

Hospitaley: a helava way

Colonisation and Christian missions is an inherited legacy embodied in my body. It is part of my history. It is a history I cannot change. Whether I am at home or away I cannot escape my history. It is to use a metaphor drawing from Vilisoni Hereniko's work on female clowning and power in Rotuma an "atua" – a malevolent spirit needing to be transformed into a positive and creative spirit (*aitu*).<sup>1</sup> I believe our history which is connected to place, space, home and which forms our identity and our understanding of race is inscribed on the body. The relationship between the body and space/place/home is multidimensional and complex. Although the body moves across space to a different place, it carries the history of the space it has inhabited. As Sara Ahmed states 'being-at-home suggests that the subject and space leak into each other, inhabit each other.'<sup>2</sup> What has been highlighted in the doing of Oceanic theologies in diaspora is the understanding that 'salvation' cannot be separated from home, place or space – all of which form identity and race and all of which is embodied in the body.

Sevati Tuwere cautions that an 'over concentration on salvation at the expense of creation is tantamount to a view of history without place, or humanity without the womb, the vanua'.<sup>3</sup> Tuwere advocates for an informed theology of place as a task for Pacific/Oceanic theology. A task equally important for theologians in diaspora. For many islanders in diaspora home is neither land or sea; home is a liminal space, an in between, in the gap – a place that is neither here nor there. For many the colonial and missionizing histories of their home land embodied in their "marked" bodies are replayed in their new home through their relationship with the host culture, their understanding of church and God. Most often migrants find themselves "playing the

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<sup>1</sup> Vilisoni Hereniko, *Woven Gods: female clowns and power in Rotuma* (Hawaii: University of Hawaii press, 1995).

<sup>2</sup> Sara Ahmed, *Strange encounters: embodied others in postcoloniality* (London:Routledge, 2000), 89

<sup>3</sup> Sevati Tuwere, 'Emerging themes for a Pacific Theology'. *Pacific Journal of Theology* series II 7(July 1992): 49-55. Tuwere ascertains the gap as the place or space or tension between traditionalism, pluralism and modernization. See also his article 'Thinking theology aloud in Fiji' in *The Gospel is not Western:Black Theologies from the Southwest Pacific*, ed. G.W Trompf (New York: Orbis,1987) 148-154. He notes that this 'gap' is not only peculiar to Oceania, it is a shared experience with third world countries and 'now found in accentuated forms among islanders' living in diaspora. A way forward is a well articulated and thought out theological ethics of place/space/home or gap 'by discerning the competing forces at work and the kind of influence these forces are having on the person and the community'. This he sees as a necessary task for the Church in Oceania. It is also a necessary task for the church in diaspora.

game” to survive an often inhospitable host both within host church and society. The irony is of course that to be truly hospitable is to be in fact counter-cultural. However, as the understanding of hospitality in the Pacific has often been based and practised on the idea of a fixed relationship between guest and host this has often meant migrants in general can and in some cases become permanent guests in their new home.

This experience of living in diaspora has necessitated my need to reconsider the term hospitality. A term synonymous with the Pacific and to evaluate how such a concept might form a basis for deconstruction, reconstruction in both the doing and understanding of theology and basically as a way of living and making sense of everyday life. In order to do this the romanticized notion of hospitality and the guest/host relationship needs to be re-evaluated. Although these examples are primarily derived from personal experience, I tell them with the presupposition that the personal is inevitably political. Part of the task of unraveling their significance is to also place them in global context and to keep in mind the histories and events associated with that particular time.

### **Let us look at some general examples.**

The first is the association of hospitality with tourism. Hospitality is a global or universal term. In our current day it is perhaps best understood as having or inviting family and friends over for a pleasant meal or of the ‘hospitality industry, of hotels and restaurants which are open to strangers as long as they have money or credit cards’.<sup>4</sup> Hospitality has always been a part of the Pacific. It is in fact synonymous with the Pacific. But how have we really understood what it means to show hospitality. How have we practised hospitality? Who actually benefits? Who are the victims? For the most part hospitality has been associated with tourism and the welcome we give to strangers (in this case the strangers are tourists).<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Christine Pohl, *Making Room: Recovering hospitality as a Christian tradition*. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: 1999),4.

