assistant President in Mothers' Union.

The manner of our corporate theological reflections included a number of group gatherings in which we shared stories and reflected together, alongside one-on-one interviews and discussions with older Mothers' Union members. As part of my time in Tonga, I was also introduced to different aspects of the church and national culture by the group as part of sharing in the importance of their Tikanga. I was also asked to prepare and lead Bible studies and sermons for both this main group and the churches from which the groups came, as part of sharing more about the world-wide vision of the Mothers' Union. The end of these group meetings contained extended times of prayer and singing as is their custom when meeting together. At the end of my time in Tonga, I met with this main group of members and shared with them the main themes in the reflections from our time together. They affirmed, added and developed these reflections. As part of the process of sharing our work together it was agreed that I would create a written record summarizing the stories, in such a way that it could be kept and shared amongst the Mothers' Union members as an important part of keeping their own histories.

#### *3.4.4 TIKANGA MAORI*

The conversations around theological reflection within Tikanga Maori took place through the principal guidance of the identified leader within that Tikanga, who has chosen to be called Hine for the purposes of this research. We did not know each other prior to my starting this research, having been based in different parts of Aotearoa. In many ways the conversations and development of relationships within this Tikanga was my greatest area of

learning and the greatest challenge to the necessary re-forming of my own subjectivity. For example, within my own Tikanga it is more acceptable to approach a person directly regarding any 'work' you might be involved in together, than it is to seek to meet socially through meals or sharing each other's houses. However, I began to understand that this was not the most appropriate manner of engagement within Tikanga Maori. Instead it was important to develop a personal relationship, which would then serve to guide the manner in which any mutual 'work' could be approached. Hine and myself therefore took the time to develop our relationship, which included a growing friendship with our wider family members. She became my kaumatua in this research process and strongly helped to shape the way that the theological reflection should take place.

Again, the manner of sharing our stories, our korero (talk), regarding our experiences of Mothers' Union and the significance of relationships within our life and work of Mothers' Union members was considered appropriate. With the main priority being to let those who participated in the research have the space to korero as they would like, I also created a set of questions to guide that process. After meeting a number of times we decided to record our 'interview' with this leader first. She then identified that I should visit with the kuia (the female elders) within the Mothers' Union and that this should be something that we should do together, as part of the kaupapa (appropriate way of conducting) for the research. It proved particularly difficult to arrange this meeting. In these difficulties, we decided that I should also meet with newer members of the Mothers' Union within Tikanga Maori and interview with them. Again, it proved difficult to create these meetings. However, it was possible for me to meet with and korero with Joyce-Anne, a recent Mothers' Union member and Hine's daughter.

**Table 1.3: Research Participants from Tikanga Maori**

Research Participants	Chosen Descriptive Attributes
<p>Hine</p> <p>Joyce-Anne</p>	<p>Hui Amorangi o te Tai Tokerau</p> <p>Te Aupouri me Ngati Whakaeke te Hapu Ko Nga Puhi te Iwi.</p> <p>Mothers' Union President of Te Pihopotanga o te Tai Tokerau. Provincial President.</p>

The corporate theological reflections within Tikanga Maori had a very different dynamic than the other Tikanga, because of the smaller number of people involved. They were, however, in some ways, far deeper. These reflections involved much more time and the build up of an ongoing relationship. Within the context of that ongoing relationship, there has been an ongoing process of theological reflection and conversations concerning how to broaden the engagement with this research amongst Tikanga Maori members.<sup>200</sup>

There have obviously been many times of anxiety on my behalf, when I have felt the academic failing of such a small number of research participants for the validity of the research reflections. However, those anxieties reflect the influence of dominant interpretations of what constitutes validity. Instead, I wish to assert that what has occurred within this particular Tikanga has been relationally-fitting. The building of research relationships between Maori and Pakeha requires appreciating an often very difficult relational history. It also requires appreciating that Maori and Pakeha may have different approaches to building relationships. For example, it may not be easy for Hine to take me to

---

<sup>200</sup> As will be discussed in the conclusions of this research, Hine and I are considering the possibility of a Hui (gathering) of the Tikanga Maori Mothers' Union members and further developing the reflections in this research.

meet with people who I have not met before and, even though her going with me is a sign of trust in me, expect them to share their personal korero, without the same level of relationship-building that occurred between Hine and myself. The corporate theological reflections between myself, Hine and Joyce-Anne therefore illustrate the significance of our individual and communal identity. The process of theologically reflecting together serves the central tenants of this research that there are different ways of cultivating relationships. Furthermore, those relationships reflect not only private, or personal, motivations and encounters, but those personal relationships take place within a broader public reality, which serves to shape and inform the relational possibilities of personal encounter.

#### *3.4.5 SHARING OUR STORIES AND REFLECTIONS TOGETHER*

Towards the end of this research process, it became possible to gather members from each of the Three Tikanga Mothers' Union groups. Three of the Tikanga Pakeha group were present, two representatives from Tonga were present and Hine was also present. Our gathering co-incided with a training programme for the Parenting Encouragement Programme developed by the World Wide Mothers' Union which was introduced to us by the Australian trainers. We therefore had the opportunity to share the reflections from within each Tikanga and affirm, or question and develop my own interpretations on our reflections. This time available to us was, however, limited. It was limited regarding the actual time we could spend together, which meant that we were also limited in the scope of our further reflections.<sup>201</sup> We used this time, therefore, as an opportunity to share extracts

---

<sup>201</sup> It is also important to mention that, given the length and depth with which these initial corporate theological reflections took place, moving to the next stage of theological development together had extended

from our stories and the reflections made; and for myself to provide an overview and summary of the main themes which emerged through our reflections. In many ways, this time could be understood as a bringing-together of the central threads of our theological reflections and as an opportunity to consider how they might be further weaved together, rather than beginning that weaving process.

It also became possible for me to meet with Luce Irigaray at the close of this research process and therefore to reflect together on its content.

### 3.5 THE EMERGING STRANDS OF A PUBLIC THEOLOGY OF RELATIONSHIPS

Narrating the emergence of the different processes of theological reflection amidst the different Tikanga, illustrates the significance of the relational approach to research that I am advocating within this research. Whilst all three corporate theological reflections contained the same central elements of reflection through storytelling, cross-cultural conversation and a corporate process of reflection, the actual process of reflection was noticeably different within each Tikanga. For example, the Tikanga Pakeha pattern of theological reflection was far more structured and ordered and more expressly used established tools of theological reflection, than the other Tikanga. As another example, the development of relationships within Tikanga Maori was far more strongly expressed than within the other Tikanga. This resulted in not only a deeper and more specific path of theological reflection, with a strong

---

beyond the reasonable scope of a Masters thesis. The transcriptions from the various focus groups and interviews among all three Tikanga within this research amounted to around 100,000 words.

guidance regarding kaupapa by a kaumatua, but also illustrated that the necessarily deep relational demands meant that co-ordinating the research was more challenging. Although I did have a prior relationship with many of the Tikanga Pakeha members, it was culturally acceptable that we could come together and discuss and share our reflections, without explicitly establishing our group relationship first. The opportunity to come together and simply give and receive our personal stories was perceived as a 'luxury' our Pakeha culture did not always facilitate, in a way which was not expressed amongst the other Tikanga.

A central theme within each Tikanga was the importance of meeting with both older and long-standing Mothers' Union members and younger members who have recently joined. The theme of inter-generational relationships also emerged as a strong theme of relational reflection within each of the Tikanga.

The process of this research did illustrate the different manners of creating public theologies amongst each Tikanga in a way which may well have been lost, if this research had begun as first intended, by bringing members of each Tikanga together into a combined focus group. By listening and intuiting within each Tikanga, a richer and more varied approach has resulted. This has required more time and space. It has also required me to become more vulnerable and open to a wider range of new personal relationships, which has, at times, asked me to embody considerable anxieties. This relational approach has at times proved very challenging. For example, anxiety exists in allowing the relationships to mature to the level at which we could better make decisions about the progression of the research, rather than fixing things prematurely in set processes. The inevitable time and resource constraints

that accompany this research process certainly contribute to the anxiety of following a relational research process.<sup>202</sup>

Through these processes I have experienced the partiality of my own subjectivity and the cultivation of inter-subjective worlds with the research participants. This means that I feel embarrassed when I narrate the intended beginning of the research process, and maintain that edge of anxiety in understanding that the rest of these written words will inevitably serve to convey my ongoing partial subjectivity.

Overall therefore, writing this particular part of the Body of Christ certainly demanded that I, the 'writer', "interrupt the composition of my own weaving of time and space...to be capable of meeting another subjectivity".<sup>203</sup> The inter-subjective process of corporately reflecting together on the significance of relationships as Mothers' Union members in the Anglican Church of Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia, served to begin to illustrate distinctives within our respective Tikanga and the unique gifts and approaches we bring to our understanding of relationships. In a sense, the negotiation of this research process is, in itself, a case study of determining loving, flourishing and respectful relationships. It is, however, to the heart of our relationship reflections together that this thesis now turns.

---

<sup>202</sup> As Marcella Althaus-Ried challenges theologians, awareness of the means of theological production is politically significant. Althaus-Reid, "In The Centre there are no fragments: *Teologias Desencajadas* (Reflections from Unfitting Theologies)."

<sup>203</sup> Irigaray, *Sharing the World*, 86-7.

## CHAPTER 4: RELATIONAL REFLECTIONS

### 4.1 THEOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS WITHIN TIKANGA PAKEHA

The two-day theological reflections within Tikanga Pakeha provided both opportunities for focused discussion and the open space for sharing stories and reflecting together without prescribed agenda. Despite the inevitable wide-range of the discussions, consistent themes emerged. Of particular significance was the repeated exploration of a broad concept of family and the implications of this breadth for public life.<sup>204</sup> There was a particular pertinence to this emphasis within a Pakeha expatriate<sup>205</sup> experience. These reflections explored the experience of belonging and the process of creating belonging, in a society and community where belonging isn't a given.

There was also a strong historical thread to the reflections which drew on the unique history of the Mothers' Union in New Zealand. Within these discussions, and more broadly in the conversations, there was a strong engagement with the impact of social changes on the norms of how different types of relationships have been and are being experienced.

Participants expressed awareness of the parts of women's experience which are often not public, particularly regarding aspects of child-bearing and miscarriage, but which are

---

<sup>204</sup> These conversations reflect the World Wide Mothers' Union emphasis on supporting family in all its forms. Although the conversations themselves did not occur in direct conversation with that phrasing.

<sup>205</sup> A number of the participants were immigrants to New Zealand themselves, while others had a number of generations of residence within the country within their families. However, within the conversations there was an evident negotiation of belonging within the New Zealand context and a particular wrestle with determining New Zealand Pakeha identity as distinct from "Mother England" (Jenny).

significant for women's experience of relationships and which can also shape their public participation.

Within all of these reflections was an underlying engagement with what was considered faithful, respectful and flourishing within inter-personal and institutional relationships.

Divine relationships with God were often also expressed inextricably from the practical experience of inter-personal relationships. These reflections again returned to the healing potential of peace and belonging that is possible in a divinely-created family of many forms.

#### 4.1.1 FAMILY IN MANY FORMS

The majority of the stories shared reflected experiences in which individuals' sense of family and belonging was divinely extended and re-created:

*One garrulous [Mothers' Union] member lived next door to us. I found her a great trial. She visited every day, sometimes twice, with assumed freedom to tell me the latest news from the District, what to do with my three pre-schoolers, my household chores, my garden etc. I started to dread her visits and her kitchen looked right into mine. One day the Lord spoke to me very clearly. He said, 'every time you see her pray for her'. I knew I hadn't thought of the idea and so I obeyed. I was amazed at the change in my attitude towards her. I started to see why she was as she was....Gradually love began to flow between us and she looked on me as a daughter. Her only daughter was still-born when she was 41. By this time she was in her 60's. And she became a mother to me. I had left mine in Wales. What a difference that prayer had made. [Perdita]*

*In PNG, as in other cultures, families are very important and [Peter] was quite concerned to hear that Michael and I did not have any children of our own, although we have quite a few God-children. They have five children and their daughter now aged 16 is Rosemary and their 12 year-old son is called Michael. Rosemary is actually baptized Rosemary Bent, so when she gets married she still will continue my name... And of course with this gift comes responsibility to help with their upbringing just as we would with our own children... Peter is a village evangelist and [their mother] is a*

*keen member of the Mothers' Union and so our links are also in the wider family of the Mothers' Union. [Rosemary]*

*[The experience] provided me with a sense of being cared for and supported and my needs were noticed and attended to without having to ask...to me [the stories shared] speak of acceptance, community, inter-generational relationships which is really important for me [begins to cry]. I've gone all emotional, I don't know why. I think, because the kids' grandparents live in the South Island which is so close, but is also so far away... And so it's important to me that the kids experience grandparents where ever they are. [Geraldine, reflecting on experiences of taking her young children to Mothers' Union meetings]*

Each of these extracts highlights how the identification of family relationships has been expanded and transformed through significant inter-personal experiences. Within these stories is an underlying exploration of how a sense of belonging is formed. Trust was a consistent characteristic in this formation:

*Relationships built on mutual trust and affection are lifelong joys. [Rosemary]*

*It made me think about the value of belonging to a group of people who have developed faithful relationships over a period of quietly getting to know and trusting each other. [Perdita]*

It was appreciated that time is needed to build relationships, along with a recognition that often relationships grow from opportune circumstances. This opportunity was directly and repeatedly perceived to be given by God, but it was also expressed that the nature of those circumstances has shifted with changing social culture:

*I think about how we make our friends and how God brings the right people into our lives. [Jenny]*

Women's groups were recognised as having an important role in providing those opportunities to build friendships and trust amongst people. However, experiences were

shared regarding how people's experience of both the church and the Mothers' Union has enabled, but also sometimes frustrated, those opportunities.<sup>206</sup> The challenge of community was very real in the reflections, with longing and frustration expressed at opportunities being missed and marginalization occurring. These challenges within organised communities ran parallel to the experiences being shared of family life. In particular, many stories were shared from group members regarding the risks they have taken in extending their own relationships, and homes, out to others:

*The gift of hospitality is looking out for the other people. [Rosemary]*

*We make a lot of assumptions rather than get to know people and allow people to be. [Geraldine]*

*Thank you for that story because just the time of building friendships and the time of healing are two interesting – well building friendships is about healing anyway [Jenny]*

This appreciation of "healing" was connected to the deep belief expressed that inter-personal relationships were directly part of relationships with God. The language of adoption within Christian scripture, and its significance for a broader understanding of family relationships, was pertinent. This language was particularly significant for one group member who had personal experience of adoption and had spoken previously about her powerful appreciation of the parental God to whom she could entrust her child:

*And while the parenting responsibility is huge, there's something about the sibling relationships that we all have together as children of the parent God and the family that we are adopted into. And that's huge. Which is wonderful. [Jenny]*

---

<sup>206</sup> For example, a story was shared from a Mothers' Union conference outside of New Zealand in which people praying in different languages had not been readily accepted, which was seen as illustrating a lack of trust and sensitivity to the needs of the different people groups present.

#### 4.1.2 A RELATIONAL GOD

As group members shared their prepared stories and as reflections brought out many more stories, there was often the self-conscious assertion of knowing God's presence in the relationship stories being told. After reflecting on Mary Sumner and the origins of the Mothers' Union, Rosemary comments: "So God weaves it all together". In a discussion later on, after Jenny shares the story of the birth of her first child at a young age without a partner, the group identifies the way that particular people in the church played important roles in connecting and facilitating possibilities and opportunities for Jenny. Rosemary comments, "And isn't it wonderful the relationships you had too with people like [vicar's name] and [another vicar's name], you know, the ripples in the pond". This imagery of the ripples was also used by Rosemary as she began our reflection on her first story:

*"Thinking about relationships of course I guess the first thing that you think of is relationships with family and God, because it's family that helps you to relate to God and introduces you to God, but then, you know, it ripples out further."*

Rosemary's reflection follows her story of a deep friendship, formed with a group of women on her migrating boat-journey to New Zealand.<sup>207</sup> So Rosemary's comments here reflect the understanding that inter-personal relationships are a primary means of growing in our appreciation of the character of God.<sup>208</sup>

---

<sup>207</sup> The friends shared a house and when a job opportunity elsewhere in New Zealand came to Rosemary, they generously offered to support her by covering her rent and expenses for six months, to give her the option of returning if the job and move didn't work out.

<sup>208</sup> This can also be seen in the description of the maternal relationship which grew for Perdita with her neighbour in the previous section.

It is therefore not surprising, perhaps, that the discussion moved from relating to more identifiably female aspects of the Christian God. Jenny shared her experience of the feminist movement in the 1970's and the subsequent contribution she made to inclusive language through the Prayer Book Commission. Both Jenny and I shared early childhood experiences of questioning our relationship with God through the lens of gendered identity:

*That is so powerful because I've always wondered what it must be like to grow up with the pronoun that's used for God being of the same gender as you... If God is presented as being not of my gender. There's a line from an off-Broadway play..."I found God in myself and I loved her fiercely". Which was hugely important for me at one stage in my life journey. To acknowledge that God is like me and was within me. [Jenny]*

Relating to God, conscious of our own gendered identity, was something that group members expressed at times as something that had been difficult, or that remained ambiguous. However, that same ambiguity was less present in discussing an appreciation of God's company in expressly female experiences, such as miscarriage and childbirth:

*So many of these things can be distractions though and this is the problem. The veil's come down for us to enter the sanctuary to be in the presence of God [Perdita]. It's finding the middle ground because I think for some of us things can seem unnecessary but for other people it's the make or break of something... [Geraldine] And allowing God to be bigger. [Eleanor] Yes, allowing God to be bigger than gender is the important thing. [Jenny]*

The challenge and joy of inter-generational relationships as an integral part of experiencing community, was another important thread of reflection. The Mothers' Union was understood to have a strong inter-generational heritage, but this was not always reflected in

the present-day experience of group life.<sup>209</sup> It was recognised that considerable shifts have taken place in wider society, in the manner and expectations of relationships between adults and children, parents and grandparents, which requires appreciation. This generational difference was profoundly illustrated in the two stories shared by Jenny. Jenny shared her experience of becoming pregnant outside of marriage in the 1960's and the dramatic relational tensions she experienced with her family. These tensions reflected the attitudes and expectations at the time, of how sexual relations and family relations should be carried out. This story was contrasted with a story of her open conversation with her eldest son regarding women's bodies:

*So the reason it came to mind first when I thought about relationships was a mother-son relationship being of a different variety to what it might have been in a previous generation...I've often thought then that the divide line between the generations might be Brazilian [bikini waxing]! [Jenny]*

Inter-generational relationships are consequentially inseparable from the influence of broader public life.

#### **4.1.3 THE PUBLIC REALITY OF PRIVATE RELATIONSHIPS: THE PUBLIC THEOLOGY OF A FAMILY IN MANY FORMS**

The origins and concerns of the Mothers' Union were considered to be both public and political in nature:

---

<sup>209</sup> Perdita shared how her first experiences of the Mothers' Union were her visits to the local group as a child with her mother in Wales. Both Geraldine and I brought prepared stories to the group of experiences that we have had as young mothers with children attending Mothers' Union meetings, which consist predominantly of more senior women members. These stories contained both joyful encounters of inter-generational exchanges, as well as experiences of isolation and invisibility as a minority. There was a celebration of particular families being mentioned, that now have three generations of Mothers' Union membership.