<sup>5</sup> Sara Ahmed argues convincingly that stranger is not someone we don’t know but rather ‘the stranger is *some-body* whom we have already recognised in the very moment in which they are seen or faced as a stranger. The figure of the stranger is far from being simply strange; it is a figure painfully familiar in that very strange(r)ness.’ In this sense Ahmed argues ‘the stranger is produced through knowledge, rather than as the failure of knowledge.’<sup>5</sup> See Sara Ahmed, *Strange encounters...*

I remember growing up with the Air Pacific slogan of “Fiji the way the world should be” until of course the first coup. Up until then Fiji or the Pacific in general was romanticised as the friendly people, people who really knew how to make you (but which *you*) feel at home when away from home. Yet all this has masked the reality of life in Fiji – the prejudices, the racism, the violence, the treatment of women, the poverty and the hierarchical structures of prejudice that provided the framework for everyday relationships and socialization with people of different cultures and races.

The second is hospitality as it pertains to women. Hospitality has also been an integral part of my upbringing. I have learnt and experienced both good and bad hospitality. On the one hand it was drilled into my being that hospitality means being a perfect host. Hospitality means in the long term being a good wife. A good wife and a perfect host are synonymous except that a good wife isn’t always the host but rather the guest whose priority is to make the host feel at home at all costs. A good host knows her place, knows what is expected of her in public, and is also skilled at masking her emotions and her opinions. It follows that a good wife and a perfect host knows how to cook, clean and weave. Hospitality then as I came to understand it meant a happy home at the woman’s expense. Fortunate for me I sucked at all of the above. I wasn’t a great cook and I was hopeless at weaving. Although I met other criteria this was not enough to make me a perfect host or a good wife. My mother surrendered me to education – I suppose for her education was a good excuse for my not cutting the grade. Unfortunately this personal experience is not pertinent to me it is a shared experience although varied with many other women in the Pacific.

Thirdly, hospitality in terms of Christian missions and foreign epistemologies. The spirit of the Christian faith often depended upon the hospitality of designated pagan cultures to those engaged in mission. The mission enterprise was part and parcel of the modern empires frenzied search, discovery and acquisition of lands and peoples beyond its borders. It is difficult to separate the ideologies of colonisation and Christian missions. In most if not all colonies Christian mission was inevitably linked

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with colonisation. The missionary enterprise, which usually preceded colonisation, was in most cases a civilising mission. According to Neil Gunson

the missionary was the ‘chief promoter of civilisation, and colonisation was regarded as the most efficient means of effecting Christian civilisation. The idea that the role of the missionary was to introduce civilisation together with the doctrine of the cross was developed into a principle missionary enterprise.’<sup>6</sup>

This ‘redemptive process’ wove its way through the process of education, the teaching of new methods of farming, trades, skills, building of proper houses, clothing and through values and cultures of the native people. The acts of colonialism and imperialism were supported by the ideological formations of the nineteenth century ‘that certain territories and people beseech and require domination’<sup>7</sup>. As most colonial schemes began with the assumption of ‘native backwardness and general inadequacy to be independent, equal and fit.’ It followed that mutuality between Europe and the peripheries was unattainable. The peripheries would always be subordinate to the center.

In these models of hospitality the relationship between guest and host is fixed. There is no movement. The guest and host are locked into a fixed and stagnating relationship of being one or the other. Yet hospitality is a dynamic relationship. I believe a recovery of the practice and language of hospitality has the possibility of not only transforming the individual but the church and society at large.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Neil Gunson, *Messengers of grace: evangelical missionaries in the South Seas* (Oxford, 1978). See chapter 10 ‘The perishing heathen observed’.