*I've always thought, with a bit of a smile, about the idea of the trade union and the Mothers' Union... It certainly fits in terms of what was going on when Mary Sumner started it. [Jenny] It was one of the signs of solidarity and was that which united people together. [Rosemary] So Mothers' Union is quite a political thing in that sense [Jenny] Yes it is and you don't think of it in that way naturally do you? [Eleanor] No not at all. [Perdita] It's also reclaiming mothering, which is so important. [Jenny]*

Mary Sumner spoke, as a woman in public, about the issues of concern that created the Mothers' Union (*"Of course women didn't speak in those days in public"* [Rosemary]) and created an interface between public and private worlds for members. This interface was particularly marked in the social changes that occurred in relation to public legislating of intimate and 'private' relationships through marriage and divorce laws. The historical split that occurred within the Mothers' Union in New Zealand, in response to the failed attempt to persuade the World Wide Mothers' Union at that time, to accept the membership of divorced women had a profound effect in the stories of members:

*I imagine there are a lot of Mothers' Union members who would have similar stories and were grief-stricken at being separated from the Mothers' Union at that point. There was terrible strife and trial. Some Mothers' Union groups refused to be separated and that caused trouble, which lives on in some areas today.[Perdita]*

*The fact that people have forgotten now [about the split] makes it much easier, but there is something about when a new group forms and moves away from the old and that zeal of the convert in AAW...and New Zealand does things first: the women's vote, all those things that New Zealand has done first and mother Britain held us back. That was the whole image that I had, and it wasn't really true, but there's something about when new things happen and that radical cut...then time goes on and you can come back together. [Jenny] That would be lovely. That would be lovely. [Perdita] It's a human process I think. It is also a theological I think in terms of healing and reconciliation and even forgiveness...we are to be on a journey towards forgiveness. There certainly was need for forgiveness in that split, because people were – they took it very personally. [Jenny]*

All the group members talked of the possibility of there being a time to return to a new form of unity, as the organized women's groups of the Anglican Church in New Zealand Tikanga Pakeha. At the same time there was a recognition that the break occurred as a relational justice issue for many members, in a post-war period in which no-fault divorce was becoming legal and participants expressed appreciation of the turbulent manner in which the church and the legal system negotiated these changes in society.

The private world of personal relationships was therefore considered as distinctly public, with regard to the historic journey of the Mothers' Union Group members also perceived that a focus on relationships is currently entering public discourse in a new way.

Relationships were expressed by Jenny to be a "hidden economy" in the current market forces:

*I'm thinking there's not a lot of money to be made from relationships that Mothers' Union values and in a society that likes to measure things by what a business can make or how much something is worth, the relationships between people are often a – kind of – hidden economy. The economy is actually about sets of relationships but it doesn't measure on a lot of graphs about GDP, or, you know, anything to do with profit. It's hidden. [Jenny]*

Geraldine shared her experience of government agencies now approaching her, to support the work that she has been involved in concerning strengthening families and parenting, because of a new appreciation of how to affect social change:

*[Funders] have noticed that family centred and community centred and grown activities that build that sense of community and build community resilience is what lasts the distance and creates significant change...we have a much greater role to play now and in a way to become much more public in our relationships and in our desire to build relationships, because we know how to do it and we can lead the way and we can be agents for change in our community...[Funders] are realizing that while [relationships-based programmes] are muckier and harder to determine, they are getting more value for the money they invest. [Geraldine]*

The image of a family in many forms is therefore a political image as much as it is an ecclesiological one.

The central concerns relating to this image, which were more deeply explored, are the process of peaceful belonging, a desire for togetherness and the healing potential of our relationships.<sup>210</sup> This relational life was unquestionably understood to take place within the sacred encounter of God:

*In a jigsaw you have all different sorts of different images. Things made up, and when you start to put pieces in, until you complete it, you can't see everything. And I think the jigsaw puzzle being completed is important because you have ups and down and ins and outs of life, how we start putting our bits of puzzle together until it's all completed in the completeness of God – at the end. [Rosemary] There's also something behind it. Something put it together or designed it. There's a kind of bigger plan. ... There's a plan yes, and God will bring all things together – that huge stuff in Ephesians chapter 1. We forget about it so much that we are all being drawn together. [Jenny]*

The family is therefore both immediate and global, human and divine, personal and political.<sup>211</sup>

*[Mothers' Union] has changed my awareness in the sense of reminding me of the importance of family life. Which is easy to forget about actually in the period of individuals who make up congregations, rather than families as such. [Jenny]*

---

<sup>210</sup> Both the theological reflections, which took place at the end of each day, focused on moments in stories shared that emphasised belonging and identity in a group. The first reflection focused on a moment in Geraldine's story where her young son identified himself very strongly with the "girls" of the senior Mothers' Union meeting. The prompting moment from the story for the second reflection was the return of a Mothers' Union group member to her local group after a tragic incident in which a fellow group member lost her life. The metaphors created from these stories were: all the pieces in a jigsaw and a Christmas tree. The first metaphor was identified with belonging and peace and the second was identified with longing and readiness.

<sup>211</sup> With particular appreciation being expressed for the Three Tikanga ordering of relationships in the New Zealand context which informs a celebration of the diversity of a world-wide Mothers' Union fellowship: "That's really important to me and that Maori and Pacific and Pakeha, as we work out some kind of life together and we work out who we are as Pakeha, we realize that we are not the same as the other two and that diversity is so real within Mothers' Union" [Jenny].

In questioning whether any public theology of relationships, from this place, would have to recognise the difficulty of relationships within Tikanga Pakeha and the split that occurred between AAW and MU, I ask:

*It has to begin in a kind of place of, brokenness isn't the right word, but it's kind of redemption, there's a need to kind of, reconciling. It's not that relationships are easy and they're right, but that there's a toughness there's a difficult place that they come from...we don't focus on relationships because they are a superficial, easy, Godly nice-Christian thing, but because they are the hardest and the grittiest reality and that our history reflects that kind of redemptive wrestle somehow. [Eleanor] Yes and it's really about love isn't it. You know, if we are open in love then we are receptive to and not fearful you now, love casts out all fear, and in relationships there can be a lot of fear and nervousness. [Perdita]*

Therefore, whilst these relational reflections may appear to speak directly to the significance of explicitly Christian forms of community, they are similarly significant to more public or political forms of family.

## 4.2 THEOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS WITHIN TIKANGA MAORI

Hine and I engaged in an ongoing reflection during the progress of this research. Our conversations together, whilst only one of which was recorded as a set-aside interview, consistently built my appreciation, and our combined reflection, on the *taonga* (gifts) within Tikanga Maori Mothers' Union. The image of the banqueting table became an important symbol for a public theology of relationships reflecting Tikanga Maori Mothers' Union.

The inter-generational family legacy of the Mothers' Union was particularly strong and important. This legacy illustrated an approach to relationships as well as being a compelling

inheritance for the Mothers' Union traditions. Part of the significance of this legacy was the *mana* (esteem and honour) the Mothers' Union gave to previous generations of women in Tikanga Maori.

God was understood as a great weaver bringing together families and communities of difference. There was a repeated affirmation that what is 'ordinary' and what is 'of God' are inextricably inter-woven. The unique context of Aotearoa New Zealand and the Treaty of Waitangi was articulated as playing a significant role in informing the practice and reality of relationships. This context includes the negotiation of Pakeha culture in the midst of expressing other relationships. It was perhaps in this light that a consideration of what could be considered as faithful, loving and flourishing for the reality of relationships was most keenly visible and was expressed through the concepts of *tika*, *pono*, *aroha*, and *mana*.

#### 4.2.1 RECEIVING A GIFT FROM PREVIOUS GENERATIONS

Hine and Joyce-Anne, as mother and daughter, both spoke of the significance of Hine's mother being a Mothers' Union member. Their faith and belonging was a gift from these important inter-generational relationships.

*Te Rawiri, yeah, that's our book, that's our prayer book that we were raised on, where we learned our Reo Maori, where we learned about Christ and we learned the prayers that were read to us by grandparents and our fathers and those people who supported Anglican – mihinare, as we prefer to be called. [Hine]*

*I was always aware that my nana was involved in it, but I didn't know what it was, but it just seemed to be something, another reason why we had to go to church was because of the Mothers' Union. So I've been brought up familiar with it but I wasn't aware of what its...I understood the kaupapa was about whanau. I understood that. But the other side of it, I didn't understand how it worked technically. My mother was*

*part of the Mothers' Union and we heard about it and then ultimately she became the president and it just seemed the right thing to do. [Joyce-Anne]*

The inheritance of belonging was expressed as a means of both trusting and honouring the fore-mothers.

*I just wondered if the significance of relationships is something that's drawn you to the Mothers' Union? [Eleanor] As I said, I think the relationships exist in my immediate whanau, be it my mother, my grandmother so, for want of a better term, I may feel a sense of obligation, being brought up as an Anglican child in a very strong Tikanga Maori Anglican family, why wouldn't I? So I think that's really important. It's an obligation to which I am drawn to because I believe in my mother and believed in my grandmother, I therefore have the belief that it's safe and good for me to be a part of. So if it's good and right why wouldn't you want to be a part of it? And secondly, because you have a relationship of trust with your elders, why wouldn't you feel – you don't have to go out and research further because obviously they've done all that and it's worked, so jump aboard. [Joyce-Anne]*

*The journey of the Mothers' Union is the journey of everyday life, and I was trying to decipher the difference between what we do in the red book [the church service book] and what we do in Mothers' Union. They're so embroiled in each other that its, for me they're all enhancing, they're all lifting, that we, you know, it's those things that we do because we know they are right and we know they are safe, and because we have seen people do them before us. And for me it's that recording of the joy, the joy of belonging, and the joy of actually nurturing those [Mothers' Union] groups as well...because my mother was in the Mothers' Union, and so was my grandmother, who I never saw, but my father told me that she came to Auckland for Mothers' Union as well. So in that way because, you know, you're living your life as a Christian and you know that Mothers' Union is, you can't actually cut off what is ordinary. [Hine]*

Joyce Anne and Hine hold the Mothers' Union in high regard because of the enabling power it had in the life of Hine's mother. Hine, in reflecting on what was so important about the Mothers' Union in her life, replied: "It gave my mother a voice". Stories were recounted of how her mother's involvement in the Mothers' Union had created a new level of responsibility within wider church and community life.

*Mothers' Union meant that they were able to have a say in their prayers... They knew what was happening in their group, and then they could pray for them or fit in a visit... But this was her own mission! It was asking for Mothers' Union prayer. And then of course when they died they had their own mothers' Union prayers around the*

*coffin, okay? So they elevated themselves as well, that they will go around on their needs and pray for this person who died. That's the Mothers' Union. Up front on the marae, they will do theirs... And I know they used to take great pride, because usually it was the men who were the priests, but they would take over and have their service. This is this voice that they were called up to do. And of course, they stood beside us, you know, what it must have done to the whole person, but what it does to the family! The people that come out of those homes, they say, 'We can do it, because I've seen it done.' [Hine]*

So the gift of the Mothers' Union is understood as a legacy embodied in inter-generational relationships which are profoundly treasured. Hine also shares her perception of the changes that need to take place for the needs of her mokopuna (grandchildren) in church life and expresses the understanding that the reality of life has changed dramatically for younger generations. So the gifts of previous generations are sometimes being lived in a new way, which also communicates an embodied legacy – a gift which seeks to be lived afresh in each generation.

#### *4.2.2 A GOD WORKING IN AND THROUGH CULTURALLY-DISTINCT RELATIONSHIPS*

Faith with God was expressed as a gift, relationally-given, particularly given through the generations. The Christian faith was articulated with a clear emphasis on the significance of personal relationships.

*You know, in all that I do with the Mothers' Union, my caring, my hearing, my praying with them, and being part of their consultative group, for me the gift is the love of Christ. The love of Christ. And you know for me, I go round and do my things and I only want to be the best that I can be for Christ. And I think of all the, you know sometimes those little groups can get quite nippy eh? Quite nippy, cause of, because of other agendas, I guess. And, you know, the work of Christ is the fulfilling the fulfilment is within you. [Hine]*

Approaching relationships with others and a relationship with Christ was therefore inseparable. Hines perceives God both in the chance meetings and in the creation of different relationships, within the wider community roles she holds. In meeting people, she meets God:

*Oh humbling to be in their presence you know...it was wonderful, wonderful feeling to be in their presence. Sort of say, 'Lord!' [Hine]*

Joyce-Anne also speaks with a keen sense of inter-relationships being the place where Christianity lives. Specifically, Joyce-Anne talks about the unique bi-cultural commitment of the Anglican Church through the Treaty of Waitangi as an important part of faithful inter-relationships:

*I don't think we should be naive to think that in Aotearoa New Zealand we don't have that [oppression] but I think that's where the role of the Treaty of Waitangi plays a big part. Now when it comes to the church we should hope that that partnership continues over, and I think one of the many strengths of the church, it does allow Maori to just do, practice and be Maori, it allows Pakeha communities to just do and be Pakeha, but it can also enable that partnership arrangement within the service, within the fellowship thereafter...I think that's where we have, I wouldn't say, mastered, but we're on the journey of weaving together the cultures and then what is asked of the church is to continue that weaving, but the weaver, now has to be the hand of the weaver is obviously, it has to be the Lord. I think that's one way I look at it, that it is ultimately the Lord who weaves us together. [Joyce-Anne]*

God is the ultimate “weaver” of relationships. The negotiation of inter-cultural weaving was prominent within these reflections, particularly negotiating pakeha cultural norms.<sup>212</sup> This negotiation may reflect that the conversations took place with me as a Pakeha. However, it also indicates that relational expression, for these women, takes place within a broader relational exchange, within the context of a majority culture of which they do not

---

<sup>212</sup> Of specific mention was the considerable difference between oral and written cultures and differing modes of formality and technicality in language. Hine was particularly aware of translation between the languages needing to reflect writing for either “Maori ears” or “Pakeha ears”.

necessarily primarily belong. This dynamic is relationally significant because “*these cultural things are very much a part of your being*”. [Hine]

The cultural protocols of forming relationships and group meetings were particularly significant for Hine. She expressed desire for more uplifting singing and dancing and a move away from presentation of written reports. She articulates protocols for meeting and welcoming that she considers liberating for relationships:

*From the very first eye-balling of people, you put those structures into place, and you know that, you know, we are the people of the land, of that community. Everyone else are visitors, so they are treated differently to begin with, and then after they've made those welcomes and you acknowledge Christ, the acknowledgement of Christ is first and foremost and the farewelling of the dead of course...then we acknowledge the purpose for which we've come. And then you welcome them for all that, and then they make a reply. And then after that you're free. You've touched base and said who you are within the context. Then you are ready to have a service together... we've broken bread together, and then after that you are talking about yourselves as a unit... so what we are doing is we're pulling down those barriers and we're opening it up to Christ. [Hine]*

Hine therefore desires to see more life-giving ways of practicing inter-relationships in the Mothers' Union contexts that reflect what she considers to be life-giving gifts from within

Tikanga Maori:

*People tell you you've had enough of, but, you know, as that philosopher Rousseau tells us, 'unless we ourselves are ready to cut the chain, who will move it'... You know, I just think that we as a small enough group, the Mothers' Union, we can afford to move in, move in to do something different, to actually extend our repertoire! [laughs]. [Hine]*

*My only wish for the Mothers' Union is that in the time that I've got I can inject some of the Maori values and encourage people to step out, because I think we've been locked up, we lock ourselves away for too long. This we are not, you know? We are not the celebrants at the church. We are celebrating in our own way, you know, it's no good coming to church saying, 'I want everyone to work together'. How? It goes back to that dominant thing. 'We want all of them'... They're all working together? Yeah, yeah well that's what it looks like, but they're not. We're working with you fellas under you... 'the umbrella' that's another dominant statement eh? It's dominant. It's like 'come with us'. Come and do it our way you know... Because, hey,*

*who has the mana? The person holding the umbrella or the person under the umbrella? [Hine]*

This awareness of culturally-distinct approaches to the practice of relationships brings a desire to deepen inter-relationships within the Mothers' Union in this context. This is a desire to let go of structures and "*look beyond the process*" (Hine) of meetings. These reflections indicate currently-felt boundaries in experiencing faithful, loving and flourishing relationships, which is more appropriately expressed in this Tikanga as relationships which are *tika* and *pono*, made with *aroha* and upholding each others *mana*:

*The tika and pono process in ongoing. It's not just one thing that makes your life tika and pono. It's like you and I sitting here and having our korero. What I give to you is what I feel is true in myself, you know? It's the best that I might have in my kete, my kete of knowledge. [Hine]*

#### 4.2.3 THE BANQUETING TABLE: A METAPHOR FOR PUBLIC THEOLOGY

The significance of metaphor in constructing meaning and language, appropriate within each Tikanga, was particularly important to Hine. Together, we developed the symbol of the banqueting table as a potential metaphor for the public theology of relationships amongst Tikanga Maori Mothers' Union. The image came from an initial conversation about the significance of the Mothers' Union banner<sup>213</sup> and Hine's practice of taking it with her in both public conferences, hui and home visits and the significance of the scripture in the Song of Solomon: 'he has brought me to his banqueting house, and his banner over me was love'.<sup>214</sup>

---

<sup>213</sup> It is a long-standing custom for women's groups within the Anglican Church to have a processional banner expressing their identity. The banner for the Mothers' Union of Aotearoa New Zealand and Polynesia has only recently been recreated and expresses Three Tikanga imagery.

<sup>214</sup> Song of Solomon 2:4

The image of the banqueting table was pertinent to Hine's memories of her mother and the work she did as a Mothers' Union member:

*And when they catered for their meetings in a grander scale, well I can remember being in the kitchen and just wondering, you know, because that's when they put their best out... And I think that that was a very strong moment. [Hine]*

This banqueting table also speaks about preparation. A significant part of this preparation in the life of Hine's mother was the income-generating projects the Mothers' Union undertook. It was extremely unusual in her mother's time for women to have their own income. This income was part of the provisions that enabled this feast to be created:

*The banquet table is that strong image that I've been waiting for you. I'm waiting. So now we just sit down and we enjoy...everyone knows that there is a long time planning for the banquet before it comes, you know, the planning is a big part of change, as well as the banquet. [Hine]*

Part of the preparation for the banquet requires a knowledge of the needs of the people invited and the formation of relationships with the guests:

*A lot of those things in the manakitanga is in the preparation, you know, when you are setting up your banquet before the guests come. That's your mana, that's your laid out manakitanga. You set that up and then of course along with that is the people. So imagine a banquet but no people. Why? Because they don't want to be stuffed up there to be hearing the same thing, you know, from dry talk and that. You've got to have people. [Hine]*

The image of eating together is an embodied, life-giving image. Hine emphasized how the invitation to a banquet comes with the invitation to "get out of order". There is always an unexpected aspect of people joining you and bringing their own ways of doing things. The invitation to eat together, but only if certain patterns or rules were followed, wasn't a genuine invitation to fellowship together.

The banqueting table also resonates strongly with the Eucharistic feast. Hine and I reflected on how her own work as a child in cleaning and preparing the church was a manner of preparing a banqueting table for the Sunday feast:

*Absolutely...We go to church and we have all the rituals and that, but we cement it, if you like, the church, the [wedding] ceremony is cemented within the church, but as people we cement it through the sharing of kai at the reception, you know?...that allows you to come together, and, you know, the whole eating and the whole gathering is another form of communication and relationships only survive on communication. [Joyce-Anne]*

The image of the table for gathering and fellowship was also present in our broader reflections:

*When you blend [our faith journey] back to the Mothers' Union, you know, you've got all that groundwork done, and that happens in our lives, before we come to the table of the Mothers' Union, and that really is the balancing, or at least the connectedness, the weaving. I come to the Mothers' Union table as an open vessel to welcome their dialogue, to welcome their journeys and sail with them in the direction, but a lot of that is because my vessel has been filled, my cup has been filled. [Joyce-Anne]*

*The platter of the Lord's work is even greater, you know? Is greater than what it used to be, because people are calling for different, there are different needs upon people. [Hine]*

The banquet table is an expression of hospitality, which therefore informs the manner of engaging in relationships:

*That's where tika and pono come in, in your little dealings, you know, your little dealings with whatever you are doing. And hospitality is a very important part of that. [Hine]*

The significance of "little dealings", the everyday interactions with others is therefore an important part of a public theology of relationships. The ordinary and the extraordinary, the family level and the organisational level, for example, are all interwoven:

*The journey of the Mothers' Union is that journey of everyday life...you're living your life as a Christian and you know that Mothers' Union is, you can't actually cut off when it is ordinary and when it is extra. [Hine]*

This is a challenge Joyce-Anne sees for an engagement with the political sphere, particularly with Maori women in parliament:

*They've got power and they have influence, and they influence our policies you know. And that might not start today but it could impact on families in the next days. [Joyce-Anne]*

The banqueting table imagery calls together many spheres of identity and belonging. It brings together the spheres that might have been separated out as private and public. A public banquet draws out the private preparations and the “*everyday life*” [Hine] within it. The banner over the banquet, and over the invitation to the banquet, is one of love – a love for self and neighbour.