<sup>7</sup> Edward Said, *Culture and imperialism* (Vintage, 1993),

<sup>8</sup> Of interest to note the argument for the recovery of and practice of hospitality is not limited to the church or the Christian tradition. Hospitality is increasingly becoming the mark or language of our current political climate not only in Australia but also globally. Philosophers such as Jacques Derrida and Levinas Emmanuel have been significant contributors to this field and as such many scholars are now arguing for an ethic of welcome based on the notion of hospitality as an underlying philosophy for immigration policies. For further treatment of hospitality and immigration policies see *Journal of Australian Studies* 77 (2003). This particular issue focussed on the theme “Sojourners and Strangers”, Mireille Rosello, *Postcolonial hospitality: the immigrant as guest* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2001) and Jacques Derrida and Anne Dufourmantelle, *Of hospitality* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2000).

The idea of hospitality is not without a certain sense of ambivalence. The Latin root of the word hospitality (*hostis*) implies that the guest may also double as the enemy. Hospitality inherently involves risks. Whenever there is a potential for hospitality there is a potential for harm as well as an exchange of gifts. Hospitality can so easily become hostility. The estranged guest may also be the stranger who harms the host and vice versa. The hospitality relationship is never a relationship of equals: it is always asymmetrical but it must exist in continuum of each other. Drawing from one of the Greek derivatives of hospitality is the notion of guest/host reversal. The guest/host reversal is an integral part of the hospitality relationship. It is somewhat like a dance whereby ‘The host and guest are often locked in a complicated ballet of proposals, expectations and careful interpretations of seemingly infinite offers.’<sup>9</sup> Mireille Rosello argues that if the guest is always the guest and the host is always the host, something has probably gone very wrong: hospitality has somehow been replaced by parasitism or charity.<sup>10</sup>

However, to work with hospitality as both a Christian and cultural concept is not sufficient. The notion of home/space and context in my case is no longer Fiji or the Pacific it needs to be expanded to include the experience of diaspora and migration. In addition hospitality as I experienced it was intimately tied with weaving and frangipani trees. One of the symbols of welcome/hospitality in the Pacific is the *lei*. For me it was the *frangipani lei*. We all received a type of *lei* in our *Vakavuku* bags – a *lei* of welcome made of shells. Each of our cultures has a type of garland made of materials pertinent to our context. The *lei* is of course a Hawaiian tradition that prior to becoming a highly commercialised product was traditionally an expression of love, reverence, respect and welcome ...

So why am I opting to use a *lei* other than say a *tefui* which is more a Rotuman term? The answer lies in frangipani trees. Next to the coconut tree the frangipani tree is the most commonly found tree in the Pacific. It is a common Pacific symbol. In addition it had to do with a tradition in my family. My father had a travelling job so we moved around quite a lot. However, each house we moved into my parents would without

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<sup>9</sup> Mireille Rosello, *Postcolonial hospitality: the immigrant as guest* (California: Stanford University Press, 2001), 172.

<sup>10</sup> Rosello, *Postcolonial hospitality...*, 167.

fail and whether or not there was an already existing frangipani tree would plant them. They were very methodical. The site had to be just right, it had to be a location in the garden that would get the right amount of sunlight. When they found the right spot they would then prepare the ground ensuring that it was dug to a certain depth. Then they would plant their cuttings, nurturing the tree as it grew and ensuring that the tree was treated of diseases as it grew. This was an image I carried with me to Australia.

In seeking to find or make a home in Australia's diverse multicultural garden I did not take a tree with roots but rather frangipani cuttings. Finding a space, making a home, establishing roots is a risky process. Frangipani's take longer to grow in the Southern parts of Australia, they also have to survive the hostile winter. It is rare to find a broad stemmed, healthy green and abundantly flowering frangipani in Sydney. Like the history that is embodied in our bodies the frangipani cuttings can carry the disease inherent in its mother plant which if left undetected and untreated will eventually kill it.

The lei or frangipani *lei* as I understood it was not just simply a decorative ornament. It had a history, it had survived a process and been transformed into a symbol and gift of welcome and it was risky business. A *leist* stated that making a lei is a symbolic weaving or braiding of experiences. The flowers being pierced symbolized the experience of everyday life – the pain and joy of living. The gift of giving a lei was both a sign of welcome as well as mutuality and respect. In the giving of the lei – the host welcomes the guest into the community or home. In return when the guest accepts the *lei*, the guest honours the host by abiding by the code of ethics or behaviour of the home or community s/he is welcomed into.

The placing of the *lei* inside hospitality whereby it becomes *hospitaleity* invites us then to explore and engage with a number of things. I have chosen the interpretative framework of *hospitaleity* for a number of reasons. *Hospitaleity* is an invitation to consider the relationship between identity, belonging and home. *Hospitaleity* is an exploration that moves between the Pacific (in my case, Fiji) and Australia. It does so through the movement (experience) of migration and diaspora; it is theologised through the metaphor of the *lei*. It raises and deals with many questions to do with

identity, belonging and home. What does it mean to be at home? How does one be at home, when one leaves home?

In these postcolonial days *hospitality* is one of those terms that can help to illuminate the lines of encounter between the gospel and cultures subjected to mission. The practice of *hospitality* presupposes this history and rather than being merely reactive, it sets out to reengage. *Hospitality* offers the opportunity to explore the dynamic relationship between guest/stranger and host in the context of the colonial and zealous Christian encounters and the multicultural reality of empire. *Hospitality* prompts us to name the issues of power, inequality, knowledge and representation. These are matters often masked in the churches' understanding of multiculturalism and likewise the government policies.

The multicultural reality can be best understood, experienced, lived and represented through the dynamics of *hospitality* and the mutual engagement of dialogue through the awareness and sensitivity of our guest (stranger/other/foreigner/outsider) and host status. In arguing for such a view I have chosen to use as my interpretative filter the dynamic and relationship between the guest (stranger, foreigner, other) and host and the act(s) and politic(s) of hospitality. Seen from this perspective *hospitality* seeks to disrupt the 'imperial gaze' of the host or 'master subject' into 'transparent space' and reveal a more real and complex space. *Hospitality* seeks to disrupt the 'illusion of transparency'. It calls into question the blindness of the church (and society) that tends toward homogeneity and the marginalizing of difference. It is the kind of patch that requires continual movement between the stranger/guest and host which cuts across spaces and established epistemologies; backwards and forwards from center to margin, never content to be static, never content with 'transparent space' but always in search of, and moving on to, new possibilities and places.

This is of course counter-cultural alien or strange even contrary to our present understanding of hospitality. *Hospitality* is to use the Rotuman word for stranger a *helava way* or as one Pakeha pronounced it "a hell of a way". *Helava* is a Rotuman word meaning both strange and beautiful. Placed beside alongside the *lei* it serves as a reminder of the dangers of domestication. It is a reminder to be *alienative* or *aleinative* – that is to be both a native (at home) and alien (a guest). To be at home is

to know and understand the culture but this can sometimes serve to make one blind to the injustices of the culture whatever this may be. To be alien, to be a stranger is to have the ability to have an insight in. It is often the strangers in our midst who disturb our complacency. Strangers help to define who we are or who we are not. It has always been the calling of the church to be both at home and a stranger within a culture. *Helava* is a reminder not to be easily domesticated but rather to be proactive about finding creative alternatives.

Hospita*leity* is movement – it is intentional and participatory. Hospita*leity* as movement is life sustaining.<sup>11</sup> Hospita*leity* presupposes the three fundamental movements of hospitality and adds to it. These movements grounded in Hebrew and New Testament traditions are: the experience of being the stranger, the guest/host reversal and the element and expectation of the surprise, which leads to a revelation, an insight and transformation. This notion of hospitality is explored and expanded further in order to construct the idea of hospita*leity*. The three additional movements are drawn from the Christian theological tradition, the experience of alienation brought about by migration and being alien in diaspora and the Oceanic symbol of hospitality -the *lei*. Given the time constraints I have touched on the core meaning of the movements.<sup>12</sup> I will do this by using a real life example.