*My call at the Mothers' Union is 'can we please look after ourselves and our neighbours? Can we value each other? And can we have some fun... It's about honouring what was left for us from Mary Sumner and allowing it to move into this time... There's gotta be a new piece born... Christ gave us life so that we could live it to our full potential and share it. [Hine]*

### 4.3 THEOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS WITHIN TIKANGA PACIFICA

A distinct characteristic in the reflections on relationships amongst the women of Tikanga Pacifica was an inter-mingling of spontaneous songs of praise and prayer. The group reflected with passion on the history of the Mothers' Union and its significance in the Kingdom of Tonga, but also created a space for very open and frank conversations, particularly for younger women, to consider its potential significance for their lives. In these conversations the well-being of inter-personal, inter-family and inter-church relationships

was considered to be paramount. There was a consistent emphasis on the gift that each person represents and the need for these gifts to be recognized and celebrated. This has been seen, for example, in the merging of AAW and the Mothers' Union in Tonga because the separation of these organisations did not reflect the reality of the inter-personal relationships between the women.

The Christian God was expressed as a God passionately concerned with personal relationships *with* members and the personal relationships *of* members. Prayer was a vital part of these relationships. The place of prayer was personal, community-focused and for the public life of Tonga in general. This intercessory foundation was seen as the particular gift given to these women from the first Mothers' Union members of Tonga.

A contextual framework which follows the pattern of garland-making was articulated by one member as a means of examining and conceptualising 'right relationships' in the Tongan context. These processes were similarly discussed in regard to the tapa-making which has been a strong part of the Mothers' Union heritage in Tonga. Together these images became a significant way of articulating a relational approach to public theology from this context. Subsequently, I have come to reflect and articulate this approach through the metaphor of a garland of praise.

#### *4.3.1 A HOME IN THE ABODE OF LOVE*

Nu'kalofa, the capital of Tonga, means the 'abode of love'. The Christian identity of the Tongan flag and the naming of Nu'kalofa were considered important amongst the women.

The language of living 'in the abode of love' draws together the intercessory ministry for Tonga of their foremothers, alongside the practice of these women's own homes. These are homes that were expressly characterised by love:

*How mum brought us up at home was so amazing and I am so proud of how she brought us up and the passion that she had and all the friends and how she responds to our neighbour and whoever came to our house and the generosity and the heart that she has for everyone. We had such a rich upbringing with a mother like mine. The richness that I am talking about is not in value or anything, but in watching love in life, in family and in life. As I grew up to understand what Mothers' Union is and their objectives, I see it in how she brought us up as children. [Grace]*

The Mothers' Union was described as a space in which community and family is augmented and where traditions, skills and practices were passed down through the generations.

*[Being in the Mothers' Union was] how we learnt. We learned from them because when they did their work we joined. We just looked at them and so now we can do it ourselves. [Langi through a translator]*

There were open, and often humorous, reflections on how the skills and roles of women have changed in relation to the focus of women gathering together. For example the move away from "baking" and the making and wearing of special Mothers' Union uniforms. In these conversations there was a keen appreciation of the changing nature of family life, with a number of these women being divorced or single parents. The change in membership conditions within Mothers' Union in this regard was significant. A deep appreciation for the Mothers' Union theme of 'relationships and not rules' was expressed many times. A number of the younger women identified themselves as "prodigal daughters", as either actual or symbolic daughters of this group of women. One such woman speaks of her sense of call back to the church:

*We have to ask God to fill us with the real love of God inside us so that we can work in some things that God wills in us. So that we can build the church, not just the house, but his church. [Lavinya]*

The living inheritance of households of love is now understood to be embodied in a similar yet different way by a new generation. There is a desire to hold very strongly to interpersonal and divine relationships and hold very loosely to institutional structures.

#### 4.3.2 RELATIONSHIPS REFLECTING THE HEART OF GOD

Whenever we discussed the gifts to be found in their Tikanga, the conversation always turned to people. The gift of being in relationships with others was expressed as central to being the people of God.

*She enjoyed being with these [lists particular individuals] women...See if someone is feeling isolated or rejected or being alone, you know, once you get involved you get this sense of belonging to something. [Translator]My Family. [Kalalaine] So she looked forward to going and meeting with them in fellowship because she knew them... I think it's Godly, you know, you want to go there because you know there's someone there that knows you. And thinking about praying, you know, even though you can just pray by yourself, you think you know God and God knows you, but you've got the sense of wanting to be with them. To be with them is important. [Translator]*

*Family. It really is a gift. A gift we need to celebrate every day. [Langi through translator]*

The appreciation of being a world-wide family of prayer was particularly significant for Toemu as she talked about her commissioning as a Mothers' Union worker with the knowledge that millions of people were praying for her: *"the power of prayer, I must tell you, oh it's wonderful!"*

The intercessory role that the Mothers' Union took upon themselves in their first incarnation in Tonga was remembered and celebrated widely. They would meet, sometimes for days at a time, and held regular prayer and tapa-making meetings. They were well-

known through Tonga, with stories being told of members of the royal family and the government coming to these women for prayer:

*The majority of these [first Mothers' Union members] they pray. When they come for a meeting – nothing but prayer. They pray and they pray and they pray...they pray and they cry to the Lord. You know, every time I sat there and watched them, I said to myself, 'The Lord heard all the words these women are saying because they love prayer and they pray for the life, the work of the church, their family, intercessory prayer for the kingdoms, for the nations... I think that is the most important thing the Mothers' Union has done for us here in Tonga, because their way and their lifestyle is nothing but prayer... I think it has really built our little country, our little nation here in Tonga, these women, the Mothers' Union, through prayer. [Toeumu]*

Toeumu in particular spoke of the way that her experience in the Mothers' Union prepared her for the wider ministry that she now has as a priest in charge of a parish and in her leadership of an inter-denominational prayer group. She speaks particularly of running these things "in a form of a Mothers' Union way of life". This "way of life" seems to be characterized by faithful devotion and intercessory call: "*How the Mothers' Union pray for everything concerned with the life of the human being*" [Toeumu]. So the older women all speak without hesitation about the way that prayer was the central part of their call as Mothers' Union members. The younger women today also talk about inheriting this call to prayer but simultaneously articulate how that call to prayer begins with their own relationship with God and then extends further and further outwards to family, neighbours and the public life of Tonga. In these conversations there is a strong sense of the felt presence of God's Holy Spirit:

*What really touched my heart was prayer. The power of prayer. And it was so powerful. Powerful for the women of the church. Not only there but for our fellowship...you feel in the Spirit of the Lord. And fellowship is not only because we pray for our family, but brings us more alive for our friends, our neighbours. And we extend it...it brings us closer to God. And not only that, but it gives us a new vision that we see everybody as a sister. That's what I get from the Mothers' Union. [Tina]*

So the flowing of inter-personal relationships was inseparable from a relationship with God.

*These days when I go to church or meet with my sister or brother in Christ, I always admire them and what they experience in their life with God... Because I experience that in my life, what God has done in my life. And the only thing that she is talking about is love. When God fills you with real love of God you can't look at other people [the same]... I always asking God to make me, to teach me to have a good relationships with him. When I have a good relationships with God I have a good relationships with my family, with my sisters, with the church... You are not God but God works in you and in other people... I always want God's heart put in my heart to say something! [Lavinya]*

A number of the women chose to share very personal stories of their personal experiences of God in their times of prayer and our meeting times together were surrounded with extended periods of extemporaneous prayer. At times the women spoke of how it was not always easy for their expressions of spirituality to find a home within the wider Anglican Church services.

Inter-personal relationships could only be considered in the light of a relationship with God which, whilst personal, was very much considered to be exercised in a collective community and for the purpose of the collective community. This approach is similar to the tapa-weaving within their cultural traditions:

*In the Mothers' Union prayer is the main tool. And the relationships. It just applies to the making of tapa. You can't do tapa alone. You have to get some women to make the tapa, just like our prayer. Our prayer is very powerful when we have women in groups. [Amalia]*

An illustration of the primary concern of these relational connections can be seen in the unifying of the Mothers' Union and the AAW in Tonga. There was a desire for the groups to be one because that better reflected the relationships amongst the women. This occurs in a very pragmatic way within each parish and grouping. Whilst it wasn't always clear how institutionally these arrangements played out, they were considered less significant than the everyday relationships amongst the women. These relationships were, however, not exalted

as without difficulty, but were still seen as the most treasured part and gift of being a member of God's family:

*Everyone has a gift. It is like a big fruit salad. Some of the fruits you like, some you don't like to eat... But when you come together as a team it tastes beautiful! This is what we are doing in our group. We may have ups and downs, but at the end of the day we have God and God's love is in you. [Amelia]*

An important part of living out a new generation of Mothers' Union women was to distinguish between the norms of everyday culture in the lifestyle of the women and the theological motivations to be found and treasured within them:

*Sometimes when we look at the objectives [of the Mothers' Union] it is very normal. That is the normal way that a Tongan lady is brought up in our culture, is to value family and family values are very strong, they are our strongest ties. It has become rules. It has become religiously followed by us and we haven't really looked into the meaning of it. This is the essence of it, looking at the real theology that is there. [Grace]*

Our reflections together on the significance of relationships was seen as part of this task of seeking to discern the theological impetus within the life and work of a Mothers' Union.

Such a reflection was made by Ana who asked to share the following scripture to conclude our first group session:

*1 Corinthians 8 verse 1 to 3. Knowledge puffs up but love builds up. I think that is what we are talking about eh? The man who thinks he knows something does not know as he ought to know. But the man who loves God is known by God. [Ana]*

#### 4.3.3 A GARLAND OF PRAISE: A GIFT AND EXPRESSION OF A PUBLIC THEOLOGY

The women, particularly the older generation of women, saw their ministry as Mothers' Union members as a gift of service that would impact their wider community. There was much talk of the significance of the roles that the children and grandchildren of many of

these women have in today's public sphere. Many of the women also shared how the Mothers' Union had provided a platform for them to exercise a ministry within their wider communities both within Tonga and further afield. This significance also relates to the act of tapa-making, which whilst an act and skill traditionally associated with women gathering together, is indispensable for the ceremonial life of their wider community. The younger women, in particular, spoke of the way that women in Tonga have a very strong backbone to the life of the country.

Whilst together we reflected on the tapa-making as a symbol of the public theology for the women. After leaving them, however, I reflected further on the importance of the contextual use of the garland-making that is being used within Tonga. Bringing this together with the strong emphasis of joy and praise in the life of the women, I have come to see another expression of their work together as being that of offering those around them the gift of a garland of praise:

*Weaving has been how our mothers and our fore-mothers have taught us. It has been taught to us from one generation to another and that's how [we look for our contextual models]... The mat is where we sit down with our stories. And every weave represents a time of something in our lives. So I think those models have been used recently and researchers in the Pacific have moved to use it a lot more. [Grace]*

Grace shares how an educational model has been created based around the process of garland making:

*This is a research model but it has applications to how our women and how our mothers, how our relationships are like in Tonga in our culture. Because if you are going to create a garland, she has to identify who will be the guest of honour, who it is supposed to be for, for what type of garland you are going to make. And there are processes. The women go and carefully pick the right flowers and leaves that she is going to sew for that garland. And at the same time when she has picked it she will come and sit down and just like planning and doing your analysis and everything... So [scholars] add two more concepts to it, which really defines how Tongan women relate to each other, even how Tongans relate to others... You finish the garland, you*

*have to give it away to the person the garland is intended for. We need scholarly recognition of that presentation. [Grace]*

Grace speaks knowing that the presentation of the garland and the process of making the garland have been a 'fitting' job by the praise which the garland solicits, which is seen in the life of the community around its presentation:

*If the job is well done then we are actually applying the smell of the garland, the garland actually fits the purpose, so we decide to praise the garland. Did it really fit the purpose? In our Tongan ways if something fits, like when we are here you will hear us laughing and clapping and songs will pour out from us! [Grace]*

These reflections from Grace sit alongside other expressions from the women which articulated similar 'outpourings' of joy and praise when the relational work of their community was 'fitting' well. From speaking of the need to celebrate the gift of each person and the gift of family, comes the symbolism of identifying that each person is a guest of honour to another's life. It is appropriate, therefore, to take the preparation time to build and honour relationships fitting for this gift of companionship. The knowledge that the relational dynamics of a community are fitting well is seen by the joy that is evident amongst the women:

*This kind of gathering [amongst the women] is very powerful. It is for us... This is good, we have fun and we enjoy it and we know the Spirit, the Spirit is always in our midst. [Ana]*

*I like [our group leader] because she is always talking and she's always trying to motivate us to get up and go and do something and she makes us laugh. Laughing a lot makes us ease up the work you know? It makes the work easier... And what I have found that being here with her it's not like a burden, but it's a joy to serve! [Ana]*

The women use this marker of praise to analyse their own community, concluding that the older women "must be doing something right because they draw us into it" [Grace]:

*If it suits the purpose it will attract the right audience to it. Along with other things it talks about when we have that feeling of appreciation and being appreciated we*

*know that you have the right context the right people to relate to. And it will also bring out that right feeling that I share with each other. It bubbles in our hearts...you start reaching out. [Grace]*

As a symbol of a public theology of relationships within the Mothers' Union in Tonga, the garland of praise speaks of honouring the potential gifts within all spheres of relationships. The gift of praise and joy is an out flowing from appreciating the gift each person has the potential to be to another. The challenge is therefore to create a context in which those gifts can be appreciated. The garland of praise is the celebration of that inter-personal responsibility rather than a burden of responsibility. As the garland is made of greenery and flowers, I intuit that the garland of praise is made of prayer and fellowship. As the garland is worn over the head and heart, it speaks of embodying the love of God for self and neighbour.

#### 4.4 BANQUETS OF JOY AMONG PRODIGAL FAMILIES

Each of these three communities of reflection share strong similarities in articulating relational approaches to God and wider community practices. Yet each is also strongly distinctive of its own context.

In common is an emphasis that relationships with God are inseparable from relationships with people. It is through other people that one learns more of God and through God that one learns more of other people. Personal relationships are an important part of spiritual journeys and spiritual journeys are implicitly relationship journeys with the world and the people with whom one lives.

The themes, language and images through which these relationship reflections are expressed are unique to the cultural contexts of each. Whilst the reflections are widespread and necessarily curtailed here, in regard to the depth and breadth of broader analysis, three distinct images have emerged, one from each. Within Tikanga Pakeha is the creation of a new family characterised by peace and belonging, indicative of the healing restorative process of relationships embodied within Christian theology. This is a family which is open in hospitality to God's call to extend the self. Within Tikanga Maori is the image of the banqueting table, a place where we prepare the best in ourselves to be ready to offer hospitality to others; a banquet in which the traditions of forebears are upheld and yet others are invited without requiring them to be anything other than themselves. Within Tikanga Pacifica is the image of the garland of praise, a gift to honour the other as a guest in our lives; a mantle of joy in the right-fitting of relationships that flow with the intimacy of God's Holy Spirit.

Together these images speak of banquets of joy and honour amongst prodigal families. These are important images, collectively and individually, to speak back to contemporary public theologies. Importantly, each of these images speaks both to and from the public square. And in their speaking they challenge prior assumptions defining that which is public and that which is private. These are collectively-identified central threads which can be woven together to express a public theology of relationships from the women of the Mothers' Union in Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia.

## CHAPTER 5:

### TOWARDS A PUBLIC THEOLOGY OF RELATIONSHIPS

#### 5.1 INTRODUCTION: RESPONDING TO THE INVITATION INTO STRATEGIC THEO- POLITICAL PRAXIS WITHIN PUBLIC THEOLOGY

The relational metaphors articulated within the Mothers' Union in the Anglican Church of Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia are poignant within a number of different debates within public theology. There is an important work for those central threads of relational metaphor to be further woven and reflected upon, within the communities from where they have come. That process would appropriately fit within the demands of a theological reflection by the people of God for the people of God. It has not been possible for that work to take place within the constraints of this thesis. What I therefore wish to do is to explore the resonance of the central threads within our theological reflections to the broader debates within public theology and consider how our reflections might further shape public theology discourse. This exploration is therefore characterised by my partiality. The interweaving of our reflections with broader contemporary debates is therefore driven by my creativity, but explicitly recognising the partial possibilities expressed in this interweaving which our collective reflections may inform and ultimately expand.

This chapter therefore begins by re-situating aspects of the contemporary debates within public theology in light of the contextual expressions shared by Mothers' Union members. In particular, I wish to discern the way that these expressions may inform the developments of feminist public theologies alongside the call for the "peripheral" re-location of public theology.<sup>215</sup> Central to these debates is, firstly, the re-negotiation of what is and is not 'public', which incorporates the creative tension between conceptualisations of centrality and marginality in academic theological discourse. And secondly, and in direct conversation with that creative tension, the type of engagement privileged within the public square.

The discussions in this chapter will consider the possibility that there may be "gifts" within the theological reflections by Mothers' Union members of a relational public theology, which, following the consideration of the possibility of gifts articulated by Marion Maddox, may be potentially offered to the wider 'public'.<sup>216</sup> This consideration will include the possible framing of the loving person, as distinct from the rational subject (critiqued in the work of Rosemary Carbine<sup>217</sup>), as a subject of public polity and theology. This framing of the loving person will be approached in the light of an Irigarayan poetics and politics of love and contextual theologies of relationality and love from Aotearoa and the Pacific context. Through this analysis the potential gift of love is considered as a theologically rigorous category to contribute within the public square. This chapter therefore concludes with a discussion around a public theology of love (and a loving public theology) as a contribution to both the marginal re-location of public theology and the manner of public theological engagement.

---

<sup>215</sup> Aguilar, "Public Theology from the Periphery: Victims and Theologians."

<sup>216</sup> Marion Maddox, "Religion, Secularism and the Promise of Public Theology," *International Journal of Public Theology*, no. 1 (2007).

<sup>217</sup> Carbine, "Ekklesial Work: Towards a Feminist Public Theology."

Before entering into the nuances of those debates, it is important to reconsider the significance of the strategic call to the periphery within public theology. Public theologies have been challenged to be astutely aware of their socio-political realities. In particular they have been challenged explicitly to speak from rather than to the margins.<sup>218</sup> These are challenges to the relational framing in which public theology takes place and implicit in appreciating the socio-political context of theological production. In part, this is a challenge not to forget the long-standing theo-political praxis of feminist, contextual and liberation theologies in the discipline's more recently invigorated concern with the public sphere. The emphasis within that theo-political praxis, as I perceive it, is to generate theological and political possibilities for communities and identity positions, whose self-actualisation has been frustrated by past and present socio-cultural and political economic realities. Such realities, it can be argued, result in limited access to the means of theological production. If part of the potential responsibility for public theology is to challenge those realities, there is simultaneously the possibility of re-creating those unjust realities into more mutually life-affirming *collective* possibilities.

There are, therefore, two potentially important implications from the theological reflections amongst the Mothers' Union members in this research, to weave for these debates. The first is the continued weaving of feminist public theologies. The second is the significance of articulating public theologies from this post-colonial and Pacific context.

---

<sup>218</sup> Aguilar, "Public Theology from the Periphery: Victims and Theologians."; Althaus-Reid, "In The Centre there are no fragments: *Teologias Desencajadas* (Reflections from Unfitting Theologies)."

## 5.2 INFORMING FEMINIST PUBLIC THEOLOGIES: THE POTENTIAL GIFT OF RELATIONALITY

There are three specific aspects of the theological reflections that I wish to expand further, in order to articulate the significance that they might have for the ongoing development of feminist public theologies. The first is the centrality of relationships and relationality amongst the research participants in cultivating both Christian identity and social transformation. The second is the gendered reality of those relationships. The third is the manner in which these theological reflections contribute to the desired poetics for feminist public theologies.<sup>219</sup>

### 5.2.1 RELATIONSHIPS WHICH CONSTITUTE THEO-POLITICAL PRAXIS

In reflecting upon the centrality of relationships illustrated in this research (particularly human relationships approached as inseparable from divine relationship), one of the Tikanga Pakeha group members commented: *It may seem kind-of obvious, but then women haven't been the ones writing theology for the past 2000 years!*

The relational emphasis was affirmed and elaborated amongst all of the Tikanga. Its significance is most visible when seen in the light of the feminist critique which Rosemary Carbine brings to the dominance of the rational subject of 'mainstream' public theology, as perceived within the United States.<sup>220</sup> Rosemary Carbine makes a distinction between a public theology concerned to create consensus, with a public theology of solidarity

---

<sup>219</sup> Walton, "You Have To Say You Cannot Speak: Feminist Reflections Upon Public Theology."

<sup>220</sup> Carbine, "Ekklesial Work: Towards a Feminist Public Theology."

concerned with social change. The latter, she asserts, is more in keeping with the history and project of feminist theologies. A public theology of solidarity does not valorize the rational power-free subject of public polity from which the female subject position has been historically excluded. At the heart of her critique is an attention to the “theological anthropology (i.e. its theological understanding of the human person-in-political community)”.<sup>221</sup> Earlier on in this thesis, I suggested the strategic counter-position between the rational-subject and the loving-person. This is a counter-position worth exploring further, in light of the theological reflections now shared: *My call at the Mothers’ Union is ‘can we please look after ourselves and our neighbours? Can we value each other? And can we have some fun’... [Hine]*

A relational emphasis is implicit in the World Wide Mothers’ Union vision and identity. Yet, it does not automatically carry over that such an emphasis will necessarily play an implicit part in the lives of its members. The methodological framing of this research, however, which invited participants to share their relationships stories, will have had an inevitable influence upon the emphasis within the theological reflections shared. Even taking this into account, the consistency with which divine and human relationships were relationally appreciated is important to consider.

It is important to labour this point a little further. It would have been possible to approach this research’s exploration of a public theology within the work of the Mothers’ Union by, for example, employing a different analytical emphasis on the more explicitly project-driven aspects of social transformation (such as the Buy Buy Childhood campaign of which Hine is a member). However, to do so would have been to assume that the primary relational

---

<sup>221</sup> Ibid., 437.

intentions or interactions encapsulated in the Mothers' Union's world-wide vision<sup>222</sup> needed no explicit analysis. This would have been to assume that a relational vision could have been taken unilaterally for granted. In such an assumption it would be of more pressing concern to consider the more *explicit* and *specific* manner of public theological engagement in the more identifiably-political incarnations of that vision, within this particular contextual specificity. My point is that whilst, at first glance, there may appear to be a self-evident and normative assumption that relationships are important and that those relationships should be loving, respectful and mutually flourishing, such an assumption betrays the depth and variety that lies beneath. That assumption also betrays recognition of the theo-political significance that a focus on relationality generates, for particular subject positions and socio-cultural realities. Relationality is not a neutral category. Whilst all three Tikanga illustrated the relational centrality in their self-perception as Mothers' Union members, the manner of that relational construction was varied and distinct to each Tikanga. This cultural distinctness is significant and visible through this research.

### 5.2.2 RELATIONSHIPS AS A GENDERED REALITY

It is with the significance of relational centrality in mind, that I wish to return to the importance of Rosemary Carbine's work in the development of feminist public theologies.<sup>223</sup> It could be argued that prior to the creation of either communities of consensus or bonds of solidarity, is an area of, potentially assumed, relational exchange that warrants the space of further analytical attention. In the potential counter-position of the loving person to the

---

<sup>222</sup> To see a world where God's love is shown through loving, respectful and flourishing relationships.

<sup>223</sup> Carbine, "Ekklesial Work: Towards a Feminist Public Theology."

rational power-free subject, is the demands of analytical concern for the manner and passion of love. This counter-position may prove to be unhelpful for many reasons, but one reason that may be helpful at this particular juncture, is to illustrate an absence of attention to the intimate building blocks of social interaction. The distinctiveness with which what is loving, respectful and mutually flourishing has been articulated by the various research participants, is significant.

For example, a public theology from this particular context speaks of relationality in terms of re-orientated European Pakeha identity in relation with a Maori spiritual framing of *aroha*, *tika*, *pono*, *mana* and a Pacific expression of theological and cultural re-interpretation:

*Sometimes when we look at the objectives [of the Mothers' Union] it is very normal. That is the normal way that a Tongan lady is brought up in our culture, is to value family and family values, they are our strongest ties... It has become religiously followed by us and we haven't really looked into the meaning of it. This is the essence of it, looking at the real theology that is there. [Grace]*

One subtle, yet clear, aspect of this relational specificity is the manner in which the different Tikanga members related to their forebears within the Mothers' Union. The articulations of belonging, trust and confidence in their forebears, spoken particularly by Tikanga Maori participants, expressed a different relational manner to that within Tikanga Pakeha. This difference was clear, even though there was a similar sense of significance shared by participants in the inter-generational character of the organisation.

As I, myself, embody a European ancestry and write within a theological community most strongly shaped by that same ancestry, the resonance of Aguilar's<sup>224</sup> and Althaus-Reid's<sup>225</sup> call to a theology of fragments and a theology from the margins resonates strongly. Through

---

<sup>224</sup> Aguilar, "Public Theology from the Periphery: Victims and Theologians."

<sup>225</sup> Althaus-Reid, "In The Centre there are no fragments: *Teologias Desencajadas* (Reflections from Unfitting Theologies)."

the expressions of the other Tikanga, I discern better the distinctive of my own Tikanga. Accordingly, cultural preferences and ways of being within a European theological lineage become increasingly visible when alternative ways of being, or more specifically, ways of embodying public theology, are expressed. This process is akin to that intimate dynamic of relationality expressed by Luce Irigaray and the inter-subjective demands of a relational approach to research:

The other asks me to interrupt the composition of my own weaving of time and space, not in order to go from a subjective to an objective perspective – as is the case in a scientific approach – but to be capable of meeting another subjectivity.<sup>226</sup>

Therefore, whilst this research may illustrate cultural distinction in approaching relationality, it is impossible for me to say whether or not the expressions within this thesis convey an appreciation of a potentially *gendered* distinction, in the prioritizing of philosophic and theological construction. Such an assertion would be without empirical validation in this research. Yet the gendered significance, in a search for a more relationally astute public theology, is perhaps an underlying question that is constantly explored throughout this work. It is part of searching towards a ‘becoming’, to use the phrasing of Luce Irigaray, of which she speaks with a particular concern for becoming woman, but also for a ‘becoming’ in our collective actualization of humanity:

It is to a more interior undertaking that the human is invited here, to a work of becoming that can be evaluated according to the blossoming of the Being of the self, of the other, of the world where they dwell.<sup>227</sup>

---

<sup>226</sup> Irigaray, *Sharing the World*, 86-7.

<sup>227</sup> Irigaray, *The Way of Love*, 147.

To specify, the particular path of 'becoming' underlying the discussion in this thesis, is the possibility of relationality being of theological and socio-political currency in the public square. Within this 'becoming' it is recognised that there has been a socio-historical construction of female gender identity which has a relational privilege, as distinct from a rational prioritisation. An illustration of this relational identity is seen in the linguistic work of Luce Irigaray which explores and demonstrates a pre-disposition to subject-object language articulation for males and a predisposition for subject-subject language construction for females.<sup>228</sup> However, to enter into this complexity of gender construction and identity, is to enter into the impossibility that Penelope Deutscher perceives within Luce Irigaray's work.<sup>229</sup> Part of that impossibility may well be a critiqued essentialism or reductionism, but also relates to the impossibility of reclaiming something which has an assumed normative state. Specifically, that love is self explanatory and that relationships are not necessarily the recognised economic currency of the public square. More specifically still, that the reclamation of relationality (or to become more relationally-aware) has a distinctly gendered significance.<sup>230</sup>

To speak of love, is also a potential move towards the speaking with love. This speaking is perhaps part of the poetical searching that feminist public theologians articulate a struggle to satisfy.<sup>231</sup>

---

<sup>228</sup> Irigaray, *Key Writings*. See particularly the section of this work regarding linguistics.

<sup>229</sup> Deutscher, *A Politics of Impossible Difference. The later work of Luce Irigaray*.

<sup>230</sup> Albeit a significance which has a complexity and historicity that is beyond the scope of this thesis to explore or articulate satisfactorily.

<sup>231</sup> Walton, "You Have To Say You Cannot Speak: Feminist Reflections Upon Public Theology."

### 5.2.3 A POETICS AND A POLITICS OF LOVE

It may be too reductionist to assert that what has become more visible through these contextual theological reflections can be understood as manners of understanding and approaching love. Yet this is a love which is expressed with political vigor and with poetical vitality. This vitality is expressed through song and prayer, through rich metaphor and visual language. It is also a poetics, conscious that it doesn't always find a place of self-expression in either the theological or public communities in which it lives:

*What we have to realise is that we don't know what that person has gone through so they should be able to praise the Lord. They've gone through the heart-ache and they want to be able to just lift the hand and say, 'praise the Lord'. We don't realise that! We don't know the hell she's been going through, the prodigal daughter, we don't even know. She was jumping like David and praising God. [Grace]*

*We are always praising, and I look at their faces and I think I shock them, but I always say we are praising the Lord. I just felt sorry about it. [Amalia]*

*It makes you free. You have witness when you say, 'Praise the Lord' and you feel free and you feel happy to shout. [Lavinya]*

*But I always think while looking through, say the boundaries, barriers that we knock down, there are also things that people bring to the fore that while women have these strengths there are some things that in the cultural contexts are more admired than others: and I put it this way, in the Maori and Polynesian way – for Maori I know – thinking orally and laterally, on the spot – and you've gotta sort of go back and look like this, backwards and forwards, so that you make that response, and for us that is very important. But the Pakeha likes the written word. [Hine]*

*Yes and it's really about love isn't it. If we are open in love then we are receptive to and not fearful, you know, love casts out all fear, and in relationships there can be a lot of fear and nervousness. [Perdita]*

These poetic expressions of vocality are self-conscious fragments, articulating a momentum towards a way of being that doesn't always fit easily within the surrounding world.

There are also, both, strongly poetic and political elements to the three central threads and metaphors for a public theology from the Mothers' Union in this context. As I now turn to explore the possibilities of those metaphors for public theology in more detail, I do so with a particular question in mind with regard to public theology. That question is, whether the category of 'love' might have the potential to be a distinctive contribution that theology can make within the public square, in the same manner that Marion Maddox considers the theology of apology.<sup>232</sup> The framing of that consideration, in Marion Maddox's work, pays particular attention to the need for a gift to clearly not be a 'Trojan horse' for asserting a theocracy or spiritual supremacy and yet however, to offer a contribution to the public square that has a theological rigor and pedigree, "whose philosophical and theological foundations are available for scrutiny and debate".<sup>233</sup> A scrutiny, Marion Maddox asserts, that takes place both inside and outside theological communities. It should also be a gift, which in its best sense, is one which is needed. Maddox herself points to that need in the strains evident in secular public life to "contain" or "make sense" of the deep trauma experienced in the human condition.<sup>234</sup> Whilst Marion Maddox identifies that the phenomenon of apology is born out of a theological endeavor, there is a possibility that the concept of love, despite its conceptual centrality in theology, may simply be far too large and amorphous to be considered in this light. Yet it might also have the potential to speak, as Heather Walton<sup>235</sup> conveys the difficulty of doing, with both a poetics and politics befitting a feminist contribution within public theology.

---

<sup>232</sup> Maddox, "Religion, Secularism and the Promise of Public Theology."

<sup>233</sup> *Ibid.*, 99.

<sup>234</sup> *Ibid.*, 99.

<sup>235</sup> Walton, "You Have To Say You Cannot Speak: Feminist Reflections Upon Public Theology."

## 5.3 INFORMING CONTEXTUAL EXPRESSIONS OF PUBLIC THEOLOGY: A BANQUET IN THE PUBLIC SQUARE

To explore the three distinct, yet complimentary metaphors for a public theology outlined in the previous chapter (the banqueting table, the family in many forms and the garland of praise), is to ask: what is it about love that is being articulated through the human and divine relationships expressed within these metaphors? The language which we used to explain these metaphors amongst each other was that the metaphors both recalled our best relational wisdom and called us to our best relational wisdom. They therefore have a dynamic vitality as they are encountered in the different traditions from which they have emerged. Whilst that vitality begs further exploration within and amongst those communities themselves, in the written context of this thesis I want to identify possibilities for their expansion within the contextual theologies and public theologies, with which they are resonant.

### 5.3.1 THE BANQUETING TABLE

There are three aspects of this metaphor from within Tikanga Maori that I particularly want to explore: “*the sharing of kai [food]... as a form of communication*” [Joyce-Ann] in the context of a Eucharist community; The preparation of “*waiting for you*” [Hine] in the context of Treaty partnerships in Aotearoa New Zealand; The “*laid out manakitanga*” [Hine] as a gift within the public square.

### 5.3.1.1 The Sharing of Kai

*[A]s people we cement [the church ritual of the wedding ceremony] through the sharing of kai at the reception...that allows you to come together...the whole eating and the whole gathering is another form of communication and relationships only survive on communication. [Joyce-Ann]*

The image of the banqueting table is particularly poignant within the strong Eucharistic tradition of the Anglican community, a poignancy Hine and I often reflected upon together. The Eucharistic meal is an embodying of a divine and human relationship, augmented in the life of Christ. The imagery of the great wedding banquet in the book of Revelation is the consummation of the relationship between Christ and the Church, which the current Eucharistic practice in some ways foreshadows. The Maori theologian Moeawa Callaghan speaks of the way that “Jesus crossed cultural boundaries” in the way “he embodied and concretized the abstract notions of love, freedom and justice”.<sup>236</sup> The banqueting table, whilst having particular cultural resonance and specificities, is not restricted by them. It is also a place which promises specific cultural redemption, in being a place where injustice and oppression are openly acknowledged in the scroll of human history. This is because that scroll can be fully encountered by the lamb that was slain.<sup>237</sup> This is a banquet, therefore, which communicates, to use the phrasing of Jenny Plane Te Paa, “the language of outrage at any and all injustice” with “the language of forgiveness and the grace of reconciliation”.<sup>238</sup>

---

<sup>236</sup> Moeawa Callaghan, "Look to the past to see the future," *First Peoples Theology Journal* 4, no. 1 (2006): 107.

<sup>237</sup> To speak with reference to the imagery given in the Book of Revelation in chapter five.

<sup>238</sup> Jenny Plane Te Paa, "Listening to the Spirit - Preparing the Way..." *First Peoples Theology Journal* 4, no. 1 (2006): 67.

### 5.3.1.2 *I'm Waiting*

*The banquet table is that strong image that I've been waiting for you. I'm waiting.*

[Hine]

The preparation and waiting within the metaphor of the banqueting table, can speak to a preparation from the divine to humanity, as well as amongst humanity.<sup>239</sup> The banquet

imagery is used in the book of Revelation as an imagery of fulfillment. The Eucharistic banqueting table is a table which, whilst speaking of fulfillment, is also a place of waiting.

The Eucharistic liturgies echo the longing: 'Come Lord Jesus Come'. It is a place of currently-experienced brokenness and redemption. The banquet table as a place of preparation communicates the relational responsibility to actively participate in redemptive longing.

The image has a particular resonance in the cultural specificity of Aotearoa New Zealand. Tui Cadogan articulates the need for the restoration of the wairua (spirituality) of mana wahine (Maori women), particularly in light of the dominant dichotomies of a secular New Zealand culture, in which spirituality has a very different understanding than within traditional Maori tikanga.<sup>240</sup> Moeawa Callaghan speaks of the way the Anglican Church in Aotearoa New Zealand and Polynesia has embodied the sacred covenant of the Treaty of Waitangi and specifically argues that any theology in Aotearoa New Zealand must base itself on the

---

<sup>239</sup> In hearing about the image of the banqueting table, Rosemary reflected on her knowledge of the very large banqueting table that had belonged to the meeting house at Parikaha and the significance of Parikaha as a place of peaceful resistance to oppression.

<sup>240</sup> Tui Cadogan, "Recovering Spirituality: The Story of Wahine Maori," in *He Kupu Whakawarua. Spirituality in Aotearoa New Zealand: Catholic Voices*, ed. Helen Bergin and Susan Smith (Auckland: Accent Publications, 2002).

experience of colonisation and the 1840 Treaty of Waitangi.<sup>241</sup> These theologians speak of examples of active participation in redemptive longing.

### 5.3.1.3 Laid out Manakitanga

The banqueting table speaks of an interaction which is explicitly relational, a relationship and communication between a host and a guest. This imagery is pertinent to the relational framing of Maori and Pakeha relationships.<sup>242</sup> There are relationships which require a language of both outrage at injustice, but also reconciliation and grace.<sup>243</sup> An important aspect of preparation, expressed by Joyce-Ann and Hine, is that preparation takes place both on the part of the host and the guest:

*"I come to the Mothers' Union table as an open vessel to welcome their dialogue, to welcome their journeys and to sail with them in their direction, but a lot of that is because my vessel has been filled, my cup has been filled". [Joyce-Ann]*

*"A lot of those things in the manakitanga is in the preparation, you know, when you are setting up your banquet before the guests come. That's your mana, that's your laid out manakitanga". [Hine]*

This mutuality of preparation takes place in the wider context of understanding that the banquet is the *"platter of the Lord's work"* [Hine].

---

<sup>241</sup> Callaghan, "Look to the past to see the future."

<sup>242</sup> The depth of this pertinence is not something I wish to do injustice to with brief and unsubstantiated reflections. Maori and Pakeha relationships are an area of considerable academic analysis as well as broader social comment. I merely wish to indicate the potential significance that this imagery might have, rather than to explicate that significance here.

<sup>243</sup> To speak in relation to the words of Plane Te Paa, "Listening to the Spirit - Preparing the Way...". *First Peoples Theology Journal* 4, no. 1 (2006): 67.

In reflecting on the possible preparations being asked of the church, Jenny Plane Te Paa speaks passionately about the possibility of indigenous cultural treasures being shared for the wider social good, in order to “contribute to the creation of better global societies”.<sup>244</sup> Jenny Plane Te Paa is understandably cautious in this encouragement, because of the way that such knowledges have previously been exploited. Yet she urges her fellow indigenous people to “[find] within ourselves more of the spirit of mutuality and interdependence which God requires of us all!”<sup>245</sup> This is an encouragement towards a manakitanga in offering the platter of the Lord’s work amongst all who are guests at the banqueting table. The offering of such gifts is particularly significant for women in the context of Aotearoa, as Tui Cadogan explicitly writes:

*“When wahine are able to access culturally appropriate spirituality, they will be uplifted and their mana restored. Only then, will the appalling statistics of violence, chronic health concerns and deprivation begin a downward trend”.*<sup>246</sup>

The context of the public square in Aotearoa New Zealand is an extremely challenging one for all aspects of well-being, particularly cross-cultural relational well-being. Yet to hold a banqueting table in the midst of this public square, in a way which honours the wahine maori from which this particular image comes, in the context of the broader theological significance that it has, is to courageously offer a gift. This gift-giving is akin to the urging given by Plane Te Paa to share cultural treasures: “in God’s name with courage and with vision...to expand the vision of our compassion and mercy far beyond ourselves.”<sup>247</sup>

---

<sup>244</sup> Ibid., 69.

<sup>245</sup> Ibid., 70.

<sup>246</sup> Cadogan, "Recovering Spirituality: The Story of Wahine Maori," 153.

<sup>247</sup> Plane Te Paa, "Listening to the Spirit - Preparing the Way...", 73.

### 5.3.2 A FAMILY IN MANY FORMS

The particular aspects within this metaphor from Tikanga Pakeha that I will explore are the process of discerning relationships with God in the midst of socially-determined personal relationships, encapsulated by the phrase: *“her kitchen looked right into mine”* [Perdita]. Secondly, the healing aspect of relationships identified and their particular poignancy in the Pakeha context illustrated in the reflection: *“we are to be on a journey of forgiveness”* [Jenny]. Thirdly, recognizing the spiritual movement of family-making amongst the community of Christ, in this particular context of bi-cultural covenant and multi-cultural reality, seen in the phrase: *“as we figure out who we are”* [Jenny].