**Jeff Gambin is a Nepalese migrant, an award winning chef and successful entrepreneur. About ten to fifteen years ago in the midst of his success he was compelled to re-evaluate his life and the direction he was heading. He took a walk one night in Sydney’s city streets and as he stood contemplating his future; a homeless man mistaking him for a “new kid” on the block offered him his only possession – a straw bag and blanket and advice. His advice to Jeff was that sleeping in the open doorway of an office building under the draft of the air conditioning vent was not a good idea. However, if he was to sleep there he would need a blanket. This experience changed Jeff’s life. Jeff sold his share of the business and dedicated himself to serve the homeless by providing three course gourmet meals each night (7 nights) of the week in the Domain in the city. Before Jeff embarked on this venture he wanted to feel what it would be like to be homeless. So he deliberately made himself homeless – walking about and sleeping on the streets at night. He wanted to know what it was like to be the “stranger” he had made a commitment to serve. In many ways he wanted his relationship with them to be based on a shared real life experience rather than charity or pity. His short sojourn proved to consolidate his commitment to the homeless and he set up a foundation called “Just Enough Faith” (JEF) which not only serves meals each night of the week but also seeks to empower the homeless by restoring their human dignity by providing them with basic skills to enable them to be employed.**

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<sup>11</sup> Audre Lorde, *Sister outsider: essays and speeches* (Freedom, California: The Crossing Press Feminist Series, 1996), 10.

<sup>12</sup> These movements are explored more fully in my forthcoming M.Th(Hons) thesis titled “*Welcome an(other) exploring an ecclesiology of hospita<sup>leity</sup> in multicultural Australia*”.

Using the movements of *hospitality* I will interpret Jeff's story.

1. **Awareness that one occupies space and that one is a guest or stranger** In this space one has been used to being host – for example our home, our nation, and the hierarchical notion that supports our superior relationship with the earth. Often this awareness is brought about by an experience of trauma such as migration or colonization which brings about a separation from the familiar and questions long held values or norms. This awareness brings about a consideration of what it means to be a stranger; it is to walk in the “other’s” shoe.<sup>13</sup> It is an internal movement which can be both brought about through a marginalizing experience or simply by becoming aware of the responsibilities of how one uses and consumes space. Jeff had a good life, he had the natural ability to turn whatever venture he touched into an instant success. Yet he intentionally made himself vulnerable, to enable him to experience what it would be like to walk in the “other” or “stranger’s” experience.
  
  2. **Movement to the margin** This awareness prompts a movement from the center where one is used to being host to the margin, edge, border of one’s familiar space. It is to intentionally enter the threshold of liminality. The sense of not being either here or there – the sense of being nowhere – and not knowing what the encounter at the margin or the experience of being intentionally marginal might bring. Jeff chose to move from his center (where he was used to being host) to the margin (the homeless) to truly experience what it was like being homeless and marginal.
  
  3. **Guest/host reversal** As Jeff experiences life on the streets with the homeless he engages in guest/host reversal. As one becomes aware of one’s own marginality, the politics of roles, the occupation of space and the self as “other” one engages in guest/host reversal and to all the mysterious or insights the relationship will unfold. In this engagement one begins to alternate between being a guest and host demonstrating an openness to new insights and learning from the “other”. The “other” in this relationship will be both the
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guest and host depending on which side of the continuum one is situated. Jesus would often engage in guest/host reversal. In the Mary and Martha story Jesus arrives at their house as a guest but takes on the role as the host to both Mary and Martha.<sup>14</sup> In his encounter with the Syrophoenician woman, Jesus is approached as the host but is humbled by the woman's (stranger) challenge of his understanding of salvation and in turn becomes a guest.<sup>15</sup> Jeff's sojourn in the streets opened up a greater depth of understanding not only of the homeless but also of himself. Although he goes to the street as their host Jeff will often comment that is the homeless who give his life purpose and meaning because of what they offer him through their stories and experience.