#### 5.3.2.1 Her Kitchen Looked right into Mine

*Her kitchen looked right into mine* [Perdita]

A potentially important part of a feminist public theology is discerning the socio-political and cultural public structures that inform and influence the reality of personal relationships. As the reflections within Tikanga Pakeha illustrated, relationships with the Christian God were, and are, strongly informed by personal relationships. If those personal relationships are, in turn, strongly informed by wider socio-political forces, there is a strong need for theological engagement in that wider public setting. This is true amongst all the Tikanga reflections, but I highlight it here because of the explicit way that the research participants recognised how the relational dynamics within their lives had been dramatically altered by

changing wider social dynamics and how, consequently, those dynamics had influenced their relationships with God.

An example of the wider social influences informing our personal relationships can be seen in Jenny's self-perception as being, "as bad as an axe murderer", in becoming pregnant outside of marriage. This experience is dramatically contrasted, a generation later, with her very frank conversations about women's bodies with her grown son. Such dramatic shifts in generational time-frame require considerable discernment to renegotiate the often-implicit assumptions, regarding normative aspects of the character of God. Ann Gilroy, in exploring Catholic Pakeha women's spirituality, speaks of the search for a "spirituality that integrates women's lives and relationships".<sup>248</sup> This search must, therefore, be one which can integrate the private and the public, albeit amongst the variety of ways private and public might come to be defined. Such a search must also, therefore, extend the feminist contribution to such a definition of the public. Marion Maddox identifies the feminist contribution to the distinction which is made between the private world of the body and home to public life.<sup>249</sup> She is concerned that an emphasis on personal relationships might further entrench "excessive preoccupation with matters of private, mainly sexual morality".<sup>250</sup> The emphasis on personal relationships in this research does not contribute to that pathway. Rather, it is to break down a false dichotomy of two separate worlds, one private and one public, by illustrating their implicit co-creation.

---

<sup>248</sup> Ann Gilroy, "Around Cups of Tea and Cofee: Pakeka Women's Spirituality," in *He Kupu Whakawairua. Spirituality in Aotearoa New Zealand: Catholic Voices*, ed. Helen Bergin and Susan Smith (Auckland: Accent Publications, 2002), 159.

<sup>249</sup> Maddox, "Religion, Secularism and the Promise of Public Theology."

<sup>250</sup> *Ibid.*, 92.

A focus on the significance of the public world, implicit within inter-personal relationships, is a potential form of public theological transformation. This is particularly pertinent given currently-experienced social shifts within the relational framing of society, as perceived by research participants. Geraldine observes that funders are recognizing the longevity and robustness of projects in which the building blocks are relationally driven. Jenny perceives that relationships are the “*hidden economy*” driving public life and attributed little quantifiable value. Such perceptions fit within feminism’s long history of illustrating the effects of public life on the embodied gendered reality of human relationships.<sup>251</sup> This is an important contribution for feminist public theologies to continue to make. Such a contribution is perhaps indicative of women’s greater participation in public life. However, it is vital to caution that such a contribution is not made by women, because there is an essentialist domain of relationships to which women must belong, but that that domain should not be restricted to a formerly-conceived private world of which women were considered the main caretakers. Instead, the “treasures” of that world, as well as the troubles, should be shared, in the similar spirit to that articulated for Indigenous cultures, by Jenny Plane Te Paa<sup>252</sup> for the potential wellbeing of the wider public. One of the important ways in which that renewed direction takes place is in the recognition of the healing potential that relationships ultimately have the possibility and power to contain.

---

<sup>251</sup> It is for this reason that I have chosen the quote from Perdita, “her kitchen looked right into mine”, because it speaks so strongly of the gendered experience of public and private spaces: the kitchen as the domain of the woman’s world in the era from which the story came and the relational significance of how that world shaped the personal relationships of the women who met within it.

<sup>252</sup> Plane Te Paa, “Listening to the Spirit - Preparing the Way...”.

### 5.3.2.2 *Building Friendships is about Healing*

“Building friendships is about healing” [Jenny]

Asserting the significance of relationships as part of a feminist expression of public theology is not *necessarily* to maintain a definition that women are essentially more relational. This point needs to be carefully considered in relation to the challenges of essentialism which are directed towards Luce Irigaray’s work in comparison, for example, to the performative understanding of gender construction expressed in the work of Judith Butler.<sup>253</sup> Ann Gilroy, in describing Pakeha women’s spirituality, strongly emphasises “their proximity and interrelationships with others” and their creative tension in maintaining “individuality” and “commitment to building right relationship among family, community and through the world”.<sup>254</sup> My concern is not so much to illustrate this creative tension for the lives of women, as to call forward the public sphere to enter into a deeper appreciation of the significance of the political and personal consequences of these inter-relationships. This is a call which, whilst potentially feminist in its genesis, is not gendered in the response it seeks to instigate. The creative tension between individualism and relationship-building is a creative tension that should be experienced by all members of the public, irrespective of their gendered identity.

---

<sup>253</sup> Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York / London: Routledge, 1990).

<sup>254</sup> Gilroy, "Around Cups of Tea and Coffee: Pakeha Women's Spirituality," 164-5.

### 5.3.2.3 As we Figure out who we are

A significant aspect of this call to relationship-building, in this particular context, is the relational public space between Maori and Pakeha. Whilst an appreciation of the Three Tikanga structure of both the Anglican Church and the Mothers' Union in this province was expressed amongst Tikanga Pakeha members, the depth of that significance and influence in personal relationships was markedly different from the embodied personal lives experienced within Tikanga Moari members. There are wide-spread conversations regarding the need to understand Pakeha cultural identity, which are expressed in academic and popular writing<sup>255</sup> and also by these group members:

*"That's really important to me and that Maori and Pacific and Pakeha, as we work out some kind of life together and we work out who we are as Pakeha, we realize that we are not the same as the other two and that diversity is so real within Mothers' Union". [Jenny]*

There is, potentially, a political imperative for a feminist public theology from this context to speak loudly about the significance of more relationally-conceptualised activity within the public square. This imperative comes from an appreciation and recognition of the more relationally-constructed theologies embodied by our covenant partners in Tikanga Maori and Tikanga Pacifica, with whose communities and neighbours we share the public square. This is perhaps both part of the "outcry for injustice" and "grace of reconciliation"<sup>256</sup> for our sisters and brothers, whose more relationally-conceptualised Tikanga continues to be asked

---

<sup>255</sup> The, perhaps, most widely known example being the writing of Michael King. See, for example, *Being Pakeha Now: reflections and recollections of a white native* (Auckland: Penguin Books, 1999).

<sup>256</sup> Plane Te Paa, "Listening to the Spirit - Preparing the Way...", 69.

to fit within a public realm in which relationality has been predominantly restricted to a gendered private realm. Further more, pakeha identify is all too often considered in relation to itself, irrespective of the relational context with Maori from which that pakeha identity is ultimately derived.<sup>257</sup> This is perhaps another example of being as ‘I’ and not ‘we’, about which Luce Irigaray critiques Western philosophy.<sup>258</sup> As Callahan challenges, any theology from the context of Aotearoa New Zealand must take as its base the 1840 Treaty of Waitangi. And, I would add, any theology emergent from the Anglican Church of Aotearoa New Zealand and Polynesia must be similarly cognisant of the relational Gospel imperatives that were discerned in that Treaty and consequently sought to be reflected in the Te Pouhere Constitution. A relational public theology from the Mothers’ Union in this church must therefore be strongly tied to these relational covenants. These covenants are inspired by the Gospel promises of relational well-being, with the potential to offer a place of belonging and peace for a family in many forms.

### 5.3.3 A GARLAND OF PRAISE

The three aspects of this metaphor within Tikanga Pacifica that I have chosen to expand are: a right-fitting measure of relational well-being depicted by the phrase, *“In our Tongan ways if something fits...songs will pour out from us”* [Grace]; the unbroken weaving of spirituality amongst everyday life depicted by the phrase *“they love prayer and pray for life”* [Toumu]; the freedom to speak with the language of love expressed in, *“the richness of love in life”*.

---

<sup>257</sup> It is significant to note that Ann Gilroy’s exploration of Pakeha spirituality does not contain any reference to relationships with Maori.

<sup>258</sup> Irigaray, *The Way of Love*, 98.

### 5.3.3.1 Songs will pour out from us

*In our Tongan ways, if something fits...the songs will pour out from us. [Grace]*

Grace referred to the contextual framing of garland-making as an appropriate measure of right-fitting relationships in their Tongan culture. She shared with me the research manual in which this framing is elaborated and from which she drew this imagery. Within the manual a number of key aspects of a Tongan research ethic are outlined: *Fe'ofa'aki*, mutual love, caring and generosity; *Faka'apa'apa*, respect; *Feveitokai'aki*, reciprocity, co-operation, consensus and maintenance of good relationships; *Lototo*, humility and generosity; *Fetokoni'aki*, sharing, fulfillment of mutual obligations.<sup>259</sup> The emphasis in this contextual articulation of research relationships, and in Grace's words, speaks of the consequences of cultivating good relationships. They demonstrate the external and internal preparations and attitudes required for the work of relationships.<sup>260</sup> Grace equates the fulfillment of those relationships with the outpouring of songs. This is a rich imagery in Christian tradition and scripture, in which songs of praise play a pivotal role.<sup>261</sup>

Although we have framed the metaphor in terms of a garland of praise, it is important to state that the outpouring of songs does not necessarily equate solely to songs of praise. In

---

<sup>259</sup> Tonga Institute of Education, "Tohi tokoni ma ao faiaka: Founa Fekumi. Research Manual for Teachers," ed. Women's Affairs and Culture Ministry of Education (ITS Tonga, 2009).

<sup>260</sup> It is significant to mention that when we were gathered to share these metaphors. Agnes commented that she had often watched the Tongan Ministry of Education programmes where the garland-making process was discussed, but that the process had never made sense to her until we developed it together in our theological reflections.

<sup>261</sup> The Magnificat, Mary's song of praise in response to the incarnation, for example, has been of particular significance in the history of the Mothers' Union.

Christian tradition and scripture; songs of lament can just as equally display the right-fitting of relational well-being.<sup>262</sup>

The outpouring of songs is a vocalisation of relationships and also a divine poetics. In the Christian tradition it is not only human beings who sing, but God sings with, over and through a humanity in the midst of a creation which also sings both in praise and pain.<sup>263</sup>

Appreciating the relational responsibility that enables songs to pour out of each other is a high relational calling. Providing the opportunity for such songs in a public context is also part of this relational responsibility. Although speaking from a different context, there is a resonance with this imagery and the writing of womanist theology which speaks of the centrality of song and dance in expressing the life of God's spirit amongst African American women.<sup>264</sup> From this context, Teresa Fry Brown recognises that to raise women's voices, first requires the political challenge to all that is asphyxiating their breath of life.<sup>265</sup> A similar challenge may well be very appropriate also in the Pacific context.

### 5.3.3.2 *Pray for the Life*

*They love prayer and pray for the life... [Taoumu]*

A further discernment of right-fitting relationships may well be an appreciation of that which is mutually life-giving. Such discernment would be to echo the groans of creation in

---

<sup>262</sup> The Psalms, for example, include songs of praise, lament and petition.

<sup>263</sup> See the imagery for example in Romans chapter eight.

<sup>264</sup> Emily Townes, "On Creating Ruminations on the Spirit'," in *Embracing the Spirit: Womanist Perspectives on Hope, Salvation and Transformation*, ed. Emily Townes (New York: Orbis Books, 1997).

<sup>265</sup> Teresa Fry Brown, "Avoiding Asphyxiation: A Womanist Perspective on Intrapersonal and Interpersonal Transformation," in *Embracing the Spirit: Womanist Perspectives on Hope, Salvation and Transformation*, ed. Emily Townes (New York: Orbis Books, 1997).

the birth pangs for the coming of God's kingdom, as expressed in Paul's letter to the Romans (Chapter 8). A focus on that which is life-giving may be particularly significant in a Pacific context in which many Pacific people have a culture of greeting each other with a greeting that issues life for the other. Winston Halapua illustrates the theological significance of this custom using both the Fijian greetings of *bula*, which means life, and the Tongan greetings of *si'oto ofā*, meaning 'all my love'.<sup>266</sup> The Maori greeting of *kia ora*, is also a greeting meaning 'have life'.<sup>267</sup>

A life-giving focus is also fitting given the theological analogies of tapa-making and weaving made by the participants. These are communal activities upon which the cycles of life in a Pacific community take place. Again, as within Tikanga Pakeha, these may be predominantly women's activities and metaphors, but that does not mean that they are restricted by gender in the symbolic implication that they have for public life. The intention, responsibility and life-giving preparations for community life lie with all public participants.

It is particularly significant that a life-giving intention is understood within a spirituality which incorporates the entirety of life. This is a movement towards that which is expansive towards the human soul and experience.

### 5.3.3.3 *Love in Life*

*The richness of love in life* [Grace's description of her mother]

---

<sup>266</sup>Winston Halapua, "Openings and Closings in the New Testament: Greetings and Blessings," in *Words for today 2011. A year of fresh perspectives on the Bible.*, ed. Nicola Slee (Birmingham: International Bible Reading Association, 2011).

<sup>267</sup> The European greeting of goodbye derives from 'God be with ye', which also compliments this approach to a life-giving inter-personal language.

It would be impossible for such a life to be lived fully if the language of love was excluded or considered inappropriate for public conversation. Such an assertion would impose a gendered rationality and fail to come close to the Ekklesia of wo/man that Rosemary Carbine urges feminist public theology towards.<sup>268</sup> In such a space it would be impossible for Lavinya to speak of “wanting God’s heart put in my heart”. Yet to speak in such a way is to allow a poetics of life to be fully lived in the public square. For life to be lived in its fullest sense requires the expression of love. That expression, whilst poetic, is not void of contextual rigor and theological substantiation. The concept of *fe’ofa’aki*, for example, points to a mutuality in love which requires care and generosity. An exploration of this concept in light of both the Christian tradition and current public realities would be an insightful and life-giving contribution to public discourse.

In the Pacific context, in which Christianity is a more dominant experience than the secular society of New Zealand, public conversations with the language of life and love may have a particular political significance. For example, Grace’s call for the traditional Tongan priority for family relationships to receive greater theological analysis holds great weight. The same analytical lens discussed above of right-fitting and life-giving realities could well be an appropriate means of undertaking this further theological analysis. Such cultural conversations may well require the similar courage which Plane Te Paa urges her community to have in sharing their cultural treasures.<sup>269</sup> This is particularly the case if not all members of those societies have had equal recourse to cultivation of theological and political language. Stephen Donald’s analysis of the inter-connection between Tongan politics and the Anglican Church would illustrate that such conversations, however, are an

---

<sup>268</sup> Carbine, "Ekklesial Work: Towards a Feminist Public Theology."

<sup>269</sup> Plane Te Paa, "Listening to the Spirit - Preparing the Way...".

important and implicit part of Tongan public realities.<sup>270</sup> To speak poetically and passionately about love, particularly a love which is theologically considered is far from a blanket of amorphous good feeling. Instead, such a conversation is an invitation to genuinely recognise the creative tension humanity encounters as guests of honour to each others' lives individually and communally. The task of further cultivating relationally-astute public discourse is consequently important. The beginnings of those conversations here show the particularity of that importance for Pacific Island women in a symbolic language and poetics with which they both inform and engage.

These various explorations are, therefore, a variety of threads to which continued reflection within the Three Tikanga Mothers' Union communities may inform, expand and enrich. They reflect possibilities for writing the Body of Christ from this particular location.

## 5.4 A PUBLIC THEOLOGY OF LOVE AND A LOVING PUBLIC THEOLOGY

I experience an impossibility stirring within me when I think about articulating a public theology of love and asserting the credibiliy that the language of love might hold within the public square. That sense of impossibility, however, may be more indicative of what has potentially been lost in the unfolding of our humanity, "to the dissolution of the soul,"<sup>271</sup>

---

<sup>270</sup> Stephen Donald, "Fefakalaitaki - Working to Achieve One's Ends?: the Anglican Church and Tongan Politics 1899 to 1913," in *Tonga - Land, Sea and People*, ed. Tangikina Moimoi Steen and Nancy Drescher (Tonga: Tonga Research Association, 2011).

<sup>271</sup> Irigaray, *The Way of Love*, 122.

rather than the impossible reality that love and relationality might come to occupy within an effective public discourse.

To speak, using the language of love, contains within it the possibility of both analytical rigour and theological pedigree. Three examples of that analytical rigour can be seen and further explored from the work within this thesis. The first is the analytical framework of approaching love within the context of a Maori world-view in which love is understood as intricate and embodied relationships between *aroha*, *mana*, *tika*, and *pono*.<sup>272</sup> This intricate relationship is then further understood in the contextual framing of *tangata*, *whenua* and *Atua*. Whilst this contextual appreciation of love has a Christian theological interpretation and it also has a valid and respected currency beyond Christian community in its origins and relevance within Maori society more broadly. Secondly, the understanding of love in the context of right-fitting relationships can be approached through the Tongan contextual relational frameworks of garland-making and right research relationships. Again, whilst this is a framework to which, and within which, a Christian theology has a deep vitality, it is not a framework which is explicitly theological but has a strong credibility in the public life of Tongan society. Thirdly, from European heritage is the analytical articulation of love in the work of Luce Irigaray. Although Luce Irigaray's writing about love speaks from an explicit feminist recovery within a patriarchal philosophical legacy, Luce Irigaray's *way of love* does also speak with an intentional life-giving freshness to the cultivation of humanity in general. The politics and poetics of love in Irigarayan philosophy, which is concerned with the most immediate of inter-personal subjective construction as well as the most distant symbolic constructions of philosophy, are articulated both within and beyond Christian theology. Luce

---

<sup>272</sup> Cadogan, "Recovering Spirituality: The Story of Wahine Maori."; Henare Tate, "Stepping into Maori Spirituality," in *Spirituality in Aotearoa New Zealand: Catholic Voices*, ed. Helen Berginm and Susan Smith (Auckland: Accent Publications, 2000).

Irigaray's language of love is written very intentionally to the public world and the cultivation of humanity.

Each of these three possible languages in which love might be framed or analysed is expressly open to critique, refinement, discussion and rigorous debate. Yet each expression would resist being contained in their entirety in such analytical abstraction. This resistance comes from a relational foundation which immediately requires inter-subjective meeting. That is to say, they represent a way of seeking and facilitating life-giving exchange of inter-subjective relations. In other words, in relational approaches the means and the ends are often synonymous.

These are public theologies of relationships and relational public theologies, which contain within them an ethics of love variously interpreted. Speaking about love and speaking with love is an important distinction. Each of these relational theologies speak from and to contexts of challenging inter-relationships. Speech within a loving public theology then, to speak in reference to Vinoth Ramachandra, is to speak in conscious relation to the "One whose speech acts heal".<sup>273</sup> The contribution of healing relationships is surely a gift which is needed in the public square. That gift can only be given if there is theological and contextual rigour contained within an inter-subjective discernment of that which is healing and life-giving. These inter-subjective demands will require an appreciation of the way that our "own speech is always broken, sharing in the no-yet-redeemed character of the world".<sup>274</sup>

---

<sup>273</sup> Ramachandra, *Subverting Global Myths: Theology and the Public Issues Shaping Our World*, 13-4.

<sup>274</sup> *Ibid.*, 14

I therefore recognise the fragmented character of the theological reflections within this thesis. But, as Marcella Althaus Reid critiques, in the centre there are no fragments.<sup>275</sup> The theological reflections shared in this research are not fragments designed to make uncomfortable predominant approaches to communication and interaction in the public square. Instead, they have a coherency in and of themselves that invites a relocation of the centre. They invite a reframing of public debate, communication and language. Duncan Forrester's hope that fragments may, indeed, also be building blocks holds true.<sup>276</sup> A recreation of the language, interaction and conceptualisation of the public is possible and necessary for the well-being, not only of those subject identities whose way of being ('tikanga') may have a predominant relational framing, but also for those whose relationality has been in some ways dissolved and they are left the poorer for it. As Grace says, "the richness that I am talking about is not in value, but in watching love in life". And as Jenny observes, the "the economy is actually about a set of relationships...but it's hidden". Geraldine's perception that "we have a much greater role to play now and in a way to become much more public in our relationships and in our desire to build relationships" has a critical importance.

There is an important distinction to make between sentiment and sentimentality. To speak with a relational language in which the loving person might be considered as a subject of public discourse is not to say that that subject is irrational and sentimental. Although I have strategically suggested a counter-position between the rational subject and the loving person, I would strongly resist such a counter-position to ultimately prevail. Instead I would assert that the rational subject and the loving person have a theological and philosophical

---

<sup>275</sup> Althaus-Reid, "In The Centre there are no fragments: *Teologias Desencajadas* (Reflections from Unfitting Theologies)."

<sup>276</sup> Forrester, "Afterword. Working in the Quarry: A Response to the Coloquium."

integrity in the same being.<sup>277</sup> The relational aspirations expressed above, specifically by these research participants, but also more broadly in the framing of this contribution, are coherently interwoven within a number of strong, relevant and rationally defensible analytic conceptualisations of relational exchange. A loving public theology is therefore rationally defensible and facilitates a called for poetics that, in itself, is a strategic theo-political imperative.

---

<sup>277</sup> Might this not be a more accurate interpretation of the Christian call to love the Lord your God with all your mind, found in Jesus' teaching in Matthew's Gospel (chapter 22:37). This is a call which combines both the work of love and the work of the mind without contradiction.

## CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSIONS

### 6.1 A PUBLIC THEOLOGY OF RELATIONSHIPS WITHIN THE MOTHERS' UNION IN AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND AND POLYNESIA

*The challenge is not just about how we live in our own cultures, but whether we perceive and experience God differently within our cultures. This is a unique challenge within MU because of the global nature of our charity's relationships and remit. There is the challenge of how we all sit together, at the common altar, and find a common language to talk about our relationships with each other and with God. Part of our path is to evolve in our relationships model, where our challenges and differences can be celebrated and respected, if not always fully understood. [Fleur Smith, Mary Sumner House]<sup>278</sup>*

The self-conscious beginnings of the theological reflections within this research can be seen as part of the evolution in the relational model to which Fleur Smith refers above. Whilst this evolution is deemed valuable and necessary within the organisation of the Mothers' Union itself, it is also an evolution of considerable value within the public square more broadly. That value lies in the potential re-imagining of the public square through a relational re-orientation. A relational lens blurs the focussed boundary between that which is considered public and that which is considered private. Therefore, exploring a public theology of relationships through the theological reflections in this research does not necessarily fit, easily and comfortably, within the established genre of public theology. The expected question of whether this research can clearly be defined as a public theology

---

<sup>278</sup> Fleur Smith, interview by author, London, 9 September, 2011.

resonates perhaps with the challenges made by Mario Aguilar<sup>279</sup> and Marcella Althaus-Reid,<sup>280</sup> regarding the marginal relocation of public theology and exploration of “unfitting theologies”. In particular, the difficulty of establishing a feminist strain within the growing area of public theology is clearly articulated by writers such as Heather Walton<sup>281</sup> and Rosemary Carbine.<sup>282</sup> Their respective works challenge the boundaries of both the conceptualisation and discourse of public theology from a feminist perspective.

These feminist challenges, it could be argued, reflect the depth of historical and philosophical absence of the cultivation of a relational culture, in which gendered sexual identities have had equal opportunity to contribute, as asserted by the philosophical challenges in the work of Luce Irigaray. Exploring possibilities in the ‘culture of the two’ and the ‘culture of the many’, expressed in Luce Irigaray’s work, lies within the heart of these theological reflections on the possibility of a public theology of relationships. As the opening quote for this chapter from Fleur Smith of Mary Sumner House expresses, recognising the need for more mature relational cultures is not privileged in Irigaray philosophy alone. There are both challenges and possibilities in pursuing an Irigaray philosophical approach.<sup>283</sup> However, as Rosemary Carbine demonstrates the significance of exploring the possibilities in the work of Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza for feminist contributions within

---

<sup>279</sup> Aguilar, "Public Theology from the Periphery: Victims and Theologians."

<sup>280</sup> Althaus-Reid, "In The Centre there are no fragments: *Teologias Desencajadas* (Reflections from Unfitting Theologies)."

<sup>281</sup> Walton, "You Have To Say You Cannot Speak: Feminist Reflections Upon Public Theology."

<sup>282</sup> Carbine, "Ekklesial Work: Towards a Feminist Public Theology."

<sup>283</sup> These challenges and possibilities are perhaps best expressed by Penelope Deutscher in talking about the impossible politics of difference within Irigaray philosophy, which articulates both the radical potential and radical impossibility of Irigaray’s assertion of the culture of the two. Deutscher, *A Politics of Impossible Difference. The later work of Luce Irigaray*. I think it is significant to note that the critiques of essentialism that are levelled at Irigaray philosophy, are critiques that have similarly surrounded the constitution of the Three Tikanga Anglican Church in this context. This is not a debate which I have seen fit to adequately address in the context of the relationships with the research participants at this early stage of our collaborative reflections.

public theology, I have considered a similar exploration in relation to the work of Luce Irigaray to, likewise, hold significance:

*“The other opens us to the possibility of another era for our subjective becoming and for our culture. The other introduces us to another logic in which the relational values, notably of coexistence in difference, are considered and cultivated...And let us recall that in our tradition, the other is at first woman, beginning with woman in the mother.”<sup>284</sup>*

This research has therefore sought to contribute to the development of feminist public theologies by exploring the potential inter-weaving of: the relational resonance within the Mothers’ Union vision; the lived embodiment of that vision in the lives of Mothers’ Union members in a relationally structured context of the Anglican Church in Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia; and with the relational paradigm shift in the work of Luce Irigaray.

*Eleanor: I think the idea of relationships needs to really explode in the minds of our societies, because it hasn’t been the dominant way that Western thought has operated.[Eleanor] Yes. That’s right. [Hine]*

The possibility, therefore, of a public theology of relationships, particularly a public theology of relationships after Luce Irigaray, speaks to the ongoing search for feminist contributions within public theology. Why, I believe, a contribution cognisant of Luce Irigaray’s philosophical influence is so significant is the potential her work holds for overcoming an unhelpful dualistic dominance in public thought. As Mary Grey<sup>285</sup> asserts, a more healing way of being requires an embrace of our sexual, embodied nature and the materiality of the earth in order to recover our heart. Luce Irigaray’s foundation of sexual difference locates a

---

<sup>284</sup> Irigaray, *Sharing the World*, 133.

<sup>285</sup> Grey, *Sacred Longings. The Ecological Spirit and Global Culture*.

new culture of relationality within such an embodiment. A public theology of relationships after Luce Irigaray therefore connects the relational reflections of this research context to the depth of significance that the re-creation of a relational paradigm shift has for the cultivation of our humanity. This has led me to attempt to articulate the beginning of a public theology of love and a loving public theology. In sharing the conclusions of this research with Luce Irigaray, she observed that, from her perspective, what is needed is not simply a relational culture in which the language of love has credence, but to cultivate “loving thought”.<sup>286</sup> The cultivation of loving thought in public theology resonates with feminist concerns to overcome the assumed neuter subject position of rational public polity. The theological reflections in this thesis *can* be understood as a cultivation of loving thought by women from a particular context. The images and language with which that loving thought has been cultivated have the potential to inform and shape the wider ecclesial and social contexts from which these reflections have originated. This loving thought is directed towards a more mature relational way of being.

The theological reflections in this research, and the exploration of a public theology of relationships they have generated, are a self-conscious beginning. I want to restate and appraise those beginnings now and look to the possibilities for their future continuation.

---

<sup>286</sup> Luce Irigaray, interview by author, Paris, September 15, 2012.

### 6.1.2 THE CENTRAL THREADS

Given the broader context of this research which has been expressed above, my central research question was: ‘What are the central threads for weaving a public theology of relationships in the context of the Mothers’ Union in the Three Tikanga Anglican Church of Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia?’ My methodological approach brought together three understandings of theological reflection with which to explore this question. The first was to employ a corporate theological reflection, epitomised by Elaine Graham (et. al.) as “writing the body of Christ”.<sup>287</sup> The second was to approach theological reflection as conversation, as articulated by Howard Stone and James Duke, which recognised the inter-subjective dialogue and “creative tension”<sup>288</sup> within corporate reflection. The third method was to prioritise the place of story-telling, which was deemed to be both culturally appropriate by research participants and was also resonant with Elaine Graham’s articulation of *power, knowledge and authority in public theology*.<sup>289</sup> Together these methods were combined in an overtly relational approach to research, which was supported by the expressions of a relational approach to theological reflection by Edward O de Barry<sup>290</sup> and the inter-subjective relational demands articulation in Irigarian philosophy.

This methodological approach became embodied in a corporate theological reflection that illustrated the distinctive cultural approach to the cultivation of relationships within the Three Tikanga of the Mothers’ Union in the Anglican Church of Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia. Amidst those cultural distinctions has also remained the appropriate tension of

---

<sup>287</sup> Graham, Walton, and Ward, *Theological Reflection: Methods*.

<sup>288</sup> Stone and Duke, *How to Think Theologically*, 7.

<sup>289</sup> Graham, "Power, Knowledge and Authority in Public Theology."

<sup>290</sup> O de Bary, *Theological Reflection - The Creation of Spiritual Power in the Information Age*.

facilitating a story-telling and theological reflection in a research setting environment in which Gyatri Spivak's challenge of whether the subaltern can speak<sup>291</sup> necessarily endures. For example, at both the beginning and end of this research process our conversations included an acknowledgement of the distinctions between oral and written cultures in the means of gathering and sharing stories. Despite this necessarily remaining tension, the research participants themselves expressed great appreciation in hearing and sharing the stories and reflections from the other Tikanga members. Speaking in relation to the language of the Mothers' Union, we articulated this process as our response to the Mothers' Union theme for 2011: Your Gifts? Discover and Celebrate!

*The concept of gift is really significant within MU because gifts have a very strong relationship principle. We need to recognise that in relation to cultivating our relationships with each other and with God. We need to cultivate and nurture our relationships and gifts, whatever that demands. Our relationships can be our gifts to each other. [Fleur Smith, Mary Sumner House]*

The process of answering the central research question was therefore a process of exploring and cultivating the gifts of relationships amongst those involved in the research, at the same time as discerning and asserting the imperative role that a relational focus might have within broader society.

---

<sup>291</sup> Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?."

### 6.1.2 GIFTS FROM THE RESPECTIVE TIKANGA

The first subsidiary question of the central research question was what do 'we' draw from our Tikanga in ascertaining what is loving, respectful and flourishing in our relationships? It is in answer to this question that the three images of the family in many forms, the banqueting table and the garland of praise were developed. These images were developed as a means of encapsulating the relationship wisdom articulated amongst the research participants. The images represent ways of exploring, as well as describing, culturally distinct expressions of respectful, loving and flourishing relationships.

Each of these images, and the stories from which they were drawn, were received as a gift given between the Tikanga participants respectively. In the collective feedback session participants strongly vocalised their appreciation in hearing the extracts of each others' stories and in the images created: *I think, you know, listening to those stories, to our voices, it's so energising, so inspiring. For each one of us there is that pool of life that is really brought out in here* [Hine].<sup>292</sup>

The life-giving significance of these gifts was expressly understood by the research participants to have a potential role beyond their own personal immediacy and to the wider church and society. This recognition was particularly articulated in our group discussion in which group members explored the ways in which each of the images was communal.<sup>293</sup>

There were also moments in which participants reflected on the significance that these

---

<sup>292</sup> Further examples include, when hearing the imagery of the garland of praise, Rosemary exclaims "It's wonderful" and Geraldine responds, "It's so powerful". Likewise in hearing the image of the banqueting table Perdita interjects, "that's beautiful".

<sup>293</sup> For example Hine expressed that there was no point having a marae if no one visited and other participants began talking about making garlands but having no one to give them to.

images and reflections might have, well beyond our own community: *What we have learnt from here will be used not just for your thesis, but for our community and our Three Tikanga Church [Grace] and the nation and the world!* [Tina].

### 6.1.3 GIFTS TO AND FROM PUBLIC THEOLOGY

The second subsidiary question asked in what ways 'we' perceive our relationships to inform our public theology. Again, the images of the family in many forms, the banqueting table and the garland of praise were developed to extend and encapsulate the theological reflections in this regard. In addition, these images were substantiated by a common theme in which relationships with God, with other people, with wider shifts in society and culture, were inextricably inter-woven. It is that inter-woven perception that undergirds the possibility of a public theology of relationships. Furthermore, it is from that prioritising of a relational language (and potentially a relational culture) that has caused me to raise the possibility of being able to talk about a public theology of love and a loving public theology. This possibility of a critically appreciated language of love is proposed in relation to Marion Maddox's discussions around the potential gifts that theology might offer the wider public.<sup>294</sup> I have raised the possibility of the gift of a loving public theology in the context of a social and cultural reality, in which more relationally-astute means of communication and inter-subjectivity are potentially needed. This is a potential need for which feminist and contextual theologians and theorists more generally hold a concern.

---

<sup>294</sup> Maddox, "Religion, Secularism and the Promise of Public Theology."

In our shared evaluations, the participants themselves identified the wider social contexts to which they believed these collective theological reflections spoke. In addition to the appreciations that were shared about the cultivation of a greater awareness of the Three Tikanga life the Mothers' Union shares, Rosemary also commented in relation to the wider Anglican Church: *The Mothers' Union is known as the 5<sup>th</sup> instrument of unity in the Anglican Communion and I think that that is a very powerful thing.*

In relation to wider society, in our discussions around these images, both Hine and Ana began reflecting on experiences that they had through their Mothers' Union groups in walking alongside and supporting women experiencing domestic violence and the transformation that they had witnessed in these women's lives. The context in which our shared group reflection was able to take place occurred alongside a training programme for a new initiative to begin the Mothers' Union Parenting Encouragement Programme in the New Zealand Diocese of Wellington. The synergy between this programme and our research was highlighted by the participants:

*I think it is really interesting that we are here talking about this [research], but that we are also here at the Parenting Programme and Three Tikanga. There is something in that, I don't know what but... [Geraldine] Yes, something is happening and we can trust God...It's just a step at a time and I just think that this is so significant and God is leading us somewhere and I think that this is all part of that. [Perditta]*

Whilst the opportunity to further explore these avenues of resonance and significance was unfortunately limited, these beginnings do point to the greater possibility of informing broader areas of concern for public theology: *I think the images are one thing, but the explanation that you have given, how to bring out the reality of that life. Who knows where this life is going to end up? [Hine].*

## 6.2 MEDICINE FOR OUR BODIES: SHARED RESEARCH EVALUATIONS

*Now I see why you are the doctor. We give you our stories and you turn them into medicine that is good for our bodies! [Hine]*

Elaine Graham (et.al.) describes the way that communal theological reflection generates and re-generates community.<sup>295</sup> Engaging in the process of this research proved to be constructive as well as descriptive for both myself and the research participants. This creativity is part of the inter-subjective challenge of relational research. In our collective feedback session, appreciation was expressed for the insights shared amongst the different Tikanga groups and a desire to further explore and develop these appreciations and relationships. In many ways this 'writing of the body of Christ', to speak in relation to Graham (et. al.),<sup>296</sup> was also a creative experiencing of the body of Christ:

*I think it is really fantastic how you have captured these images. When I hear of the garland, I just want to close my eyes and think of the people sitting around sharing these stories...they are all stories that look to the past to give them a future. That's what it's all about and it's about all these things that are happening around us. It's all around us and we've got to be here. I want to go and explore with them...[Hine] Maybe the time is now... [Perdita]*

Alongside these affirmations, however, must sit my own continued discomfort at the necessarily-remaining tensions in the "power, knowledge and authority", as expressed by Graham,<sup>297</sup> in the cultivation of these theological reflections. Althaus-Reid<sup>298</sup> challenges

---

<sup>295</sup> Graham, Walton, and Ward, *Theological Reflection: Methods*, 61.

<sup>296</sup> Ibid.

<sup>297</sup> Graham, "Power, Knowledge and Authority in Public Theology."

theologians to be self-consciously aware of the conditions of production for all theology. Given the realistic time and resource constraints placed upon the completion of a Masters thesis and the way in which the research participants discerned it was best to corporately engage with this project,<sup>299</sup> I am very aware that our conversations were very much a beginning. We did not have the opportunity to further develop the potential significance of the metaphors and images from our stories in the same collaborative approach as these initial threads were discerned. But to assert that such a project, even if completed, could escape the challenges of power differentials or speak with anything other than partiality and aspects of brokenness would also be naïve.

*“To open a place for the other, for a world different from ours, from the inside of our tradition, is the first and the most difficult multicultural gesture. Meeting the stranger outside of our own boundaries is rather easy, and even satisfies our aspirations, as long as we can return home and appropriate between ourselves what we have in this way discovered. To be forced to limit and change our home, or our way of being at home, is much more difficult, especially without being unfaithful to ourselves.”<sup>300</sup>*

What the theological reflections in this thesis have perhaps best achieved, both for myself and the research participants, has been the opportunity to perceive something of the different worlds in which we live. Despite being a theological reflection in a context which is expressly relationally-structured, we did not come to this corporate theological reflection with a relationally-trained subjectivity that was able to easily articulate and move within our different worlds. The manner of our theological reflection chosen, meant that I, in turn with the different participants, attempted to negotiate our multi-cultural inter-subjectivity. It was

---

<sup>298</sup> Althaus-Reid, "In The Centre there are no fragments: *Teologias Desencajadas* (Reflections from Unfitting Theologies)."

<sup>299</sup> By this I refer to the decision that, before gathering together as a group to reflect on the questions within this research, it was important to first spend time in our respective Tikanga to reflect on our own relationship stories. I am extremely grateful for this decision, because I believe that the project has generated a greater depth as a result.

<sup>300</sup> Irigaray, *Sharing the World*, 133.

in being able to come together, albeit briefly, to share these different possibilities in our inter-subjective worlds, that I sensed a communal recognition amongst the research participants (which can be seen in some of the expressions by the participants above) that a greater appreciation of our inter-subjectivity was being formed. To speak in relation to Luce Irigaray's words above, there was a perceptible change in our own 'homes', which, there were indications that having been experienced, generated a greater yearning towards.<sup>301</sup> This beginning, therefore, has generated energy and enthusiasm to find a way to move forward together and more intentionally create such a weaving.

*This is great, this is great. I want to have a whole half-day session [affirmations from the others] so we can pull open the doors of this learning. Wow! I'm listening to your paper and thinking, wow, I want to get in here and shake the doors! [Hine]*

Hine's enthusiasm above illustrates the life-giving process of the corporate reflection, but also the energy and desire to push these possibilities further expressly in the manner and terms of the research participants themselves. Together we discussed possibilities in how we might do this and particularly we talked about the possibility of gathering these reflections together, with further exploration in the respective communities, in an accessible book form co-created to share with our wider Three Tikanga communities.<sup>302</sup> Such a project could weave from these beginning threads of a public theology and more appropriately achieve the hoped-for desire to cultivate a theology by the people of God for the people of God, as spoken of in the methodological rationale behind corporate theological reflection.

---

<sup>301</sup> I do not, however, wish to gloss over the complexities of these varied inter-subjective relationships by using collective and plural terminology unproblematically in this statement.

<sup>302</sup> One important aspect that may need to be considered in this sharing is to recognise the relational hurt that has occurred in the history of the Mothers' Union in this context and the creation of alternative women's groups within the church in these lands. The broader relational context amongst which these reflections might be shared is one where past pains may still be present.

### 6.3 THE TASK OF WEAVING

The task of further weaving is therefore still to come. But in that task, some threads of faithfulness have been created. Such a weaving may include expanding upon each of the metaphors more broadly within each Tikanga and applying the metaphors and the discussions within them about models of relationships, to particular public issues of concern (such as the Buy Buy Childhood Campaign or Three Tikanga discussions within the Anglican Church). More significantly, they may include the broader creation of community that a more extensive corporate theological reflection would inevitably generate. These are possibilities specific to this context and the decisions to be made by this group of women.