4. **Repentance and Conversion** The guest/host reversal leads one to repentance and radical conversion. One becomes aware of what is wrong, of one's place in perpetuating that wrong (bearing in mind that the personal is always political) which leads to a genuine expression of repentance which inevitably leads to conversion. Repentance (*metanoia*) is the turning away from what has been done in the past with the firm resolve not to repeat it. Repentance presupposes regret, remorse, sorrow and contrition for one's unrighteousness and it involves changing one's ways. It is an act that involves the whole person – the mind, will, emotion and action. The genuineness of one's repentance is demonstrated by actual changes in one's actions, thoughts, feelings, through one's evaluation of one's life in the light of scripture/or other religious tradition, through honesty in confession, and through receptivity of forgiveness. The Greek for conversion - *epistrephein*, *strephein* and *metanoia* mean to turn, to turn again, or to return. Conversion therefore cannot be seen as one moment of turning but rather an ongoing or a series of turnings. 'The person undergoing conversion is seen to be transformed through a combination of deep intellectual activity, emotional maturation, increasing ethical vigour and sensitivity, and an intensifying of the religious love of God and humanity.'<sup>16</sup> Repentance and Conversion are both internal and external movements which leads to new ways of thinking and being and the need for

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<sup>14</sup> Luke 10: 38-41.

<sup>15</sup> Mathew 15:21-28 and Mark 7: 24-30.

<sup>16</sup> Lewis Rambo, 'Conversion' in A new dictionary of Christian Theology Alan Richardson & John Bowden, ed., (London: SCM Press, 1983), 124.

action through reconciliation. Jeff is not a Christian although he values and affirms the place of religion and faith in the continuing critique of government policies and in upholding the value of human dignity. Although Jeff's repentance and conversion does not fall strictly into a Christian framework he demonstrates a repentance and conversion from an old way of life (thinking of self, equating success with wealth, being self-motivated) to a new way of thinking and being (serving others). Conversion leads to transformation.

5. **Transformation** The hospitality relationship results in a gift or surprise being exchanged. Abraham is hailed as one of the earliest practitioners of hospitality. In the story of Abraham and the three strangers (Genesis 18:1-15) Abraham welcomes the strangers, offers them water, rest and his choicest food. In return Abraham and Sarah are blessed with the news that Sarah (in her old age) would bear a son. It can be further said that Abraham offers hospitality also recognizing the divine other in the strangers. The author of Hebrews referring to this passage wrote: "Let mutual love continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it". (Hebrews 13:1-2). In terms of *hospitality* the gift is transformation. Transformation comes in the way of insight and new learning which compels one to be and act differently. Transformation not only calls for an internal movement (change within) – it leads to an external movement of structures and change. In the case of the homeless, it is challenging governmental policies, and reminding it of their ethical responsibilities.
  
6. Finally, orthopraxis! This is a re-engagement with the world through models of being community, engaging with society through justice initiatives, new models of church, new inspiring liturgies and the list goes on. Orthopraxis brings together theory and praxis (as opposed to orthodoxy). Here the word or theory is collapsed into action. Doctrine or policy do not remain at the intellectual level but are integrated into action. Jeff demonstrates this through his commitment and action to the homeless seven nights a week, cooking choice gourmet meals. In doing so he hopes to alleviate the gap between governmental policy and the reality of pain on the streets.

These movements do not necessarily have to be linear or in the order described above. The example I have used to apply the movements relate to the experience of homelessness. The movements of *hospitality* can also apply to other experiences such as migration and interfaith relationships. The focus is movement and the idea is to continue the movement between being a guest and a host so one is not locked permanently into one role with the aim of being changed and transformed.

All of the above movements are held together by the metaphor of weaving not of mats but of a *lei*. I am part of a tradition of weavers both within my own immediate clan and the Oceanic community of weavers. Weaving is traditionally viewed in Pacific Island cultures as a feminine activity. According to Hereniko in his study of female clowning and power it is a subversive task. The task of weaving in the Pacific is a communal activity – one does not weave alone or for oneself.<sup>17</sup> One weaves together with others and for the community.<sup>18</sup>