From a broader perspective, I believe that there is considerable opportunity for the further development of a potential contribution within the field of public theology, for privileging a language of relational poverty and relational richness,<sup>303</sup> and further challenging the relative absence of love in the public discourse. Such a contribution can be made both within and beyond an Irigarain relational paradigm shift. However, a sensitivity to sexuate and cultural identity that heeds the warning of Irigaray and many other feminist and contextual theorists is imperative in such debates.

---

<sup>303</sup> The language of relational poverty is now being used in regard to child-well-being and is considered the most significant aspect of healthy neurological growth, which has entered the popular media within New Zealand. This is an example of an area of work which is highly salient to the aims and objectives of the Mother's Union and one which the Mothers' Union from this context could strongly inform in Aotearoa New Zealand and the Pacific. Joanne Black and Ruth Laugesen "The mind of a child" in *New Zealand Listener*, August 25<sup>th</sup> -31<sup>st</sup>, 2012, 18-23.

Ultimately, part of the possibility for the beginning threads in this thesis to be further interwoven depends upon the response to these theological reflections by others. That is the heart of the relational and inter-subjective challenge epitomised in any potential gift. This inter-subjective challenge is particularly given to public theology by Althaus Ried<sup>304</sup> and Aguilar.<sup>305</sup> In the opening of this thesis, Fleur Smith from Mary Sumner House explicitly identified the marginality of the Mothers' Union and their purposeful location on the margins in terms of power and authority within the church. The potential wider significance that our corporate theological reflections may have is not necessarily, therefore, in our hands. Whether or not these theological reflection remain as fragments, far away from the centre, or whether the potential gifts that they contain are received within the public square more broadly, depends as much on the manner with which these gifts are received as it does on the manner with which these gifts are given.

---

<sup>304</sup> Althaus-Reid, "In The Centre there are no fragments: *Teologias Desencajadas* (Reflections from Unfitting Theologies)."

<sup>305</sup> Aguilar, "Public Theology from the Periphery: Victims and Theologians."

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

Aguilar, Mario. "Public Theology from the Periphery: Victims and Theologians." *International Journal of Public Theology* 1 (2007): 321-37.

Althaus-Reid, Marcella Maria. "In the Centre There Are No Fragments: *Teologias Desencajadas* (Reflections from Unfitting Theologies)." In *Public Theology for the 21st Century*, edited by William Storrar and Andrew Morton. 365-83. London, New York: T & T Clark a Continuum Imprint, 2004.

Amini, Majid. "Religious Identity: Reflections on Revelation and Rationality." *International Journal of Public Theology* 3 (2009): 443-59.

Anderson, Owen. "Public Theology, the Ethics of Belief and the Challenge of Divine Hiddenness." *International Journal of Public Theology* 1 (2007): 382-407.

Atherton, John. *Public Theology for Changing Times*. London: SPCK, 2000.

Avis, Paul. *Eros and the Sacred*. London: SPCK, 1989.

Beattie, Tina. "Catholicism, Choice and Consciousness: A Feminist Theological Perspective on Abortion." *International Journal of Public Theology* 4 (2010): 51-75.

Black, Joanne and Ruth Laugesen. "The mind of a child." in *New Zealand Listener*. August 25-31, 2012, 8-23.

Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York, London: Routledge, 1990.

Cadogan, Tui. "Recovering Spirituality: The Story of Wahine Maori." In *He Kupu Whakawarua. Spirituality in Aotearoa New Zealand: Catholic Voices*, edited by Helen Bergin and Susan Smith. Auckland: Accent Publications, 2002.

- Callaghan, Moeawa. "Look to the Past to See the Future." *First Peoples Theology Journal* 4, no. 1 (2006): 104-09.
- Carbine, Rosemary. "Ekklesial Work: Towards a Feminist Public Theology." *Harvard Theological Review* 99, no. 4 (2006): 433-55.
- Cowley, Joy. *Tarore and Her Book*. Wellington: Bible Society New Zealand, 2009.
- Davidson, Allan. "Culture and Ecclesiology: The Church Missionary Society and New Zealand." In *The Church Missionary Society and World Christianity 1799-1999*, edited by Kevin Ward and Brian Stanley. 198-227. Grand Rapids, Surrey: Eerdmans and Cuzon, 2000.
- . *Christianity in Aotearoa: A History of Church and Society in New Zealand*. Wellington: The New Zealand Education for Ministry Board, 2004.
- Brain Davis, *The Way Ahead: Anglican Change and Prospect in New Zealand*. Christchurch, The Caxton Press, 1995.
- Deutscher, Penelope. "Between East and West and the Politics of 'Cultural Ingenuite' Irigaray on Cultural Difference." *Theory, Culture & Society* 20, no. 3 (2003): 65-75.
- . *A Politics of Impossible Difference. The Later Work of Luce Irigaray*. New York: Cornell University Press, 2002.
- Donald, Stephen. "Fefakalaitaki - Working to Achieve One's Ends?: The Anglican Church and Tongan Politics 1899 to 1913." In *Tonga - Land, Sea and People*, edited by Tangikina Moimoi Steen and Nancy Drescher. 20-29. Tonga: Tonga Research Association, 2011.
- Education for Ministry "The Microscope Method" in *Common Lessons and Supporting Materials: Year One*. Section 2.1.1. Sewanee: The University of the South, 1998.
- Forrester, Duncan. "Afterword. Working in the Quarry: A Response to the Coloquium." In *Public Theology for the 21st Century*, edited by William Storrar and Andrew Morton. 431-38. London, New York: Continuum, 2004.

- Freire, Paulo. *Pedagogy of the Opressed*. New York: Continuum, 1983.
- Fry Brown, Teresa. "Avoiding Asphyxiation: A Womanist Perspective on Intrapersonal and Interpersonal Transformation." In *Embracing the Spirit: Womanist Perspectives on Hope, Salvation and Transformation*, edited by Emily Townes. 72-94. New York: Orbis Books, 1997.
- Gilroy, Ann. "Around Cups of Tea and Cofee: Pakeka Women's Spirituality." In *He Kupu Whakawairua. Spirituality in Aotearoa New Zealand: Catholic Vioces*, edited by Helen Bergin and Susan Smith. 159-74. Auckland: Accent Publications, 2002.
- Graham, Elaine. "Power, Knowledge and Authority in Public Theology." *International Journal of Public Theology* 1 (2007): 42-62.
- Graham, Elaine, Heather Walton, and Frances Ward. *Theological Reflection: Methods*. London: SCM Press, 2005.
- Greany, K. "Editorial." *Gender and Development* 14, no. 3 (2006): 341-50.
- Grey, Mary. *Sacred Longings. The Ecological Spirit and Global Culture*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004.
- Grimes, S., and J. Nubiola. "Reconsidering the Exclusion of Metaphysics in Human Geography." *Acta Philosophica* 6, no. 2 (1997): 265-76.
- Halapua, Winston. "Openings and Closings in the New Testament: Greetings and Blessings." In *Words for Today 2011. A Year of Fresh Perspectives on the Bible*, edited by Nicola Slee. 230-36. Birmingham: International Bible Reading Association, 2011.
- Hollywood, Amy. *Sensible Ecstasy. Mysticism, Sexual Difference, and the Demands of History*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2002.
- Ihaka, Kingi. "Poi." In *A New Zealand Prayer Book He Karakia Mihinare O Aotearoa*. 157. Christchurch: Genesis, 1989.

Irigaray, Luce. *Between East and West: From Singularity to Community*. Columbia University Press: New York, 2002.

———. *Elemental Passions*. Translated by Joanne Collie and Judith Still. New York: Routledge, 1992.

———. *Everyday Prayers*. Translated by Luce Irigaray and Timothy Mathews. Paris: Maisonneuve & Larose, 2004.

———. *Il Mistero Di Maria*. Milano: Paoline, 2010.

———. *I Love to You*. London, New York: Routledge, 1996.

———. *Key Writings*. London, New York: Continuum, 2004.

———. *Sexes and Genealogies*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1987.

———. *Sharing the World*. London, New York: Continuum, 2008.

———. *The Way of Love*. London: Continuum, 2002.

Johnson, Lydia, and Joan Alleluia Filemoni-Tofaeono, eds. *Weavings: Women Doing*

*Theology in Oceania*. Suva, Fiji: Institute of Pacific Studies, University of the South Pacific, 2003.

Kindon, Sara, Rachel Pain, and Mike Kesby, eds. *Participatory Action Research Approaches and Methods: Connecting People, Participation and Place*. Oxford, New York: Routledge, 2007.

King Hainsworth, Deirdre, and Scott Paeth, eds. *Public Theology for a Global Society: Essays in Honor of Max L. Stackhouse*. Grand Rapids, Cambridge: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2010.

King, Michael. *Being Pakeha Now: reflections and recollections of a white native*. Auckland: Penguin Books, 1999.

- Landman, Christina. "A Public Theology for Intimate Spaces." *International Journal of Public Theology* 5 (2011): 63-77.
- Le Bruyns, Clint. "Corporate Social Responsibility and Gender Justice in South Africa." *International Journal of Public Theology* 3 (2009): 222-37.
- Lloyd, Genevieve. *The Man of Reason: 'Male and Female in Western Philosophy'*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, London: Routledge, 1993. First Edition, Methuen and Co Ltd., 1984.
- Loades, Ann. "Simone Weil: Resistance and Writing." *International Journal of Public Theology* 4 (2010): 100-17.
- Lorraine, Tamsin. *Irigaray and Deleuze: Experiments in Visceral Philosophy*. New York: Cornell University Press, 1999.
- Maddox, Marion. "Religion, Secularism and the Promise of Public Theology." *International Journal of Public Theology*, no. 1 (2007): 82-100.
- Martin, Alison. *Luce Irigaray and the Question of the Divine*. Leeds: Many Publishing, 2000.
- Massey, Doreen. *for space*. London: Sage Publications Ltd, 2005.
- McIntosh, Esther. "The Concept of Sacrifice: A Reconsideration of the Feminist Critique." *International Journal of Public Theology* 1 (2007): 210-29.
- Moi, Toril. "From Femininity to Finitude: Freud, Lacan, and Feminism, Again." In *Dialogues on Sexuality, Gender and Psychoanalysis*, edited by Irene Matthis. 93-135. London: H. Karnac Books Ltd., 2004.
- Need, Stephen. *Truly Human Truly Divine: The Story of Christ and the Seven Ecumenical Councils*, London: SPCK, 2008.
- Newell, Philip. *Christ of the Celts. The Healing of Creation*. Glasgow: Wild Goose Publications, 2008.

Nicholson, Rangi. "Ko te mea nui, ko te aroha: theological perspectives on Maori language and cultural regensis policy and practice of the Anglican Church." Phd diss., The University of Auckland, 2009.

———. "The Theological Implications of Three *Tikanga Church*" in *Proceedings of Theology in Oceania Conference, Dunedin, 1996. Doing Theology in Oceania: Partners in C Conversation, Hanga Mahi Karaipiture Ite Moana Nui-A-Kiwa: Tutaki A Kanohi, Kia Whakawhitwhiti Korero*, edited by Clive Pearson. Dunedin, 1986.

Norris, Pippa, and Ronald Inglehart. *Sacred and Secular: Religion and Politics Worldwide*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.

O de Bary, Edward. *Theological Reflection - the Creation of Spiritual Power in the Information Age*. Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2003.

Claudia Orange, *The Treaty of Waitangi*. Wellington: Allen & Unwin with Port Nicholson Press, 1987.

Parker, Olive. *For the Family's Sake: A History of the Mothers' Union 1876-1967*. Oxford: Mowbrays, 1975.

Pitman, Julia. "Feminist Public Theology in the Uniting Church in Australia." *International Journal of Public Theology* 5 (2011): 143-64.

Plane Te Paa, Jenny. "Listening to the Spirit - Preparing the Way...". *First Peoples Theology Journal* 4, no. 1 (2006): 64-73.

Radford Ruether, Rosemary. "Feminist Theology: Where Is It Going?". *International Journal of Public Theology* 4 (2010): 5-20.

- Radner, Ephraim, and Philip Turner. *The Fate of Communion: The Agony of Anglicanism and the Future of a Global Church*. Grand Rapids, Cambridge: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2006.
- Ramachandra, Vinoth. *Subverting Global Myths: Theology and the Public Issues Shaping Our World*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2008.
- Robertshawe, Nancy. "The Mothers' Union in New Zealand 1886-1952." In *A History of the Mothers' Union and the Association of Anglican Women in New Zealand*. 1-10.
- . "The Mothers' Union in New Zealand 1952-1969." In *A History of the Mothers' Union and the Association of Anglican Women in New Zealand*. 11-21.
- Rose, Gillian. "A Body of Questions." In *Using Social Theory: Thinking through Research*, edited by M. Pryke, Gillian Rose and Sarah Whatmore. 47-64. London: Sage Publications, 2003.
- Sanderson, Eleanor. "The Challenge of Placing Spirituality within Geographies of Development." *Geography Compass* 1, no. 3 (2007): 389-404.
- . "A Future Shaped by Love: Towards a Feminist Geography of Development and Spirituality." In *Teaching*, edited by Luce Irigaray and Mary Green. 156-65. London: Continuum, 2008.
- . *Our Hearts Are Our Homes and Our Homes Are Our Hearts: Reflections and Prayers from Members of the Mothers' Union in Tanzania*. China: Everbest Print, 2006.
- . "The Prayers We Breathe: Embodying the Gift of Life in the Maternal Feminine." In *Breathing with Luce Irigaray*, edited by Emily Holmes and Lenart Skof. London: Bloomsbury Continuum, forthcoming.
- Slater, Terry "Encountering God: Personal Reflections on 'Geographer as Pilgrim'." *Area* 36, no. 3 (2004): 245-53.

- Smith, Linda. *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*. London: Zed Books, 1999.
- Spivak, Gyatri. "Can the Subaltern Speak?". In *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, edited by C Nelson and L. Grossberg. 271-315: University of Illinois Press, 1988.
- Stone, Howard, and James Duke. *How to Think Theologically*. 2nd ed. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006.
- Storrar, William, and Andrew Morton. "Introduction." In *Public Theology for the 21st Century*, edited by William Storrar and Andrew Morton. 1-21. London, New York: T & T Clarke, A Continuum Imprint, 2004.
- Tate, Henare. "Stepping into Maori Spirituality." In *Spirituality in Aotearoa New Zealand: Catholic Voices*, edited by Helen Berginm and Susan Smith. 38-53. Auckland: Accent Publications, 2000.
- The Mothers' Union. <http://www.themothersunion.org> (accessed 21<sup>st</sup> July 2011).
- . "Mothers' Union Logo Postcard Collection." London: MU enterprises Ltd, 2007.
- . *United in Prayer and Worship*. Bristol, United Kingdom: JW Artowsmith Ltd, 2002.
- Tonga Institute of Education. "Tohi Tokoni Ma Ao Faiaka: Founa Fekumi. Research Manual for Teachers." edited by Women's Affairs and Culture Ministry of Education: ITS Tonga, 2009.
- Townes, Emily. "On Creating Ruminations on the Spirit'." In *Embracing the Spirit: Womanist Perspectives on Hope, Salvation and Transformation*, edited by Emily Townes. xi-xix. New York: Orbis Books, 1997.
- Tuwere, Ilaitia. *Vanua: Towards a Fijian Theology of Place*. Suva, Fiji: Institute of Pacific Studies, University of the South Pacific and College of St John the Evangelist, 2002.

Ver Beek, K. A. "Spirituality: A Development Taboo." *Development in Practice* 10, no. 1 (2000): 31-43.

Waitangi Action Committee, "The Historical Drama of Waitangi." In *Te Hikoi ki Waitangi - 1985*. Auckland: Waitangi Action Committee, 1985. 18-29.

Walton, Heather. "You Have to Say You Cannot Speak: Feminist Reflections Upon Public Theology." *International Journal of Public Theology* 4 (2010): 21-36.

Whiford, Margaret. *Luce Irigaray Philosophy in the Feminine*. London: Routledge, 1991.

Widdows, Heather. "The Janus-Face of New Reproductive Technologies: Escaping the Polarized Debate." *International Journal of Public Theology* 4 (2010): 76-99.

Willesden, Bishop of. "New Dimensions: The Report of the Bishop of Willesden's Commission on the Objects and Polies of the Motheers' Union." 1972.

Woodhead, Linda and Rebecca Catto, eds. *Religion and Change in Modern Britain*. London: Routledge, 2012.

## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX 1: INFORMATION FOR RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS FROM TIKANGA MAORI

#### **A PUBLIC THEOLOGY OF RELATIONSHIPS**

##### **INFORMATION SHEET FOR PARTICIPANTS FROM TIKANGA MAORI**

Greetings to you. Thank you for showing an interest in this project. This information sheet outlines the purpose and proposed content for this research project, which you are invited to read and consider before deciding whether or not to participate. If you decide to participate we thank you. If you decide not to take part there will be no disadvantage to you of any kind and we thank you for considering our request.

#### **What is the Aim of the Project?**

This project invites members of the Mothers' Union in Aotearoa New Zealand and Polynesia to share some of their stories and life experience in order to reflect on the significance of relationships in their life and work. This will be an opportunity for us to reflect on the relationship themes that the World Wide President, Rosemary Kempself, has given during her time in office. For example, this current year we focus on, 'faithful relationships'. Next year the theme will be, 'Your gifts? Discover and celebrate!' This research seeks to reflect within our Tikanga and our traditions on the relational gifts that we draw upon and offer to others through our life as Mothers' Union members.

An impetus for this project comes from recognising the challenges in the contemporary experience of the Anglican Communion to discern what being in relationship with each other (in an institutional context) means. The Mothers' Union has been described as an important strand of unity within the Anglican Communion. This project also recognises the unique relational character of the partnership model within the Three Tikanga context of the Mothers' Union in Aotearoa New Zealand and Polynesia.

The aims of this project have been discussed with the World Wide President of the Mothers' Union and the Provincial President in Aotearoa New Zealand and Polynesia.

This project is being undertaken as part of the requirements for a Masters in Theology.

The image of weaving is at the heart of this research projects aims and philosophy. Weaving is a metaphor used by women doing theology in the Pacific. I approach the gathering and sharing of our stories as the gathering of flax; a process which respects the life and spirit of the gifts given by the earth and by God. I therefore particularly want to acknowledge the life and gifts given by each story teller, each research participant. The process of preparing and then weaving the flax, is the process of reflection and analysis that I undertake as a researcher

following our sharing of stories. The challenge I give to myself is that my own process of weaving creates a gift which is then given back in a life-giving way to the community, such as is the case with the woven mat in Pacific culture or the kete in Aotearoa. My intention is therefore that participating in this research is a life-giving process for all those involved.

### **Information about the Researcher**

This research is being undertaken by Reverend Dr Eleanor Sanderson. Eleanor is a Mothers' Union member and an ordained priest in the Anglican Church from the Diocese of Wellington. She will facilitate the research process and also participate in reflecting on her own experience within the Mothers' Union.

Eleanor is a member of the Centre for Theology and Public Issues at the University of Otago.

### **What Type of Participants are being sought?**

Each Tikanga will participate in a way determined as most suitable to them. Participation within Tikanga Maori will be guided by the Provincial President.

### **What will Participants be Asked to Do?**

Should you agree to take part in this research you will be invited to take part in an in-depth interview with the researcher.

Before the interview, you are invited to reflect and pray about your experience as a mothers' Union member and the importance of relationships in your life and to think of two stories from your life experience which come to mind in that process. These two stories may directly be about your experience within the Mothers' Union or they may relate to relationships in your life more generally.

In the interview you will be invited to share these stories and then reflect on them with the researcher.

The reflection together may include:

- Reflecting on the details of your involvement within the Mothers' Union
- Reflecting about the way your experience within the Mothers' Union has influenced different relationships which are important to you.
- Reflecting about how the different aspects of your tradition and culture influence the way in which you approach relationships.
- Sharing aspects of Maori theology and reflecting on its resonance with the approach to relationships that are important to you.

- Reflecting on the particular lessons and gifts which you think we have here in our three Tikanga Mothers' Union context which you believe are important to share and to celebrate.