In Vilisoni Hereniko's study of the *han mane'ak su* or female ritual clowns and power Hereniko draws the link between weaving and spirits. A *sa'a* (the Rotuman word for weaving) which since the 1960's had disappeared as an institution inverted social order. "A *sa'a* was an occasion when women gathered together to weave fine mats for an important future event. Within this setting certain taboos were broken, and certain rituals performed."<sup>19</sup> Linking the *sa'a*, the *sa'aitu* and the legend of *Aeatos* Hereniko makes the case for the sacred task of weaving. "The acts of weaving fine mats symbolized the weaving into malevolent ghosts. In this way ghosts could be constrained and transformed into benevolent gods whose mana could then be harnessed...."<sup>20</sup> Weaving (order) or noise was used to physicalize the *atua* and to transform it into an *aitu* as in the legend of *Aeatos* and physicalized in the person of the *han mane'ak*. The *sa'a* in Rotuma or the production of fine mats was time-consuming, tedious and disruptive to normal life. The *han mane'ak* or clowning supposedly made it lighter. Chaos (noise) accompanied weaving. The mats were not considered sacred until the *han mane'ak* (clown played it). Although the institution of

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<sup>17</sup> Although weaving is associated with women, the men plant pandanus and harvest its leaves for weaving. In this sense it is seen as a community activity.

<sup>18</sup> Mats are symbolic and very valuable in Oceania. They are used for gifts at weddings, tributes at funerals and in reconciliation rites as in the Samoan *ifoga* ceremonies.

<sup>19</sup> Hereniko, *Woven Gods...*, 113.

<sup>20</sup> Hereniko, *Woven Gods...*, 115.

*sa'a* may have disappeared I would want to say that it has found a place in weaving a theology – albeit metaphorically. The medium is no longer the mat but rather the weaving of *atua's* (ghosts of the homeland and the past) into benevolent *aitu's*. Weaving in this sense for me takes on a new potent sacred meaning. It allows me to weave the past into a creative future.

Weaving is a skilled and disciplined craft. It is not only concerned for creating new patterns it is also concerned for how patterns of the past inform the patterns of the present. My mother is a meticulous weaver. She would spend as much care and deliberation weaving as she would spend unraveling the threads of mistakes or to add a join on an incomplete-complete mat. I remember when my mother was teaching me to weave using different mediums; whenever I made a wrong turn in my weaving or took a shortcut that resulted in a ridiculous or distorted pattern, my mother would not let me continue weaving until I had unraveled the kinks or knots and understood the nature and consequences of my mistakes. She would sternly remind me that a good weaver is one who spends as much time, care and deliberation weaving as well as unraveling. Weaving the *atua's* (bad theology of the past) into *aitu's* – creative and fulfilling *hospitality*.

Similarly, I believe that the task of the theologian, the Christian community and theology, is one of weaving and unravelling. Weaving is an event which enables the continuity and discontinuity of the past, the present and the future. In order to weave and unravel the Christian community needs to have a discerning eye to recognize where the joins, kinks or bumps and knots are. On the one hand the theologian needs to identify where the joins are and to recognise the variety of distinct patterns present. On the other hand, in order to weave or welcome an(other) theology or presence the Christian community needs to be able to identify where the kinks and knots are so that these may be unravelled to enable the join. Most often it is the kinks and knots in our theologies or understandings of church that keep us from welcoming an(other). In critically evaluating these theologies, ideologies and philosophies we are then able to disengage in order to reengage new patterns of welcome and hospitality through the movements of *hospitality*.

Weaving is a continuity of the past. Patterns and methods of the past do not control the weaving or making of new patterns, but help to create new meanings informed by the past. The cycle of weaving continues with old and new methods and is manifested by new patterns formed or woven on the mat. For the women in Oceania, the completion of a mat necessitates the weaving of a new one. Although a new mat is woven, new patterns imagined and created, new material and ideas sought on how the new mat can be improved, the patterns and strands of the past are not neglected.

Weaving is a cultural metaphor that resonates with the biblical tradition of hospitality. It is a helpful metaphor for doing a contextual theology. For this particular task I find Daniel Hardy's etymological study of the word 'context' instructive. Hardy points out that the Latin verb *contexere* means to 'braid', to 'weave' or 'connect'. It is the task of the *leist* to gather strands, critically assess each strand individually, find their points of connection and discontinuity and braid or weave (*lei*) these strands together.

The metaphor of weaving naturally lends itself to *lei* making. The *lei* braids together individual flowers held together by a strand(s). There is no one or right way to weave a *lei*. In fact there are several methods of *lei* making. *Leis* can be woven, braided, strung or pierced or knotted. They can range from simple to elaborate, complex arrangements. *Leis* are not only made from flowers or frangipanis but also shells, leaves, raffia and pandanus leaves. I am not a weaver of mats much to my mother's disappointment. The task I see before me now is one of gathering, braiding and weaving the cultural and theological traditions of the past (*atua*'s) with my present local and global context.

It is here that I turn to a Rotuman proverb, and to the Rotuman phrase for hospitality which informs my sense of being a weaver and a *leist*. '*Or un*' is an old Rotuman proverbial saying which means to 'tie with sinnet'.<sup>21</sup> This proverbial saying has two meanings. The first is normally 'said to someone who is facing difficulty or hardship, suggesting that the person be patient and accept the difficulty'.<sup>22</sup> This must not be taken to imply a passive attitude or acceptance to hardship. It is meant to cheer a

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<sup>21</sup> Sinnet is a coconut fibre or strand. Several of these strands are woven together to make a traditional belt used to hold up the *ha' fali* (traditional wraparound skirt or sarong).

<sup>22</sup> Elizabeth Inia, *Faeag es fuaga: Rotuman proverbs* (Suva, Fiji: Institute of Pacific Studies, 1998), 200.

person on, urging the person not to give up but to patiently endure.<sup>23</sup> It can be likened to Paul's exhortation in *Romans* 12:12 'Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer.' The inference here is that difficulties and hardships don't go on forever. In the meantime one needs to stay strong and focussed in order to overcome the difficulty or hardship. Although this proverbial saying could be used to validate women staying on in abusive relationships and upholding oppressive cultural norms I believe it is not intended to imply that and cannot be justified to be interpreted in that manner. Its second meaning provides the balance to patient endurance and supports the understanding that patient endurance is not passive suffering or acceptance of one's unjust lot in life. It is to persist, to use Paul Tillich's words 'in spite of' the odds.<sup>24</sup>

To 'or un' or 'to put on a belt of sinnet means to work hard'. The belt of sinnet in this case is the braided strand that pierces and connects each individual flower of the lei. 'Or un' is usually the advice parents give to their sons who go to live in their wives villages implying maturity and responsibility for their new family. To 'or un' in this sense implies a commitment to a goal, to responsibility and is a sign of maturity, independence, a person come of age. The closest word to hospitality in Rotuman is *famor maeve hanis*. The word *maeve* also means to have courage and to endure. To weave or lei the strands of hospita<sup>l</sup>ity, is to 'or un' to be people of courage and to have the ability to endure in spite of the odds. Like the Rotuman institution of *sa'a* it is the courage and endurance to subvert social order, to place chaos and order (work and play) and to weave and transform *atua's* into *aitus*.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion the movements of hospita<sup>l</sup>ity can lead us toward an open dialogue with different cultures, religions and theories. These movements and turns can also provide the foundation for cross-cultural theology(ies) conversation and relationships and interfaith dialogue in Australia. I argue this on the following basis: I believe that the principles and practice of the movements of hospita<sup>l</sup>ity enables and empowers us to

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<sup>23</sup> This proverbial saying is similar to another Rotuman proverb, *af al* which means to grit your teeth. This is normally said to people who are facing difficult tasks urging them not to give up. It is also said to women during childbirth as a means of encouragement. See Elizabeth Inea, *Faeag es fuaga ...*, 155.

<sup>24</sup> See Paul Tillich, *The courage to be* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1952).

“show” grace to those different from us and provides a safe, sacred theoretical and physical space to be vulnerable, to explore our *strangerness* and allow for transformations to occur. The movements and turns of hospita*leity* provides the necessary framework whereby theory, action and reflection become inseparable moments in praxis.

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