The researcher will subsequently analyse the reflections shared with those also made with members of all three Tikangas of our Mothers' Union. This analysis will seek to discern what aspects of our Tikanga and traditions are most significant in informing the approach to relationships that shape the life and work of Mothers' Union members. Research participants will be invited to discuss and affirm the conclusions of the research made by the researcher.

Please be aware that you may decide not to take part in the project without any disadvantage to yourself of any kind.

### **What Data or Information will be Collected and What Use will be Made of it?**

The Interviews will be audio recorded and transcribed by the researcher if consent by research participants is given to do so. These transcriptions will be used by the researcher in analysing the reflections from the meeting. No one other than the researcher and her supervisors will have access to the audio recordings or their transcriptions.

The disclosure of any personal information belonging to each research participant will be discussed with each participant. This includes the choice of anonymity and the disclosure of any potentially relevant information regarding length of experience within the Mothers' Union, roles held and other relevant roles held within the Anglican Communion. This information, if disclosed, would be used to provide a context of experience in which the research takes place, and may be part of the experience reflected upon.

The data collected will be securely stored in such a way that only those mentioned below will be able to gain access to it. At the end of the project any personal information will be destroyed immediately except that, as required by the University's research policy, any raw data on which the results of the project depend will be retained in secure storage for five years, after which it will be destroyed.

On the Consent Form you will be given options regarding your anonymity. Please be aware that should you wish we will make every attempt to preserve your anonymity. However, with your consent, there are some cases where it would be preferable to attribute contributions made to individual participants. It is absolutely up to you which of these options you prefer. The results of the project may be published and will be available in the University of Otago Library (Dunedin, New Zealand) but every attempt will be made to preserve your anonymity if that is your wish.

A summary of the research will be provided to research participants. Research participants will have the opportunity to correct or withdraw information at this point. A summary of the completed research will then be provided to all participants.

This project involves interviews with an open-ended discussion and questioning technique. The general line of discussion will focus on the way our culture and traditions speak into our experience of the different relationships that are significant in our life and work as Mothers' Union members. The precise nature of the discussions can not be determined in

advance, but will depend on the way in which they develop at the time. Consequently, although the University of Otago Human Ethics Committee is aware of the general areas to be explored in the interview, the Committee has not been able to review the precise discussion questions to be used. In the event that the flow of discussion does develop in such a way that you feel hesitant or uncomfortable you are reminded of your right to decline to answer any particular question(s) or participate in the discussion and also that you may withdraw from the project at any stage without any disadvantage to yourself of any kind.

### **Can Participants Change their Mind and Withdraw from the Project?**

You may withdraw from participation in the project at any time and without any disadvantage to yourself of any kind.

### **What if Participants have any Questions?**

If you have any questions about our project, either now or in the future, please feel free to contact either:-

Rev. Dr Eleanor Sanderson

or Professor Andrew Bradstock

Centre for Theology and Public Issues

Centre for Theology and Public Issues

Department of Theology and Religion

Department of Theology and Religion

and St John's Theological College

University Telephone Number: 03 4798450

College Telephone Number: 09 5212725

# A PUBLIC THEOLOGY OF RELATIONSHIPS

## CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPANTS

I have read the Information Sheet concerning this project and understand what it is about. All my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I am free to request further information at any stage.

I know that:-

1. my participation in the project is entirely voluntary;
2. I am free to withdraw from the project at any time without any disadvantage;
3. the audio-tape data will be destroyed at the conclusion of the project but any raw data on which the results of the project depend will be retained in secure storage for five years, after which it will be destroyed;
4. this project involves an open-questioning where the precise nature of the questions and discussion which will take place can not be precisely determined in advance and that in the event that the flow of discussion develops in such a way that I feel hesitant or uncomfortable I may decline to participate and/or may withdraw from the project without any disadvantage of any kind.
6. I do / do not wish to remain anonymous [**please delete as appropriate**]

If I choose to remain anonymous I understand that the results of the project may be published and available in the University of Otago Library (Dunedin, New Zealand) but every attempt will be made to preserve my anonymity.

7. I agree to the following personal information being attributed to me, either as named personally or with an anonymous pseudonym (as indicated above)

[ please complete as you choose]:

Current Mothers' Union group, Hui Armorangi and Iwi:

Current and previous Mothers' Union roles held:

Previous Mothers' Union groups attended of involved with:

Current and previous roles within the broader church or civil society:

I agree to take part in this project.

.....

.....  
(Signature of participant)

(Date)

## APPENDIX 2: INFORMATION FOR RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS FROM TIKANGA PACIFICA

### A PUBLIC THEOLOGY OF RELATIONSHIPS

#### INFORMATION SHEET FOR PARTICIPANTS FROM TIKANGA PACIFICA

Greetings to you. Thank you for showing an interest in this project. This information sheet outlines the purpose and proposed content for this research project, which you are invited to read and consider before deciding whether or not to participate. If you decide to participate we thank you. If you decide not to take part there will be no disadvantage to you of any kind and we thank you for considering our request.

#### **What is the Aim of the Project?**

This project invites members of the Mothers' Union in Aotearoa New Zealand and Polynesia to share some of their stories and life experience in order to reflect on the significance of relationships in their life and work. This will be an opportunity for us to reflect on the relationship themes that the World Wide President, Rosemary Kempzell, has given during her time in office. For example, this current year we focus on, 'faithful relationships'. Next year the theme will be, 'Your gifts? Discover and celebrate!' This research seeks to reflect within our Tikanga and our traditions on the relational gifts that we draw upon and offer to others through our life as Mothers' Union members.

An impetus for this project comes from recognising the challenges in the contemporary experience of the Anglican Communion to discern what being in relationship with each other (in an institutional context) means. The Mothers' Union has been described as an important strand of unity within the Anglican Communion. This project also recognises the unique relational character of the partnership model within the Three Tikanga context of the Mothers' Union in Aotearoa New Zealand and Polynesia.

The aims of this project have been discussed with the World Wide President of the Mothers' Union and the Provincial President in Aotearoa New Zealand and Polynesia.

This project is being undertaken as part of the requirements for a Masters in Theology.

The image of weaving is at the heart of this research projects aims and philosophy. Weaving is a metaphor used by women doing theology in the Pacific. I approach the gathering and sharing of our stories as the gathering of flax; a process which respects the life and spirit of the gifts given by the earth and by God. I therefore particularly want to acknowledge the life and gifts given by each story teller, each research participant. The process of preparing and then weaving the flax, is the process of reflection and analysis that I undertake as a researcher following our sharing of stories. The challenge I give to myself is that my own process of weaving creates a gift which is then given back in a life-giving way to the community, such as is the case with the woven mat in Pacific culture or the kete in Aotearoa. My intention is therefore that participating in this research is a life-giving process for all those involved.

## **Information about the Researcher**

This research is being undertaken by Reverend Dr Eleanor Sanderson. Eleanor is a Mothers' Union member and an ordained priest in the Anglican Church from the Diocese of Wellington. She will facilitate the research process and also participate in reflecting on her own experience within the Mothers' Union.

Eleanor is a member of the Centre for Theology and Public Issues at the University of Otago.

## **What Type of Participants are being sought?**

Each Tikanga will participate in a way determined as most suitable to them. Participation within Tikanga Pacifica will be guided by the Provincial President.

## **What will Participants be Asked to Do?**

Should you agree to take part in this research you will be invited to take part in an in-depth interview with the researcher.

Before the interview, you are invited to reflect and pray about your experience as a mothers' Union member and the importance of relationships in your life and to think of two stories from your life experience which come to mind in that process. These two stories may directly be about your experience within the Mothers' Union or they may relate to relationships in your life more generally.

In the interview you will be invited to share these stories and then reflect on them with the researcher.

The researcher will subsequently analyse the reflections shared with those also made with members of all three Tikanga of our Mothers' Union. This analysis will seek to discern what aspects of our Tikanga and traditions are most significant in informing the approach to relationships that shape the life and work of Mothers' Union members. Research participants will be invited to discuss and affirm the conclusions of the research made by the researcher.

Please be aware that you may decide not to take part in the project without any disadvantage to yourself of any kind.

## **What Data or Information will be Collected and What Use will be Made of it?**

The Interviews will be audio recorded and transcribed by the researcher if consent by research participants is given to do so. These transcriptions will be used by the researcher in analysing the reflections from the meeting. No one other than the researcher and her supervisors will have access to the audio recordings or their transcriptions.

The disclosure of any personal information belonging to each research participant will be discussed with each participant. This includes the choice of anonymity and the disclosure of any potentially relevant information regarding length of experience within the Mothers' Union, roles held and other relevant roles held within the Anglican Communion. This

information, if disclosed, would be used to provide a context of experience in which the research takes place, and may be part of the experience reflected upon.

The data collected will be securely stored in such a way that only those mentioned below will be able to gain access to it. At the end of the project any personal information will be destroyed immediately except that, as required by the University's research policy, any raw data on which the results of the project depend will be retained in secure storage for five years, after which it will be destroyed.

On the Consent Form you will be given options regarding your anonymity. Please be aware that should you wish we will make every attempt to preserve your anonymity. However, with your consent, there are some cases where it would be preferable to attribute contributions made to individual participants. It is absolutely up to you which of these options you prefer. The results of the project may be published and will be available in the University of Otago Library (Dunedin, New Zealand) but every attempt will be made to preserve your anonymity if that is your wish.

A summary of the research will be provided to research participants. Research participants will have the opportunity to correct or withdraw information at this point. A summary of the completed research will then be provided to all participants.

This project involves interviews with an open-ended discussion and questioning technique. The general line of discussion will focus on the way our culture and traditions speak into our experience of the different relationships that are significant in our life and work as Mothers' Union members. The precise nature of the discussions can not be determined in advance, but will depend on the way in which they develop at the time. Consequently, although the University of Otago Human Ethics Committee is aware of the general areas to be explored in the interview, the Committee has not been able to review the precise discussion questions to be used. In the event that the flow of discussion does develop in such a way that you feel hesitant or uncomfortable you are reminded of your right to decline to answer any particular question(s) or participate in the discussion and also that you may withdraw from the project at any stage without any disadvantage to yourself of any kind.

### **Can Participants Change their Mind and Withdraw from the Project?**

You may withdraw from participation in the project at any time and without any disadvantage to yourself of any kind.

### **What if Participants have any Questions?**

If you have any questions about our project, either now or in the future, please feel free to contact either:-

Rev. Dr Eleanor Sanderson	or	Professor Andrew Bradstock
Centre for Theology and Public Issues		Centre for Theology and Public Issues
Department of Theology and Religion		Department of Theology and Religion
and St John's Theological College		University Telephone Number: 03 4798450
College Telephone Number: 09 5212725		

# A PUBLIC THEOLOGY OF RELATIONSHIPS

## CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPANTS

I have read the Information Sheet concerning this project and understand what it is about. All my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I am free to request further information at any stage.

I know that:-

1. my participation in the project is entirely voluntary;
2. I am free to withdraw from the project at any time without any disadvantage;
3. the audio-tape data will be destroyed at the conclusion of the project but any raw data on which the results of the project depend will be retained in secure storage for five years, after which it will be destroyed;
4. this project involves an open-questioning where the precise nature of the questions and discussion which will take place can not be precisely determined in advance and that in the event that the flow of discussion develops in such a way that I feel hesitant or uncomfortable I may decline to participate and/or may withdraw from the project without any disadvantage of any kind.
6. I do / do not wish to remain anonymous [**please delete as appropriate**]

If I choose to remain anonymous I understand that the results of the project may be published and available in the University of Otago Library (Dunedin, New Zealand) but every attempt will be made to preserve my anonymity.

7. I agree to the following personal information being attributed to me, either as named personally or with an anonymous pseudonym (as indicated above)

[ please complete as you choose]:

Current Mothers' Union group, Hui Armorangi / Diocese and Tikanga:

Current and previous Mothers' Union roles held:

Previous Mothers' Union groups attended of involved with:

Current and previous roles within the broader church or civil society:

I agree to take part in this project.

.....

.....  
(Signature of participant)

(Date)

## APPENDIX 3: INFORMATION FOR RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS FROM TIKANGA PAKEHA

### **A PUBLIC THEOLOGY OF RELATIONSHIPS**

#### **INFORMATION SHEET FOR PARTICIPANTS FROM TIKANGA PAKEHA**

Thank you for showing an interest in this project. Please read this information sheet carefully before deciding whether or not to participate. If you decide to participate we thank you. If you decide not to take part there will be no disadvantage to you of any kind and we thank you for considering our request.

#### **What is the Aim of the Project?**

This project aims to explore the way in which relationships are significant in the life and work of the Mothers' Union in Aotearoa New Zealand and Polynesia. It will ask Mothers' Union members to reflect on the important aspects of the different relationships that have been part of their journey as Mothers' Union members. This will be an opportunity for us to reflect on the relationship themes that the World Wide President, Rosemary Kempzell, has given during her time in office. For example, this current year we focus on, 'faithful relationships'. Next year the theme will be, 'Your gifts? Let's celebrate!' This research seeks to reflect within our Tikanga and our traditions on the relational gifts that we draw upon and offer to others through our life as Mothers' Union members.

An impetus for this project comes from recognising the challenges in the contemporary experience of the Anglican Communion to discern what being in relationship with each other (in an institutional context) means. The Mothers' Union has been described as an important strand of unity within the Anglican Communion. This project also recognises the unique relational character of the partnership model within the three Tikanga context of the Mothers' Union in Aotearoa New Zealand and Polynesia.

The aims of this project have been discussed with the World Wide President of the Mothers' Union and the Provincial President in Aotearoa New Zealand and Polynesia.

This project is being undertaken as part of the requirements for a Masters in Theology.

The image of weaving is at the heart of this research projects aims and philosophy. Weaving is a metaphor used by women doing theology in the Pacific. I approach the gathering and sharing of our stories as the gathering of flax; a process which respects the life and spirit of the gifts given by the earth and by God. I therefore particularly want to acknowledge the life and gifts given by each story teller, each research participant. The process of preparing and then weaving the flax, is the process of reflection and analysis that I undertake as a researcher following our sharing of stories. The challenge I give to myself is that my own process of weaving creates a gift which is then given back in a life-giving way to the community, such as is the case with the woven mat in Pacific culture or the kete in Aotearoa. My intention is therefore that participating in this research is a life-giving process for all those involved.

## **Information about the Researcher**

This research is being undertaken by Reverend Dr Eleanor Sanderson. Eleanor is a Mothers' Union member and an ordained priest in the Anglican Church from the Diocese of Wellington. She will facilitate the research process and also participate in reflecting on her own experience within the Mothers' Union.

Eleanor is a member of the Centre for Theology and Public Issues at the University of Otago.

## **What Type of Participants are being sought?**

Each Tikanga will participate in a way determined as most suitable to them. Within Tikanga Pakeha a focus group will be created with 4 participants and facilitated by Eleanor Sanderson. Participants are invited through a conversation with the Provincial leader of Tikanga Pakeha.

This focus group will meet over a two day period. This meeting will take place at a location in Wellington. All food and refreshments will be provided for participants during the two days of meeting.

## **What will Participants be Asked to Do?**

Should you agree to take part in this project you will be asked to attend a two day focus group during October 2011. Take part in an e-mail exchange, prior to the first meeting, to establish the most appropriate dates for that meeting and affirm that you are comfortable with the focus of reflection for those days.

Before the focus group, you are invited to reflect and pray about your experience as a mothers' Union member and the importance of relationships in your life and to think of two stories from your life experience which come to mind in that process. These two stories may directly be about your experience within the Mothers' Union or they may relate to relationships in your life more generally. During the focus group we will take it in turn to share and reflect together on these stories. We will also use a specific method of theological reflection, called the microscope method, to further reflect on these stories at the close of each day.

The researcher will subsequently analyse the reflections to discern what aspects of our Tikanga and traditions are most significant in informing the approach to relationships that shape the life and work of Mothers' Union members. Research participants will be invited to discuss and affirm the conclusions of the research made by the researcher.

Please be aware that you may decide not to take part in the project without any disadvantage to yourself of any kind.

## **What Data or Information will be Collected and What Use will be Made of it?**

The focus group meetings will be audio recorded and transcribed by the researcher if consent by research participants is given to do so. These transcriptions will be used by the researcher in analysing the reflections from the meeting. No one other than the researcher and her supervisors will have access to the audio recordings or their transcriptions.

The disclosure of any personal information belonging to each research participant will be discussed with each participant. This includes the choice of anonymity and the disclosure of any potentially relevant information regarding length of experience within the Mothers' Union, roles held and other relevant roles held within the Anglican Communion. This information, if disclosed, would be used to provide a context of experience in which the focus group takes place, and may be part of the experience reflected upon.

The data collected will be securely stored in such a way that only those mentioned below will be able to gain access to it. At the end of the project any personal information will be destroyed immediately except that, as required by the University's research policy, any raw data on which the results of the project depend will be retained in secure storage for five years, after which it will be destroyed.

On the Consent Form you will be given options regarding your anonymity. Please be aware that should you wish we will make every attempt to preserve your anonymity. However, with your consent, there are some cases where it would be preferable to attribute contributions made to individual participants. It is absolutely up to you which of these options you prefer. The results of the project may be published and will be available in the University of Otago Library (Dunedin, New Zealand) but every attempt will be made to preserve your anonymity if that is your wish.

A summary of the focus group meeting will be provided to research participants following the meeting. Research participants will have the opportunity to correct or withdraw information at this point. An opportunity to collectively reflect on the research process and results will also be incorporated into the focus group day.

A summary of the completed research will be provided to all participants.

This project involves focus groups with an open-ended discussion and questioning technique. The general line of discussion will focus on the way our culture and traditions speak into our experience of the different relationships that are significant in our life and work as Mothers' Union members. The precise nature of the discussions can not be determined in advance, but will depend on the way in which they develop at the time. Consequently, although the University of Otago Human Ethics Committee is aware of the general areas to be explored in the interview, the Committee has not been able to review the precise discussion questions to be used. In the event that the flow of discussion does develop in such a way that you feel hesitant or uncomfortable you are reminded of your right to decline to answer any particular question(s) or participate in the discussion and also that you may withdraw from the project at any stage without any disadvantage to yourself of any kind.

### **Can Participants Change their Mind and Withdraw from the Project?**

You may withdraw from participation in the project at any time and without any disadvantage to yourself of any kind.

### **What if Participants have any Questions?**

If you have any questions about our project, either now or in the future, please feel free to

contact either:-

Rev. Dr Eleanor Sanderson

or Professor Andrew Bradstock

Centre for Theology and Public Issues

Centre for Theology and Public Issues

Department of Theology and Religion

Department of Theology and Religion

and St John's Theological College

University Telephone Number: 03 4798450

College Telephone Number: 09 5212725

# A PUBLIC THEOLOGY OF RELATIONSHIPS

## CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPANTS

I have read the Information Sheet concerning this project and understand what it is about. All my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I am free to request further information at any stage.

I know that:-

1. my participation in the project is entirely voluntary;
2. I am free to withdraw from the project at any time without any disadvantage;
3. the audio-tape data will be destroyed at the conclusion of the project but any raw data on which the results of the project depend will be retained in secure storage for five years, after which it will be destroyed;
4. this project involves an open-questioning technique of focus group discussion where the precise nature of the questions and discussion which will take place can not be precisely determined in advance and that in the event that the flow of discussion develops in such a way that I feel hesitant or uncomfortable I may decline to participate and/or may withdraw from the project without any disadvantage of any kind."
6. I will be provided with food and refreshment during my participation in the focus group meetings.
7. I do / do not wish to remain anonymous [**please delete as appropriate**]

If I choose to remain anonymous I understand that the results of the project may be published and available in the University of Otago Library (Dunedin, New Zealand) but every attempt will be made to preserve my anonymity.

8. I agree to the following personal information being attributed to me, either as named personally or with an anonymous pseudonym (as indicated above)

[ please complete as you choose]:

Current Mothers' Union group, Diocese and Tikanga:

Current and previous Mothers' Union roles held:

Previous Mothers' Union groups attended of involved with:

Current and previous roles within the broader church or civil society:

I agree to take part in this project.

.....

.....

(Signature of participant)